

# N. Hawthorne || Transcendentalism

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# Transcendentalism | | Hawthorne

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## I. System of thought, belief in essential unity of all creation

- God exists in all of us — no matter who you are; even sinners or murderers, still contain the spark of godliness within themselves. No need for guilt.
- Personal insight is stronger than logic or experience: through insight a deeper inner truth can be found
- They encourage humanity to transcend the material world of experience and facts, and become aware of the spirit of the universe.
- Influenced by German Trans. Immanuel Kant, Platonic and neo-platonic thought, Eastern Philosophies
- Part of the Romantic Movement in Europe and the Abolitionist Movement in US
- Heavily involved in humanitarian causes

Walt Whitman

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Henry David Thoreau

Margaret Fuller

## II. Humans feel guilt due to sins humans create.

- We need to ask God for forgiveness.
- Continually wrote on themes of repentance and guilt which allows him to be “modern”— he addresses the problems of sin and guilt as an internal conflict— proposing psychological issues in his characters.
- Overt morals on human conditions.
- He did not believe in a specific theology.
- William Faulkner heavily influenced by Hawthorne. Both use images of failed Christians as focal points.
- He considered his work to be *partial* allegories.

# *allegory / fable / parable*

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**Allegory:** a symbolical narrative with representations of abstract elements or human characteristics

- Characters and events used symbolize a deeper moral or spiritual meaning.
- Characters cannot step outside of their roles or the figures they represent.

**Fable:** allegorical story with a moral; an explicit message is presented to reader

- These are mostly short fictitious works (some are only three sentences long).
- Usually story involves animals or inanimate objects as actors within the story.
- Animals and natural elements represent human characteristics or personality-types. Some do use human-centered actors.

**Parable:** brief story based in realistic terms and contain an explicit teaching of morality or philosophy

- These stories deal with human characters as actors.
- These do not contain magic nor fantasy aspects; strictly contain teachings of a social, political, religious, and/or moral issue.

# parable

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## *The Parable of the Elephant* **Buddha**

There was a mighty white elephant with a strong trunk and long tusks, trained by a good master, and willing and serviceable. This elephant, led by his trainer, came to the land of the blind. Very soon the rumours went in the land of the blind that an elephant had come to their country. So the wise men and teachers of the blind came up to the elephant and began to investigate him. And when the elephant was gone they met and discussed the animal among themselves.

There were some who said he was like a great thick snake; others said he was like a snake of medium size. The former had felt the trunk, the latter the tail.

Further, there were some who claimed that his figure was like a high column, others declared he was large and bulky like a big barrel, still others maintained he was smooth and hard but tapering. Some of the blind had taken hold of one of the legs, others had reached the main body, and still others had touched the tusks.

In the end they abused and scolded one another over their disagreements, and finally every one of them swore that everyone else was a liar and was cursed on account of his heresies.

Everyone of these blind men was honest in his contentions, sure of having the truth and relying on his own experience. But the elephant trainer knows that every one of them has a parcel of the truth, that every one is right in his way, but wrong in believing his outlook to be the whole truth.

Not one of these sectarians observed that the elephant was white, for all of them were blind who had investigated the truth to the best of their ability.

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The master of the elephant is an Enlightened One. He has brought the white elephant of truth into the land of the blind, and he who listens to him well will understand all the claimants who have parcels of the truth. He who takes refuge in His doctrine will cease to bicker and quarrel.

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“The Parable of the Elephant.” *Parables of Buddha. The Gold Scales.*  
Ed. Tormod Kinnes. Web. 29 May 2010. <http://oaks.nvg.org>.

# *The Minister's Black Veil*

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## **Qualifies as an Allegory/ Parable because:**

- speaks of moral issue
- the subject broadens to psychological morality rather than a religious morality
- carries a moralistic tone
- human characters act out as representations of human personality types
- the veil itself acts as a symbol
- terse paragraphs, terse situations

## **Fails as an Allegory/ Parable because:**

- dialogue breaks formula; the language reads as dramatized exchanges
- Hawthorne as an “average” writer is moralizing,  
the lesson is not delivered by a figure of religion or philosophy
- the moral issue is not defined; it is left unclear
- the images are not defined, obvious symbols

# *The Minister's Black Veil*

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## **How does this compare with Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"?**

- atmospheric gloom; characters react with dread and fear
- protagonists create self-fulfilling prophecies
- protagonists portray strong sense of disconnect from community
- characters are tormented with secret crimes
- these crimes are never fully revealed to the reader
- the veil and the house both transcend their mundane definitions
- the veil and the house transform to characters and create sense of dread
- both narrators deliver stories with a strong authority
- both themes place an emphasis on the psychological consequences of sin/guilt, rather than concentrating *solely* on the moral consequences of sin/guilt.
- both protagonists sacrifice themselves to save a perception of morality  
(*Some critics believe Usher is conscientiously choosing death to remove the Usher curse.*)
- the veil and the house both have the last word

# *The Minister's Black Veil*

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## **How do the stories shift and contrast with one another?**

- Parson Hooper gains sense of fulfillment with his death; he is supplied with a psychological resolution; the narrator implies however a tragic end with an overt moralistic tone.
- Roderick Usher is limited to a fearful, violent end; a tragedy; without a clear psychological resolution
- Hooper becomes scapegoat for the community.
- Usher portrayed as victim of circumstance or fate.
- Hawthorne deals with *morality* as a main focus and its ramifications.
- Poe deals with *fear and terror* as a main focus and its ramifications.