

JIHOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V ČESKÝCH
BUDĚJOVICÍCH
FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

QUEST FOR PERFECTION IN NATHANIEL
HAWTHORNE'S *MOSES FROM AN OLD MANSE*

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Studijní obor: Anglická a americká literatura

Ročník: 3.

2016

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PODĚKOVÁNÍ

Ráda bych poděkovala vedoucí své diplomové práce, paní PhDr. Marianě Machové, Ph.D., za její trpělivost a nasměrování právě k povídkám.

ANOTACE

Tato práce se zaměřuje na téma hledání dokonalosti v povídkách ze souboru *Mechy ze staré fary* (*Mosses from an Old Manse*) Nathaniela Hawthorna. Cílem práce je zodpovědět na otázku nakolik je pojetí dokonalosti v Hawthornově díle ovlivněno jeho puritánským dědictvím a nakolik transcendentalismem, jehož byl současníkem. Proto se první část práce zabývá pojmem dokonalosti v dílech předních puritánů a transcendentalistů. Následují kapitoly, v nichž se rozebírají konkrétní povídky a pojetí dokonalosti v nich. Vždy jde o dvě povídky, které mají společné téma, a to vědu, mezilidské vztahy a umění.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is focused on the quest for perfection in Nathaniel Hawthorne's collection of short stories *Mosses from an Old Manse*. The goal of this work is to answer the question to what extent is the concept of perfection influenced by his Puritan heritage or Transcendentalism of the present day. Therefore, the first part of the thesis deals with the concept of perfection in writings of prominent Puritan and Transcendental authors. Then follow chapters that analyse specific short stories and the concept of perfection used in them. In all cases, there are always two short stories connected with one theme, namely science, interpersonal relationships, and arts.

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1 Introduction

Quest for perfection is one of the more interesting themes to be found in Nathaniel Hawthorne's stories, particularly in his second collection of short stories, *Mosses from an Old Manse*. In many of its stories, characters seek perfection, be it in science, arts or relationships, and sometimes even in more areas at once. This creates great tension as they strive to achieve their goals while at the same time realizing the impossibility they are aiming at.

To my knowledge, criticism seems to omit the quest for perfection in Hawthorne's works. The only exception is probably "The Birth-mark" in which the quest for perfection is apparent. The studies focus on many areas that connect with perfection such as characters, arts or science, but almost never on perfection itself. Thus, the quest for perfection and perfectionism may be mentioned but is not the topic of systematic study as far as I am aware.

Nathaniel Hawthorne drew inspiration for his stories from various sources such as books he read, his own experience, history, and the events of the present days. All of them combined in his stories and characters and shaped them in the way they are found nowadays. This applies to the question of perfection as well. Possibly, the two most important influences on his works were Puritanism and Transcendentalism. Puritans were among his ancestors, and he referred to Puritan period and its characters very often. Transcendentalists, on the other hand, were his contemporaries and even close friends.

I argue that the point of view of both Puritans and Transcendentalist of perfection heavily influenced and shaped Hawthorne's stories and that they left impact, which can be still found in the stories and characters. Moreover, since Puritan and Transcendental worldview contrast each other in many ways, it creates an interesting tension which provides Hawthorne's stories with additional depth and richness. Although it may seem that the Transcendental approach to perfection outweighs the Puritan approach in some of the stories, this is not so. Hawthorne's Puritan heritage bears much more weight than the influence of the Transcendentalists in his tales.

This can be seen in many of his characters in his other works. *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Blithedale Romance* represent the scale between Puritanism and Transcendentalism and their influence in his characters. Hester Prynne seeks

redemption and her place in Puritan community. She has to deal with her guilt but also with her role as woman in the society. At the same time she is a woman who is not afraid to stand against it. Roger Chillingworth, her husband, is an example of Hawthorne's scientists who seek knowledge to use it for their own means. He believes he has right to use it according his own ideas even if it means injuring others. Priscilla has a mysterious past and two personalities, herself and her alter ego, the Veiled Lady. There is also Miles Coverdale who begins his journey as an idealist, but it is the reality and heritage of other characters that turns him from the farm and its innocent worldview. No matter where the characters stand in the Puritan-Transcendental scale, their Puritan heritage always seems to prevail. It is, therefore, interesting to find out if this pattern repeats in *Mosses from an Old Manse*.

This influence shall be examined in six stories and three areas, namely of science, romantic relationships, and arts. Before that, though, it is essential to define what perfection meant for Puritans and Transcendentalists. For this purpose, writings of eminent Puritans and Transcendentalists shall be examined, and based on the outcome, the stories shall be dealt with. John Robinson, John Winthrop, and John Cotton will be presented as Puritans; whereas, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Margaret Fuller represent Transcendentalists.

Then follows the chapter dedicated to the quest for perfection in science. There, I shall focus on Hawthorne's two complex stories about men of science; specifically "The Birth-mark" and "Rappaccini's Daughter". The next chapter concentrates on the problem of expectations in romantic relationships or interpersonal relationships in general, as presented in "Mrs. Bullfrog" and "Feathertop". The last chapter contends with the delicate issue of artistic perfection. The stories used there shall be "Drowne's Wooden Image" and "The Artist of the Beautiful".

As for the sources, the first chapter on Puritans and Transcendentalists is for the most part on the primary sources: their actual writings, be it essays, sermons or collections thereof. Most of the secondary materials for the first chapter originate from *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume I, 1590-1820* and *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume II, 1820-1865*, both edited by Sacvan Bercovitch.

In the three chapters that deal with the individual stories, *Tales and Sketches*, the complete compilation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's stories, edited by Roy Harvey Pearce,

is used. Secondary sources mostly consist of essays concerning the particular short stories.

2 Perfection as Heritage

2.1 Puritans

The Puritan theme has always been characteristic for Nathaniel Hawthorne's works. The Puritans presented a major historical background for Hawthorne's region and town, and at the same time, they played an important part in his own family history. He was fascinated with this history and studied the writings left behind by the Puritans, and works written about their period, such as *The Journal of John Winthrop* and Winthrop's *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649* (1825-1826), Caleb H. Snow's *A History of Boston* (1825) and Joseph Felt's *The Annals of Salem from Its First Settlement* (1827). With regard to Hawthorne's profound study and fascination with Puritans, it is beneficial to see what they thought about the idea of perfection.

However, first it is necessary to define what is meant by the term "Puritans". The Puritans were originally English Protestants who "thought that the English Reformation has been aborted and that it remained too closely tied to Roman practice and belief. Puritans demanded a personal, existential religious experience of conversion which became the basis for their zeal and drive" (Brauer 42). The term "Puritans" was used by their adversaries and its usage did not have clear borders. Robert Sanderson, a conformist minister, complained in 1619 in Boston that "rascal people will call any man that beareth but the face of honesty, a Puritan" (Winship 118). Puritans were not limited only to the New World or only to England. Puritanism emerged in England as a reformist movement, and then some of its adherents gradually moved to the New World and participated in its colonization. Not all the settlers coming to the new colonies were Puritans, and even among Puritans there were differences in opinions on various topics.

The term Puritan can, therefore, describe various kinds of people. It may concern the European Puritans or the American Puritans, the settlers of New England in the course of the seventeenth century, regardless of their religions or creeds. A person who did not want to leave the Church of England could be considered a Puritan, the same as a non-conformist, who stood openly against it. In plain terms, the term Puritan can mean many things, if it is not properly defined. In the following thesis "Puritan" will mean a non-conformist resident of the New England Colonies in the 17th century, if not specified otherwise.

Puritanism started in England, and it was only after several decades until some of the Puritans moved to New England, which makes it hard to decide if they were English or American. In fact, the settlers of the first generation were English, and only those born on the American coast of the Atlantic Ocean could be considered as truly American. Furthermore, there was an active exchange of ideas between New England and the mother-country; the “strong temptation to regard New England's culture as ready formed and hermetically sealed in the second half of the seventeenth century” (Winship 131) has no foundation. Not only were there new immigrants coming to New England but also many settlers “did return in the early 1640s to join the English Civil War and the Puritan Commonwealth” (Elliott 191).

The religious culture of New England Puritans and Anglicans was similar in certain degree because they shared the same origin and the same cultural background. Although some aspects were different and caused a breach between the Church of England and Puritans, still they had a lot in common. “Anglicans in England preached jeremiads ... plotted the moral reformation of their British Israel, studied the practical divinity of old nonconformists, and themselves wrote books of piety that devout lay New Englanders studied in turn” (Winship 131–132). To ascertain what Puritans actually thought about perfection, it is necessary to go through their teaching, pamphlets, and sermons. Since the Puritans were deeply religious people, it is only logical to assume that their notion of perfection would be rooted in the Bible and their interpretation of it.

Puritans emphasized the necessity to acknowledge their sins. This was something that showed profoundly in Hawthorne's works also, as will be seen in “Rappaccini's Daughter”, for example. Randall Stewart notices that “Hawthorne and Puritans were in complete agreement, therefore, in the belief that human nature is radically sinful” (Fairbank 985). This then manifests through many Hawthorne's heroes who do not reach perfection just because of their innate sinfulness. The theme of sin is closely related to guilt and the question of purity of heart as well as final redemption, if possible. Again, this can be illustrated in the story of Aylmer and Georgiana in “The Birth-mark”.

The best way to examine the problem of perfection will be to actually look at the teachings of prominent Puritan preachers, theologians and thinkers, which should represent what the idea of perfection was in reality. Perfection, as a term, can be also

defined as flawlessness and impeccability, which suggests purity or the uttermost point that can be reached, an achievement of the model or the ideal or perhaps even the development of the full potential.

The Biblical ideal of purity and flawlessness would be God or the person of Jesus Christ. The Bible calls flawlessness holiness, in opposition to the sin as a flaw that stains, hurts, and deforms a person. God says to people several times throughout the Bible “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (*ESV*, 1 Peter 1.16). On the other hand, it is not written anywhere that anyone actually attained that stage and became perfect in this sense. Perhaps it is a position reserved for God and actually becoming perfect would mean to pose as an equal to God. The Bible actually calls for perfection but it does not seem that any living human being could actually attain it, which creates a problematic contradiction. This tendency to strive for perfection was perhaps one of the most characteristic qualities of the Puritans in New England. It is evident in the fact of how the society in the 21st century tends to understand the term “puritan”. The term attained a strong negative undertone, and it is generally understood to mean a deeply religious person who follows strict rules and stands against all human pleasures.

Puritans observed many rules indeed, but this has to be seen through the eyes of the 17th century point of view. Many of their rules would not have been out of place in other places of their world, especially in the Christian Europe. It was a period of wars among the Protestant and the Catholic countries of inquisition, of morality, and of absolute values which were based on the Bible and which were indubitable. Perhaps they differed only in the measure of their zeal from the others, or maybe not even that. For them, the observations of the rules was one of the ways of measuring the degree of their Christianity and perfection, since they were explicitly told to strive for perfection and to prove it in their deeds and their behavior.

This legacy of Puritanism is not visible in many of the chosen tales in this work at first sight. However, it shows in the way Hawthorne described the society and background of his characters. It is apparent in “Drowne’s Wooden Image” when “the aged, whose recollections dated as far back as witch-times, shook their heads, and hinted that our forefathers would have thought it a pious deed to burn the daughter of the oak with fire” (Hawthorne 942). Or in “The Artist of the Beautiful” when the practical of mainstream is opposed to the ideal of Owen Warland: his artistic ability “was as completely refined from all utilitarian coarseness as it could have been in either

of the fine arts. He looked with singular distaste at the stiff and regular processes of ordinary machinery” (Hawthorne 909).

Puritans were deeply religious people, who predominantly understood perfection according to the Bible and its teachings. To see their ideas of perfection, it is necessary to go through their writings and especially focus on the important personages among the Puritans and their ideas. These are represented here by John Robinson, a pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers in the Netherlands, John Winthrop, a governor in New England and author of the famous comparison of the new colonies to the city on the hill, and John Cotton, a preacher and writer in the American colonies.

John Robinson was the minister who accompanied and led the Puritans who decided to leave England to Netherlands. The group settled in Amsterdam but soon moved to Leiden and stayed there for a decade. Before they left England, Robinson was in position of an assistant pastor but when they settled in Leiden, he soon became the main pastor of the congregation. Another prominent leader was William Brewster in the position of a ruling elder. Of the passengers of the *Mayflower*, the members of Robinson’s congregation comprised about one third. Others followed several years later but John Robinson never reached the shores of the New World because he died in Netherlands.

John Winthrop was a lawyer and became a governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. At sea on board the *Arbella* in the spring of 1630, he composed one of the most significant texts of Puritan writing: his sermon ‘A Model of Christian Charity’. This is famous especially for his comparison of the new colony to the city on the hill. It was a reference to a parable Jesus used in the Gospels. He compared his followers to the light: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (*English Standard Version*, Matthew 5.14–16). Jesus wanted to emphasize that the believers had to live in such way others would notice the difference between themselves and the believers. They were not supposed to live in some isolated place but remain visible to others and set an example. John Winthrop used this parable to motivate the settlers to do their best “for we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us” (Winthrop).

John Cotton was a Puritan preacher and minister. He had been an Anglican minister and was able to maintain this position for a long time in spite of his Puritan views. However, the situation became unbearable in 1632, and so he left England the next year and came with his family to Boston. There he quickly became the second pastor of the Boston church and held the position of very influential leader and minister in New England and wrote many books and sermons.

Robinson mentions perfection many times in his writings. In most cases, he either quotes or paraphrases the Bible. One of the many examples is his quote of 1 Timothy 2.5: “There is but ... one Mediator, Jesus Christ ... both author and finisher of all, both begins, and perfects all” (Robinson, ch. 8). This expresses one part of the perfection dilemma; the perfection belongs to God and only He can attain it or grant it to somebody. This may be key to many Hawthorne’s characters as they stubbornly seek perfection in their own struggle and not in religion. Another case is the reference to Philippians 1.6. Robinson speaks about sin and God’s grace, and mentions that the apostles in their letters call the Christians saints and “such as in whom God will perfect the good work begun in them, until the day of Christ” (Robinson, ch. 6). The second part of the dilemma is the persuasion that the believers should strive for perfection themselves. “Neither should we stint our endeavours and desires absolutely at the degree of goodness, to which any mere man is come before us: but should aim at the very perfection, which the law of God requires” (Robinson, ch. 19).

When Winthrop speaks about the settlers and their community, the danger they will face, unity and love among its members, he mentions perfection in connection with love. “The definition which the Scripture gives us of love is this: Love is the bond of perfection. First, it is a bond or ligament. Secondly, it makes the work perfect” (Winthrop). It could be said that love is a requirement of perfection. Love in this context is something, which connects both parts of the perfection paradox. It is clearly something, which should be apparent in human motives and acts towards each other. On the other hand, the New Testament states that the ability to love comes from God, indeed, “God is love” (*ESV*, 1 John 4.8) and “by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (*ESV*, John 13.35). Love abridges this breach between the Divine right to and the human striving for perfection.

Robinson also mentions another form of perfection, which could be called a human form of perfection. He speaks about the ability to become more perfect based

only on human striving, when he talks about human abilities and capacities for different spheres of work. “Ability for a man's calling is greatly to be desired for many reasons ... it is a good way for him to grow to great perfection, by daily improving his ability to the full” (Robinson, ch. 27). This is especially visible in Hawthorne’s portrayal of his scientists and artists who have sacrificed their lives to pursuit of their vocation. They have been diligent in their work and improved both their knowledge and skill. It is interesting to note that with perfection that includes God, the aim is always perfection, as if an absolute state, but here it is “great perfection” which gives an impression of a state close to perfection but not the absolute one. In another place, he again mentions a degree of perfection, not the absolute perfection: “Living ... amongst the wise and good, we have still matter of imitation, and provocation to aspire unto greater perfection in goodness” (Robinson, ch. 37). Again, this is the human side of the perfection dilemma, he realizes that human beings cannot attain perfection, but they can strive for it and in this way make progress and become more and more perfect.

John Cotton in his writings expresses the same ideas, more or less. In his *Treatise of the Covenant*, he speaks about holiness, by which he means the holiness in practice such as “holy Duties, as Prayer, or Conference, or the like ... [which] soon groweth wearisome to flesh and blood ... yet the Lord would have us to pursue it ... consider what the Apostle saith, *Follow still after it, even unto perfection*” (*Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* 70–71). Holiness is just another word for perfection, because it is one of the main attributes of God, it is an expression of God’s perfection. Perfection and holiness are measured here by practical deeds that were demanded from the believers as signs that they were true and active Christians. It is the case with human striving for perfection and according to Cotton, it seems that it can be actually attained if man seeks hard to achieve it.

In another text he talks about the perfect heart and good deeds. He concludes that “let a man never do so many actions, and take the *Summa totalis* of it all, and wanting a perfect heart it will all be evil in the sight of the Lord” (*The Way of Life* 202). It follows from this passage that to attain the coveted perfection, the good acts are not sufficient in themselves, there must be something more about it; otherwise, everything is in vain. As he says later, “the good things ... were not done with perfect heart,” (*The Way of Life* 204), and so they were considered as useless in the eyes of God.

While Robinson and Winthrop spoke about love that actually connected the Divine and the human way of perfecting and perfection, Cotton speaks about another

bridge: a perfect heart. The perfect heart can be either the attitude of the human toward God and others as well as the motives for one's action. If it is not perfect, that is to say, good, pure, and impeccable, perfection cannot be. In the human striving for perfection, people should search their hearts, attitudes, and motives. On the other hand, the Bible speaks about the change of heart that can be done only by God. Jeremiah 17.9 says that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick" (*ESV*), but God promises: "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (*ESV*, Ezekiel 36.26). This moves the question of the perfect heart again into God's sphere of doing as it cannot be done by human striving or only to the certain degree. The issue of perfect heart is then the same as the striving for perfection in general, people have to strive for perfection but it is God who is perfect and makes perfection possible.

The Puritan idea of perfection is deeply rooted in the Bible and the concept of God as the only perfect being. Perfection in connection with God can be also seen as holiness or the absence of sin. God is the only one who can be perfect or who can grant perfection to the human being in certain sense. The Bible in many places calls people to be perfect and to aim at perfection; however, at the same time it is understood that that perfection cannot be actually attained. There is also a mention of the so-called human perfection that is connected with human and secular things such as the ability to perform some activity well, very well or perfectly. This area of doing is more human than Divine, yet still it cannot be said about anyone that they are absolutely perfect. The skillfulness is rather expressed in degrees of perfection than in absolute perfection.

These two sides of perfection, or God's perfection and human perfection can be abridged, and that is by love and the perfect heart. In both cases, God and the human being have to take part both in love and creation of the perfect heart. Man has to strive for love, perfection and perfect heart, that is, for practical signs and deeds that show his love and goodness towards others. This would not be enough, God also is the one who gives the ability to love and do good things, He gives the right motives. The outcome of the Biblical teaching on perfection, as Puritans understood it, creates a dilemma because it clearly says that they should aim at perfection in all areas of life. On the other hand, they could not expect becoming perfect because nobody could ever become perfect. These two irreconcilable conditions must have created a great strain inside the Puritan community and deeply affect both the individuals and the whole society.

2.2 Transcendentalists

If the Puritans provided Hawthorne with his history, the Transcendentalists represented his contemporaries. They were a group of men and women associated with The Symposium, or the more commonly known Hedge Club, which was founded in 1836. “The sole rule the members agreed to was that no one whose presence might prevent discussion of any particular subject could be invited to meetings” (Packer 377). The prominent members of the Club included Ralph Waldo Emerson, David Henry Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, George Ripley, Frederick Henry Hedge, and many others. The group consisted of strong individuals who were united by the common philosophical worldview; they shared common background and common interest in new ideas.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was a close friend with some of them and was in contact with others. His relationship with the Transcendentalists was an ambiguous one. In some ways, he is sometimes considered as one of them. For example, he took part in Brook Farm experiment. On the other hand, though, he did not agree with them and “opposed the optimism of transcendentalists” (Fairbanks 976). “Hawthorne doubted the efficacy of most social reform and turned inward to the heart and soul. Whereas Emerson flirted with a belief in natural goodness, Hawthorne doggedly retained his belief in universal depravity” (Mills 101). It was precisely his Puritan heritage what prevented him from being an enthusiastic advocate of the bright future of humankind. He was always looking into human hearts and saw corruption there. “A Transcendentalist he certainly was not. He escapes being labeled because he was an artist more than a philosopher, more even than a moralist or an analyst – a symbolist of moods and inner struggles, a poet of human hearts and souls” (Mills 102).

In many of his tales, there is a contrast between the ideal and the reality of a human heart as Hawthorne understood it. Beatrice Rappaccini in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” is young and beautiful and good, the embodiment of the ideal woman, but then the reader realizes she is poisonous as well. In “Drowne’s Wooden Image”, Drowne becomes a true artist when he creates the carving of the beautiful woman only to sink into mediocrity again. His characters always struggle, and if there is victory, it is never complete.

One of the significant background traits of the Transcendentalists was Unitarianism. It was a very liberal form of Christianity; advocating the belief that God is only one person, not three, and that Jesus Christ was human, not God incarnated. For the Transcendentalists and Emerson especially, Unitarianism was the religious background in which they were brought up; it “held out the promise of a Christianity enlightened enough to be tolerant and otherworldly enough to inspire and console” (Packer 332). Moreover, it offered a more acceptable version of Christianity than Calvinism of the Puritans did with its teaching of total depravity and absolute dependence on God in question of salvation. For Emerson, Unitarian “Christ who ennobled through his example rather than atoned through his bloody sacrifice and a God who encouraged human striving after perfection rather than a humiliating dependence upon his inscrutable will were advances in the history of spirituality that marked Christianity’s emergence from superstition” (Packer 332). Unitarianism was Christianity freed from everything that might have been considered offensive to the contemporary society because it proclaimed tolerance and reason above all things. It embraced criticism of the Bible with doubts of historicity of Jesus Christ and questioning of the necessity of biblical miracles. It became enlightened but slowly ceased to have anything to offer to the world around.

Another very important influence was the philosophy of German idealism. Americans found the new ideas of Kant, Schegel, Fichte, and others through the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle. Coleridge presented German philosophy in his writings *Biographia Literaria* (1817) and *Aid to Reflection* (1825). His works became popular in America, because his innovative philosophy offered a help to Unitarian dilemma; “a way for them to satisfy the hunger for contact with the transcendent without abandoning the values of tolerance and rational enquiry” (Packer 355). Carlyle’s reviews and essays were even more important for New England because he examined German philosophy more closely and challenged the thinking of Americans.

All of this also brought extraordinary emphasis on man as an individual and one who can stand against the world and change it according to his own wishes. This tendency is balanced by later interest in Eastern philosophy and its goal in becoming one with the Universe. The fascination with German and Eastern philosophy caused increased interest in nature as important figure in human life. Although Transcendentalists were a rather heterogeneous group, they became active in social

reforms. Many of them joined anti-slavery societies; others championed the rights of the poor and pioneered the rights of women.

While the Puritan view of perfection was grounded in their view of life, of Christianity and predominantly based on Bible, the Transcendentalists, although still Christians in name, derived their understanding of perfection from their own understanding of the world. This was heavily influenced by German philosophy and Eastern philosophy. Again, it is the best to examine the writings of the Transcendentalists to see in what ways they understood and defined perfection. The representatives of Transcendentalism discussed in this thesis are Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was the leading figure of the Transcendentalists, the major thinker of the movement. He came from a family of Unitarian ministers and became a minister himself but then left the church because he felt he did not believe in everything he was required to preach or perform as an ordained minister. The greatest problem consisted in the criticism of Bible and the commemoration of Lord's Supper. "The deciding argument for Emerson, however, was more personal ... 'This mode of commemorating Christ is not suitable to me. That is reason enough why I should abandon it.' ... Even if Christ *had* intended [it] ... upon all Christians, 'and yet on trial it was disagreeable to my own feelings, I should not adopt it,' " (Packer 369). He became a teacher but soon began to give lectures instead. He lectured on various topics regarding literature, arts and philosophy. He gradually became famous and after many years he was invited to give lectures abroad, in Canada and England. The success of the lectures persuaded him to modify them into essays and publish them. Again, it was a success. Both his lectures and essays were full of ideas about what the society and men should be and could be like. They were ideas to inspire people and help them to become better men, better participants of American society, that is, according to Emerson's ideal.

Emerson finds perfection in nature, in the first place. In his essay "Nature" he observes: "Nature is a sea of forms radically alike and even unique. A leaf, a sun-beam, a landscape, the ocean, make an analogous impression on the mind. What is common to them all,—that perfectness and harmony, is beauty" (Emerson, 19). Perfection is everywhere around him; it transcends the world because it is embodied in nature and nature surrounds us. Perfection is expressed by nature, which is visible to men. Nature

is perfect because it is an expression of God, the Ideal or the Universal Being. It has to be noticed that the God of Transcendentalist is not the same as the God of Puritans. Therefore, the term Universal Being will be used instead. This Universal Being transcends everything that exist in the universe, not only nature, but also human beings. “I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God” (Emerson 10). That would imply that perfection must be inherent part of men as well. However, the reality denies such statement.

Hawthorne disapproves of such a statement by creating his flawed characters. Owen Warland, the artist in “The Artist of the Beautiful”, is one of them. He seeks perfection both in his arts, in creating the perfect imitation of a butterfly, but also in himself, since the perfect cannot be born from imperfect. Especially in this story, there is an obvious attempt to look at possibility of creating perfect things or existence of perfect people among the ordinary.

Perfection cannot be attained by anyone. Only few people can get very close to it. Those are the remarkable men, geniuses, heroes, and poets who are elect to guide the masses toward enlightenment. They show the way. The paradox is that the masses never let themselves to be guided or to attain anything, the effort of the geniuses is in vain. They understand the futility of their endeavor but work to fulfill their role in the history. Owen Warland is such a genius, but according to Hawthorne, society is not interested in being shown way. Instead, he is being scorned by others.

“To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius” (Emerson 259) says Emerson in his essay “Self-Reliance”. He describes mark of a genius; the ideal is an individualist who is sure of himself. The ideal man is the one who believes in himself and his heart. He should believe according to his own measures, according to what he thinks that is true for himself. Moreover, the ideal man is the one who realizes that what he holds as true is true for the humanity, too. This marks him as the leader and an example for the rest. The thoughts of genius have to be true as well.

Again, the question arises, how can people be sure that a man is in fact a genius and has the right to show them the way, that his thoughts are those to direct others and not somebody else? Anyone could claim his right to be followed. But who ascertains that those are really geniuses, and even if they are, that they show a good way? The absence of objective law becomes a problem in Emerson’s theory. He believes in the inherent goodness of the man, or at least of the few, of the elect. He believes with

Carlyle in the great men, heroes, and geniuses who are great individuals and do not have to be restricted by common laws because they exceed them. They make their own laws which makes them tyrants and dictators. They define good and evil, but what is good for them, does not mean it has to be good for others also. A genius or a hero does not mean he will have common good in his mind. The opposite is more likely. It seems that the ideal man who should be perfect has at the same time strong tendency towards losing this perfection. This creates tension and a problem.

Another form of perfection comes from human endeavor. In his essay “Prudence”, he states: “But culture, revealing the high origin of the apparent world, and aiming at the perfection of the man as the end, degrades every thing else, as health and bodily life, into means” (Emerson 358). Here Emerson reveals the means to attain perfection, it is through culture and education of men. Culture is the way to attain perfection; it is the course.

However, it is not certain what this perfection actually means. The natural perfection coming from the Universal Being means recognizing oneself and his own place in the universe, the connection and unity between the self and the Ideal Being. Perfection by culture is different. It seems more likely that in the end, when man is perfected, implies full development of human abilities and, at the same time, development towards goodness. “No wonder that Emerson believed that he was asserting a truth of cardinal importance for human development when he said in 1840: ‘In all my lectures, I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man’ ” (Matthiessen 6).

However, this development is not meant to actually have an end. Stephen Cavell says that “Emersonian Perfectionism does not imply perfectibility – nothing in Emerson is more constant than his scorn of the idea that any given state of what he calls the self, is the last” (Cavell 3). Emerson’s idea of perfection is rather a spiral or circle than a line. It gets closer and closer to the desired point but possibly never achieves it.

Henry David Thoreau was Emerson’s good friend. Although much younger, they shared common interest in art and philosophy. Thoreau wrote essays and poems, some of them were published in *The Dial*. For some time he lived with Emerson’s family and was helping Emerson with everything that was necessary. He tried to both write and support himself, but he did not know how. “Finally Ellery Channing suggested to Thoreau that the only solution to his perennial problem ... would be to

build himself a cabin on Emerson's newly acquired land at Walden Pond" (Packer 513). He did it and spent two happy years there.

Some of his best known works are *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* or "Resistance to Civil Government", later called "Civil Disobedience". *Walden* describes his life at the Walden Pond, it combines observations of nature around him with observations of human society and civilization. Where Emerson describes nature in philosophical terms, Thoreau sounds more like an ecologist. He combines his observations of nature with his thoughts on history, philosophy and literature. "Civil Disobedience" is a reaction to his imprisonment for his refusal to pay tax. He refused to pay it because he objected to slavery and the Mexican war, which he considered unjust. One of his relatives paid the tax instead of him, and so his imprisonment lasted only one night. Unlike Emerson, he never attained much popularity during his life because most of his works were published either before or after his death. While Emerson is rather contemplative, philosophical, and very often hard to understand, Thoreau puts the movement into practice, as in "Civil Disobedience".

In "Civil Disobedience", Thoreau presents his quest for the perfect society:

I please myself with imagining a State at last which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor; which even would not think it inconsistent with its own repose, if a few were to live aloof from it, not meddling with it, nor embraced by it, who fulfilled all the duties of neighbors and fellow-men. A State which bore this kind of fruit, and suffered it to drop off as fast as it ripened, would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen (Thoreau 246).

Thoreau's ideal state and ideal government should mean freedom, justice, and respect towards individuals and their rights. First of all, though, it should provide the same rights for everyone. This was aimed at the obvious presence of slavery where the great part of the residents of his country was denied all human rights. He then continues thinking about an even more perfect state; in fact, he imagines gradual evolution from the current state of things to something more and more perfect. The first step toward perfection is disposal of slavery; examples of such states are not hard to find for Thoreau. This is not the final condition for Thoreau: he imagines something "more perfect and glorious" which does not exist anywhere. Be it what it may, this belief

expresses his idea of gradual development through human striving for better conditions in human society.

This idea rings true with Hawthorne, too. Except, he seems to think there is not enough individuals who would like to improve society. At the same time, they may have conflicting ideas as to what an improvement actually means. The butterfly in “The Artist of the Beautiful” can symbolize such idea. Whereas Owen Warland strives to bring it into existence, other characters are indifferent or even hostile to it. Owen Warland understands the improvement of society in adding more of the beautiful and the ideal while others emphasize the utilitarian. In Hawthorne’s tales, characters usually strive to improve themselves, but they do not have capacity to influence society as the whole. Yet perfection of society assumes gradual perfection of all its components, of the individuals. If the government should become more perfect and govern justly, the individuals have to behave in better way. Thoreau speaks about individuality, but his idea of perfection of government presumes conformity to something; only then can government cease to govern when all the individuals obey voluntarily some rules from their own will and not because they are told to or forced to.

Such a society would more likely be reminiscent of a kind of utopia where all the individuals obey certain rules because they want to, not because they have to. Then would Thoreau’s opening lines of *Resistance* come true: “ ‘That government is best which governs not at all’; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have” (Thoreau 227). However, it would not be a society full of individuals but more likely of robots, programmed alike.

The notion of the perfect state where all are respected and the government does not have to rule contradicts the rest of Thoreau’s essay where he speaks about the responsibility of an individual towards the society and the government. “Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator ... The only obligation which I have a right to assume, is to do at any time what I think right” (Thoreau 228). This is an echo of Emerson. The individual is the one who decides what is right and what is wrong; nobody else has the right to do that for him. Thoreau applies Emerson’s theory on state and government.

Thoreau tries to show how an individual can stand against the state when government makes unjust or immoral decisions, as in the case of the Mexican war. “Moreover, any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one already” (Thoreau 235). It is not necessary to wait for others, an individual who knows

what is right and just should act and do it. An individual can actually make a difference in society. First, because he does it for himself and for his conscience; he acts according to his knowledge and he does what he thinks that is right and just. Second, if there are more individuals like him, they will attain some change. He calls for activity, for peaceful resistance, for refusal of supporting the government with money if the individual does not perceive government's actions as just. For Thoreau, a perfect society is a vision of a peaceful utopia where the government does not have to rule, and yet all the individuals are still free to express their ideas and do whatever they want. It is a place that gradually improves through the self-consciousness of individuals toward perfection but probably never really achieving it.

Margaret Fuller received a superb education because her father, a congressman, decided to give her the same education as his sons would get. For the two years she was editor of *The Dial*, she published essays and wrote a book on the rights of women: *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Later, she moved to New York and became a journalist.

While Thoreau applied the ideas of Transcendentalism to the relationship between an individual and his government and to the question of the ideal society, Margaret Fuller was interested in woman's position in the society. Like Thoreau, she was trying to show ways how to improve the society. In her *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* she advocated for the rights of women, using examples from history, literature, and mythology to prove that women are capable to be equals with men if given opportunity.

I wish Woman to live, first for God's sake. Then she will not make an imperfect man her god, and thus sink to idolatry. Then she will not take what is not fit for her from a sense of weakness and poverty. Then, if she finds what she needs in Man embodied, she will know how to love, and be worthy of being loved. By being more a soul, she will not be less Woman, for nature is perfected through spirit (Fuller 161).

Although "Mrs. Bullfrog" and "Feathertop" are minor short stories, Hawthorne portrays his female characters as strong women. Neither Laura Bullfrog nor Mother Rigby let men dictate their terms. However, there is also opposite example in Georgiana Aylmer from "The Birth-mark" who cannot resist her husband's insistence and lets him

perform the fatal surgery. In some ways, Hawthorne agrees with Fuller, but only to certain point.

Fuller emphasizes woman's right and need of intellectual education, of developing her ability to think and learn. She objects that if that is denied to the woman, she places man in place of God; she worships him because he possesses what she cannot have. However, if she has access to comprehensive education she is able to value herself, the man, and his position in the society. Her natural skills will be perfected by first perfecting her intellectual aspect. Fuller applies what Emerson developed before; the spirit and intellect, that is, the soul, has to come first. Society can progress only when women are equally intellectually developed as men are. She perceives perfection as something that can be attained because for a woman who would like to get education but cannot, the model of perfection is found in the man and his education as well as his abilities. This is the ideal which has to be attained first.

She perceives society as composed of two parts: male and female. To attain the ideal condition, they should be balanced, they should be equally developed. "There cannot be a doubt that, if these two developments were in perfect harmony, they would correspond to and fulfill one another, like hemispheres, or the tenor and bass in music" (Fuller 155). She understands the society as an organism whose parts are mutually dependent on each other. This means that whatever one part does, necessarily affects other parts as well. Therefore, she concludes, "[m]an can never be perfectly happy or virtuous, till all men are so" (Fuller 154). This applies not only to men but women as well. By denying their rights to women, men deny their own happiness.

"However disputed by many, however ignorantly used, or falsified by those who do receive it, the fact of an universal, unceasing revelation has been too clearly stated in words to be lost sight of in thought, and sermons preached from the text, 'Be ye perfect,' are the only sermons of a pervasive and deep-searching influence" (Fuller 9). These are the words that introduce Fuller's book to the reader. She then continues, saying how this perfection could be attained. Some suggest to learn through intellect; others prefer learning by trial and error. While still others recommend to take another route: "In quietness yield thy soul to the causal soul. Do not disturb thy apprenticeship by premature effort; neither check the tide of instruction by methods of thy own. Be still, seek not, but wait in obedience. Thy commission will be given" (Fuller 10).

Without any doubt, the third option signifies the Transcendental view of the problem. It means not to force anything on the individual. Perfection has to be found by

introspection and by uniting with the universal soul, with the absolute. It is interesting that perfection is not expected to come from any activity but, instead, by mere passivity and waiting. In fact, action of the individual could stop this process of becoming perfect. This kind of way toward perfection seems to contradict Fuller's ideas of developing women. Intellectual development and education are not usually gained by introspection but by intentional endeavor. Perhaps this seeming contradiction can be easily explained. The society where women have access to education and can intellectually develop present only one side of Fuller's idea of gaining perfection. Intentional self-education has to be accompanied by periods of seclusion when the mind is allowed to process what it has been taught. The individual also has to develop her own understanding of things and her own point of view. Only then can be the process of education and personal development complete.

Perhaps the most educated woman from the short stories mentioned in this work is Beatrice Rappaccini. She is considered to be so educated that "she is already qualified to fill a professor's chair" (Hawthorne 983). Yet, the fact that "Rappaccini is said to have instructed her deeply in his science" (Hawthorne 983) does not bring her happiness but death. Education is not everything and knowledge may be dangerous, Hawthorne seems to say.

In conclusion, perfection as perceived by the Transcendentalist was heavily influenced by their background and developing interest in philosophy. Unitarianism was of great importance because it offered the option of rational Christianity without everything considered obsolete and outdated, such as belief in miracles or the divinity of Jesus Christ. Philosophy of German idealism mediated through Carlyle and Coleridge brought the emphasis on the individual and the human self. Another point was the greater value of the spiritual and the soul as compared to the natural and material. This was even more intensified by later studies of Eastern philosophy although, there the individuality was suppressed in place of achieving unity with the Universal. Both German and Eastern philosophy shared new interest in nature and its role for humanity.

According to Emerson, perfection is found first in nature because it is an expression of the Universal Being, the Ideal. Perfection cannot be found in humanity, but there are few who are close to it. They are the ideal men who are strong individuals and are gifted to lead the rest. The problem is that they become the measure for the

others; their subjective view becomes the law. Emerson proposes another route toward perfection which is the education and culture. Its aim is the gradual improvement of mankind. The more educated an individual will be the better he will be. The greater part of the society will, thus, be improved for the betterment of all humankind. Cavell argues that nothing is further from Emerson's idea of perfection than understanding perfection as a final state; he, rather, perceives it as a circle or spiral, an endless route towards perfection but never actually achieved.

Thoreau applies the idea of perfection to the government and the individual. He strives for a society where government would not have to rule at all, and where all the individuals would have equal rights. He does not realize though, that such a society would assume perfect individuals behaving according to certain code so as not to break any rules. Only then the government would not need to govern. On the other hand, he very decidedly emphasizes individual responsibility for improving oneself and, thus, the whole society. Only in such a way can be society changed.

Fuller saw the perfect society as a place where women would gain a position equal to men in education and intellectual development. In this case, the goal of "perfect condition" is what the man has and woman does not; that is, the education and possibility of its application. Society consists of men and women. It is an organism which is interdependent, and it cannot flourish fully if one part is neglected. She offers the way toward perfection not only in education but also in quietness and introspection which implies knowledge of the individual's own self and the inner thoughts.

Transcendentalists have two main viewpoints of perfection. The first one is rather philosophical. Perfection can be found in Nature because Nature with its beauty and harmony reflects the Universal Being. A way toward perfection lies in seclusion and introspection which opens one's understanding of the Universe and the Universal Being and man's place in it. The second way is more practical; it signifies education and culture. In such way, people will become better and, thus, the society will be improved as a whole. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and the same is true about the society. According to the Transcendentalist, the society is only as good as its worst members or as educated as its most uneducated members. Perfection perhaps cannot be achieved, but it has to be aimed at and striven for.

Although Hawthorne is sometimes classified as a Transcendentalist, his views are often in stark contrast with their ideas. He disapproves of Emerson's idealism and his belief in generally good humanity. His characters are not usually strong, they are

rather weak and struggle with themselves. Men like Aylmer, Rappaccini, or Warland are exceptional but they work for themselves and for their own improvement rather than for society. They may even disregard others as lesser beings. Although they are educated, it does not make them better. Baglioni and Rappaccini, two scholars from “Rappaccini’s Daughter”, can serve as an example. Hawthorne encourages his characters to strive for perfection but he agrees with Emerson that it is not possible to achieve it.

Society usually does not accept Hawthorne’s characters well, they prefer to be alone. They work hard on themselves or in their area of expertise, but it is hard for them to deal with other people. In some ways they correspond to Thoreau’s idea of perfect people, simply because they seem to disregard society altogether and live for themselves. At the same time, they may be too passive and introspective. They stay apart from the society; so, they cannot influence it, be it for better or for worse. They are not the perfect people Thoreau looks for. They are strong individuals, but they are alone.

Hawthorne portrays women in different ways. Sometimes they are equal to men in education but not in experience. This is case of Beatrice Rappaccini and Giovanni Guasconti. Or, they simply choose different course in life than their counterparts. Annie Hovenden may not posses Owen Warland’s artistic abilities, but she is realistic and a part of society which he is unable to enter. And then there are women can make their way in man’s world, such as Mother Rigby. In all cases, Hawthorne makes them equal to men in their introspection and does justice to them. They are never flat and only secondary characters.

Fuller’s idea of introspection as a way towards perfection certainly finds its way to Hawthorne. His characters are very introspective with rich inner life. However, this can be both a blessing and a curse since it provides them with a place and time to doubt themselves and others; thus, they easily become their own obstacle. Hawthorne definitely agrees with some principles originated from the Transcendentalists, but he mostly stands on his own ground and confronts the theory of the Transcendentalists with the reality he sees in people around him.

2.3 Comparison

It is no surprise that Puritans and Transcendentalists differ in their viewpoint of perfection. Puritans saw it through the Bible while the Transcendentalists were influenced by German and Eastern philosophy. Both groups would more or less agree that perfection cannot be reached, but at the same time it has to be striven for. The reasons differ, though. Puritans believed that perfection could be achieved only with God's help. It was also necessary to have love and good heart and good motives, which again referred to God's doing since the Calvinistic doctrine of utter depravity prevented any possibility of goodness in humankind. Christians were called to be perfect, but at the same time it was made clear that this was impossible with one's own strength.

Transcendentalists viewed perfection as unceasing improvement of individuals towards improving both oneself and by educating individuals in addition to society as the whole. The process of becoming perfect was nowhere to be seen, but perfection had to be struggled for or else life would become meaningless. This endeavor has a parallel in the second notion of Puritan perfection where one strives to improve oneself as much as possible. Again, it is expected that one would get close to perfection but never become perfect.

According to the Transcendentalists, perfection can be found in Nature because it is a reflection of the Universal Being. It can be found in its beauty and harmony. Such a notion would be easily agreed upon because Puritans believed that the world was created by God so it, to some measure, reflected his traits. However, the strong emphasis on individualism would become very problematic. Transcendentalists declared the individual to be the best judge of his own ideas and acts. Even more, it was said that there were men who were entitled to create the law or interpret it as they willed. Such strong men were seen as the ideal men and very close to perfection. This whole notion would be fiercely opposed by Puritans since, for them, all the answers, at least to the moral questions, were found in the Bible, and nobody could evade its truth. Also, the common good was of greater value than the good of the individual because the survival of the group was more important than that of the individual. The stress on individuality would be seen as the mark of self-centeredness, not progress.

Six stories from Hawthorne's collection show in various ways the tensions between various types of perfection and imperfection. The quest for perfection becomes

central for the characters and influences their choices. It also points at the possibility or impossibility of becoming perfect and what it means for everyone.

3 Perfection in Science

3.1 “The Birth-mark”

“The Birth-mark” and “Rappaccini’s Daughter” are two of Hawthorne’s tales that focus on science and men who are dedicated to it. The scientists as portrayed by Hawthorne are rather a combination of alchemists, magicians, and men of science. They pursue science and seek for knowledge that is hidden from the rest of humankind but “[m]an’s intellect is not to be trusted to make the world better. ... This fundamental error is seen also in the ‘scientists’ whom Hawthorne put into his writings. ... They are constantly trying to improve on Nature, and they as constantly fail” (Mills 92). Moreover, they cannot reach society and influence it because they are rather reclusive in their lifestyle and have only a few companions. In both stories, women share their life in some way and take part in the scientific experiments. Both stories are also heavily impacted by the search for perfection in the imperfect world.

“The Birth-mark” tells the story of Aylmer and his wife Georgiana. Aylmer is a scientist who marries Georgiana who is a perfect woman except for one tiny detail. There is a birth-mark on her face in shape of a small human hand. Soon after the marriage takes place, Aylmer realizes his strong dislike towards the birth-mark and begins to think about a possibility of its removal. He loves Georgiana but their conversations regarding the birth-mark and his glances and stares at her gradually begin to make her ashamed of the birth-mark and shudder at his gaze. At last she decides to ask him for help and suggests the removal of the birth-mark if that is possible. He agrees and takes her into his laboratory where he eventually presents her with a potion, which should remove it. She drinks it, remarking that she would drink even poison if it was he who presented it. She falls asleep and the birth-mark begins to fade. After some time she wakes up, only to pity him and his attempt to perfect her and dies.

There are four main characters in the story; Aylmer, Georgiana, Aminadab, and the birth-mark. They can be understood not only as real characters but also as allegorical types which allows more interpretations of the story. Each character is a key to the understanding of this particular quest for perfection. Aylmer is “a man of science – an eminent proficient in every branch of natural philosophy” (Hawthorne 764). He is also a very successful scientist because in his laboratory “he had made discoveries in

the elemental powers of nature, that had roused the admiration of all the learned societies in Europe” (Hawthorne 769). “For his seeker Hawthorne fabricated a scientist and a Neoplatonist who, believing that spirit inheres in matter, which may lead to if not become pure spirit, quests in the narrative present for ideal beauty” (Ruecker 447). Gupta states that “Hawthorne believed content to be of greater importance than form” (Gupta, “Theory of Art” 319) but this “should not lead us to think that he underestimated the value of form or was negligent as craftsman” (Gupta, “Theory of Art” 320).

Aylmer is a combination of a scientist and an artist. He operates in the field of science but he also creates. When Georgiana is in his laboratory, he shows her “[a]iry figures, absolutely bodiless ideas, and forms of unsubstantial beauty” (Hawthorne 771). His thirst for knowledge led him also to the exploration of human physiology and the essence of human life. “Here, too, at an earlier period, he had studied the wonders of the human frame, and attempted to fathom the very process by which Nature assimilates all her precious influences from earth and air, and from the spiritual world, to create and foster Man, her masterpiece” (Hawthorne 769). Although his character represents the spiritual, his work seem to mostly concern the matter both in his earlier studies and in his treatment of Georgiana. At the same time he follows the call of the ideal, of the spirit he believes is hidden in the matter. He is like the boy on Owen Warland’s box who pursues the butterfly but never catches it. Aylmer is a Transcendentalist. He puts his lofty ideas in practice in science which occupies the highest place in his life. He has always known that success demands sacrifices, but he is not afraid of them.

It is not said what made him to leave his laboratory and court Georgiana. So far, only his love of science and knowledge was known, suddenly love for a human was developed in him, too. “He had devoted himself, however, too unreservedly to scientific studies, ever to be weaned from them by any second passion. His love for his young wife might prove the stronger of the two; but it could only be by intertwining itself with his love of science, and uniting the strength of the latter to his own” (Hawthorne 764). He obviously loves his wife, but his love of science is even stronger. Somehow, it happens that he can join those two in one and turn his wife into one of his experiments.

Aylmer also presents himself as a perfectionist, a man whose motto could be: “I want perfection or nothing.” In science, he gradually progresses toward perfection; gaining all the possible knowledge he can. He would know he has achieved perfection if there was nowhere to go anymore. Every challenge and every setback is only another

step toward perfection. However, when Georgiana studies his folio she observes that “his most splendid successes were almost invariably failures, if compared with the ideal at which he aimed” (Hawthorne 774). This is a hint that even his experiment with her will not be as successful as he thinks. Aylmer’s strong idealism forbids him to see the danger. Moreover, the birth-mark brings him on the verge of insanity so he is willing to undergo anything to get rid of it. He pretends he only wants to make her perfect in his eyes.

Another of his qualities is his ability to manipulate others. Only with several remarks and suitable glances he gets Georgiana to believe that her birth-mark is something out of place. “It needed but a glance, with the peculiar expression that his face often wore, to change the roses of her cheek into a deathlike paleness” (Hawthorne 766-767). Georgiana admits that she never thought about it and would not even consider doing anything with it had not Aylmer behaved as he did. Since his judgment is her only measurement, she begins to see the birth-mark in the same way as he does.

This hermetic marriage is absolutely dominated by Aylmer ... The most telling expression of his dominance is the ease with which he convinces Georgiana, after her momentary futile flush of resistance, that the mark on her cheek, which she, until that time, had regarded as charming, is, indeed, a terrible imperfection, so that she completely accepts his valuation of her (Zanger 365-366).

The source of the problem lies in the separation of the couple from the rest of the world where Aylmer’s thoughts become Georgiana’s only mirror and measure. He plants the idea of a possible removal of the birth-mark, and soon enough, she herself begins to hate the birth-mark and asks him to remove it, to conduct the experiment if he can.

Georgiana, as the second character, is primarily defined as Aylmer’s wife. All that is known about her is either directly or indirectly a product of Aylmer’s choices, acts, and decisions. In the story, her inward qualities are of minor importance; the focus is on the birth-mark and her imperfection. She is easily influenced by her husband and agrees to become his experiment because life with him becomes unbearable. She also accepts his views on perfection and becomes a perfectionist herself. When she is dying, she tells Aylmer: “Do not repent, that, with so high and pure a feeling, you have rejected the best that earth could offer” (Hawthorne 780). She encourages him not to be content with imperfection but to aim as high as possible and not to be sorry for her death and the failure of the experiment.

Although he has caused her death she does not blame him. She gave him her consent. She might have realized she had nothing to lose by entering the experiment. Either Aylmer succeeded and the birth-mark, the source of his hatred would be gone and they would be happy again, or she would die and then she would be free of her miserable life with him and his obsession with the birth-mark.

Her heart exulted, while it trembled, at his honorable love, so pure and lofty that it would accept nothing less than perfection, nor miserably make itself contented with an earthlier nature than he had dreamed of. She felt how much more precious was such a sentiment, than that meaner kind which would have borne with the imperfection for her sake, and have been guilty of treason to holy love, by degrading its perfect idea to the level of the actual (Hawthorne 777).

Her perception is so twisted that what would normally be seen as his selfishness and ambitions she sees as perfect love. Or perhaps, she does not know what love is; that it should be an acceptance of another with everything he or she has and is. Aylmer is not able to do that. On the other hand, it is also possible that Georgiana is indeed perfect and loves her husband fully and unconditionally. She loves him the way he is, with his ambitions and selfishness because she realizes that perfection is impossible in this world. She realizes impossibility of Aylmer's quest for perfection and of her probable death if the birth-mark is removed but decides to grant him his greatest wish and lets him gain perfection even if just for one moment.

Aminadab is Aylmer's servant. While Aylmer symbolizes the spirit, Aminadab stands for matter and earthiness. Although he is presented as a brute, it is he who feels pity for Georgiana. Thompson interprets Aminadab's name as a reference to a biblical high priest, yet Aylmer's remarks toward Aminadab are very humiliating. "As Thompson sees it, Hawthorne's 'Aminadab is a symbol of an early authority which is now discredited; the priestcraft for which he stands is no longer significant' " (Walsh 258), and his remark about Georgiana is "rooted in compassion. The old authoritarian religion, in spite of its excesses, had a greater respect for the human personality than has amoral science" (Thompson 415). Aminadab can, in his humanity, see much more than Aylmer. In this polarization of matter and spirit, matter and clay of Aminadab is more humane and closer to perfection of Georgiana's spirit than Aylmer who claims mysteries of nature yet kills Georgiana by his ambitions.

Traditional interpretations of the story explain it in terms of "a conflict between head and heart or inhuman science and compassionate humanity" (Rucker, "Science and

Art” 447). It seems that Aminadab may lack many things and is not appealing at the first sight but he has the most important thing – a heart full of compassion and maybe even love. If Aylmer followed Aminadab’s remark Georgiana would live and he would have his happiness. It is Aminadab who laughs and triumphs at the end. Aminadab can also refer to Puritans and their heritage of perfection in heart and in love. Perhaps even Puritans were seen in similar ways as Aminadab: brutes on the surface with tender heart inside as opposed to the beautiful yet cold contemporaries.

The last important character is the birth-mark. It is silent yet speaks loudly both through Aylmer and Georgiana. They admit that they would not mind the birth-mark if it was not the only thing between Georgiana and perfection. “No, dearest Georgiana, you came so nearly perfect from the hand of Nature, that this slightest possible defect – which we hesitate whether to term a defect or a beauty – shocks me, as being the visible mark of earthly imperfection” (Hawthorne 765) confesses Aylmer. Yet, since it seems such a small thing, it is a temptation Aylmer cannot resist. He who saw such secrets and mysteries, cannot be stopped by a mere birth-mark. So he tries his luck and confronts the Nature. His obsession with the birth-mark outweighs a mere desire for perfection. It turns into a race to destroy the birth-mark. “The birthmark, of course, is emblematic of human mortality and imperfection, the realization of which shocks Aylmer to the point that he becomes obsessed with removing it from his beloved wife’s cheek” (Walsh 260).

Although he hates the birth-mark and shudders whenever he accidentally glances at it, at one point he says: "Believe me, Georgiana, I even rejoice in this single imperfection, since it will be such rapture to remove it” (Hawthorne 771). He expresses joy of a scientist and a man by being presented a seemingly unsolvable problem. The birth-mark is a challenge for him he is only too happy to accept. It turns into a play and contest between Nature and himself as a scientist and alchemist. He wins and loses at once. He wins because he manages to destroy the birth-mark. Yet, at the same time Georgiana dies, and so he fails. The birth-mark “grappled with the mystery of life, and was the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with a mortal frame” (Hawthorne 780). It is suggested that the birth-mark was not only a matter of skin, but it was linked with Georgiana’s self, with her very core. Although they alluded to such a possibility through their conversations, neither Georgiana nor Aylmer took it very seriously. The birth-mark became such a big problem and such an obsession for both of them that they did not care much for death, only for removal of the mark. “[L]et the

attempt be made, at whatever risk. Danger is nothing to me; for life – while this hateful mark makes me the object of your horror and disgust — life is a burthen which I would fling down with joy” (Hawthorne 768).

Since the whole story is clearly and closely focused on the paradox of perfection and imperfection, this topic has to be analyzed as well. Hawthorne, as the author of “The Birth-mark”, strongly suggests that perfection is impossible in the world because the world is imperfect in its nature. Aylmer desires perfection, but that is elusive. When he thinks he has achieved it, he realizes he lost forever. The birth-mark disappears but so does Georgiana. Perhaps, in becoming perfect she ceased to be fit for the imperfect world. “Like the first germ, this one also implies that while humanity may intuit perfections that transcend existence, humanity must shape its aspirations in terms of the decreed conditions of existence, which is unalterably imperfect. Disregard of the decree, then, leads to deserved loss” (Rucker, “Science and Art” 446).

The final struggle to gain perfection, the removal of the birth-mark, is the climax of the story. Aylmer tries to fight Nature or God and gain the outward perfection; he tries to overcome the imperfect birth-mark. Georgiana agrees to undergo the experiment to have peace at last, whether it be without the birth-mark or in the grave. And the experiment fails. There might be several reasons for Aylmer’s failure. The first one is that he simply does not have enough knowledge. He is not perfect enough to struggle with this type of problem. Unfortunately, it cannot be repeated. It is a final test to his ability in which he fails. The second clue lies in the fact or possibility hinted before: the birth-mark is too closely intertwined with Georgiana’s life. The removal of the birth-mark removes her life. The third idea is that imperfection corrupts perfection. Then perfection, naturally, ceases to be perfect. This can be seen through the story as Aylmer infects Georgiana with his ideas and his views. In the story, she is the most perfect before she marries Aylmer because, thereafter, she begins to perceive the imperfection of the birth-mark and gradually accepts his view of the matter as her own. In the search of perfection she loses the perfection she had. The final idea comes from the fact that the story takes place in the imperfect world. If perfection is created in this world there comes again the paradox the Puritans dealt with. The perfect and the imperfect cannot exist simultaneously One has to destroy another. “ ‘My peerless bride, it is successful! You are perfect!’ ‘My poor Aylmer ... I am dying’ ” (Hawthorne 780)! Those are the final words of Aylmer and Georgiana.

Another way perfection can be problematic is because “[i]mperfection is ... a value with infinite possibilities for movement forward” (Holmes 483). Imperfection offers a way while perfection denies it. It is static and final. This also may be a reason why Georgiana dies. Human beings clearly need goals and Georgiana, achieving perfection, loses it. Perhaps Aylmer is even wrong about Georgiana’s perfection because the birth-mark, the imperfect mark, which is supposedly connected with her life, directly implies imperfection and mortality lies in her very core. This would mean the experiment would be useless anyway, but the couple decides to overlook it and address the outward beauty and outward perfection. The focus of the story lies so strongly on Georgiana’s perfection that nobody questions Aylmer’s perfection. Except for his skill in the science he is far from the ideal. He is not perfect outwardly and he is certainly not perfect from the inside. Yet, he foolishly believes he can grant somebody perfection.

The whole story shows the impossibility of ever gaining perfection yet the necessity to struggle to achieve it; because, only in failures and mistakes the fullest human abilities can be shown. The perfection in question is Georgiana’s, not Aylmer’s, and it is the outward beauty and perfection, not the inward one. Even though there are no objective measures for the ideal of beauty, and thus perfection, the husband aims for it and fails. He does not realize that perfection is impossible in the sphere of the imperfect world. Although he manages to destroy the birth-mark, in the same instant his wife dies. The quest for perfection takes all – her beauty, her life, her happiness.

3.2 “Rappaccini’s Daughter”

“Rappaccini’s Daughter” tells the story of a young Italian, Giovanni Guasconti, who comes from Naples to study in Padua. The window of his room has a view of a beautiful garden full of unusual, exotic plants and flowers. He is told that the owner is the famous doctor Giacomo Rappaccini, who, together with his daughter, takes care of them. When he watches the doctor and his daughter Beatrice in the garden, it strikes him that he does not dare to touch the plants while the girl is not afraid of them. Professor Baglioni warns Giovanni against Rappaccini, but he does not care. He becomes acquainted with Beatrice; and, although he sometimes doubts if she is really poisonous as she seems to be – “beautiful, shall I call her? – or inexpressibly terrible?” (Hawthorne 985), he spends his time with her in the garden. One day he realizes he became poisonous, too. He quarrels with Beatrice and gives her an antidote he received from Baglioni which is supposed to neutralize the poison. She drinks it and dies.

The quest for perfection appears on two levels in the story. One is on the professional, scientific level between Rappaccini and Baglioni, and the second is on the personal and amorous level between Beatrice and Giovanni. Rappaccini and his motives remain a mystery for the greater part of the story. He is believed to be a cold scientist who sacrifices his daughter for the sake of an experiment. Most of the information comes from Baglioni whose personal animosity towards Rappaccini distorts the reader’s and Giovanni’s view of the doctor. Baglioni praises him as “a physician so eminently skilled” (Hawthorne 981) but then warns Giovanni that “there are certain grave objections to his professional character” (Hawthorne 982). Rappaccini is said to love science above everything else, people included, and cares only for increasing his professional knowledge. His specialty is poisons which come from his plants, most of which he himself created.

Critics vary in their interpretations of Rappaccini. The standard view is of Rappaccini as a prototype of a cold scientist who is indeed heartless and does not hesitate to conduct his experiments on people, his own family included. Norfolk in his “Rappaccini’s Garden of Allegory” holds this opinion when he describes Rappaccini as a man “who has offered up his child as a sacrifice to science” (Norfolk 177). Others understand Rappaccini as a father who only wants to protect his daughter. Uroff, in “The Doctors in ‘Rappaccini’s Daughter’ ”, sees Rappaccini as a caring father who

poisons his daughter unintentionally and then realizes that the “only cure for her poisonous body, from the homeopathic point of view, is contact with a more intense but similar disease” (Uroff 65) which he finds in Giovanni. This view turns the whole story into experiment in which Rappaccini wanted, in fact, poison Giovanni to cure them both.

The truth is somewhere in between the two opposite viewpoints. In his final and only speech in the story, Rappaccini tries to make himself understood: “Dost thou deem it misery to be endowed with marvellous gifts, against which no power nor strength could avail an enemy? Misery, to be able to quell the mightiest with a breath? ... Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil, and capable on none” (Hawthorne 1005)? It seems he intended his experiment with his daughter as a way to defend her against the evil world and perhaps against men like Baglioni who might have wished to harm her. Still, Beatrice considers his action as evil and complains she “would fain have been loved, not feared” (Hawthorne 1005).

The story is also a twisted parallel to the story of creation and of the garden of Eden. In the Bible, God creates the world and then creates the garden Eden where he places the first man, Adam. Because he is lonely, Eve is created from one of his ribs. Then comes a serpent who questions God’s orders and so Eve decides nothing will really happen if she eats the forbidden fruit. Her act of disobedience admits sin, death, and curse into the world. Norfolk asks a crucial question: “Is Rappaccini's garden an Eden of innocence – or a fallen Eden, corrupted by the knowledge of good and evil” (Norfolk 176)? In Hawthorne’s story, Rappaccini creates a garden that looks like a paradise, full of exotic beauty but also full of poison. Instead of a man, he places a woman into the garden; but she is lonely, and so Giovanni is lured into the garden and gradually poisoned. He becomes one of her species by breathing the odor that surrounded her; “there was a fragrance in the atmosphere around her ... which the young man ... scarcely dared to draw into his lungs. ... Could it be Beatrice's breath ... A faintness passed like a shadow over Giovanni” (Hawthorne 992). Then comes Baglioni to intervene, and the paradise is destroyed.

“There is wickedness in the garden ... brought about by the evil machinations of Dr. Rappaccini in his unholy manipulation of static forms of God’s Creation” (Boewe 48). The question is, if Rappaccini is more God or Adam in the story. If he creates his garden innocently, he is more like Adam; then comes Baglioni in the form of serpent to destroy him through his manipulation of Giovanni. However, if he tries to usurp God’s

place and create his own twisted idea of the Garden of Eden, then “Rappaccini’s Daughter” is a story of fallen paradise.

Baglioni seems to be only a minor character, but at a closer reading it is clear that he might be responsible for the development of the whole story and for Beatrice’s death. After Giovanni’s first conversation, the narrator remarks that “there was a professional warfare of long continuance between him and Doctor Rappaccini, in which the latter was generally thought to have gained the advantage” (Hawthorne 982-983). Baglioni says that Rappaccini would “sacrifice human life, his own among the rest, or whatever else was dearest to him, for the sake of adding so much as a grain of mustard-seed to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge” (Hawthorne 982). From what he says, it becomes clear that Baglioni both envies and feels threatened by Rappaccini. He fears that he is not as good in medicine and science as Rappaccini and so uses Rappaccini’s character flaws against him. When it becomes obvious that Giovanni is being threatened by Rappaccini as well, he decides to act.

Baglioni’s aim is to destroy Rappaccini professionally. Science and the experiments are very important for Rappaccini, and the most important experiment is his daughter Beatrice. In her, he fabricated a new kind of human being. Beatrice is humanity in reverse because she lives by what everything else is killed by. Beatrice once comments when smelling a flower: “Give me thy breath ... for I am faint with common air” (Hawthorne 984), probably meaning she needs her regular dose of poison to live. It is not clear if Baglioni knew that Beatrice would die after drinking his medicine. If it worked and she was cured, the young couple could live happily and Rappaccini’s greatest experiment would be thwarted. If it killed her, Rappaccini would lose not only his experiment but his daughter as well.

In a way, he would lose her anyway, either by death, by Giovanni or by estrangement since Beatrice slowly began to hate her destiny. She dies because “so radically had her earthly part been wrought upon by Rappaccini’s skill ... the powerful antidote was death” (Hawthorne 1005) to her. As for Baglioni’s role in this, at the moment of her death he looks from the window and “in a tone of triumph mixed with horror” (Hawthorne 1005) he calls: “Rappaccini! Rappaccini! And is *this* the upshot of your experiment” (Hawthorne 1005)?

If Rappaccini is to be condemned on the grounds that he cares infinitely more for science than for mankind and would sacrifice human life for his experiments,

as Baglioni contends, then on those same grounds, it is necessary also to condemn Baglioni who does in fact sacrifice human life to uphold the good old rules of medicine. We can only assume that he cares infinitely more for the medical profession than for human life (Uroff 67).

Baglioni reveals his true nature when it is clear that he was performing his own experiment, and in the tragic climax of the story he is watching its outcome from Giovanni's window. He wants to lay the blame on Rappaccini, in a way he is right, but Baglioni is more to blame because Beatrice dies of his antidote. If Giovanni does not realize the possible effect of the antidote, he can be partially excused because of his inexperience and present state of mind. Baglioni should know better.

Both Baglioni and Rappaccini aim for perfection in science, that is to accumulate as much knowledge and possibly fame and scientific acknowledgement as possible. Baglioni does not want to admit it, but everyone affirms that Rappaccini is more successful scientist than Baglioni is. His collection of fabricated poisonous plants and his accomplishment with Beatrice and Giovanni confirm it. When he attains this utmost success, he loses it. Everything he has been carefully building collapses in one moment, in the moment when he should have celebrated. It is bitter and unfair because the fatal strike comes from a man who was simply more poisoned than Rappaccini ever thought. This poison is Baglioni's envy of Rappaccini. Of course, Baglioni could say that he meant well, that he wanted to save Beatrice and return her to life. He could even say that she was dangerous to others and that the madman Rappaccini had to be stopped before he harmed anyone else. However, the motive stays the same, it is his envy of Rappaccini, not sincere concern for Beatrice.

Both Giovanni and Beatrice have outward perfection; both are considered exceptionally beautiful. When Giovanni first sees Beatrice, there is "a young girl, arrayed with as much richness of taste as the most splendid of the flowers, beautiful as the day" (Hawthorne 979). Later Beatrice notices Giovanni for the first time: "There she beheld the beautiful head of the young man ... with fair, regular features, and a glistening of gold among his ringlets" (Hawthorne 985). Both the boy and the girl are young and seem to be perfect. And in both cases, the outward appearance is deceitful.

" 'Rappaccini's Daughter' reveals the consequences for a woman of a man's failure to accept her as she is" (Person 63). Giovanni, although not a scientist, is in many ways similar to Aylmer because both of them are not satisfied with their women.

Giovanni is young and handsome, he gradually falls in love with Beatrice which blinds him to advice of others or his own experience and observation. He even ignores the wound Beatrice's hand caused to him when she stopped him so he would not touch the most poisonous flower in the garden and would not die. Next day, he felt pain and on his hand he saw "a purple print, like that of four small fingers, and the likeness of a slender thumb upon his wrist ... but ... Giovanni wrapt a handkerchief about his hand, and wondered what evil thing had stung him, and soon forgot his pain in a reverie of Beatrice" (Hawthorne 994). He simply chooses to believe what he wants to be true, not what is so obviously true, but also unpleasant. In this, he likens to Aylmer who is also unable to grasp anything else but his own version of truth. Unlike Aylmer, though, Giovanni at least admits doubts.

When he realizes that he became poisonous as well because he developed the same symptoms as Beatrice did, he blames Beatrice. Person claims that "Hawthorne is typically ambiguous about whether Giovanni has actually been poisoned or has only introjected his fear of Beatrice" (Person 63). This opinion leads him to a conclusion that by killing Beatrice he "is condemned to take her place ... he must remain alone for fear of infecting another with the poison he believes he has absorbed" (Person 63). This idea puts Giovanni into an even worse position than the traditional interpretation that he, indeed, became poisonous. It would mean that Beatrice dies because of his mental instability.

However, the interpretation that Giovanni really becomes poisonous is more plausible because not only Giovanni, but also Baglioni and Rappaccini, confirms his poisonousness. Giovanni remembers "Baglioni's remark about the fragrance that seemed to pervade the chamber. It must have been the poison in his breath" (Hawthorne 1000) and Rappaccini tells Beatrice: "Pluck one of those precious gems from thy sister shrub, and bid thy bridegroom wear it in his bosom. It will not harm him now" (Hawthorne 1004)! So, when he learns he became poisonous he overreacts and his true feelings are revealed. The first problem is, he does not want to admit his own blindness and unwillingness to have open eyes and ears to act upon information he gets. Instead, he accuses Beatrice: "Accursed one ... Thou hast filled my veins with poison! ... made me as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and deadly a creature as thyself, — a world's wonder of hideous monstrosity" (Hawthorne 1002)! His love toward her in one moment changes into enormous hatred.

Giovanni, like Aylmer in 'The Birthmark,' confuses perfection of love with perfection of the woman, and in tampering with her, in an attempt to modify and re-create her, he destroys not only the woman but also all his possibilities of happiness. Indeed, both Aylmer and Giovanni are fundamentally unable to love and therefore cannot fall into humanity and maturity (Askew 341).

Beatrice comments on Giovanni's outburst when she is dying: "Thy words of hatred are like lead within my heart – but they, too, will fall away as I ascend. Oh, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine" (Hawthorne 1005)? Her final words indicate that the inner is more important than the outward, and the spiritual is of greater consequence than the natural. Natural beauty or poisonousness caused to somebody are nothing when compared with the beauty or ugliness of human character. Beatrice is poisonous but her soul is not. To Giovanni she says "though my body be nourished with poison, my spirit is God's creature, and craves love as its daily food" (Hawthorne 1003). Giovanni is surprised and offended when she prays; he assumed that the poison in her veins infected her personality as well. At the end, it is he who is more gravely poisonous.

Beatrice is not only beautiful but also kind and innocent, as she has spent all her life in her father's house and garden. Giovanni notices during their first conversation in the garden "such lack of familiarity with modes and forms" (Hawthorne 992) that he responds "as if to an infant" (Hawthorne 993). The reader gradually understands that there is immense poison behind all that beauty and kindness. Due to her father's experiment, Beatrice is poisonous to everything that is normal, to everything that does not contain poison and enters her presence. Oddly, she is not able to kill a human, but it is revealed that her presence and breath gradually infects another being, as is the case with Giovanni. Her poisonousness is a natural quality; it does not affect her character. The poison was never her choice, it was done to her; she is not happy when she kills or harms someone. She does not harm anyone deliberately. When Giovanni accuses her of intentionally infecting him, she professes her love and defends herself: "But it was not I! Not for a world of bliss would I have done it" (Hawthorne 1003)!

The inward and outward perfection or imperfection does not necessarily correspond to each other, as shows Beatrice. "Giovanni's moral error is to confuse Beatrice's earthly component (the poison) with her spirit, which actually remains angelic to the end" (Crews 403-404). She is beautiful, yet poisonous, but although

poisonous, her poison does not infect her inner perfection. Giovanni is handsome, but there is secret poison in him which shows its existence in the critical moment. Then his selfishness, lack of judgment, and self-criticism appear. His poisoned character is then accompanied by his poisoned body. Although there is no direct link between those two kinds of poison, it may seem that what is in the soul spreads gradually into the body. The outward poison cannot reach the inward side of the person the same as the outward perfection cannot change man's corrupted heart.

In conclusion, there are two levels of perfection in the story. First, there is Rappaccini's and Baglioni's search of deeper scientific knowledge. Both of them are successful, but Rappaccini excels as he manages to create new plants and even a new kind of humanity. He creates man and woman who live by poison and are poisonous to everything that is not poisonous. The story is reminiscent of a twisted parallel to the story of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden where Rappaccini is either the innocent Adam or he is a self-proclaimed God. This could be an allusion to the Emersonian concept of the genius who is not afraid to stand alone against gods and above humans. Rappaccini attains his goal, and his experiment is successful. However, his success is immediately followed by the death of Beatrice. At the same time, he loses the fruit of his work and his only daughter. Moreover, his fall was caused by his professional rival.

The problem of Beatrice and Giovanni consists in the difference between the external and internal perfection and the relationship between them. Both young people seem to be perfect from the outside and both of them seem to be very good in the matter of their character. However, there is a problem with both of them. Beatrice is poisonous, she lives by poison and the absence of poison kills her at the end. She also kills or infects anything that comes into her presence. This questions her character, but it is proven that her poisonousness is only external; she does not poison others deliberately. The poison in her does not influence her character either; she is very kind.

Giovanni, on the other hand, harbors selfishness and anger. In the critical moment, he hurts Beatrice tremendously. This reveals his own poison that is accompanied with the natural poison that sustains him now. Beatrice blames him that his poison is much worse than hers was. The point of the story lies in the question of differences between the external and internal perfection and their importance. Although the internal perfection does not have to be obvious at once, it becomes more important. The outward cannot reach the internal, but the inner being can become visible in the natural in due time.

3.3 Comparison

Both stories feature similar characters and similar topics. In “The Birth-mark”, the external perfection is sought after. In the experiment, Aylmer manages to remove the birth-mark from Georgiana’s face and, thus, makes her externally perfect, but she dies at the same moment. His victory is his loss as well. On the other hand, the internal perfection is not considered important, both Aylmer and Georgiana become obsessed with the outward. It is said that the birth-mark is more than only a spot on her face; it is intertwined with her own life. Since the birth-mark is seen as the symbol of corruption, it can mean that her inner being is corrupted the same as her visage or that her obsession with the birth-mark very quickly corrupts her. She has no more peace and becomes desperate to get rid of it. Aylmer’s quest for perfection consists in accumulation of scientific knowledge. His greatest happiness comes at the moment when he can join his two loves in one: his science and his wife in the birth-mark experiment. He is so good that he succeeds, but his success also becomes his failure.

In “Rappaccini’s Daughter” the external perfection is present in both Giovanni and Beatrice as they are considered very good looking people. This perfection is questioned when it is discovered that Beatrice is poisonous. Does her poisonousness disqualify her beauty? Rather, she is presented as the first of a new species, as a new Eve. This means that there is no other woman Beatrice can be compared to and that she is perfect. Even Giovanni cannot change her status because he also becomes the first one of new species, a man. The fact that there is deadly poison in her veins that kills or wounds everything that is not poisonous questions her internal perfection as well. At the beginning she is described as a kind person and the reader naturally assumes that her external perfection is only mirrored in her internal perfection. When the poison in her is revealed, Giovanni is surprised that there could be actually anything good, lovely, or not twisted in her. Yet, it is true. The poison in her remains a biological thing; it does not affect her.

While the birth-mark seen on Georgiana defects her, as many people say, the poison of Beatrice cannot be seen at once. Only when non-poisonous plants, animals or humans come into her presence is it realized. The obsession with the birth-mark quickly changes Georgiana; the defect in her outward appearance affects her inner being as well. In this, she is similar to Giovanni in whom the critical moment reveals his inner corruption of heart, his selfishness, anger, and lack of judgment. Both the birth-mark

and the poison in Beatrice are shown to be too closely linked with Georgiana's and Beatrice's life to be removed. In both cases, the effort to remove them is fatal. The birth-mark is the part of Georgiana the same way as Beatrice cannot live without poison, and an antidote kills her.

Both stories show that the internal perfection is more important than the outward perfection. Although beauty is more easily seen and admired, the heart, or the quality of human character, is of greater importance. Beatrice tells Giovanni he was more poisonous from the beginning than she was. This means that the corruption of heart is more serious than biological poison because it can kill other human hearts in the same way Giovanni is very seriously harmed Beatrice with his words. The same case is with Aylmer who lets his obsession with the birth-mark to first distress, then manipulate and kill his wife. His obsession is a more serious matter than an insignificant birth-mark.

All three scientists in the stories strive for perfection in science. Rappaccini creates new Eden and new humanity, although a poisonous one. He achieves something that has never been achieved before. He succeeds but at the same time loses everything because of Baglioni's intervention. His destiny is similar to Aylmer's. Both of them have enough scientific knowledge to successfully accomplish what they decide to, but in both cases there is something that has been overlooked. Aylmer has no idea that the removal of the birth-mark will remove his wife's life as well. Rappaccini does not realize the enormity of Baglioni's envy and his eagerness to give an antidote to Beatrice in order to thwart the experiment either by destroying the poison in Beatrice or by killing her. Both stories confirm the same idea: perfection can be achieved, but it has to be immediately lost or destroyed as it cannot exist in the realm of the imperfect world and in the presence of imperfect people.

Several points in the stories correspond to the Puritan view of perfection. The striving for perfection would be certainly applauded, especially the striving for internal perfection. Unfortunately, the stories portray quite the opposite: the striving for external perfection that would be considered as a vanity, especially in case of Georgiana. The characters confirm the Puritan point of view that the heart of man is corrupted and that perfection cannot be gained without God's help. Giovanni's poisonous words and Georgiana's and Aylmer's obsession with the birth-mark confirm this. Paradoxically, Beatrice validates the point as well because she prays, or is able to pray. Thus the reason for her internal perfection.

As for the science, the matters become more complex and problematic. The Puritans would approve of the endeavor to do one's job as well as possible and to gain as much proficiency in one's work as possible, but the aim both scientist take would be very dubious. Both Aylmer and Rappaccini work on the border of natural laws. Aylmer's obsession with the birth-mark, especially Rappaccini's creation of new species, would be seen as an interference into God's creative realm of work. Perhaps there would be no surprise that both stories end tragically; both Georgiana and Beatrice have to die because such unnatural acts have to be punished. There are borders which are not meant to be crossed.

As for the Transcendental view of the stories, the strong emphasis on individualism is apparent. Both Aylmer and Rappaccini are intellectually strong and unusually gifted men. They are not afraid of new paths; they seek them. They are sure that they know what is good for others and either influence or decide for others. Aylmer manipulates his wife into undergoing the experiment; Rappaccini poisons his own daughter, lures Giovanni into the garden, and lets him infect himself with the poison. Even Baglioni thinks he knows what is best and interferes. He thwarts the experiment but also kills Beatrice. On the other end of the spectrum are Georgiana, Beatrice, and Giovanni who seem more like pawns in the game of the three scientists.

Nature is very important in "Rappaccini's Daughter" since the greater part of the story takes place in the garden. However, it is not pure Nature; it is a fabricated one. In a way, it is of the same kind as Aylmer's laboratory. There is almost nothing natural there; everything is twisted. Even the flowers "have shocked a delicate instinct by an appearance of artificialness ... the production was no longer of God's making, but the monstrous offspring of man's depraved fancy, glowing with only an evil mockery of beauty" (Hawthorne 990-991). Everything is twisted in the garden. It appears to possess the beauty and harmony that Emerson valued in the Nature, but in fact it does not.

There is no place for education and improvement of people in the stories. In fact, they seem rather to deteriorate. Beatrice and Georgiana die. Giovanni is poisoned. Baglioni becomes a murderer, and Aylmer and Rappaccini are left behind in the ruins of their previous success. Moreover, all the characters are very educated people. Except Georgiana, they are either scientists or their students. Yet, despite their superb education, tragedy is not hindered.

It is clear that both Puritan and Transcendental views of perfection mingle through both stories. Both tendencies influence the development of the stories, but the

Puritan view seems to be much stronger. The individualism and education become the source of the corrupted heart that is the invincible barrier towards perfection.

4 Perfection in relationships

4.1 “Mrs. Bullfrog”

“Mrs. Bullfrog” and “Feathertop” transition the quest for perfection from the world of science to the tangle of human relationships. Both are satirical pieces in which Hawthorne criticizes human society and its eagerness to see only what it wants but not reality. Durr comments on “Mrs. Bullfrog” as a “burlesque”, a “story which is broadly comical”, but reminds the reader that “it too deals with the old motif of appearance and reality and has as its ‘moral’ the acceptance of inevitable mortal imperfection” (Durr, “Hawthorne’s Ironic Mood” 488). This short story addresses the topic of the search for the right marriage partner and its perils. The general idea for this chapter lies in the question how the quest for perfection is applied to interpersonal relationships, and more specifically, to romantic relationships between men and women. It addresses the question how is perfection seen and in which ways.

Thomas Bullfrog is a man who saw women from such proximity during the years spent working in a shop where he sold clothes to women that he will probably never marry. In his mind, he has formed an image of an ideal woman he would have liked to married but whom he could not have found anywhere. When he accidentally meets her, he marries her and takes her home. During the journey an accident happens and he finds her bride Laura transformed into an ugly woman with sharp tongue. Very quickly she is transformed back which leaves him dumbfounded. Later he finds an article which identifies her as a woman who prosecuted her lover for abandoning her and for breaking his promises. He is devastated because of this second fatal blow to the perfect image of his bride. She tells him, though, that it is normal for women to hide their imperfections before the wedding and that no perfect women exist at all. He should be happy to have such capable wife who stood her ground even at court and won five thousand dollars as compensation which became her dowry. When he realizes that he is suddenly very thankful for the lawsuit because it gave him a rich bride.

Thomas Bullfrog is a rather weak character compared to his wife because he does not do much in the story except choosing his bride and then being gradually surprised by the real woman he married. His wife takes the place of the main protagonist. He describes himself to be once “an over-curious simpleton” (Hawthorne

406) because he, like others, resolved “to wed nothing short of perfection” (Hawthorne 406). He admits that it was just his proximity to women when he realizes “the ladies themselves were hardly so ladylike as Thomas Bullfrog” (Hawthorne 406), opening his eyes to their profound flaws which made him determined to find a woman free from the long list of the shortcomings.

He expresses his requirements for wife predominantly in physical qualities and her being “ladylike”: “Besides the fundamental principle, already hinted at, I demanded the fresh bloom of youth, pearly teeth, glossy ringlets, and the whole list of lovely items, with the utmost delicacy of habits and sentiments, a silken texture of mind, and, above all, a virgin heart” (Hawthorne 406-407). Most of the list he eventually finds in Laura, but he makes his decision in such haste that the reality takes him by surprise.

Laura Bullfrog is presented to the reader in two forms: first, as a beautiful bride and wife and then as an ugly old woman. It is hinted in the story that her good looks may be a product of some potion or a spell which is broken because of the accident. The real Laura was “a person of grisly aspect, with a head almost bald, and sunken cheeks, apparently of the feminine gender, though hardly to be classed in the gentler sex” (Hawthorne 409). The deceived husband seems to come to terms quite quickly with this fact once she transforms back into her beautiful form. If she can stay beautiful most of the time, he can live with it. Her temper is different matter. What is worse, she begins to unveil it even before the accident. She speaks more decidedly to him which is only a prelude to the profound change during the accident when she injures the coachman and behaves more like a witch than a lady. After her transformation, she again behaves almost faultlessly, but then Mr. Bullfrog finds the old article describing her suing another man, which in his eyes, is most unladylike. This is his main loss and fault of the whole situation because he missed an important piece of information, which, as she states, “all the world knew” (Hawthorne 411). He may have heard about this had not he married Laura only two weeks after they met. The episode at the court is seen in opposite ways by each partner. While he sees it as serious character flaw, she understands it as a benefit because she “has shown the proper spirit of a woman, and punished the villain who trifled with her affections” (Hawthorne 412). Laura presents herself as a strong woman who does what she feels should be done no matter the ideas of others.

In this story, it can be seen that perfection may be accidental depending on the point of view of the person interested in. More specifically, the cause of disagreement is perfection of a woman, what makes her perfect, and the opposite views presented here by Thomas and Laura. It is interesting that there is no comment concerning his own looks or character. He looks for perfection in others but overlooks himself. In this he is like Aylmer. Thomas has been so affected by the wrong character traits of women that the idea of the perfect woman is crystallized in his mind “such varied excellence did I require” (Hawthorne 406), but it did occur to him that a perfect woman may require a perfect man to create the perfect match.

Concerning a perfect woman, both Thomas and Laura agree in the sphere of the body. The woman has to be beautiful to be perfect. Thomas has been looking for such a wife, and Laura turned herself into beautiful young lady, thus confirming the importance of physical beauty. Mr. Bullfrog’s idea of perfection is ladylike behavior, the opposite of what he witnessed in the women at his shop: a gentle, quiet and refined woman. Laura shatters this ideal twice: first, when she transforms back into her ugly form and second, when the article about the lawsuit is read. The first case is conceivably pardonable because she behaves according to her character. Beautiful women act beautifully, and ugly women act disagreeably. It is expected that a pretty woman’s appearance should match her candor. Nobody is amazed to see an old witch hit a man or use very strong words in dealing with others.

However, the second case is more serious according this rule. The woman in the article is not described as an ugly old woman but as someone who is able to arouse intense feelings in a man toward herself. At the same time, she does not hesitate to go to court to defend her rights. This shocks Thomas because, in his mind, the idea of a beautiful woman and unladylike behavior do not correspond. Laura has a different opinion on the matter. According to her, seeming discord between countenance and behavior is not unfortunate. Suing a lover may be very unladylike, but it serves two purposes. First, it shows that woman is not just a defenseless victim but someone who can act and negotiate on her own. She does not hesitate to depart from the norm to attain her goals. Second, her actions are also very practical, which eventually causes Thomas to give his consent.

After all, Laura does not even proclaim herself to be perfect. When they continue traveling after the accident, she reprimands him: “You have discovered, perhaps, some little imperfections in your bride. Well – what did you expect? Women

are not angels. If they were, they would go to heaven for husbands – or, at least, be more difficult in their choice on earth” (Hawthorne 412). Her words give comical point to the story because, absolutely contrary to the man’s expectations, she notes her “little imperfections”. The rest of her speech reveals profound truth here. In fact, Laura very gently reminds her husband of his own imperfections. She understands that there are no perfect women as well as there are no perfect men. Even if they existed they would not look for partners among imperfect human beings. Therefore, Laura was bound to be imperfect to some extent. At the same time, she deliberately kept those imperfections well hidden from her suitor. She must have been aware of the fact that he was looking for perfect bride; so, she made herself to appear to meet all his conditions and requests. He got what he wanted. This short story concerns the quest for perfection on the man’s side while woman is well aware of her own imperfections and probably of his also. However, she decides to play his game and give him what he wants.

In the view of perfection, Puritan and Transcendental heritage, is especially prevalent in this chapter, heavily influenced by the historical position women held in society during those times. A perfect Puritan woman would be predominantly a wife and a mother of children, quiet, obedient and hardworking, pious, and charitable. A perfect woman of Transcendentalists could stand somewhere between the Puritan ideal and the intellectual woman, such as Margaret Fuller. She would possess good female traits, beauty but also a highly developed intellect and education. They imagined a woman who would be an intellectually equal partner to man, but, at the same time, they still demanded a wife and mother who would properly represent the family and the husband to the surrounding world.

According to the Puritans, there would be plenty of issues to address in the case of Thomas and Laura Bullfrog. Concerning Laura, most disturbing would be the path towards perfection which she chose or even the fact she decided to gain physical perfection. If her ugly form was natural for her cannot be known. Nonetheless, there would be no excuse for her to strive for perfection through witchcraft as she did. Thomas’ issue is his pride and determination to get the best, according to him. Although, as he says, “if a young angel, just from Paradise ... had come and offered me her hand, it is by no means certain that I should have taken it (Hawthorne 407). Such were his expectations of his future wife. In those times, the primary reason for marriage

was having children. However, for this, one does not need a woman as good, as beautiful or as perfect as an angel.

Again, the themes repeat here. Mankind searches for perfection and tries to reach it only to see how it leaves his grasp forever. Man is encouraged to strive for perfection. In Thomas's case, he encourages himself, though not in very healthy way, but when he almost achieves it, it disappears like a delusion. Thus, it appears it is worse to try and lose than never dare to do it. Paradoxically, Laura, as a woman, speaks what Puritans thought: perfection is impossible to gain. She seemingly possesses it but only outwardly and only for some time until spell is broken, which can happen any time. It seems that her outward perfection influences her inward state of soul: when she is beautiful, she is the model of perfect woman. This idea loses its place when it is revealed she has questionable past and that she has been lying to her husband since they met. When the spell is broken it only reveals what is really hidden inside her, perhaps covered by better attributes, but still there, nevertheless. Even Thomas is not better. When he finds out the truth he knows nothing can be done, yet he gladly forgives his wife once he hears that her past act brought with her an enormous dowry. Suddenly, his desire for perfection does not matter anymore.

It is interesting to notice how Laura tries to fit or evade the expectations put on her by society as a woman. Again, the ideal is primarily of a Puritan wife here: her goal in life would and should be to marry well, to become a mother, and to give children to her husband. This should be accompanied with perfect manners, and ideally, perfect physical features also. However, to accomplish all this she has to change herself to fit the ideal. First, there is a change in physique, and if change is made, it can be taken to the utmost and lead to perfection instead of her original ugliness. To a degree, manners and behavior come with the outward appearance. Yet because all of that is done, even by the agency of some sort of spell, it is transitory, and not even she can fully control it. Although she seems to fit the ideal outwardly and it seems she tries to do everything in her power to become such woman, she breaks out from this paradigm. She defends her presence at the court even though it is considered to be contrary to the ideal. She defends her right to defend herself.

According to Transcendentalists, perfection can be found in Nature with its beauty and harmony, but perfection can be also gained through introspection. People can also become more and more perfect through culture and education. Laura has found no beauty and harmony in herself. She realized there would be no improvement, not

even perfection, by any natural means; thus, she decided to use her own ways toward perfection. Most likely, she did not care very much for her soul or her spirit because it seems that the great part of her endeavor to perfect herself is spent on her exterior. Her introspection brought her to the idea that she has to act to achieve what she wants. No passivity would change anything. Not even culture and education would possibly help her. Something drastic had to happen which would change her very being. Witchcraft did the trick for Laura and changed her into the most beautiful woman in the country, at least according to Thomas Bullfrog. Her outward change also somehow influenced her spirit because when beautiful she acts accordingly, and when ugly, she is a shrew.

Laura's issue lies especially in her physical ugliness but also in her repulsive behavior. Transcendentalists do not really address either. Beauty is either present or absent; there is no advice how to cultivate it. Outward aspects of one's person cannot be changed. Inward features are different; those can be cultivated, but again, only to some extent and only if there is willingness to do so. What is more, culture and education can only improve that which is already present, they cannot really change a bad person for the better. They can provide rules, morality, or examples. They can show how to think or what to think, but they can hardly change person if there is no determination to do so.

Thomas Bullfrog seeks for perfection in his future bride, but he has no care to work on his own improvement. He takes himself as a static man, as if carved in stone, with whom no change can be made. He imagines that his ideas and abilities simply stay. They can be added but not improved nor changed. Whatever he learned about women he understands as a fact that cannot be doubted. If he decides to find the perfect woman it has to happen no matter how futile it can prove to be. He cannot realize his state. He desires perfection in his wife but does not have any notion regarding his own imperfection. This idea does not even come into his mind. Perhaps he is even so self-assured he considers himself perfect: the great man who is infallible and has every right to judge the perfection in others. Laura is different. Since she moves between the extremes, ugliness and beauty, she understands need for perfection and can appreciate it. Perfection and the benefits it brings is worth everything to her, and she is not afraid to cross lines to achieve it. She knows what she wants, and nothing will stop her.

Transcendentalists also proposed that women should be educated to be equal partners of men. In the story of Thomas and Laura, intellect and education have no place at all. His only worry is to find a beautiful and well-behaved woman. Thomas probably does not have much education himself to require anything similar from his

future wife. It is possible he would feel humbled if his wife was more educated than he was. Laura herself does not appear to care much for intellectual development. She is clever, though, because she knows what to do to become a wife and mother. Perhaps she understands that true education is not valued so high in women as their appearance and manners. Also, the purpose of women around Laura is to get married, have children, and live comfortably. And so she does it in her own way. Being exceptionally ugly, she uses a spell to change herself. Even some years before she managed to acquire fortune by suing a man, be it her lover, suitor, or not. Money and beauty are the most important matters both for Laura and Thomas. For her, they enable her to fulfill her role; and for him, they are what he always wanted.

4.2 “Feathertop”

In “Feathertop: A Moralized Legend”, Mother Rigby, a witch living somewhere in New England, one day decides to make a scarecrow to protect her plants. The result of her work is so good she decides to play a trick on somebody. She endows the scarecrow with human resemblance so he appears to be a human being and sends him to magistrate’s house to court his pretty daughter Polly. When he enters the town, everybody admires his fine clothes and, therefore, considers him to be a noble. The magistrate welcomes him into his house and lets him alone with his daughter Polly. They talk and walk around the parlor and the girl appears to be falling in love. However, she looks into a mirror, and in the reflection she sees herself and Feathertop as he truly is, a scarecrow. She faints and Feathertop runs back to the witch. He declares he does not want to live anymore and tosses away Mother Rigby’s pipe which provided him his human likeness and energy and becomes a simple scarecrow again.

In “Feathertop”, perfection can be found on several levels. First, it is Mother Rigby creating a scarecrow too perfect for his role and, consequently, the relationship between Mother Rigby and Feathertop. In a way, she is an artist, although a crooked one. She could be compared to Drowne in “Drowne’s Wooden Image” who also creates, or seems to create, a human being made of wood. Even in his case there is the possibility of witchcraft. The second level is the way Feathertop affects the people he meets when they see a rich man in him. It is a question whether this is caused by Mother Rigby’s talent or their own projection that they see and hear only what they want to. The last level lies in Feathertop’s relationship towards Polly Gookin and their mutual awareness of each other’s perfection and imperfection.

Neither the witch, Feathertop, the magistrate, nor Polly are perfect. The witch is an outsider who lives on the outskirts of society but influences it according to her wishes since she knows the secrets of many of its members. That is how she gets Feathertop into the magistrate’s house. She is an outcast because of what she does; she is a witch and she openly admits it, even boasting to be the best witch in New England. She usually likes doing nasty things, but the day Feathertop is created, she is in a very good mood; she makes a scarecrow she calls pretty. However, there can never be anything like a pretty scarecrow, these will always be a mismatch of parts which do not

belong together. As for the scarecrow, Feathertop can be considered perfect and pretty, although a witch made him.

Mother Rigby is called one of the best witches in the New England and the creation of the perfect imitation of a human being, as she says, proves her abilities. Although Feathertop does not look like a human being, at the beginning she uses her power of illusion to make him human-like in many aspects. He is so perfectly human she repeatedly utters her success, “He’ll meet plenty of his brethren, at every street-corner” (Hawthorne 1106). When he complains he has nothing to say, she scolds him: “Thou shalt say a thousand things, and saying them a thousand times over, thou shalt still have said nothing! ... When thou comest into the world, (whither I purpose sending thee, forthwith) thou shalt not lack the wherewithal to talk” (Hawthorne 1110).

For people in the streets, Feathertop is a perfect illusion of what they want to see. At the same time it is possible that Mother Rigby is aware of their way of thinking and creates Feathertop to perfectly fit their imagination. This part of the story becomes satirical comment on human society. Holaday notices that although “the satire is directed against people in general rather than one person in particular ... Feathertop, himself, is not satirized at all” (Holaday 104). It is their reaction to him which is the core of the satire. He is presented as an innocent being caught in the middle of human affairs.

One reason why the citizens of the town are so eager to accept the illusion of Feathertop is that he brings with himself the illusion of wealth, nobility, and education, which, consequently, raises their own importance in their eyes. Not only do they admire his clothes and speculate his origin and intentions, they assign him impossible things: “If he came among us in rags, nobility would shine through a hole in his elbow” (Hawthorne 1115). They let his appearance blind them. Only two inhabitants of the town can see past the exterior. “[A]n impertinent cur, which, after snuffing at the heels of the glistening figure, put its tail between its legs and skulked into its master's backyard, vociferating an execrable howl. The other dissentient was a young child, who squalled at the fullest stretch of his lungs, and babbled some unintelligible nonsense about a pumpkin” (Hawthorne 1116).

This statement shows that children and animals can see beyond the pretense of the adults and are not blinded by the outside. They can feel the truth about the inward qualities of human beings. It is strange, though, despite Feathertop’s pleasant personality, the dog is frightened to death. It can feel the presence of the invisible

companions with which the witch gifted his creation. The child behaves in a similar way. Those who glimpse the reality or suspect anything have either a sixth sense or have a history of dealings with the witch. There are signs to consider, yet people prefer to see the good and pleasant to the suspicious and uncomfortable. It should be reminded here that Mother Rigby is another person who does not yield to the illusion she created. Actually, she is the only person that can see Feathertop both ways: as the scarecrow but also the way she wants the townspeople to see him.

The magister cannot recognize Feathertop as a scarecrow, but he pays close attention to him because of a message he was given by Feathertop that connects him with the witch. “Mother Rigby's word of introduction, whatever it might be, had operated far more on the rich merchant's fears, than on his good will” (Hawthorne 1118). Furthermore, he notices things he does not like about the stranger: he sees moving figures on Feathertop’s pipe and “became convinced, that these figures were a party of little demons” (Hawthorne 1118). Yet, he could not afford to do anything about the guest because of his fear of Mother Rigby.

Polly, who is the focus of Mother Rigby’s trick, does not suspect anything until the mirror reveals the truth. She is happy to find such a rich and pleasant man interested in her and promptly falls in love. She is yet another person to be fooled by the outward appearances. “No matter what Feathertop said, his words found depth and reverberation in her ear; no matter what he did, his action was heroic to her eye” (Hawthorne 1120). Not only magic but also love blinds her eyes. Moreover, she sees only what she wants to see. Therefore, her shock is much stronger when she spots Feathertop’s true nature in the mirror.

The thoughts on how much Polly truly influences Feathertop with her love differ. Holaday states that Hawthorne “let him [Feathertop] fall in love with Polly Gookin. What is more, he let that honest experience so humanize Feathertop that he cried out in self-contempt to Mother Rigby, ‘I've seen myself, mother! I've seen myself for the wretched, ragged, empty thing I am!’ ” (Holaday 105). Durr, on the other hand, is convinced there is not even a hint of possibility of love between Polly and Feathertop. “The point in ‘Feathertop’ is that the gentleman is a dummy and that Polly, like the people at large, falls for a mere illusion, a pasteboard mask behind which is nothing. What she feels for the dummy cannot deserve the name of love, and indeed there is nothing in Feathertop to love” (Durr, “Feathertop’s Unlikely Love Affair” 493).

As usual, the truth is found somewhere between the two extremes. In my opinion, Feathertop's illusory essence does not affect Polly at all. She would fall in love the same if what she saw was real. The story would be just the same if there was indeed a handsome and rich noble parading with Polly. At the same time, it is true that what Hawthorne calls love, in Polly's case, cannot be true love because she does not know anything essential about Feathertop. It is only infatuation. However, the situation would be the same if a real young man stood in Feathertop's place.

Fortunately, Polly is saved through the truth-telling mirror. Both Polly and Feathertop are changed through this experience. Polly is the only person in the story who was not aware of the deception and who is able to see the reality just the way it is. Neither people outside nor her father experience this. She faints because the truth is too much for her to bear. It remains a question to answer what happens to her when Feathertop is gone. Is she able to adhere to reality or is she going to stay in the sphere of the illusory?

Pretense and illusion is one way to seemingly gain perfection. It is an attempt to create something that does not exist either to fulfill human expectations or that of one's own. Illusion is an attempt to shortcut the hard work and get to the place of perfection quickly. Unfortunately, it has to pass, and truth reveals itself, as in the case of Feathertop. There is always a mirror that tells the truth, be it welcome or unwelcome to others or the one who pretends. Yet, people are not willing to look into the mirror very often because what they glimpse may cause similar effects as what happens to Polly and Feathertop when they see their reflections. The truth may be too much for the person who has been under the illusion. It may be that the illusion was welcome and encouraged, such as an apparently rich and handsome man interested in Polly, yet the exposed lie stabs the deceived person twice.

First, the illusion is transient and reality reveals is revealed. Second, the deceived person realizes his own weakness and willingness to let himself deceive. This is the case of Polly who cannot bear the scarecrow she sees in place of her suitor. The mirror does not have to be physical, it can be a situation, a remark which opens the eyes unable to clearly see. Sometimes the realization is so painful that the mirror is broken, either by the deceived or by the deceiver. Such is not the case with Polly; she faints instead, as if she broke herself to shield herself against pain.

Feathertop experiences another type of transformation. Again, opinions vary whether he is able to actually realize the truth about himself. “The scene is dramatic but fallacious; for it is impossible that Feathertop, as the story defines him, should suddenly reveal a capacity for self-knowledge. He is all exterior ‘without heart, soul, or intellect’ and upon this fact the whole moral of the legend is founded” (Durr, “Feathertop’s Unlikely Love Affair” 493). Even if he was not able, the mirror experience changes him, and he is, indeed, able to know himself and react accordingly.

Feathertop is a strange case of deception because, although he is aware of the pretension, the ugly truth about himself affects him also very strongly. He is not able to look at himself, nonetheless for Polly to see him as he really is. The shock of reality and truth is so severe he runs away, collapses, and gives up. In this case, the witch is the real mastermind, and, as such, she remains behind the scenes. She causes the illusion yet is not there to face the mirror. Therefore, she is unchanged. She continues creating illusions and pretenses because this is what people demand of her. Her spells are a shortcut to their desires and to perfection as they see it. They do not realize there will be a mirror to face, sooner or later, nor the pain their choices shall cost them. The magistrate is such person. He cannot deny entrance to Feathertop because he once dealt with the witch, and facing that mirror now would be too costly for him.

What is interesting about Feathertop is the tension in his personality. He is created by a malicious witch which should affect him and his actions, yet he impresses the reader as a very kind person. His life energy comes from Mother Rigby’s mysterious pipe that is being constantly filled by an invisible being called Dickon, possibly a demon. Feathertop procures his energy from it; and if he stops, the illusion of his humanity fades away, and his true resemblance appears.

However, his “innocence and his readiness to die are indicative of a capacity to thwart the evil forces that Mother Rigby has released. Returning to the cottage and to death, Feathertop renounces the ethics and the ambition of the artisan whose craft becomes a craftiness that is opposed to the achieved essence of her creation” (Rucker, “The Art of Witchcraft” 39). He seems to contradict the statement that from good nothing bad can come and vice versa. It might be that he does not actually speak much, and when he speaks it is just the social pleasantries and nothing that would indicate much about his character. Yet, when he sees his true image in the mirror he cannot bear it and leaves the town, refusing to live. He proves to be very sensitive toward his surroundings. In short, he is kind; although he should not be.

One of the issues which present the Puritan heritage in this short story is the matter of heart and self-knowledge. As said before, the Puritans valued highly the ability not only to question one's own power but also admit one's incompetence. This is shown in Feathertop's awakening in front of the mirror. He also becomes the hero when he decides to stand against his own creator, her rules, and basically, against himself. Illusion is a problem. As a matter of fact, it is a lie which would be abhorrent to Puritans. The ending of the story proves they would be right. Illusion cannot bring happiness and does not work as the shortcut to perfection. For some time it seems t it has been achieved, only for him understand it has failed and destroyed relationships and trust with others. Unfortunately, illusion takes into account man's fallen nature, as would Puritans put it: the nature which prefers the illusion of perfection as opposed to the hard way of daily labor toward perfection.

Strangely enough, some of the themes valued by the Puritans could be interpreted as positive with the Transcendentalists also. As one of the way of gaining perfection is through introspection, the mirror experience represents a symbol in which it can take place. Feathertop's and Polly's reaction, and the consequent absence of others, show various reactions humanity is capable of and the strength of the spell of illusion on human beings. Feathertop's introspection brings him to give up his human existence as it shows him who he really is. He becomes a symbol of self-knowledge and the reality that often lurks under the illusion of civilization and culture. The witch endows him with illusively good looks and rich clothes as well as money, but it means nothing when the illusion is gone and only the scarecrow remains. Perhaps his reaction to his true image also sprouts from his realization of who he truly is. He realizes he cannot improve, and his human likeness is only an illusion, both from the outside and the inside. Although the witch compares humankind to the scarecrow several times, even saying that the scarecrow may be better than many of them, for Feathertop there is no future. His humanity is only a bubble that pops.

Feathertop comes into existence as a composition of various sticks, a sack, a pumpkin, and various shabby clothes Mother Rigby has at her home. He is a bit slow because he has no brains since his head is only a pumpkin, but this is not a problem as the witch puts it: "I've seen worse ones on human shoulders ... many a fine gentleman has a pumpkin-head, as well as my scarecrow" (Hawthorne 1104). Despite all this, he seems to be good, kind, and have tender heart. He confirms the theory that people are naturally good except for the fact that he is not human, and other main protagonists do

not have good intentions and, therefore, deny it. He is a puppet and does what he is told. He is even pretty and perfect but only as a scarecrow. His human perfection is only an illusion that disappears in the mirror.

4.3 Comparison

Both “Mrs. Bullfrog” and “Feathertop” are similar in many aspects. Both deal with interpersonal and romantic relationships. In both stories, deception and illusion make the momentous part of the plot, and women are its cause. In “Mrs. Bullfrog”, Thomas Bullfrog looks for perfect bride and finds her, only to realize he has been tricked by the woman. It is only the illusion that is perfect and beautiful, but the reality of his wife is an ugly old woman. She is beautiful and ladylike on the surface, but there is ugliness and bad behavior underneath. In “Feathertop”, the witch creates an illusion of a handsome man to court magistrate’s daughter Polly. In fact, the man is a scarecrow she has created, and his mission is meant as a trick.

Both Laura Bullfrog and Mother Rigby use witchcraft to create their illusion. In both cases, the illusion is broken by incidents beyond their control, and the truth is revealed. Laura suffers directly because she is revealed as an old woman instead of a young bride; while, in the second story it is Feathertop the scarecrow who pays the price of humiliation. Mother Rigby is not affected at all since she stays at home. While Laura does it to be able to snatch a husband and get married, which means fulfilling her role as a wife and mother, the witch does the trick just for fun and does not care if others are injured in the process. Laura does not seem to be troubled by the revelation of her deceit since she already got what she wanted. It is Thomas who is the injured party, yet he has only himself and his rush to get married to blame. Mother Rigby’s trick does not work as intended, but both Polly and Feathertop are, nonetheless, traumatized by it. Both of them see the reality of the situation and cannot bear the revelation of the lie. Feathertop can be compared both to Laura and Thomas Bullfrog because he is the one on whom the illusion is performed, but he is also the greatest victim of the story since he gives up his pseudo-human life after his encounter with the mirror.

In both stories there is someone who seems to be the perfect embodiment of the ideal of humanity only to be revealed as a product of witchcraft and an illusion. Truth is always revealed but it is too late for Thomas Bullfrog to save himself from the marriage with the ugly old woman. Polly is saved very quickly, but the revelation is too much for Feathertop who decides to “die”. The stories differ in the outcome. While Thomas accepts Laura with all her “imperfections” because she is very rich; nobody accepts Feathertop, not even himself. He represents the truth that one cannot pretend and live an

illusion because, not only it will be revealed, but also it severely affects the deceiver himself.

In both stories, the emphasis is on the outward perfection and outward beauty at the expense of the quest for inner perfection. Both Laura and Feathertop actively take part in the illusion of perfection but seem not to care about the inside. Laura acts throughout the story as if nothing happened but Feathertop is shaken. He reveals his tender heart and refuses to continue in the deception. He chooses to remain a simple scarecrow than continue his career as an illusion of man and, thus, ethically wins over the witch and the whole human society. He shows himself capable of great sacrifice and proves his good character in spite of his origin.

5 Perfection in art

5.1 “Drowne’s Wooden Image”

The fifth chapter focuses on perfection in arts, especially on the creative process and its outcome. Thus, this chapter has much in common with the second chapter on science. Yet, it is different because art is seen as the purest form of creation; it is not utilitarian. Its essence is the search for beauty, which means the perfect form and perfect rendering of a subject, whether real or imaginative, into piece of art.

In both stories discussed here is reflected Hawthorne’s relationship towards art. As Gupta puts it, “Hawthorne’s critics have found his attitude toward the artist rather perplexing, even ambiguous ... Hawthorne does not present the artist in a very favorable light. F. O. Matthiessen, for example, wrote that Hawthorne was ‘not wholly sympathetic with his artists’ ” (Gupta, “Treatment of the Artist” 65). This is especially visible in his treatment of Owen Warland but also in his portrait of Drowne.

“Drowne’s Wooden Image” is a story of a wood carver who manages to produce a true masterpiece. Drowne carves sculptures: figure-heads for ships. One day a captain comes and orders one and then suddenly Drowne changes his routine and focuses only on the new order. Neighbors see it is a sculpture of a woman in exotic dress. When the project is finished and painted, the wooden image looks just like living woman. Then, one morning, the captain walks from his place to Drowne’s workshop with a woman that is exactly like the sculpture. Everybody thinks she is Drowne’s wooden image brought to life and suspect both the captain and Drown of some trick. One of the neighbors, painter Copley, follows them inside but upon entering there is only Drowne and the wooden woman since the captain and the lady exited through another door already. Drowne is sad and appears as if he woke up from a dream. None of his subsequent works reach the quality expressed in the wooden lady.

As well as many of Hawthorne’s characters, Drowne is a lonely man. Fairbanks notices that “isolation of the individual from his brethren was Hawthorne’s major theme. It was, in his repeated analyses, a separation stemming from sin” (Fairbanks 975). Both Aylmer and Rappaccini or Giovanni are alone, Mother Rigby included. Neither does loneliness escape Hawthorne’s artists. It is more profound with Owen Warland, but even in Drowne, the separation from society is clear. It becomes clearer the better artist

he becomes. Actually, his separation from society is directly proportional to his ability as an artist.

Drowne is a young artisan who from “his earliest boyhood, he had exhibited a knack – for it would be too proud a word to call it genius – a knack, therefore, for the imitation of the human figure, in whatever material came most readily to hand” (Hawthorne 933). However, there is something that stops him from being called artist: “except that deep quality, be it of soul or intellect, which bestows life upon the lifeless, and warmth upon the cold, and which, had it been present, would have made Drowne's wooden image instinct with spirit” (Hawthorne 934). Art is something more transcendental and spiritual.

He is very good at his job, and his works are widely praised. It is also true that he “was the first American who is known to have attempted, – in a very humble line, it is true, – that art” (Hawthorne 933) of figure-carving so it is possible his praise is not deserved. Yet, something happens that moves quality of his works into a completely different level. Even when the carving is only half complete and not definite yet, “there was already an effect that drew the eye from the wooden cleverness of Drowne's earlier productions, and fixed it upon the tantalizing mystery of this new project” (Hawthorne 935).

Drowne's new project is not only mysterious because he is almost never seen to work upon it, but also there is change of quality. As it is revealed later, the reason is that his spirit is “kindled by love” (Hawthorne 943): he is seen to kneel in front of the carving and even hugging it. When the lady leaves that last morning, Drowne admits: “This image! Can it have been my work? Well – I have wrought it in a kind of dream” (Hawthorne 943). “Drowne thus realizes an ideal that Hawthorne would define ... he expresses the truth of the human heart rather than the intentions of the intellect or conscious mind” (Person 64). The change of art is the result of change of heart.

If the sculpture of the woman is considered as the peak of his craft, as his only true piece of art, it can be said that he attained perfection at that moment. There is no flaw in the sculpture, it is perfect in the sense of design; moreover, he even manages to capture everything he sees in the model and render it in the image. The carving is so good that “[m]ost persons, at their first entrance, felt impelled to remove their hats, and pay such reverence as was due to the richly dressed and beautiful young lady, who seemed to stand in a corner of the room, with oaken chips and shavings scattered at her

feet” (Hawthorne 938). He even manages to capture her expression so well that the real woman, then, is understood to be the image brought to life.

Of course, someone could object that Drowne does not create a piece of art but a copy: that true art has to include something more than just an exact replica of the original. Still, his genius lies in the fact that he manages not only to literally copy the appearance of a living woman into the carving but also capture her spirit and soul. And this he is enabled to do because he gives her his own heart and their souls touch each other. Person confirms it with his observation: “Indeed, no less artist than John Singleton Copley, the most famous American painter of the eighteenth century, perfectly glosses the process which produced the wooden image: so powerful was the image of the woman, he suggests, that it ‘first created the artist who afterwards created her image’ ” (Person 64).

Another aspect that confirms importance of love for creating the masterpiece and true art is developing madness that other characters see in him; or at least they think he is mad. He has definitely changed his behavior and is seen “bending over the half created shape, and stretching forth his arms as if he would have embraced and drawn it to his heart; while, had such a miracle been possible, his countenance expressed passion enough to communicate warmth and sensibility to the lifeless oak” (Hawthorne 936) or even, “if credit were due to the rumour that he had been seen kneeling at the feet of the oaken lady, and gazing with a lover's passionate ardour into the face that his own hands had created” (Hawthorne 939). This behavior is later explained by his feelings toward the original. Since he cannot have the lady, he can express his feelings to her wooden copy. His neighbors are not aware of her existence, though, and are concerned over him.

He is also considered mad because he shows disregard for money or established rules, be it of arts or society. “‘If I can produce my desired effect by painted wood, those rules are not for me, and I have a right to disregard them.’ ‘The very spirit of genius!’ muttered Copley to himself” (Hawthorne 938). His feelings force him to reinterpret what is considered normal and safe. He is able to see and understand the world and his surroundings in a completely new way. Not only this, he is also able to put his new understandings into practice.

This is the mark of genius. He is considered mad because he refuses to do what others do. The only explanation of this is that such an act is either a willful violation of the established standard or madness. The first case would mean rebellion. Such behavior has to be suppressed. Madness is different. It is a connection with something

beyond human reason and understanding, with the spiritual. Genius is not expected to obey the rules, he can break them just because it is widely understood he can see more than others do. He can show the way. Madness sets him aside from the normal men.

Gupta reminds that Hawthorne “in his treatment of the artist, he looks at the subject from all possible points of view. He takes into account the dangers to which the pursuit of perfection exposes the artist, the maladjustments to which he is prone, his spiritual expatriation, and the agony and suffering he has to undergo” (Gupta 80). Pursuit of perfection separates an individual from society but also due to his behavior, which seems strange to others, society separates from him. Again, similar characteristics could apply to Aylmer or Rappaccini, they leave society, but at the same time, society avoids them as well. For Drowne, this genius stage comes with love but, sadly, also departs alongside the woman he loves. His words, that he feels as if he woke up from a dream, only confirm his madness and geniality that are now matter of past.

Although there is not much mention of the lady in the story, Person suggests she gains a unique position among Hawthorne’s heroines. “Instead of being ‘killed into art’ like Georgiana and Beatrice, the Portuguese woman retains her integrity and vitality. Its ‘life’ absorbed by the real woman, the statue ‘dies’ instead” (Person 65). In this story, it is the woman who gains while the artist loses his inspiration with the woman gone. “Indeed, the story can be read as a remarkably positive example of a woman’s ability to enter the sphere of male art without sacrificing her power to be herself” (Person 65).

The key to the whole story lies in the penultimate paragraph. It also opens the door to understanding Drowne’s genius, madness, art and perfection. First, it is told what happened after that morning. Drowne returned to his mechanical carving and produced works of the same quality as before, never reaching the level of his masterpiece.

We know not how to account for the inferiority of this quaint old figure, as compared with the recorded excellence of the Oaken Lady, unless on the supposition, that in every human spirit there is imagination, sensibility, creative power, genius, which, according to circumstances, may either be developed in this world, or shrouded in a mask of dulness until another state of being. To our friend Drowne, there came a brief season of excitement, kindled by love (Hawthorne 943).

Drowne opens the door to another dimension of his own being through his enchantment with the foreign lady. He behaves as if he was mad: he creates arts as if he was genius and then acts as if some spell was broken.

It is as if he was composed of various layers which can be opened only when specific conditions are met, as if the invisible, human spirit and soul were like a castle with many chambers and doors that open only upon external influence. When some of the doors can be opened, it means others have to remain simultaneously closed. When Drowne sinks into his madness, as his neighbors say, he acquires unique ability to create a stunning piece of art. However, at the same time he loses his ability to create things he has always been creating. He loses his mediocrity. Those two mutually exclude each other. Again, when the door towards geniality is closed; mediocrity welcomes him again.

Defined as absence of flaws, perfection, absolute beauty, and maximized completeness, for that matter, is present when Drowne creates his masterpiece. It is curious that Drowne does not even seem to seek perfection. He has been content to create the works he did. It is true, though, there is nobody to compare with so, perhaps, his works were perfect for him and for his neighbors as well. Where there is no comparison there is place for no improvement or even thirst for competition. However, as soon as there is created the wooden lady, he and others see he is capable of more. Before, there was contentment because he was always creating works on the same level, but after there is always disappointment. Even if Drowne was content with his subsequent works, his neighbors never forget the fatal carving and always compare the perfect masterpiece with the mediocre pieces he usually produces.

It rendered him a genius for that one occasion, but, quenched in disappointment, left him again the mechanical carver in wood, without the power even of appreciating the work that his own hands had wrought. Yet who can doubt, that the very highest state to which a human spirit can attain, in its loftiest aspirations, is its truest and most natural state, and that Drowne was more consistent with himself when he wrought the admirable figure of the mysterious lady, than when he perpetrated a whole progeny of blockheads (Hawthorne 943)?

Hawthorne suggests here that perfection, or rather the state when man is able to create perfection, is his true state and not mediocrity. It does not matter how long one dwells in one or another but rather if one is able at least for one moment attain that

perfect level. Such a moment, apparently, has more weight than the rest of life spent on other levels. He also seems to say that man was created for perfection, and this is his destiny and his aim. In just one moment he is, “in its truest and most natural state”, in the place where he belongs. Even one such moment is worth years of his endeavor to do so.

However, the state of perfection is a momentum which can be attained but cannot be maintained. Drowne achieves it when he meets the foreign lady and falls in love with her. Suddenly, he is able to create on a level he had never dreamt of before. Then she leaves his life; the carving is completed and taken away by the captain, and the momentum is gone.

Change of human heart is the turning point of the story. This theme can be retraced to Puritans who emphasized God’s transformative love to individuals and even the necessity of love in reaching perfection. It is significant that the power in action here is Drowne’s love towards the woman, not the other way around. His love, perhaps, was not reciprocated at all. As well as Georgiana’s love for Aylmer does not prevent her tragic demise, so Drowne’s love does not warrant his lady stays with him or even loves him back. His love affects only him and his work.

Another crucial part of the story, that would be important from the Puritan worldview, is the focus on one’s work and skills. Puritans valued highly a good work ethic. Man should not be lazy but earn his living from daily labor. Drowne is doing exactly that. He is a wood carver and his carvings support the work of others. Particularly, his figure-head carvings are special; they do not only adorn the ship but also make it specific. His carvings “had crossed the sea in all directions, and been not ignobly noticed among the crowded shipping of the Thames, and wherever else the hardy mariners of New England had pushed their adventures” (Hawthorne 933-934). He participates this way in the world trade.

Although he is described more as a craftsman than an artist, his works are not only for utility purpose; he creates beautiful things. This is perhaps a more important part of his occupation and makes him an artist although he may be considered mediocre. This is seen in other works he produces: “He became noted for carving ornamental pump-heads, and wooden urns for gate-posts, and decorations, more grotesque than fanciful, for mantelpieces. No apothecary would have deemed himself ... without setting up a gilded mortar, if not a head of Galen or Hippocrates, from the skilful hand of

Drowne” (Hawthorne 933). His art might not be impressive but since his work had its main meaning in its ornamentation, it is art.

Now art in itself might be little problematic with Puritans. Since they regarded God with most respect, art and beauty might have not held much importance for them. If it did not directly celebrate God, such as the decoration of a church or praying house, it might have no use. Drowne’s art held exactly this purposeless aim. His creation had secular use, be it with ships and trade or pumps and urns.

The figure of artist is an important one for Transcendentalist since they adhered to beauty. The artist creates beauty. This is what the artist and others predominantly seek in the pieces he produces. If it is not so, he is not artist but an artisan. Drowne shifts between these two roles throughout the story. He begins as an artisan who produces things grotesque and almost beautiful but rather mechanical in their essence. His pieces are not valued because of their aesthetics but because of their utility. Suddenly, he creates a true piece of art which everybody admires. The narrator even suggests that nobody who saw the carving of wooden woman, could ever see anything “else so beautiful in after life” (Hawthorne 939). The wooden woman was Drowne’s highest peak in his carrier, his perfection. With it he achieved the absolute beauty and harmony he possibly could have in his work. However, by next project, he returns back to the artisan he normally is.

One of the main problems with the quest for perfection lies in disappointment which is bound to appear in man’s life. There are two ways through which it can come. First, there is first fear and then disappointment if man does everything in his power to achieve perfection, though it never happens. This has something to do with perfection being hard to define. As ideals of beauty differ throughout history and culture, so it is with perfection. What one may proclaim perfect another will slander. Drowne’s neighbors unanimously declare his masterpiece to be work of genius, but that can be answered by absence of a competitor or even a critic. No doubt there would be people who would dislike the statue and find it disagreeable.

With such a shifting target perfection is not easy to hit. The artist has to answer himself for whose eyes he creates and whose standards he has to meet to have his work pronounced perfect. It is strange, though, that even if everyone proclaims the work perfect, the artist being his own biggest critic, can still find many flaws in it. What others overlook he sees.

The second reason for disappointment lies in achieving perfection but losing it and having to live in the mundane again. This is exactly what Drowne has to deal with after his success with the carving. It can be compared to a fall from high place after long and exhausting climb. The artist achieves perfection he has always struggled for and a sense of euphoria fills him. But then comes the fall. As much as perfection and its joy was extraordinary so much is despair beyond the ordinary. Yet, the narrator suggests that this one moment of perfection and euphoria surpasses everything. It may be true: the first kind of disappointment seems to be safer because it eludes the acute pain of failure which accompanies the transition process from the height of perfection through the pit of despair back to the level of normal.

Another important characteristic in the story is the view of the artist as the genius, an inspired man. This can be seen in his ability to create art that surpasses the work of others and also his supposed madness and estrangement from society. Unlike Owen Warland, Drowne is able to integrate into society again as soon as his inspiration passes over. Owen is less likely to do that since his artistic temperament is much stronger and his separation from society much deeper.

In this story, the quest for perfection combines first in hard work to do the best although there is something always missing. Then follows the short period of glory in reaching perfection through love toward the woman who is the model for the carving.

5.2 “The Artist of the Beautiful”

Owen Warland is a misplaced artist who was apprenticed a watchmaker, but instead, lives in his dreamy world. He spends his time creating an artificial butterfly. This task takes years to accomplish. There are times he has to overcome setbacks, be it his own clumsiness, the touch of others that harms the little butterfly machine, or his own destructive hand in anger. In the meantime, Annie, his love, marries another, Robert Danforth the smith, complete opposite of Owen Warland in all his aspects. Owen also has a very strained relationship with her father, Peter Hovenden, his former employer.

Finally, Owen succeeds and creates the perfect butterfly device that cannot be distinguished from a real butterfly. He brings it to Annie as his wedding gift. Both Annie and Robert admire it but they cannot see its real value. When Peter tries to touch it, the butterfly seems to wither because, as Owen says, “In an atmosphere of doubt and mockery, its exquisite susceptibility suffers torture, as does the soul of him who instilled his own life into it” (Hawthorne 929). They quickly put it on their child’s finger hoping its innocence will help to revive the butterfly. It seems to help, and the butterfly flies again. Yet, it is crushed in the child’s hand while Annie screams and Peter laughs scornfully.

This short story masterfully describes the process of creating a piece of art, the process of artist’s evolution, and the process of achieving perfection. In many ways Owen Warland’s quest is similar to that of Rappaccini. Rappaccini spends years to create his Eden with his poisonous Adam and Eve only to have his project destroyed in his own presence when it is completed. Unlike the perfect butterfly which is the embodiment of purity and spirituality, “Beatrice, like every other being in the garden, is tainted by evil, just as Giovanni comes to be tainted once he gains familiarity with Beatrice and the plants” (Boewe 48).

Holmes argues that story of Owen Warland “record[s] a process” which lies in his “quest for artistic fulfillment” (Holmes 481). Others “characterize Owen ... as a visionary trapped in an uncaring and totally mundane society” (Betha 23). Interpretations may focus on Owen as an artist or, rather, as a member of society. For the purpose of this work it is, of course, necessary to focus on his development as the artist. Moreover, it is vital to remember what influences him and Hawthorne’s

description of his main character. Bethea notices that “[t]he story instead affirms a specific type of romanticism tempered by a harsh reality that it initially shuns and it ultimately seeks not to transcend” (Bethea 24).

Owen has always been skillful in dealing with tiny mechanisms and in observing the secrets of nature. He became Peter Hovenden’s apprentice; there, his abilities developed. He was to be an artisan, a watchmaker, but his whole being desired creativity and innovation. “So long, however, as he remained under his old master's care, Owen's lack of sturdiness made it possible, by strict injunctions and sharp oversight, to restrain his creative eccentricity within bounds” (Hawthorne 910).

This period can be understood as achieving the skills he shall need later, such as dealing with the precise mechanisms of watches: how to make or to repair them. These skills will be useful for him when he creates the butterfly; although, he may not be aware of this momentarily when his apprenticeship seems tedious to him. He is also learning the process of artistic restraint, which means that not every idea may be put into action as soon as it comes; and that although his idea of the mechanic butterfly may have appeared already in his childhood, it was not until much later that the idea turned into reality. This is what Annie refers to when she tells him how she knows that his project includes spiritualizing of matter: “from something that I heard you say, long ago, when you were but a boy and I a little child” (Hawthorne 917). It takes years for the artist of the beautiful to really invent the butterfly, which was only a vague idea in his childhood.

When his apprenticeship is finished and he becomes his own master he quickly manages to annoy his customers. “His custom rapidly diminished – a misfortune, however, that was probably reckoned among his better accidents by Owen Warland, who was becoming more and more absorbed in a secret occupation, which drew all his science and manual dexterity into itself, and likewise gave full employment to the characteristic tendencies of his genius” (Hawthorne 911). He is actually thankful that the customers do not bother him anymore, and he can engage in his butterfly project. The idea that has been growing and developing in him since childhood can eventually start to give its fruits. The waiting period is over and the time of trying and searching ways of putting the dream into practice begins.

In Owen’s case, it is a process in which activity alternates with inactivity. This is of two kinds. First, his neighbors consider his job of watchmaking a period of true activity. They think in practical terms and cannot understand Owen. Once, when he is

disappointed with his project, he deals with watches again. “Owen now indeed, applied himself to business with dogged industry. It was marvellous to witness the obtuse gravity with which he would inspect the wheels of a great, old silver watch ... In a word, the heavy weight upon his spirits kept everything in order” (Hawthorne 913-914). They cannot see that his job is practically killing him and that he serves the society in this way only because he is desperate and lost. Activity, as seen by his neighbors, drags him while inactivity, which they do not understand and do not even see because he hides his creativity. “Always at the approach of dusk, he stole into the town, locked himself within his shop, and wrought with patient delicacy of touch, for many hours. Sometimes he was startled by the rap of the watchman” (Hawthorne 916).

Activity from Owen’s point of view differs. He is truly active when he really works on his artistic project. Then there is time when he spends time in “his wanderings in the woods and fields ... he was seen to steal gently up, wherever a butterfly had alighted, and lose himself in contemplation of it” (Hawthorne 919). Such walks, seen as proof of madness, were actually his time to study and gather information for his secret project. Since nobody knew he was working on the mechanical butterfly, though they considered it a useless project, he was studying Nature and butterflies. The third way he was spending his time was making or repairing watches. He was active at the time but considered it as a burden rather than something really useful. The point is, what his neighbors considered useful, he did not.

The whole creative process is crowned with accomplishing the task and creating the butterfly. In the final scene, he confronts the three characters who acted as antagonists of sorts: Peter, Robert, Annie, and the child.

Right from the beginning the narrator shows Owen’s importance among the others and his ideas in contrast with those of Peter Hovenden, Robert Danforth, and Annie. “Obviously disputing with Hovenden, Danforth, and Annie over the worthiness of Owen as a subject, the narrator calls attention to the authority of his version of Owen over that of the antagonistic triad. He thereby alerts us to the manipulation of oppositional views of Owen at issue throughout the tale” (Newberry 85). As the story unfolds, Owen develops and he tries to communicate with each of them.

Hovenden is the most antagonistic and practical of them all. He cannot grasp art nor Owen because there is no purpose in them. When he visits Owen after his first setback, again repairing the clocks and watches, he makes himself clear: “Only get rid

altogether of your nonsensical trash about the Beautiful – which I, nor nobody else, nor yourself to boot, could never understand – only free yourself of that, and your success in life is as sure as daylight” (Hawthorne 914). By saying this, he means he himself cannot understand that. He considers the world according to its practical and, perhaps, monetary value. Since art and time spent inventing the butterfly is not to be redeemed with money, Hovenden sees no reason by Owen should waste his time in it.

On the other hand, he may mean well because he knows Owen’s potential in the watchmaker business. McClay comments that “there seems to be something deeply and disturbingly unnatural about Owen, including even his relationship to the proper ends of human technology. And it actually is very hard to argue with the virtues that Peter Hovenden commends” (McClay 115). Peter also knows that man needs money to pay bills, and Owen is not to gain them investing his time and skills into the butterfly. Not only does he misunderstand the beautiful and art, but Owen is beyond his understanding.

At the same time, Owen cannot understand his master’s care for him, and his mere presence became exhaustive experience for him: “There was nothing so antipodal to his nature as this man’s cold, unimaginative sagacity, by contact with which everything was converted into a dream, except the densest matter of the physical world. Owen groaned in spirit and prayed fervently to be delivered from him” (Hawthorne 914). He embodies the utter practicality of human society. He and Owen are complete opposites.

Robert Danforth, the smith who eventually marries Annie Hovenden, is also in some ways an opposite of Owen Warland. Owen himself defines them as the opposites when he compares Robert’s physical strength and his artistic and intellectual power. “Strength is an earthly monster. I make no pretensions to it. My force, whatever there may be of it, is altogether spiritual” (Hawthorne 911-912). “There are even hints in his character of the Greek god Hephaestus, the blacksmith-artisan god of craft and technology, and in that sense Danforth too is being represented as an artist—not an artist of the beautiful, but of the useful” (McClay 115). In the midst of all the interpretations that see Owen as the artist, it is refreshing and inspiring to see there may be other artists in the story, too. Robert’s classification as possible artist may mean there are more type of artists in the world, not only the one Owen embodies. It can also refer back to Hawthorne and his problematic view of the artists.

Annie is very close to Owen, and he is in love with her. However, “[e]ven Annie, who ... initially loves Warland, is finally incapable of realizing the value of Warland’s inner nature” (Bethea 26). The narrator proclaims that she had not “been enlightened by the deep intelligence of love” (Hawthorne 918), but there is more to this. Bethea states that “they fail each other, one permeated by the dogma of patriarchy, the other saturated with the ideology of the ideal” (Bethea 26). It means that Owen seeks perfection not only in his creation, which he repeatedly fails to reach or make progress in, but he also imagines Annie as the perfect woman who will be perhaps the only human being that could actually understand him. However, when she destroys the butterfly with just a touch of her needle, Owen’s dreams regarding her are confronted with reality. Neither he nor she can be what the other anticipates. Owen lives in his life of dreams and the ideal while Annie is Peter Hovenden’s daughter and, therefore, stands firmly on the ground. Sooner or later, they are bound to realize the impossibility of their match, unless one of them leave their place to enter the world of another.

The last antagonist is the child who is both innocent yet also, as Owen thinks, there was “a resemblance between it and Peter Hovenden's habitual expression. He could have fancied that the old watchmaker was compressed into this baby-shape, and was looking out of those baby-eyes” (Hawthorne 925). The butterfly confirms Owen’s suspicion when it rapidly changes while the child touches it. Thereafter, when the butterfly “was about to alight upon his finger. But, while it still hovered in the air, the little Child of Strength, with his grandsire's sharp and shrewd expression in his face, made a snatch at the marvellous insect, and compressed it in his hand” (Hawthorne 930). In some ways, the child connects all three previous antagonists in itself and thus manages to destroy Owen’s butterfly, although unconsciously. It has its father’s strength, Annie is his mother and there is his grandfather’s expression in his eyes.

“The butterfly is crushed, but it does not represent the defeat of Warland’s artistic vision. Rather its shattered remnants constitute the ashes from which rises the phoenix of his creative mind” (Bethea 32). The narrator notices that Owen “looked placidly at what seemed the ruin of his life's labor, and which was yet no ruin. He had caught a far other butterfly than this. When the artist rose high enough to achieve the beautiful, the symbol by which he made it perceptible to mortal senses became of little value in his eyes, while his spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of the Reality” (Hawthorne 931).

[A]s this story indicates, some things are indeed "naturally impossible," but defeat in one realm may be the necessary grounds for victory in another—that is, material defeat may be prerequisite to spiritual victory. Owen's imperishable possession of the reality of the beautiful at story's end, in a form that could never be effaced or taken away from him, represents a perfection that would never have been possible for him, had he not first striven with all his might, and failed, to embody that spiritual reality in a material form (McClay 123)

This represents the climax of the story and Owen's quest for perfection in arts. As the story says, it "was his fortune, good or ill, to achieve the purpose of his life" (Hawthorne 924). It is true that he manages to create the perfect butterfly, which is indistinguishable from the natural one. "[F]or Warland and Hawthorne, the realization or failure to realize an ideal vision is less important than its constant pursuit" (Bethea 33). The whole story can be seen in two ways.

First, the reader can focus on Owen's process of creating the butterfly, his progress and setbacks, "a tripartite structure of regressions and progressions that Liebmann terms a journey from innocence to experience to a higher innocence" (Bethea 26). This involves his apprenticeship, the process of trial and error, and finally his "instant of solitary triumph" (Hawthorne 924).

Not only does he create the perfect butterfly but he transforms himself into, hopefully, not only better person but a better artist. He strives for perfection not only in art but also in himself. In some ways he achieves both. He creates the butterfly although the butterfly is crushed by the child. His personal perfection is illustrated by his reactions towards it and by the sheer fact that he actually manages to create something considered perfect even by man like Robert Danforth: "Well, that does beat all nature!" (Hawthorne 928), which is "the heartiest praise that he could find expression for" (Hawthorne 928).

In completing his life-long project he also achieves his goal in life, and there is nothing more he can do. He has to either to find something that surpasses the perfect butterfly or his life has no more meaning. For this reason the narrator comments that the creation of the butterfly was also Owen's misfortune. Even if his butterfly was not destroyed by the child, there was void in front of Owen and nothing to fill it. In this way, the sought perfection becomes a curse for the artist because it is the last step and there is no way in front of him. He cannot reach any place higher, only downward and backward. He cannot even remain there frozen in time.

The Puritan heritage of “The Artist of the Beautiful” again lies in the problem of heart and sin. As said before, many of Hawthorne’s characters are separated from society and it was “a separation stemming from sin” (Fairbanks 975). “For Hawthorne, too, the source of evil was the human heart” (Fairbanks 976). In the story, this is illustrated in the dichotomy of Owen Warland and Peter Hovenden. Both see each other as evil, and both have problems in their hearts which they cannot see, though the other and the narrator understand. Since the narrator is sympathetic to Owen, it is easier to notice Peter’s transgression. He presents the matter-of-fact view of life combined with old Puritan superstitions towards anything that cannot be explained. “Owen! Owen! there is witchcraft in these little chains, and wheels, and paddles! See! with one pinch of my finger and thumb, I am going to deliver you from all future peril ... But I warn you again, that in this small piece of mechanism lives your evil spirit. Shall I exorcise him?” (Hawthorne 915). He cannot see what is beyond the material.

Owen, on the other hand, suffers from exaggerated idealism and is blind to anything else. It can seem that he is not able to notice anything else except the butterfly and anything that is closely related to it. However, “Hawthorne’s view of human nature is often dark, but never despairing ... [he] argues the insufficiency of man and the divisive effects of sin” (Fairbanks 989). This is exactly what happens to Peter Hovenden and Owen Warland. Their hearts are corrupted, and it shows outwardly by their stubborn decision to see only what they see and not trying to understand the opposite point of view.

The influence of Transcendentalism lies in the quest for the perfection and for the ideal. This is perfectly expressed in the box which encases Owen’s butterfly.

[W]hen Owen creates the butterfly and sets it free, we are invited to enter a new realm unrestricted in its possibilities. Both a transcendent moment and place, clarifying the condition and activity of worldmaking, made-believe, fantasy, and the imaginary, this new realm also appears every bit as real as the external reality it critiques ... we cross the threshold where interpretation proper should begin (Newberry 83).

The box is inlaid with decoration “representing a boy in pursuit of a butterfly, which, elsewhere, had become a winged spirit, and was flying heavenward; while the boy, or youth, had found such efficacy in his strong desire, that he ascended from earth to cloud, and from cloud to celestial atmosphere, to win the Beautiful” (Hawthorne 926). The picture represents Owen’s own journey when creating the butterfly as well as

the journey every artist has to make. There is idea, which the artist cannot grasp nor touch. He has to follow the idea no matter the obstacles, and even then he cannot be sure he can ever even touch it.

This is the profound emphasis on the spiritual, which is to be pursued by all means. The spirit is perfection in itself, and only by attaining it man fulfills his purpose. However, just as the boy on the box never actually grasps the butterfly, the spirit, so man cannot expect fulfillment of his wishes. It is the endless following and never giving up that is important. Just as Owen overcomes his antagonists and his own nature, so must man pursue the goal of rising above the normal towards higher things.

This uniqueness also demands sacrifices. The butterfly requires everything. The boy must not ever lose sight of it, and thus, he cannot look at anything else. The greatest loss lies in the area of relationships. Just as Owen becomes a solitary man who does not understand anybody and nobody understands him, so it is with others who would like to imitate his quest for the ideal, the beautiful, and the spiritual. “The artist’s isolation is the price he has to pay for his glorious gift. It is unfortunate, no doubt, perhaps even tragic, but at the same time inevitable, that the artist should remain alienated from his fellow beings, that he cannot share their joys and suffering” (Gupta, “Treatment of the Artist” 77).

5.3 Comparison

Although both Drowne and Owen Warland are artists and they seek their fulfillment in arts and perfection, they differ in many aspects. Both of them achieve perfection in their work but in different ways and for different lapses of time. Drowne creates his wooden image because he is in love which elevates him into ability to truly create art. Owen, on the other hand, has been an artist for his whole life, but he chooses to spend many years on one miniature, though challenging, project. He achieves his goal after many setbacks either from the society or from himself while Drowne does not face adversity at all. His victory is then sweeter, and his loss more devastating than it could ever be for Drowne.

There is also a difference in the women involved in the stories. Drowne's lady is an object of his love and artistic endeavor. He does not try to change her like Aylmer or Giovanni nor does he cast his expectations like Thomas Bullfrog. It seems he is aware of the hopelessness of his love and so he puts it into his wooden image. It is his love, not hers, that changes the depth of his work and allows him to produce true piece of art. At the same time, it is the loss of his lady that leads him back to the mundane artisan he has always been. Annie Hovenden has always been Owen Warland's friend and also his love interest. He wants her understanding: to share his love of the beautiful and art. However, her touch destroys months of his work which symbolizes her inability to truly understand him. She is the daughter of her father and chooses the practical artist Robert Danforth over the impractical and idealistic Owen Warland. It is also significant that the butterfly is intended as Owen's wedding gift for her. She is given the butterfly as her last opportunity to truly understand its beauty, value, and its creator himself. Although she fails, still she is capable of more understanding than men in her family.

Another aspect that connects and separates Drowne and Owen is their relationship toward human society. Both of them are loners, but Drowne seems to interact much more easily than Owen has ever been able to. Drowne's estrangement from society is only temporary when he creates his masterpiece. When his lady has left, he is again his old self, and later he even becomes known as the Dean in the local church, thus becoming fully integrated in society.

Owen, on the other hand, has always stood against all, given his sensitive personality, dislike of the utilitarian and practical things and love of the beautiful.

During his life he has managed to separate from society very efficiently. There still remains human contact, such as when he drinks wine with his companions or visit Annie and her family, but such events prove to be exceptions and no rule. He is always the misunderstood man and perhaps truly mad genius because nobody, and perhaps not even the reader, is able to comprehend him fully.

The last aspect which yet remains to be discussed are their artistic projects. Drowne carves an image of woman that shall be part of captain's ship. Its meaning is perhaps more decorative than practical, but still it serves a particular purpose. He does not spend lots of time on his work and is finished rather quickly. Owen is set against anything even remotely utilitarian. His butterfly has purely aesthetic value. He has decided to surpass nature in completing a butterfly as good or even better than can be found. His devotion to his project is so fierce he does not even consider selling it although he realizes its monetary value.

Unlike Drowne, Owen shall be able to create again because his artistic ability is not dependent on the outside input but on his own personality. He calmly suffers destruction of his work which only strengthens him and gives him ability to detach from the material and cling to the spiritual. Like the boy on the box, he has left the Earth and no disaster can bend him. Although he is a loser in the eyes of society, he is to be happier and more content than Drowne who sinks back into oblivion. Both of them manage to create true art, but only one of them can be really called an artist.

6 Conclusion

Quest for perfection is an important part of the six stories discussed in this work. It affects not only the protagonists but also other characters in many ways. Rappaccini and Aylmer, men of science, sacrifice their women to fulfill their scientific ambitions. For a short time they achieve their goal only to have it destroyed and their lover dead at their feet. Their knowledge and detachment from the world make them the typical Transcendental geniuses who have the ability to stand apart and lead society to higher spheres. However, neither is willing nor able to do that. They are defeated by the basic order of things known to Hawthorne, which is, that perfection cannot exist in the imperfect world and that pride and an attempt to equal oneself with God cannot remain unpunished. Yet it is rather their own faults and flaws that destroy them than some sort of destiny or act of God.

Feathertop and Laura Bullfrog try to pretend and create an illusion as a shortcut to perfection. Both are achieved through witchcraft, and again, both are doomed to be revealed and destroyed. Thomas learns there are no ideal women in the world, and, indirectly, that he is not perfect either. Both Polly and Feathertop face the mirror that expose their true selves which gives them an opportunity to rise from illusion and actually work toward true perfection. Even in these tales, the Puritan view prevails as illusion is considered a lie and, thus, cannot go undetected and without proper denouement. While Thomas and Laura accept her illusion, both Feathertop and Polly cannot bear it. Feathertop prefers to lose his existence than to continue in his pretense.

The artists, Drowne and Owen Warland, seek perfection and gain it. While Drowne returns into mediocrity, Owen seems to achieve both the material and spiritual sense of perfection. He manages to create the butterfly, and although it is destroyed, he is able to keep hope and contentment. In this way, he still holds his spiritual butterfly which cannot be crushed nor taken away from him. In these stories, the protagonists, especially Owen Warland, come closest to the Transcendental ideal of the seeker of the beautiful and the spiritual. Drowne wins for a short time, just as Aylmer or Rappaccini, but Owen truly crosses the boundary and achieves perfection he has sought. Although his adversaries, who resemble the Puritan ways in many aspects seem to win, he is the moral victor of the story and has his last word not only in his tale but also in the whole collection.

Puritanism sees perfection only in relationship with God who asks men to strive for perfection but, at the same time, never achieving it. Transcendentalists believe that man is naturally good and through education and gradual improvement he may come close to perfection or perhaps even reach it. These tendencies perpetually clash in Hawthorne's stories and characters. They usually seek for perfection on their own, believe in themselves, not in God, and try to make their own way in the world. Very often they reach perfection, but the moment of their victory is also their doom and loss. The state of perfection is unsustainable.

Although it is impossible to gain perfection in the material world; it is possible in the spiritual one. Therefore, it must be sought there and not in places where the characters sought it: in visible scientific projects, romantic relationships and people, or works of art. The final emphasis is on the spiritual. This can be found both in the Puritan and Transcendental way of thinking. Although it seems the Puritan heavily influenced the outcome of the quests for perfection in all the stories and made it clear perfection was impossible in this world, the last story shows there is still hope for those who want to gain perfection.

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