My Kinsman, Major Molineux

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Born in Salem as Nathaniel Hawthorne, the future author of *The Scarlet Letter* and more than 100 short stories was descended from members of the original Massachusetts Bay Colony. His great-great-grandfather was the notorious John Hawthorne, the so-called "hanging judge" who oversaw the Salem witch trials. Largely raised in Raymond, Maine, Hawthorne returned to Salem after graduating from Bowdoin College in 1821, where he became acquainted with poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and future President Franklin Pierce. In Salem, Hawthorne embarked on his career as a writer in almost suffocating solitude. Other than his two sisters, he saw few people and was shy to a fault. But his inner musings never ceased, and he filled notebooks with ideas for stories. Other than the youthful and anonymous novel *Fanshawe*, Hawthorne's rise as one of the greatest of American authors began with the short story collection *Twice-Told Tales*, of which Longfellow wrote a glowing review. Married to Sophia Peabody in 1838, Hawthorne labored in relative obscurity until the publication of *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850 made him an international celebrity. That same year, he met Herman Melville, who dedicated *Moby-Dick* to Hawthorne. The next four years were an especially productive period, during which he wrote *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Snow-Image*, *The Blithesdale Romance*, and *Tanglewood Tales*, as well as the campaign biography of his old friend Franklin Pierce. Hawthorne spent his later years serving as a consul in Liverpool and traveled through England, France, and Italy, a journey that produced a great deal of travel writing, as well as inspiring his last published novel *The Marble Faun*. Hawthorne died in his sleep in 1864 while touring the White Mountains. One of the pallbearers was Hawthorne's former neighbor Ralph Waldo Emerson, who remarked "I thought there was a tragic element in the event, that might be more fully rendered—in the painful solitude of the man, which, I suppose, could no longer be endured, and he died of it." Hawthorne's own assessment was even bleaker, writing that "I have not lived, but only dreamed about living."

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"My Kinsman Major Molineux" is set during the run-up to the Revolutionary War, as the colonists are growing impatient with the British authorities and routinely run their representatives out of town. Hawthorne claims that study of the annals of Massachusetts Bay reveals that "of six governors in the space of forty years […] two were imprisoned by a popular insurrection; a third […] was driven from the province by the whizzing of a musket-ball; a fourth […] was hastened to his grave by continual bickerings with the House of Representatives; and the remaining two, as well as their successors, till the Revolution, were favored with few and brief intervals of peaceful sway." The stage is thus set for the coming war, and the atmosphere that young Robin unknowingly steps into is one of barely-concealed violence and popular discontent. By the end of the story, Robin finds that his kinsman has himself run afoul of the colonists, having been tarred and feathered. This was a common practice in the late-18th century, such as in 1766, when Captain William Smith (a suspected informer to British customs agents) was tarred, feathered, and dropped into the Norfolk, Virginia harbor. Tarring and feathering was a reliable brand of mob violence that also appeared in Salem the following year, when employees of the customs service and tax agents were routinely so attacked. Ironically, Hawthorne himself would enter politics in 1853 after his lifelong friend Franklin Pierce had him appointed American consul to Liverpool. Back in the states, he would make the acquaintance of Abraham Lincoln and witness firsthand the rumblings of the Civil War and the end of slavery, which Hawthorne had echoed Pierce in proclaiming would not "be remedied by human contrivances," but would, over time, "vanish like a dream."

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Hawthorne infused his tales of New England with mythical and gothic trappings, popularizing the dark fabulism practiced by Edgar Allan Poe, later by Ambrose Bierce ("An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"), and originated by Washington Irving in stories like "Rip Van Winkle." Hawthorne considered himself a provincial and seems never to have encountered Balzac, Stendahl, or the strain of German romanticism that influenced Poe—instead, Hawthorne prized *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan's Christian allegory. Among Hawthorne's early champions was Ralph Waldo Emerson, author of the influential essay "The American Scholar," though Hawthorne himself grew disenchanted with Emerson's brand of Transcendentalism after living at the utopian Brook Farm community, which he gently satirized in his 1852 novel *The Blithesdale Romance*. Hawthorne also made an impression on Henry James, who wrote a short book on him in 1879 and was still under his influence when he published *Washington Square* the following year. Though Henry Wadsworth Longfellow praised Hawthorne throughout his career, his greatest literary friendship was inarguably Herman Melville, who called Hawthorne's work "shrouded in blackness, ten times black." Hawthorne's influence on literature is incredibly broad, and critic Harold Bloom has placed him beside

William Faulkner and Henry James as one of the three greatest American writers. Along with Hawthorne's "Endecott and the Red Cross" and Melville's "Benito Cereno," American poet Robert Lowell adapted "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" into the stage play *The Old Glory*. Most recently, Hawthorne's story "The Minister's Black Veil" inspired Rick Moody's memoir *The Black Veil*, while Stephen King cites "Young Goodman Brown" as the genesis of his O. Henry Award-winning "The Man in the Black Suit." and Hawthorne's story "Rappaccini's Daughter" even influenced the creation of Batman villain Poison Ivy.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** My Kinsman, Major Molineux
- **When Written:** 1831
- **Where Written:** Salem, Massachusetts
- **When Published:** 1832 in *The Token and Atlantic Souvenir* magazine
- **Literary Period:** Romanticism
- **Genre:** Short story
- **Setting:** Boston, 1732
- **Climax:** Robin meets eyes with Major Molineux, who has been tarred and feathered.
- **Antagonist:** The Horned Man
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Trusting in Providence. Nathaniel Hawthorne's personal religion was a fusion of Calvinism, Roman Catholicism, and early evangelism. He believed in original sin, predestination, and the concept of Providence, which would punish the guilty and reward the virtuous. These themes appear symbolically in almost all of Hawthorne's works.

Good Company. *The Snow-Image, and Other Twice-Told Tales*, in which "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" was first anthologized, was published by Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, a house that helped establish American literature by printing the work of Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry David Thoreau, and Mark Twain.

PLOT SUMMARY

"My Kinsman, Major Molineux" takes place during a single night, as an 18-year-old, country-bred man named Robin arrives by ferry in Massachusetts Bay, where he hopes to "begin in the world" with the help of his wealthy and eminent cousin, Major Molineux. Little does Robin know that the colonies have turned hostile toward public servants who represent the Crown, having already driven out a number of governors. Robin is prepared for warmth and respect from the locals due to his association with the Major, but is only treated with distrust and indifference from the townspeople.

Unable to find a house befitting the imagined grandeur of his "kinsman," Molineux, Robin encounters an old man, who loudly rebukes and threatens him, much to the amusement of the patrons and employees of a nearby barber shop. He then visits a tavern full of mariners and craftsmen, all of whom he considers to be lowly drunks. Here, Robin notices a horned man whispering to a group of ill-dressed associates. Robin asks this innkeeper where he can find Molineux, but he erroneously suspects that Robin is a runaway servant named Hezekiah Mudge, whose description superficially resembles Robin's clothing (a gray cloak, leather breeches, and a tri-corner hat). When he finds out that Robin has no money with which to afford supper, the innkeeper throws him out.

Surprised at his cold reception in Massachusetts, Robin continues to roam the streets and back alleys of the town, hungry and dazed. He hopes to run into Molineux as he wanders, but only encounters crowds of young people dressed in elaborate, European-inspired clothing. He inspects the faces of every older gentleman he passes, hoping one of them will be his kinsman, to no avail. Robin hears the old man who threatened him earlier approaching once again, and crosses the street to a series of ramshackle houses on the bay. The door to one of these is open, with a woman in scarlet petticoats standing in the foyer. Opting to try his luck once again, Robin asks the woman where he can find Molineux. She claims that this is Molineux's house, that she is his "housekeeper," and that he is asleep inside after a strong draught of liquor. Robin believes her, and tells her that he'll deliver a message from Molineux's friends in the country and then retire to his room at the inn for the night. But the woman tries to pull Robin indoors, only retreating when the night watchman passes by. The watchman calls Robin a vagabond and tells him to go home, lest he be put in the stocks.

Robin resumes his wandering, noticing more groups of outlandishly dressed people who seem to be speaking foreign languages as they hurry along the road. He randomly stops a man wearing a bulky cloak and asks where he can find his kinsman, only to discover that it is the horned man from the tavern, now with his **face painted** half-red and half-black. The stranger tells Robin to wait an hour in the same location if he wants to see Molineux pass by. Disconsolate, Robin looks in through the window of a nearby church and sees the moonlight shining down on a **Bible**, a sight that evokes homesickness and loneliness, as it reminds him of his father, a New England clergyman, and the rest of his beloved family. At his wit's end, Robin returns to the spot where he met the horned man and is soon joined by a kind gentleman who steps out from the shadow of the steeple and inquires sincerely after Robin's business in the city and general wellbeing. The gentleman

claims to be familiar with the horned man, and warns Robin of the riotous mood of the townspeople.

Eventually, a parade led by the horned man comes by, full of merriment, music, and costumes. What's more, all of the individual townsfolk Robin has met that night appear on the scene. At the center of the procession, pulled along in a cart, is Major Molineux, having been tarred and feathered. He makes humiliated eye contact with Robin, causing Robin to shake violently with "a mixture of pity and terror." After the revelers and their captive have passed, Robin asks the kind gentleman for the way back to the ferry, having concluded that his ventures in the town are a failure. But the gentleman tells him that if he stays, he may yet "rise in the world without the help of your kinsman, Major Molineux."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Robin – The 18-year-old protagonist. Robin is the son of a clergyman, and is determined to find his place in the world. Raised in the country, he has come to Massachusetts Bay to find his cousin Major Molineux, who has offered to help Robin establish himself. Though penniless at the time of his arrival, Robin is finely dressed thanks to his parents, who have equipped him with a gray cloak and a tri-corner hat. Robin is certain that he will receive a warm welcome from the townspeople due to his illustrious kinsman, and imagines Molineux living in great wealth and pomp. Instead, he finds himself a figure of ridicule from the locals: he is ignored, insulted, and even mistaken for a fugitive. Other than a brief respite when Robin peers into a church and admires a **Bible** in the moonlight, his night brings one disappointment after another: he encounters an ominous, "**double-faced**" horned man, an eager but lewd woman who falsely claims to be Molineux's housekeeper, and, finally, a kind gentleman who consoles Robin. When Molineux finally appears, it is as the tarred and feathered prisoner of the townspeople, who are marching in a parade led by the horned man with all the unfriendly figures Robin has met so far that night in succession. Determined not to be made a fool of and imagining a grand destiny for himself, the optimistic Robin only reveals himself as parochial and naïve. When the story opens, he considers himself shrewd and conducts himself with a grandiosity bordering on pretension. By the end, worn down by the night's misadventures, he has come closer to becoming "wiser in time," just as he had hoped he would at the story's outset, but at the unexpected price of painful experience and deep disappointment. He exhibits disassociation between his home and his new environment, wondering "Am I here, or there?" and is prepared to return to the ferry and back to the country, having "grown weary of town life." The kind gentleman, however, urges him to remain and "rise in the world without the help of your kinsman, Major Molineux."

Major Molineux The object ofRobin's search, Major Molineux is his wealthy and distinguished cousin who, during a visit a year or two years ago, showed great interest in Robin. Being himself childless, he offered to set Robin up in the wider world of Massachusetts Bay. But upon arriving, Robin can't find anyone who admits to knowing of Molineux. When the Major finally appears at the end of the story, he has been tarred and feathered by the resentful townspeople, who likely see him as a puppet of the British authority against which the American colonies are rebelling. The Major is being carried in a cart in "foul disgrace" while a parade of townspeople, led by the horned man, play musical instruments, don disguises, and dance about. The two cousins make eye contact and the elderly and once-majestic Major quivers with humiliation, even frothing at the mouth. Robin is horrified, and once the procession has passed, he bitterly notes that he has finally found his kinsman, and that the Major will "scarce desire to see [his] face again."

The Horned Man – The horned man is a mysterious figure with horn-like protrusions on his forehead, shaggy eyebrows, a hooked nose, and fiery eyes—all characteristics reminiscent of classical depictions of the devil. Robinmeets the horned man three times: first conspiring quietly near the doorway of an inn, then walking the streets alone, and finally at the head of the parade in which a tarred-and-feathered Major Molineux is held captive. When Robin meets him in the street, the horned man's is "**double-faced**," having been painted half red and half black, an effect that Robin likens to "two individual devil, a fiend of fire and a fiend of darkness." The nature of his power over the townspeople is unknown, but he is evidently some sort of authority as he leads the masses in their decidedly sinister merriment. Before the parade, he tells Robin to wait an hour if he wants to see Molineux "pass by," foreshadowing the disturbing sight of Molineux that follows. The horned man is a deeply symbolic figure; in his final appearance, he is seated on a horse and bearing a sword, with his face painted red and black. His face is thus characterized as a metaphor for the political dissent, social unrest, and violence happening in New England: "the red of one cheek was an emblem of fire and sword; the blackness of the other betokened the mourning that attends them." He fixes his eyes on Robin, who reacts with horror. The horned man is an agent of chaos, and his role in the story is to represent the infernal power of mob rule, insurrection, and pandemonium.

The Kind Gentleman The only outwardly kind person Robinmeets is a gentleman who emerges from the shadow of a church steeple and keeps him company as he waits for Molineux. A seeming paragon of Christian charity, he recognizes both the horned man and Molineux from Robin's descriptions, and cryptically asks Robin if a man can have several voices as well as two complexions. Once the crowd has

passed by and Robin has asked the way back to the ferry, the gentleman urges him to stay in Massachusetts and rise in the world by himself (just as America is on the cusp of establishing itself without Britain). The gentleman is the counterpoint to the horned man, and can be construed as a Christly figure acting as Robin's savior.

The Old Man – The first person with whom Robin speaks when he arrives in Massachusetts Bay. He is a brusque old man "with a full periwig of gray hair, a wide-skirted coat of dark cloth, and silk stockings." Walking with the help of a cane that strikes the cobblestones as he walks, his voice, punctuated by a cough or quirk that sounds like "hem," is described as "sepulchral," meaning reminiscent of the grave. Robin bows before him, grasps the edge of his garment, and inquires after Major Molineux, only to be loudly rebuffed and threatened with the stocks, much to the amusement of the patrons of a nearby barber shop. Robin thinks to himself that the old man must be "some country representative [...] who has never seen the inside of my kinsman's door, and lacks the breeding to answer a stranger civilly." The next time Robin hears the old man approaching—due to his unabating cough and the sounds of his walking stick on the pavement—he quickly makes himself scarce to avoid a repeat of their previous meeting. Though he denies knowing the Major, the old man is watching from a balcony and laughing uproariously when the parade passes by with a tarred-and-feathered Molineux in tow.

The Innkeeper – Robinmeets the innkeeper in the public house of a tavern soon after arriving in town. Initially courteous, the innkeeper receives Robin with the warmness of a "second-generation [...] French Protestant." Robin thinks the he must recognize his relation to Molineux, but once the innkeeper learns that Robin has no money with which to pay for supper, he threatens to turn him in to the police due to his resemblance to a wanted man named Hezekiah Mudge. After telling Robin to trudge away, Robin reflects "is it not strange that the confession of an empty pocket should outweigh the name of my kinsman, Major Molineux." Hence, the innkeeper provides Robin with one his first lessons about the harsh social climate of town life, and hastens his growing sense of disenchantment.

The "Housekeeper" – In a rundown district near the harbor, Robin chances upon an open doorway where stands a pretty, seductive, and "saucy" woman dressed in a scarlet petticoat who greets Robin with flattery and claims that the Major is inside sleeping off a strong draught of liquor. Taking her on her word that she is Molineux's housekeeper, Robin is almost pulled inside by the woman—who in reality is likely a prostitute—before a watchman appears and causes her to flee indoors. She reappears with the rest of the townspeople as part of the parade at the climax of the story, where she pinches Robin's arm.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Night Watchman – Robin is startled by an ornery night watchman bearing a lantern. He mistakes Robin for a "vagrant," and threatens to put him in the stocks. He reappears at the story's climax, visibly enjoying Robin's distress.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

INNOCENCE VS. CORRUPTION

Nathaniel Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" was written in 1831, but set 100 years earlier, during the long run-up to the American Revolutionary War, when colonial Massachusetts was actively opposed to the governors appointed by King James II. This is the state of affairs when the story's innocent, country-bred protagonist, Robin, obtains passage to Massachusetts Bay and searches for his cousin and benefactor, Major Molineux, who has "inherited riches, and acquired civil and military rank." Robin considers himself "a shrewd youth" and has an inflated idea of Molineux's influence and good standing. But throughout the course of a single evening, Robin encounters cruelty, wickedness, and corruption, culminating in the discovery that Major Molineux has been tarred and feathered by the locals, who are led by a mysterious horned man who resembles the devil. As Robin plummets from confidence and security to total resignation, Hawthorne suggests that the price of experience and worldliness is the surrender of innocence.

Robin believes Major Molineux enjoys a high station and prestige in town, but instead finds that the townspeople either deny knowledge of the Major or hold him in contempt (possibly because he represents British rule to the rowdy colonists). Looking about the ramshackle township, Robin can find no house worthy of his cousin's station, thinking that "This low hovel cannot be my kinsman's dwelling [...] nor yonder old house, where the moonlight enters at the broken casement." Already, Robin's naïve expectations have set him up for disappointment. Each time he mentions Molineux's name to the townspeople, Robin receives some manner of abuse. He is laughed at by the patrons of a barber shop, threatened with being put in the stocks by a watchman, and chased out of an inn after being mistaken for a runaway servant.

He then meets a woman in a "scarlet petticoat" whom he takes to be Molineux's housekeeper, but who is likely a prostitute and attempts to drag Robin indoors. Each of these encounters serves to further disillusion Robin regarding the reputation of his cousin and his prospects in the town. Robin waits outside

the church, told that Molineux will soon be passing by. However, when the Major passes by, it is in a cart, having been tarred-and-feathered by the townspeople who bear torches and wear outlandish costumes. The Major seems to recognize Robin and their eyes meet, at which point "a bewildering excitement began to seize upon [Robin's] mind; the preceding adventures of the night [...] and more than all, a perception of tremendous ridicule in the whole scene, affected him with a sort of mental inebriety." In witnessing his cousin tarred and feathered rather than honored and adored, Robin is effectively cured of his misconceptions—and, by extension, his innocence—and now sees the madness and injustice of life.

Prior to seeing his cousin tarred and feathered, Robin, in his innocence, anticipates kindness from the townspeople, but receives threats and jeers in return. His preconceived notions as to the warm reception he is prepared for are worn down throughout the course of the story. At one point, Robin pompously accosts an old man, whom he greets with a bow and inquires as to the residence of his kinsman. The old man angrily snaps at Robin with such force that it strikes him "like a thought of the cold grave obtruding among wrathful passions." A group of barbers and their patrons witness the exchange and laugh at Robin's distress, further adding to the disenchantment he experiences as he becomes acquainted with his new surroundings.

Three times throughout this same night, Robin meets a mysterious and sinister figure with protuberances resembling horns on his forehead. This devil-like figure represents corruption incarnate, and the high cost of experience, namely the surrender of innocence. After encountering the man inside a tavern, Robin meets the man a second time. His face is **painted black and red**, "as if two individual devils, a fiend of fire and a friend of darkness, had united themselves to form this infernal visage." The man embodies the concept of duplicity and appears whenever Robin's innocence or misconceptions are dashed, thus his face also suggests the difference between appearance and face or expectation and reality, reflecting Robin's own disillusionment as he is met with unkindness and mockery from the townspeople. This culminates in the ultimate loss of innocence as Robin sees the horned man leading a tarred-and-feathered Molineux at the head of a parade, the horrible sight of which forces Robin out of his naiveté completely.

Near the end of the story, Robin meet a gentleman who treats him with seemingly genuine kindness. Beaten and discouraged, Robin asks him to show the way back to the ferry, only to be told that it is too soon for him to leave and that he "may rise in the world without the help" of Molineux. The story abruptly ends, leaving the means by which Robin will "rise" to the imagination of the reader—one implication seems to be that Robin has landed in a compromised position and will soon find himself exploited. On the other hand, he may enjoy his newfound freedom and rise without a patron or father figure (Molineux), just as the country is attempting to "rise" without its own "father" (British rule).

As the story draws to a close, Robin loses the last shred of his innocence and realizes that the world is unpredictable, unruly, and often impossible to navigate. However, the story ends with a surprising note of hope, as Robin is told that he may yet rise without Molineux. Now that his innocence has been replaced by experience, Robin is free to begin again, and with the benefit of a hard-won wisdom that he altogether lacked at the beginning of the story. Robin's trials have been necessary, for they have taken him from an inexperienced youth who expects success and profit to come easy to a boy on the verge of manhood who now has the option of facing the world head-on.

CIVILIZATION VS. CHAOS

"My Kinsman, Major Molineux" begins with a lengthy description of "colonial affairs," as pre-Revolutionary America is growing increasingly hostile to English rule. Already, six royally-appointed governors have been either overthrown or imprisoned by their constituency. The sense of civilization at the brink of anarchy pervades the story, culminating in the tar and feathering of the titular Major Molineux. The old authorities are at the mercy of a rowdy colony that has taken to dressing as Native Americans (similar to the events of the Boston Tea Party) and have embraced chaos rather than submit to the rules of civilization. Robin, unaware of the political climate into which he is setting foot, encounters a self-rule that rejects foreign powers, placing unpopular citizens in the stocks, challenging the British via the House of Representatives, and otherwise replacing the stringent policies of British power with a vigilante-minded mayhem that has yet to establish its own charters. For Hawthorne, so-called patriotism breeds chaos, as the rejection of the existing system—British colonial oversight—embraces pandemonium and civil discontent in lieu of any new program of self-governance.

Robin's misadventures bring him face to face with an unruly colony in transition between the English monarchy and self-rule. Accosted by an old man who refuses to aid Robin, the young man thinks to himself that the elder "lacks the breeding to answer a stranger civilly" and considers smiting him with his cudgel. Robin does not yet realize that he has stumbled upon a culture that has already done away with common courtesy. In a local tavern, Robin spies locals drinking punch made available thanks to "West India trade," a reminder of the (heavily taxed) goods that will ignite the American Revolutionary War.

On a spacious street, Robin looks for Molineux among "many gay and gallant figures" dressed in decorated military garb as well as "travelled youths, imitators of the European fine gentleman of the period." Both types are significant as they are halfway between English fashion and homegrown American

style. Despairing of ever finding the home of Molineux, Robin finally encounters him being dragged along by the very people Robin has met throughout his search and realizes that his "kinsman [is] reviled by that great multitude" due to his lofty position. This is the ultimate realization of the colonists' disdain for foreign-appointed authorities.

Over the course of 40 years, the Massachusetts Bay colony terrorizes the governors that James II, the incumbent King of England, appointed. But by merely punishing the king's representatives, the townspeople revert to barbarism rather than affecting real political change. The colonial Americans are suspicious of "power which did not emanate from themselves," and have "rewarded their rules with slender gratitude." Without a government of their own, Massachusetts has descended into mob justice. Of the six governors appointed by the king, two are imprisoned during an insurrection, one is fired upon by a musket, another is "hastened to his grave by continual bickerings with the House of Representatives," and the remaining two are "favored with few and brief intervals of peaceful sway." With this description, Hawthorne is cleverly setting the scene, as Robin will descend into an atmosphere of resentment torn between self-rule and overseas power. This opening paragraph adds significant context because, at the end of the story, Robin encounters a riotous group of colonists who have humiliated and deposed the Major, another case of structure giving way to unruliness.

In lieu of any laws of their own, the colonists have descended into mobocracy, led by a devilish figure representative of misrule. The mob's mysterious leader is "war personified," with one side of his face painted red, "an emblem of fire and sword," with the other painted black in "mourning." This demonic figure preages the coming period of Revolutionary violence. Robin is refused aid or instruction by nearly everyone he encounters, most of whom deny knowing the Major, only to find them attending to the carnivalesque parade at the story's climax, attended by revelry, trumpets, and "shouts, the laughter, and the tuneless bray" of the procession.

Hawthorne's literary works, most notably his novel *The Scarlet Letter*, often deal with how mob mentality and hypocrisy underpin seemingly benign norms. In "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," those norms are overthrown, leaving a populace that is indifferent, callous, and even sinister. At the story's conclusion, it is hinted that that Robin (and by extension the American colonies) may rise from the ashes of British rule. But in the meantime, chaos reigns supreme and violence bubbles up from just under the surface of Massachusetts society. What's more, America will never truly be free of these elements. For Hawthorne, the crumbling of civilization in favor of pandemonium is America's original sin, and the foundation of an essentially lawless society.

GOOD VS. EVIL

After Robin fails to secure directions to Molineux's house, the horned man he previously met at the inn tells him that Major Molineux will soon pass by on the street. While he waits, Robin looks through the windows of a church and sees a single ray of light illuminating a **Bible**. He thinks of his family and goes into a reverie as his imagination floats between "fancy and reality." As his homesickness threatens to overwhelm him, he stumbles upon the only kind person he has spoken to so far, "a gentleman in his prime, of open, intelligent, cheerful, and altogether prepossessing countenance." This unnamed gentleman, the counterpart to the horned man, is a reminder of the decency, sympathy, and nobility that still exists even at the center of an evil or indifferent populace.

The kind gentleman offers aid to the disheartened Robin as he sits outside of a church, making him a saintly figure that appears in the midst of profound distress. Robin relates the story of how he came from the country to Massachusetts for the gentleman, who listens eagerly and compliments Robin on his "shrewdness." The gentleman mentions that the name of Molineux is not unfamiliar to him, the only person so far who has credibly admitted to knowing of the Major. He seems to know more than he says, as he ensures that Robin remain outside the church as Molineux and his tormentors pass by. As all the wicked and cold-hearted individuals Robin has met pass by, the gentleman alone remains by Robin's side in his time of need. This simple goodness is a buffer against the unkindness that has greeted Robin thus far in Massachusetts.

The kind gentleman seems to have an unspecified relationship with the horned man, further proof of the subtle contest between good and evil vying for power in Massachusetts Bay. The gentleman mysteriously tells Robin that he knows the man, but "not intimately." This implies that the kind gentleman as somewhat of a Christ figure, and the horned man as his devilish counterpart, and suggests an unspoken rivalry between the two men—one kind and curious, the other disinterested and crude. In discussing the horned man, whose face is inexplicably **painted red and black**, and the coming crowd, the gentleman asks Robin if a man cannot have several voices "as well as two complexions?" This can be read as an indication that the colony is halfway between good and evil and this same question lies at the heart of humanity, which is capable of both. All people must choose between the forces of individual order and the temptation represented by the horned man, who leads the townspeople into a frenzy. Seized momentarily by the festivity of the crowd, Robin loses himself and briefly partakes of the mob's "contagion" as it spreads across the multitude. The gentleman brings Robin back to reality and asks him if he is dreaming. With this, the good man rescues Robin from being swept in by the evil power that has apparently taken control of the town. Hence the goodness seems to dispel the evil that has

gripped Robin's soul.

The ambiguous ending sees the kindly gentleman tell Robin, who asks for directions back to the ferry, that given a few days, he "may rise in the world without the help of [his] kinsman, Major Molineux." Even a town beset by evil may be overshadowed by goodness. It is unknown by what means Robin, according to the gentleman, will "rise in the world." But by promoting self-reliance and imploring Robin to have faith in himself, the stranger becomes the boy's savior. That said, there is the possibility that the stranger means to induct Robin into some dishonest labor. From the story, it is impossible to know, but as Robin has come to distrust everything around him, even kindness feels conditional and potentially criminal. The gentleman is different from every other person Robin has met and seems almost otherworldly, an indication that he is a Christ figure in opposition to the devil that leads the mob. As such, he is goodness incarnate and Robin's salvation.

Hawthorne's view of evil, on display in this story, is that it is bred by the masses and thrives on duplicity. Good is always an individual choice and must take root even amidst collective sinfulness. Readers don't know in what direction Robin's fate will take him, but he is warned not to submit altogether to the wickedness that he finds in every corner of his search for his kinsman. Through the story, Hawthorne suggests that people are not born to either total goodness or evil but arrive halfway between the two. Evil can be grotesque, as with the horned man, or spread by more subtle means until it seems to smother the possibility for good; but there always exists the hope of persevering and taking a personal stand against widespread iniquity.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE HORNED MAN'S PAINTED FACE

Three times, Robin encounters a man with horn-like protrusions on his forehead. The second and third time Robin meets this horned man, he has painted his face half-red and half-black. Apparently a figure of considerable influence in town, the painted face of the horned man thus represents division and duplicity, both between America and Britain and among the American people. The overall effect is described as if "two individual devils, a fiend of fire and a fiend of darkness, had united to from this infernal visage." An hour later, when Robin witnesses the horned man leading the parade of people who have tarred and feathered Molineux, the man's face is said to be "war personified; the red of one cheek was an emblem of fire and sword; the blackness of the other betokened the mourning that attends them." The division is significant, as America is itself split between self-governance and British rule, and the shadow of the Revolutionary War has fallen over the Massachusetts Bay colony.

Red is traditionally associated with bloodshed and violence, while black is the color of woe and bereavement—the nascent United States will come to see plenty of both. Just after Robin encounters the horned man's painted face, a kind gentleman emerges from the shadows of a nearby church and is the only townsperson in the story to show genuine care for Robin. The gentleman's kindness and association with the purity of the church thus embodies Christian charity, while the horned man physically resembles the devil and represents cruelty and iniquity. The gentleman asks Robin "May a man not have several voices [...] as well as two complexions?" This suggests that the horned man, and particularly his face, is merely a representative of the larger crowd, representing the spirit of the mob justice and divisiveness that is plaguing the American colonies.

THE BIBLE

Peering in through the window of a church, Robin sees moonbeam alighting on an open bible. This Bible represents the structure, purpose, and certainty that is seemingly absent from the political unrest in Massachusetts Baby, as well as Robin's ambiguous decision between returning home and staying in Massachusetts. After wandering around the city looking for Molineux, his kinsman, the sight reminds Robin of his home and clergyman father, evoking loneliness and wistfulness. He thinks of his father reading from the scriptures and the welcoming atmosphere of his home, in contrast to his cold reception in Massachusetts Bay. The Bible thus symbolizes surety of the deliverance from sin and is emblematic of the goodness that he has so far found lacking here in the wider world. Torn between the familiarity of home and his current unfamiliar environment, Robin wonders, "Am I here, or there?" Outside the church is a graveyard, and Robin wonders if his kinsman isn't dead and buried. This thought intrudes on the sense of peace Robin feels from the sight of the pews, windows, and the Bible in the church. Robin has come to Massachusetts in hopes of "begin[ning] in the world] and thus attaining manhood, but to do so he must face a world far more complex than the simple life that he is accustomed to. Hence, the Bible beckons Robin back to his old life while the kind gentleman—who, significantly, emerges from the shadow of the church steeple—advises Robin to remain and make a life for himself without the help of his kinsman. At the conclusion of the story, it is unknown which Robin will choose. Thus, the Bible remains a symbolic half of the unresolved conflict between familiarity and new opportunities that Robin now faces.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Selected Tales and Sketches* published in 1987.

My Kinsman, Major Molineux Quotes

The annals of Massachusetts Bay will inform us, that of six governors, in the space of about forty years from the surrender of the old charter, under James II., two were imprisoned by a popular insurrection; a third, as Hutchinson inclines to believe, was driven from the province by the whizzing of a musket ball; a fourth, in the opinion of the same historian, was hastened to his grave by continual bickerings with the House of Representatives; and the remaining two, as well as their successors, till the Revolution, were favored with few and brief intervals of peaceful sway.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

As the story opens, Hawthorne sets the stage by specifying the mood of pre-revolutionary Massachusetts Bay. King James II is the ultimate authority of the colonies, something that its citizens resent tremendously. The first sparks of the American Revolution are already showing in the strain between the people and their governors. Meanwhile, there is a sense of widespread anarchy, as the colonists refuse to be governed and have become hostile toward the British-appointed leaders of the community, to the point that they have actually taken up arms against these governors. Two faced an uprising and were jailed, one was driven out after being shot at, another died after the stress of dealing with an irate House of Representatives, and the last two lived in a permanent state of panic without a moment's rest.

By situating his tale in the midst of the political turmoil and civil unrest plaguing Massachusetts during this time, Hawthorne positions his dreamlike atmosphere parallel to the run-up to the Revolution, as chaos threatens to overwhelm civilization. Since the colonists are powerless to appoint their own governors, they have regressed into mob justice, with the result that visitors to the city encounter a place torn between two governments and, eventually, two countries.

The youth, one of whose names was Robin, finally drew from his pocket the half of a little province-bill of five shillings, which, in the depreciation of that sort of currency, did but satisfy the ferryman's demand, with the surplus of a sexangular piece of parchment valued at three pence. He then walked forward into the town, with as light a step, as if his day's journey had not already exceeded thirty miles, and with as eager an eye, as if he were entering London city, instead of the little metropolis of a New England colony.

Related Characters: Major Molineux , Robin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Robin arrives in town filled with hope and destiny as he begins the search for his illustrious kinsman, Major Molineux. Mysteriously referred to as having more than one name, Robin is wayward and somewhat pretentious. Having saved up every bit of money he could get his hands on, he is nevertheless broke by the time the ferry docks, thanks to the economic gulf between the American colonies and Great Britain, leading to the devaluation of their currency, something Robin doesn't appear to have foreseen.

Hence, Robin has no money, no clear idea of where to find the Major, and no real sense of reality. His profound innocence is already setting him up for disappointment, as he is filled with restless energy despite his long journey. As far as the inexperienced Robin knows, Massachusetts Bay is the height of civilization, on par with London itself. Taking in the scene with an eager eye, he begins the journey of that night, unaware of what waits in store.

He now became entangled in a succession of crooked and narrow streets, which crossed each other, and meandered at no great distance from the water-side. The smell of tar was obvious to his nostrils, the masts of vessels pierced the moonlight above the tops of the buildings, and the numerous signs, which Robin paused to read, informed him that he was near the centre of business. But the streets were empty, the shops were closed, and lights were visible only in the second stories of a few dwelling-houses.

Related Characters: Robin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

The geometry of the city "entangles" Robin, as though claiming him for itself. Leaving the bay and the town's outskirts behind, he begins to penetrate the commercial district, but even there the streets are empty and the businesses are closed. Still, there is a sense of menace in the narrator's gothic description of the seemingly deserted thoroughfare, as the rather gawky Robin enters into the bleak and even beguiling town. But the first real hint of Robin's coming education in the realities of the world are underscored bus smelling tar—which, unbeknownst to him, foreshadows his tar-and-feathered kinsman. As a result, Robin is ironically closer to the Major than he realizes—though not at all in the state he imagined his kinsman to be. Still expecting to find him and be welcomed into the township, Robin instead becomes an outsider, a stranger in a land where the doors are shut and the windows closed, seemingly locking Robin outside in the manic architecture of the streets.

❝ A number of persons, the larger part of whom appeared to be mariners, or in some way connected with the sea, occupied the wooden benches, or leather-bottomed chairs, conversing on various matters, and occasionally lending their attention to some topic of general interest. Three or four little groups were draining as many bowls of punch, which the great West India trade had long since made a familiar drink in the colony. Others, who had the aspect of men who lived by regular and laborious handicraft, preferred the insulated bliss of an unshared potation, and became more taciturn under its influence. Nearly all, in short, evinced a predilection for the Good Creature in some of its various shapes, for this is a vice, to which, as the Fast-day sermons of a hundred years ago will testify, we have a long hereditary claim.

Related Characters: The Horned Man , Robin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

A drunken and smoky atmosphere greets Robin as he enters the tavern and encounters his first sign of the unruly citizenry in Massachusetts Bay. Mostly made up of sailors, the lively visitors to the inn are likely traders and importers, while the non-maritime guests are drinking alone after a day's work, seeking the "insulated bliss" of liquor, which the narrator calls "the Good Creature" and notes its predominance in the colonies. This vice is juxtaposed with mention of the sermons that decry the drunkenness of parishioners on Fast-day. Evil, or at least the corrupt nightlife of the city, lurks within the establishment, as evidenced by the horned man, who is also among the various and shabbily dressed bar patrons. The narrator also mentions the West India trade, which famously sold to the colonists at considerable markup, laying the groundwork for the country's rebellion and independence.

❝ "What have we here?' said he, breaking his speech into little dry fragments. 'Left the house of the subscriber, bounden servant, Hezekiah Mudge—had on, when he went away, grey coat, leather breeches, master's third best hat. One-pound currency reward to whoever shall lodge him in any jail in the province." Better trudge, boy, better trudge!"

Robin had begun to draw his hand towards the lighter end of the oak cudgel, but a strange hostility in every countenance, induced him to relinquish his purpose of breaking the courteous innkeeper's head. As he turned to leave the room, he encountered a sneering glance from the bold-featured personage whom he had before noticed; and no sooner was he beyond the door, than he heard a general laugh, in which the innkeeper's voice might be distinguished, like the dropping of small stones into a kettle.

Related Characters: The Innkeeper (speaker), The Horned Man , Robin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

After confessing his poverty, Robin abruptly finds himself unwelcome as the innkeeper drops his façade of friendliness and effectively kicks Robin out of the establishment. Moments ago, Robin expected the bar patrons to offer to guide him to Major Molineux's house and is shocked when mention of his kinsman's name does not immediately lead to a warm reception. Instead, the innkeeper taunts Robin, bringing up a wanted servant of the unlikely moniker of "Hezekiah Mudge," who has absconded with his master's clothing. Hence, Robin's expectations of being instantaneously accepted as one of the town's most decorated and well-bred inhabitants is instead met with comparison to one of the town's lowliest citizens,

challenging his rather naïve and egotistical notion that being related to Major Molineux would award him automatic respect or privilege in Massachusetts Bay.

Robin's naiveté and innocence are in full bloom as he runs afoul of the innkeeper and the horned man, snickering by the door. Robin's first real experience of the vice and villainy of the town almost spurs Robin to violence, as he considers "breaking the innkeeper's head," only to be turned away, much to the amusement of the crowd, whose mirthful and mocking laughter follows Robin back out the door. Following his encounter earlier with the old man, this is the second time that Robin has been threatened with imprisonment and drives home the sense of Robin as outsider, innocent to a fault, and persecuted by the law.

"Nay, the Major has been a-bed this hour or more," said the lady of the scarlet petticoat; "and it would be to little purpose to disturb him to-night, seeing his evening draught was of the strongest. But he is a kind-hearted man, and it would be as much as my life's worth, to let a kinsman of his turn away from the door. You are the good old gentleman's very picture, and I could swear that was his rainy-weather hat. Also, he has garments very much resembling those leather—But come in, I pray, for I bid you hearty welcome in his name."

Related Characters: The "Housekeeper" (speaker), Major Molineux , Robin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

The crafty "housekeeper" all but explicitly lies to Robin, as she pretends to be the hired help of Major Molineux. The woman gives Robin the kind of reception that he came to Massachusetts expecting to find. The irony, however, is that the woman's flattery is false, and she is playing Robin for a fool by pretending to recognize a resemblance between the two kinsmen, exactly the kind of treatment he has expected since first arriving in town. Faced with the corruption of the woman—who the reader can infer is probably a sex worker, rather than the Major's housekeeper—Robin's innocence almost dooms him. There's something suspicious about the portrait she paints of the drunken Major Molineux, sleeping off a powerful draught of beer, namely that it is at odds with Robin's idea of his kinsman's virtuousness.

Likewise, the cluster of worn-down buildings is a far cry from the luxury in which Robin presumes the Major dwells. Robin fails to put the pieces together as to the woman's true profession and intent, and is nearly seduced by the woman, whose scarlet petticoats mark her as wicked or promiscuous. This is also likely Robin's first brush with a woman outside of his family and parish. Robin is playing the part of a "holy fool," as, struck by her beauty, his inexperience makes him an easy mark. The so-called "housekeeper" is a figure of evil who seeks to corrupt Robin and will soon try to pull him indoors before being interrupted by the night watch.

Robin gazed with dismay and astonishment, on the unprecedented physiognomy of the speaker. The forehead with its double prominence, the broad-hooked nose, the shaggy eyebrows, and fiery eyes, were those which he had noticed at the inn, but the man's complexion had undergone a singular, or, more properly, a two-fold change. One side of the face blazed of an intense red, while the other was black as midnight, the division line being in the broad bridge of the nose; and a mouth, which seemed to extend from ear to ear, was black or red, in contrast to the color of the cheek. The effect was as if two individual devils, a fiend of fire and a fiend of darkness, had united themselves to form this infernal visage.

Related Characters: Major Molineux , The Horned Man , Robin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

Robin reencounters the horned man, who tells him to wait for his kinsman to appear in an hour's time, and who will turn out to be ringleader of the riotous mob. This time the horned man's face is painted, giving him a horrifying half-black, half-red appearance. Hawthorne's description of the horned man as having a "broad-hooked nose, shaggy eyebrows, and fiery eyes" leaves little doubt that the man is made-up to resemble the devil, and thereby takes on a symbolically devilish and immoral role in the story. His doubled face stands in for any number of the story's active contrasts: night vs. day, appearance vs. reality, and, above all, good vs. evil. But the one the narrator mentions by name is hellfire and darkness, two opposing forces (light and dark) that nevertheless conjure up a hellish description that is

referred to as infernal, or pertaining to malevolence.

The horned man, in the context of the story, seems not altogether human, and treats the innocent Robin with disgust and vitriol. This persona contrasts sharply with Robin, the son of a clergyman, who believes in the virtues of the church and is altogether wholesome. But here, Robin meets his opposite in the person of the horned man, an evil and otherworldly presence that represents the true face of the city and the violence lurking just below the seemingly sleepy town. His repeated presence throughout the night thus implies a forthcoming challenge to Robin's youthful innocence.

> A fainter, yet more awful radiance, was hovering round the pulpit, and one solitary ray had dared to rest upon the opened page of the great Bible. Had Nature, in that deep hour, become a worshipper in the house, which man had builded? Or was that heavenly light the visible sanctity of the place, visible because no earthly and impure feet were within the walls? The scene made Robin's heart shiver with a sensation of loneliness, stronger than he had ever felt in the remotest depths of his native woods; so he turned away, and sat down again before the door.

Related Characters: Robin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

After the horned man passes by, Robin takes refuge in the shadow of a church, which he scales in order to peep inside the windows. There he spies the moonlight spilling out over the pews and a single ray illuminating an open Bible. All at once, Robin is flooded with homesickness and intense loneliness, as the sight of the Bible brings his longing for purity, far from the spirit of evil that has enveloped the city, to the surface. The Bible is Robin's greatest link with his former life and, upon seeing it, he enters a kind of reverie or fugue state. Foremost in his mind is the thought of God and man, nature and civilization. He wonders if God (or "Nature") can only enter where corrupt mankind isn't present, and whether Heaven can coexist with the dark, sinful realities of the city that Robin has so far discovered.

From these musings, it is clear that Robin is now on the road to shedding his innocence for worldly experience. However painful it has been for him, it is clear that he can no longer go back to his innocent childhood in the country. Though the Bible is a tantalizing sight, he can only look through the window. He can no more reach the holy display that he can reclaim his past (and much simpler) life. The narrator's description of the "awful radiance" of the scene puts this moment of bittersweet relief into sharp contrast with the decidedly ungodly townspeople and, in particular, the horned man.

> "Am I here, or there?" cried Robin, starting; for all at once, when his thoughts had become visible and audible in a dream, the long, wide, solitary street shone out before him.

Related Characters: Robin (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Dreams have been invoked consistently throughout the story, and now Robin's growing sense of estrangement from the world he knows is even more pronounced, as he experiences a moment of dissociation where he can scarcely chart the gulf between the boy who left the country to seeks his fortune and the cynical-minded man who he is on the cusp of becoming. Losing control of his thoughts following the image of the Bible that prompted a long remembrance of his welcoming home, he questions to which side he truly belongs.

Robin has been painfully separated from his former innocence and despairs finding his kinsman. His thoughts seem to acquire substance and he sees but one road ahead of him. Excluded from his home and the comfort of familiarity, Robin has begun to acquire experience at the expense of innocence— just as he is locked out of the church and can only peer in, he can no longer return to his memories without a crippling sense of isolation.

"Well, Sir, being nearly eighteen years old, and well-grown, as you see,' continued Robin, raising himself to his full height, 'I thought it high time to begin the world. So my mother and sister put me in handsome trim, and my father gave me half the remnant of his last year's salary, and five days ago I started for this place, to pay the Major a visit. But would you believe it, Sir? I crossed the ferry a little after dusk, and have yet found nobody that would show me the way to his dwelling; only an hour or two since, I was told to wait here, and Major Molineux would pass by."

Related Characters: Robin (speaker), Major Molineux , The Horned Man , The Kind Gentleman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

Though he hasn't yet discovered the shameful manner in which he will be reacquainted with his once-revered kinsman, Robin is at least able to retain some of his former dignity as he speaks to the only sympathetic soul he has run across all night. The kind gentleman even seems impressed with Robin, and encourages him. Just as the horned man, with whom the kind gentleman is passingly acquainted, represents evil, the kind gentleman seems to embody the ideal of Christian charity. As such, he presents Robin with the opportunity to regale him with his story so far. It is also the fullest picture yet of Robin's origins, intent, hopes, and means.

Even more than his older brother, who is fated to run the family farm, Robin is the son and brother upon whom the others have pinned their hopes. Through saving and the generosity of his family, Robin hoped to make it in the world. His failure is therefore not merely personal, but seems on the verge of family dishonor. The kind gentleman, instead of pointing out Robin's youthful inexperience, is happy to listen and reaffirm Robin's virtues, and to validate the disregard with which Robin has been subjected by the townspeople.

The single horseman, clad in a military dress, and bearing a drawn sword, rode onward as the leader, and, by his fierce and variegated countenance, appeared like war personified; the red of one cheek was an emblem of fire and sword; the blackness of the other betokened the mourning which attends them. In his train, were wild figures in the Indian dress, and many fantastic shapes without a model, giving the whole march a visionary air, as if a dream had broken forth from some feverish brain, and were sweeping visibly through the midnight streets.

Related Characters: The Horned Man , Robin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

The horned man reappears at the head of a cacophonous parade that is moving through the city blowing horns, laughing, and frolicking with a demonic energy. Dressed as an officer and bearing a sword, the horned man appears to have the entire city in his grasp, as a train of colonists who are disguised—and therefore immune to persecution—revel in his wake. The narrator's language indicates an atmosphere of fever and, again, references a dream being made solid. At this juncture, the story has become, chiefly, a parable for the independence that doesn't shy away from the violence of war, which will follow in the horned man's passage just as surely as the revelers (which come to include, either as participant or onlooker, every person Robin has met so far that night).

The horned man's double-faced visage is described once more but, this time, instead of fire and darkness, his cheeks depict "war personified" by the grim realities that underpin the patriotic mythology of the American Revolution, namely a sense of destruction and mourning for the dead. Hawthorne is not regretting the Revolution or at all opposed to American self-governance, but is advocating for an awareness of the violent acts with which these means were achieved. Notably, the lack of any rule of law to constrain the mob is representative of the British authorities' inability to regain mastery of their colony.

Right before Robin's eyes was an uncovered cart. There the torches blazed the brightest, there the moon shone out like day, and there, in tar-and-feathery dignity, sat his kinsman, Major Molineux!

He was an elderly man, of large and majestic person, and strong, square features, betokening a steady soul; but steady as it was, his enemies had found the means to shake it. His face was pale as death, and far more ghastly; the broad forehead was contracted in his agony, so that his eyebrows formed one grizzled line; his eyes were red and wild, and the foam hung white upon his quivering lip.

Related Characters: Major Molineux , Robin

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Robin has at last come face-to-face with his kinsman, but the encounter on the streets, with the Major a prisoner of the same people who have humiliated him and made him ridiculous, is far from the celebratory greeting he expected. Instead, he is little more than a beaten old man brought low from the very citizenry whom he served. The illumination of nature (via the moon) and the man (via the lit torches) combine to create an even greater sense of spectacle, a spotlight from which the Major is unable to escape , and from which Robin cannot tear his glance. At last, evil and chaos have triumphed over order and justice, and Robin breaks definitively from the peace and faith in the world that he once knew.

Molineux has been discussed throughout the story as an illustrious figure, which makes the defeat in which he finally makes his appearance all the more bitter. Robin is crushed, and the Major so ashamed that Robin will go on to decry any chance of meeting the Major again, having already witnessed his punishment at the hands of the locals. His tar-and-feathered body is sarcastically referred to as a state of "dignity," and his physique is that of a once-strong man brought to utter and agonizing brokenness by his enemies, the townspeople, who have come to resent him along with all other authorities.

"No, my good friend Robin, not to-night, at least,' said the gentleman. 'Some few days hence, if you continue to wish it, I will speed you on your journey. Or, if you prefer to remain with us, perhaps, as you are a shrewd youth, you may rise in the world, without the help of your kinsman, Major Molineux."

Related Characters: The Kind Gentleman (speaker), Robin

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the story, Robin resolves to return home empty-handed and resume his former way of life. He clearly does not recognize how much the night's events and misadventures have changed him, believing he can return home and say goodbye to the harsh city life of which he has grown weary. But the kind gentleman, a figure of divine providence, recognizes that all is not lost, and that Robin may have opportunities hitherto unknown. While the kind gentleman isn't specific regarding the nature by which Robin will rise in the world, he reassures him that he may be able to get by without his kinsman and by way of his own virtues. Now purged of his innocence by the harrowing sight of a tarred-and-feathered Molineux, Robin has both literally and figuratively looked corruption in the eye and, though it pains him, he is on the path to manhood and no longer trusts purely in appearances. Just as the nascent United States will soon prosper without British assistance, so too may Robin become his own man without assuming that family connections alone will be sufficient to sustain him.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

MY KINSMAN, MAJOR MOLINEUX

The British monarchy "assume[s] the right of appointing colonial governors" in the American colonies. The governors are criticized by the public, who resent the fact that they do not have a say in the laws that govern their lives. The British rulers are also dissatisfied with the governors' "softening" of "their instructions from beyond the sea."

Set before the American Revolution, the colonists are restless with all manner of British rule, an antipathy that extends to outcry over foreign-appointed governors. Roughly a generation before the Boston Massacre ignites the American Revolution, Massachusetts is already a powder keg, as the tension between the Americans and the British is palpable at this point.

Under the rule of King James II, all six governors implemented in the span of 40 years in the Massachusetts Bay area are met with great dissent. Two are imprisoned, a third is driven out, a fourth dies an early death due to stress, and the remaining two are "favored with few and brief intervals of peaceful sway." The "inferior members of the court party" have a similarly taxing experience. The narrator states that the preceding information happened about a century ago and serves as a "preface to the following adventures," and tells the reader to disregard popular narratives of colonial history.

Hawthorne continues to set the stage, as his narrator captures the mood of widespread discontent of a century ago (making the date of these events circa 1732, as Hawthorne wrote "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" in 1832). The year of George Washington's birth, 1732 is well before the colonists organize against the British. Instead, there is a mood of anarchy and grassroots resistance, as the colonies become resentful of their British-appointed leaders. Even those who are not driven out by the Americans suffer maddening harassment from the locals. The narrator, however, insists that the story is taking place outside of history, which lays the groundwork for the story's dreamlike atmosphere.

At 9:00 on a "moonlight evening," an 18-year-old man arrives in Massachusetts Bay as the sole passenger on a ferry boat. The ferryman observes that the passenger has "well worn" but durable clothing, a cudgel, and a wallet. He also has "brown, curly hair, well-shaped features, and bright, cheerful eyes." The young man, whose name is Robin, pays the ferryman the five shillings they agreed upon, plus an extra three pence. Robin has traveled 30 miles to get to this "little metropolis of a New England colony," and he curiously observes his surroundings as he enters the town.

Robin's youthful appearance and his pride in his somewhat shabby clothes communicate the innocence and optimism with which he is embarking on his journey to Massachusetts Bay. Amazed by his first glimpse of the city, the country-bred Robin begins his trip with a sense of destiny, believing fortune to be on his side.

Robin thinks to himself that this "low hovel" cannot be where the kinsman he has come to see lives, since it is not "worthy" of him. He stops an old man walking ahead of him who is carrying a long cane and repeatedly clearing his throat in a "solemn and sepulchral" manner. Robin grabs onto the skirt of the old man's coat and asks him where he can find the house of "my kinsman, Major Molineux," loudly enough to catch the attention of a barber in a nearby shop. The old man yells at Robin to let go of him, threatening to have the young man's feet bound in the stocks.

In Robin's first brush with the realities that belie his expectations, he imagines that the renown of his famous, successful kinsman must set Major Molineux apart from the humble buildings that line the street. The old man who rebukes Robin's inquiry is a deathly figure, with a voice reminiscent of the tomb. Instead of the warm welcome he anticipates, he is met with the threat of the stocks, where criminals and troublemakers were bound, a common practice in the colonies until the mid-18th century.

The men in the barbershop laugh as Robin lets go of the old man and continues to wander the meandering "crooked and narrow streets," smelling tar in the air. He thinks to himself that the old man is a poor reflection of America, as he "lacks the breeding to answer a stranger civilly," and therefore couldn't possibly have any knowledge of the respectable Major Molineux.

Robin is already a figure of fun for the locals, who are amused at his naïveté and foolishness. Robin tells himself that the old man must be beneath the station of his great kinsman and therefore uncivil and poorly-bred. The scent of tar foreshadows a possible tar-and-feathering, a common form of public torture and punishment during this time. It is an early hint that Robin has found himself in a hostile territory of which he is completely ignorant.

Robin reflects that he "will be wiser in time" and enters the town's business district, though most of the shops are closed and the streets are empty. On the corner of a lane, he finds an inn with a sign bearing the "countenance of a British hero swinging" before the door. He hears the sounds of merry voices and smells "the fragrance of good cheer." Pulling back a curtain, he sees a well-furnished table and realizes how hungry he is, having missed a proper dinner. Certain that his relation to the Major will make him welcome, he enters the smoke-filled tavern.

Robin has come to Massachusetts Bay in search of experience, and chalks up his lessons so far to an unworldliness that he is eager to discard. His naïveté as a young, inexperienced man is obvious, as he still expects to be welcomed by the patrons of the tavern, and is heartened by the cheer he hears coming from inside. The likeness of the British hero above the door, meanwhile, is another signal of the disconnect between the Americans and their British overlords.

Inside, Robin takes stock of the establishment's patrons. Mariners converse from wooden benches and leather chairs, a few little groups are engaged in draining vast qualities of punch, which "the West India trade had long since made a familiar drink the colony." Others drink alone and in silence. All are said to share a "predilection" for alcohol, "a vice to which, as Fast Day sermons of a hundred years ago will testify, we have a long hereditary claim." Robin feels a kinship with "two or three sheepish countrymen" eating bread and bacon in the corner of room, "heedless of the Nicotian atmosphere."

The liveliness of the tavern is ascribed to the alcohol, one of many goods that the colonists purchase at a marked-up price from the West Indian trade, which will become a point of contention throughout the 18th century, culminating in the Boston Tea Party in 1773. Both the sailors and solitary country folk are predisposed to heavy drinking and tobacco (implied by the term "Nicotian"), creating an air of decadence with which Robin feels unacquainted and uncomfortable.

Robin's attention is attracted to who he observes as a "horned man" speaking in hushed and conspiratorial tones to some poorly-attired youths by the door. The man's forehead bulges with "a double prominence" and whose eyes burn like "fire in a cave" under shaggy eyebrows.

The first appearance of the horned man presents him as a beguiling figure, whose resemblance to the popular depiction of the devil is illustrated by his horns and fiery eyes. The horned man's disturbing features are a stark contrast to Robin's own youthful appearance and tattered clothing, situating this strange character as a foil of evil to Robin's innocence.

As Robin wonders to whom he should direct his inquiry regarding the whereabouts of Major Molineux, he is approached by an initially cheerful innkeeper with the manners of "a French Protestant." He recognizes Robin's country bearing and welcomes him to town, where there is "much that may interest a stranger." Thinking that the innkeeper perceives his resemblance to his famous cousin, Robin confesses to having only "a parchment three-pence" in his pocket and asks for Molineux's address. The patrons of the tavern turn toward Robin and he thinks they are probably all eager to act as his guide. Instead, the innkeeper notes Robin's resemblance to a runaway servant and wanted man by the name of "Hezekiah Mudge," and tells him to trudge off before the innkeeper reports him to the authorities for the one-pound reward.

Robin expects his breeding (specifically, his relation to the Major) to matter more than his ability to pay for supper, and even makes the mistake of thinking that the denizens of the tavern are jockeying for the honor of serving as his guide, when in fact they are bemused at the youth's brazen manner. This suggests that, in his naïveté about city life, Robin has also taken on a level of youthful arrogance. What's worse, Robin is wearing clothing similar to that stolen by an escaped servant from his master, so rather than resembling the highest-ranking citizen as he had hoped, he in fact is taken for one of the lowest.

As he leaves, the horned man snickers at Robin and he hears the sound of laughter behind him as he returns to the street. He reflects "with his usual shrewdness" how strange it is that his "confession of an empty pocket should outweigh" the name of Molineux. He thinks of violently thrashing the innkeeper with his cudgel if he ever catches him alone, but continues his search, rounding the corner of the lane and coming to a spacious street of elegant houses and a steepled church whose bell tolls nine o'clock.

Once again, Robin's high expectations are dashed by the ridicule of the Massachusetts Bay locals. The narrator ironically refers to Robin as "shrewd" throughout the story, drawing a contrast between his high opinion of himself and his gawky and presumptuous self-presentation. Unaware of how the world really works, Robin, in the archetype of the "holy innocent," laments that his poverty should exclude him from the company of men and he bitterly contemplates violence, which would almost certainly lead to his arrest and possible torture within this politically and socially-contentious setting.

In this well-lit quarter of the city, Robin searches the face of each "elderly gentleman" who passes by for Molineux's features. Instead, he encounters "many gay and gallant figures" in expensive garments carrying silver-hilted swords in imitation of European styles and dancing to "fashionable tunes." Robin feels outclassed by these "travelled youth" and the gorgeous goods displayed in the shop windows. Robin tries another side of the street, "with stronger hopes than the philosopher seeking an honest man, but with no better fortune." Rebuked by the elders that Robin briefly waylays, he hears the sound of the old man's cane and "sepulchral hems" striking the pavement. Hoping to avoid a repeat of his past embarrassment, he turns the corner to a far less gilded part of town.

Here, foreign sensibilities prevail over colonial manners, but Robin is no closer to finding the Major. The narrator humorously compares Robin to the philosopher Diogenes of Sinope (c. 404-323 BCE), who famously held a lantern to the faces of the citizen of Athens, saying he was searching for an honest man.

Nearing the harbor, on a street of "mean appearance," Robin is hungry, impatient, and prepared to use his cudgel on the "first solitary passenger whom he should meet." The street is largely deserted except for a row of shabby houses. In the doorway of one of these, there is an attractive woman in scarlet petticoats. Thinking his luck may be about to change, he asks her to direct him to Major Molineux's household. The woman, whose "bight eyes possessed a sly freedom," claims that Major Molineux dwells inside the house. Robin believes her wholeheartedly and feels that he is in luck, and "so indeed [...] is the Major, in having so pretty a housekeeper."

Robin's patience is beginning to wear out, though he is still naïvely optimistic enough to mistake the fetching woman in scarlet for Molineux's housekeep, when in fact she is very likely a prostitute looking to take advantage of Robin. The color scarlet will reappear in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, where it similarly symbolizes Hester Prynne's promiscuity and perceived corruption.

The presumed "housekeeper" tells Robin that his kinsman is inside in bed and not to be disturbed, as he is sleeping off a powerful draught of liquor. She also flatters Robin, saying he is "the good old gentleman's very picture." As she takes hold of Robin's hand, Robin hesitates, as he reads "in her eyes what he did not hear in her words." She attempts to pull Robin inside, but then a night watchman with a lantern in one hand and a spear in the other emerges from another doorway, causing the "housekeeper" to run inside the house, leaving Robin on the threshold.

Robin very nearly succumbs to the disreputable woman's advances, as she treats Robin with the flattery and recognition he has been searching for elsewhere. He even overlooks her curious characterization of the Major as a heavy drinker until he perceives a duplicity between what the "housekeeper" says and the lustful intentions he reads in her eyes. Most telling of all, she runs indoors when the night watchman appears, as her livelihood is criminal and would result in heavy punishment were she apprehended plying her trade.

The night watchman calls Robin a vagabond and tells him to go home or hang in the stocks. Robin thinks to himself, "This is the second hint of the kind [...] I wish they would end my difficulties, by setting there tonight." Still, he asks this "guardian of midnight order" to guide him to the house of Molineux and receives only "drowsy laughter" in return as the watchman vanishes around the corner. From the open window above him, the "housekeeper" beckons him with a "saucy eye" and a protruding arm. He hears her coming back down the steps, but Robin, "being of the household of a New England clergyman," resists temptation and runs off.

Robin cynically wishes the night watchman would make good on his threat and enforce the apparent curfew Robin is violating. Although considered at worst criminal, and at best an annoyance by those Robin has met on the street so far, Robin is able to avoid the wiles of the "housekeeper" when she beckons to him. His background as the son of a clergyman reveals Robin as a devout Christian, putting him at odds with the secular and sinful city folk who engage in vices like drinking and prostitution. It also places him in further contrast with the menacing horned man from the tavern.

Now Robin is truly lost, walking unlit streets "desperately and at random." He wonders if he is under the spell of a wizard, like the one back in the country who once kept three pursuers wandering through a winter night even though they were 20 paces from their cottage destination. Though the streets are desolate, Robin does discern two hurried groups of men in "outlandish attire" who speak to Robin in a strange dialect and then curse him in English when he fails to answer. Robin decides to simply knock at the door of every mansion "worthy to be occupied by his kinsman." But as he passes the church, he sees a stranger bundled up in his cloak and bars his way, holding out his cudgel with both hands.

Robin's meditates on a legendary wizard from his home in the country and continual search for his kinsman further reflect his pure, single-minded intentions and his naïveté as a young man from the country. The men, with their strange clothing and dialect, foreshadow something strange and potentially sinister happening in the city, yet Robin remains blissfully unaware of any potential danger around him.

Robin blocks the stranger's path and demands to know the dwelling of Major Molineux. The stranger retorts, "Keep your tongue between your teeth, fool, and let me pass!" He threatens to strike Robin down, but Robin persists and the stranger throws back his cloak and tells Robin that if he waits at his present location for an hour, Major Molineux will pass by. Robin is dismayed to discover that the stranger is in fact the horned man from the inn, but this time his face is **painted half-red and half-black**, "as if two individual devils, a fiend of fire and a fiend of darkness, had united themselves to form this infernal visage." The horned man leers at Robin, then muffles himself once more and hurries past, leaving the shocked Robin to reflect, "Strange things we travelers see!"

The horned man reappears in his demonic new guise, explicitly representative of fire and darkness. As a symbol of the mayhem and violence that has overtaken Massachusetts Bay in the wake of political revolt, the red half of the horned man's face represents war and bloodshed, while the black half represents death and doom. The fact that he repeatedly appears throughout Robin's night in the city thus foreshadows a potentially violent event on the horizon. The wrath with which the horned man treats Robin is the latest of the Seven Deadly Sins he has encountered so far, including lust (the "housekeeper"), greed (the innkeeper), and pride (the old man).

Robin seats himself on the church steps and resolves to wait for his cousin. He spends a few moments "in philosophical speculations upon the species of man who had just left him," but becomes distracted by the respectable houses around him bathed in the moonlight, "creating, like the imaginative power, a beautiful strangeness in familiar objects" like the irregular rooftops and the "pure snow-white" of some of the buildings and the "aged darkness" of others. Growing wearisome again, Robin peers into the distance and sees a large Gothic mansion. He wonders if this might, finally, be the house of his kinsman Major Molineux.

What is familiar has been made strange in the night's surreal atmosphere, casting all into light and darkness just as the horned man's split face separated fire and darkness. The moonlight and "pure snow-white" buildings are a symbolic foil to the horned man's evil appearance, and their pairing with the "aged darkness" of other buildings parallel the contrast between Robin's innocence and the horned man's sinister presence.

A scarcely-audible sound floats through the air, a "low, dull, dreamy sound, compounded of many noises." Robin marvels at "this snore of a sleeping town," broken by the occasional "distant shout." Instead of approaching the mansion, Robin climbs a window-frame and peers into the church. There, he witnesses an idyllic and perhaps holy sight, as the moonlight floods over the pews and a single ray alights on an open **Bible**. The sight fill Robin with nostalgia and loneliness, as he wonders if Nature itself has come to worship the houses built by man or whether the light has come to sanctify the deserted church "because no earthly and impure feet were within its walls." Climbing back down, he looks grimly upon the church cemetery and wonders if Molineux is lying dead beneath the earth. Haunted by the thought of Molineux's ghost gliding by, he exclaims, "Oh that any breathing thing were here with me!"

As the mob gathers in the distance, Robin experiences the city as a living thing. With darkness gathering all around, he experiences a rare moment of peace, as the sight of the open Bible reminds him of his home in the country and his upbringing as the son of a clergyman. These memories, while first a relief, soon compound Robin's loneliness and causes him to fear that he is the only living person in a city of the dead.

Now firmly in the grasp of his own plaintive memories of home, Robin sends his thoughts "over forest, hill, and stream," back to his family house and the old tree under which he and his siblings would listen to his father reading from scripture. He thinks of his elder brother and younger sister and recalls that though he was often bored at the time, now these informal services number "among his dear remembrances." He cries out, "Am I here, or there?" and fixes his eye on the church, halfway between "fancy and reality." He seems to see a face in the Gothic window. Just then, he spies, sitting in the shadow of the steeple, "a gentleman in his prime, of open, intelligent, cheerful, and altogether prepossessing kindness."

While Robin has only been thinking of his happy future with the Major thus far, he now feels the tug of the past and longs for the welcoming simplicity of his home. He has been changed by the experiences he has so far endured, and feels caught between the innocence and simplicity of his home in the country and the novelty and opportunity that the city offers. A sense of dissociation descends on Robin, as he realizes he no longer knows himself, nor knows where he belongs.

The kind gentleman approaches Robin with concern and asks if he can be of any service to him. Despondent, Robin doubtfully asks him if there is really such a man as Molineux in these parts, or if he is dreaming. The kind man replies that the name is "not altogether strange," and asks the nature of Robin's business with the Major. Robin relates that his father is a clergyman and that the Major, "having inherited riches, and acquired civil and military rank" visited one or two years ago and, being childless, offered to take Robin and his older brother under his wing. The elder brother "was destined to succeed to the farm" cultivated by their father, leaving Robin to seek his fortunes elsewhere under the tutelage and support of Molineux, "for I have the name of being a shrewd youth." The kind gentleman replies, "I doubt not you deserve it […] but pray proceed."

The first kind individual Robin has met all night emerges from the shadow of the steeple and seems to be familiar with Molineux. The fact that the gentleman emerges from darkness further develops the ongoing metaphor in the story between light and dark, good and evil, and suggests that although the man is compassionate, he is not naïve like Robin—rather, he is well-acquainted with the more sinister people and practices going on in the city and has remained kind in spite of the turmoil that surrounds him. His character, then, represents a kind of maturity, worldliness, and resilience that Robin himself has not yet developed. Although there is something otherworldly, even godly, about the kind gentleman, he is immediately committed to Robin, the "holy innocent," as though a sort of guardian angel.

Robin continues that, being 18 years of age, he felt it "high time to begin in the world." After his mother and sister put him in "handsome trim," he embarked five days ago for Massachusetts Bay. He also relates his encounter with the "ill-favored fellow" with the **painted face of two colors**, who told him to wait at this spot for his cousin. The kind gentleman says he knows the horned man Robin speaks of, though "not intimately," and says Robin can trust his word. The kind gentleman decides to keep Robin company as he waits.

Robin's wish to begin in the world has perhaps come true, though he has found that the wider world is full of unrest, cold cruelty, temptation, and indifference. Again, the kind gentleman seems vaguely heaven-sent as he admits to knowledge of the horned gentleman. The Biblical Satan is depicted as a fallen angel in works like Milton's Paradise Lost, meaning that an angelic figure like the kind gentleman would be aware of a devilish figure like the horned man, though "not intimately."

Robin hears the shouting he heard earlier growing closer and asks the kind gentleman about the uproar. The kind gentleman replies that "there do appear to be three or four riotous fellows abroad tonight," but that's nothing out of the ordinary and the night watchman will surely be on their heels and put them in the stocks by "peep of day." Robin wonders how a thousand voices can make up a single shout and the gentleman cryptically answers, "May not a man have several voices […] as well as two complexions?" Thinking of the "housekeeper" in her scarlet petticoats, Robin retorts that "a man may: but Heaven forbid that a woman should!"

As the mob approaches, the crowd shouts with a single voice, in contrast to the horned man, who represents division. The kind gentleman's comment that one man can have "several voices […] as well as two complexions" prompts Robin to consider how one individual has the ability to influence an entire mob—or even an entire city—into a state of rebellion and pandemonium. And although Robin has experienced a series of interactions that have challenged his innocence throughout the evening, his ignorance of mobs and civil unrest reflects his enduring naïveté.

Robin hears a trumpet and a "wild and confused laughter" coming from an adjacent street and wonders aloud whether they should join the merrymaking. But the kind gentleman urges Robin to continue his vision, lest he miss his kinsman when he at length passes by. The uproar now fills the streets and windows open on all sides as the townspeople find their sleep disturbed and half-dressed citizens ask one another for an explanation as to the din. A hundred yards away the source of the "shouts, the laughter, and the tuneless bray, the antipodes of music" emerges in a procession of people bearing torches.

Robin is tempted to join the fray, reflecting his transformation into a less innocent man, but the kind gentleman reminds Robin of his quest. By now the single shout has become a carnivalesque procession, lending a level of dark irony to the night's atmosphere. The townspeople wear disguises in order to hide their identities and evade imprisonment, just as the participants of the Boston Tea Party dressed up as Native Americans during their protests.

At the head of the parade, wearing "military dress," atop a horse and wielding a drawn sword is the horned man, still with his **double-painted face**, who appears "like war personified; the red of one cheek [...] an emblem of fire and sword; the blackness of the other betokened the mourning that attends them." Behind him is an unruly crowd, some disguised as Native Americans, creating a fevered atmosphere "as if a dream had broken forth." Spectators surround the mass of revelers, as the horned man turns in his saddle and makes eye contact with Robin. Terrified, he mutters, "The double-faced fellow has his eye upon me."

The horned man appears as a symbol of war and desolation, a harbinger of the coming Revolution and war that will envelop the colonies. He leads the townspeople who have effectively succumbed to chaos and evil, and the transition between colonial status and independent statehood is expressed here as a violent riot.

When Robin finally breaks his gaze from the horned man's fiery eyes, the procession of musicians pass him by and he hears the rattle of wheels. At the center of the crowd, lit by torches that blaze so brightly that "the moon shone out like day" and attended by trumpets that "vomited a horrid breath," is an uncovered cart where Molineux himself sits captive, in "tar-and-feathery dignity."

As a representative of British authorities, Molineux has become a target of the riotous locals. Just as they drove out the succession of governors, as documented in the preface to the story, they have humiliated and tortured the Major. Ironically, the narrator describes the Major's "dignity," when in fact he has been made ridiculous by the vengeful crowd, highlighting the disturbing contrast between Robin's former perception of his high-esteemed kinsman and the disgraced, pathetic figure he now sees before him.

"A large and majestic person," the elderly Molineux is clearly humiliated, his face "ghastly" to behold and foam hanging from his open mouth. He trembles inside the cart and he meets Robin's gaze and recognizes Robin where he stands "witnessing the foul disgrace of a head grown gray in honor." Overcome by both pity and terror, Robin feels his legs tremble. Reflecting on his adventures that night, the crowd with their torches, the air of "tremendous ridicule," and "the spectre of his kinsman reviled by that great multitude," Robin experiences a "sort of mental inebriety."

Robin's high opinion of the Major is completely subverted as he sees the shamed Major Molineux. His becoming figure and honor are tarnished, and Robin sees the reality behind the man he extolled—far from the powerful and distinguished Major Robin admired, he is in fact a frail old man. As a result, Robin feels as though drunk. He has at last shed his status as "holy innocent" as he, like the kind gentleman, is now forced to reckon with the malevolent potential of human beings.

All the various townspeople Robin has met so far reappear: the night watchman rubs his eyes and seems to enjoy Robin's shock; the "housekeeper" with the scarlet petticoat laughs and pinches Robin's arm while fixing him with her "saucy eye"; the innkeeper passes on his tiptoes; and the old man, wearing a nightcap, laughs from a balcony with the same "sepulchral hems" as before, "his solemn old features like a funny inscription on a tombstone." Finally, Robin seems to hear the laughter from the barbershop, the guests at the tavern, and "all who had made sport of him that night."

The reappearance of all the hostile people Robin has met so far brings the story full-circle, as the shocking experienced of seeing Molineux tarred-and-feathered brings the true nature of their characters to light for him. All the various types of people who pass Robin by, or appear from the shadows, are at odds with the usual depiction of Americans as pious or righteous. This implies that traditional narratives of the American Revolution may oversimplify the American people as infallible heroes, rather than complex individuals who can embody "two complexions," both good and evil.

The pandemonium travels through the crowd like a "contagion," and Robin shouts with a laughter that is the loudest of all. As the "mirth went roaring up the sky," the narrator imagines the Man in the Moon looking down and declaring "the old earth is frolicsome tonight!" The horned man gives a signal for the crowd to move on and they pass "like fiends that throng in mockery around some dead potentate, mighty no more, but majestic still in his agony." They leave the street (and Robin) behind, "in counterfeited pomp, in senseless uproar, in frenzied merriment, trampling all on an old man's heart."

Robin is momentarily infected by the spectacle, which is referred to as a communicable disease, and joins in the laughter of the crowd, which is so loud and unruly that the moon itself seems to take notice that the world is out of balance. The contagious magnetism of the crowd reemphasizes the kind gentleman's earlier point that a man can have "several voices," as it seems that the horned man's malevolence has thoroughly infected the mob, and even tempts to influence Robin.

The kind gentleman asks the dazed Robin if he is dreaming. Now "somewhat pale" following the night's misadventures, Robin is "not quite so lively" as he was but mere hours ago, so he just asks the gentleman for directions back to the ferry, for he has at last met his kinsman, and says that "he will scarce desire to see my face again." Bitterly, he adds that he has grown "weary of town life."

Although Robin is exhausted after the night's misadventures and resolves to return home in defeat, he has clearly shed his former innocence and is firmly on the road to maturation. The horror of seeing Molineux in his tortured state has prompted Robin to finally see things as they are—he is no longer blinded by optimism and pretension.

The kind gentleman protests that Robin should at least stay the night and wait a few days before he makes his final decision as to whether to stay or to return to the country. Robin is "a shrewd youth" who, or so the gentleman says, "may rise in the world without the help of your kinsman, Major Molineux."

Just as America will face its future alone, without the stewardship of Britain, so too Robin may prosper by virtue of his own efforts, without the aid of Major Molineux. Though it is unclear whether he will stay or go, Robin's harrowing experience away from home has forced him to become his own man, and he will have to trust his instincts going forward.

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