

My kinsman, major
molineux



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Introduction

The declaration of independence states that “ all men are created equal that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (Archives. gov). The declaration of independence was premised on the need and desire to be free from Colonialism. Consequently, Hawthorne in his narrative, “ My Kinsman, Major Molineux,” describes the transition of the protagonist from a dependent young man to a transformed independent person. The narrative’s setting in the pre-revolution era characteristically sets the stage, for the appreciation of principle freedoms and the subsequent rebellion against colonialism. Hawthorne shows Robin’s transition from a naive, ignorant and religious country man to an inquisitive, thoughtful and a renegade young man. Therefore, Hawthorne’s narrative is an embodiment of the basis in which the declaration of independence was borne; the quest for freedom, liberty and a happy life.

Analysis

Through the narrative, Hawthorne, illustrates America’s transition from a British dependent and theocentric state to a country which is independent and of varied social norms. Robin is symbolic to young American, “ a youth of barely eighteen years” (Baym and Levine 374). Hawthorne uses Robin’s movement from country to the city as symbolism to Americans in search of better fortunes. As such Robin enters the new world with only his wallet as his sole belonging (Fossum 175). However, his leaving home is not an

indication that he has disowned his family; consequently, America had not disowned Britain.

Hawthorne, through the protagonist, illustrates the choices that pre-independent America had to make; moreover, he illustrates the American transition from a theocentric society into a secular society. He achieves this through Robin's movement from his theocentric homeland into a secular society in the city. Robin finds himself in a society which contravenes his religious upbringing; therefore, he is uncomfortable with city dwellers that made him feel, "ashamed of his quiet and natural gait" (Baym and Levine 377). Consequently, Robin has no choice but to abandon his puritan upbringing and assume the secular way of life.

America's transition into a secular society is reinforced through Robin's encounter with the prostitute. While, in his homeland it was unthinkable for a Christian young man to approach or be approached by a prostitute; however, this is not the case in the city. Robin's naivety to her actual intentions indicates his ignorance in such matters as he affirms, "Pretty mistress...I know nothing to the contrary" (Baym and Levine 378). While Robin knows that her version of events is not reliable, "the scarlet Petticoat and her sexual invitation" he permits himself a degree of indulgence (Baym and Levine 378). This is symbolic to America's realization that while the colonialist has control over their liberties, they are within reach.

Therefore, Hawthorne reveals through the protagonist, the manner in which society is abandoning theocentrism and embracing the dynamics of the new age. This transition is among the freedoms and liberties that would

eventually be an integral basis of the declaration of independence.

Furthermore, Robin is a typical American renegade, representing his own persona in an unfamiliar world which he is unable to comprehend fully (Fossum, 203).

Robin's purpose is to find his kinsman, Major Molineux who is symbolic to Britain at the time. Therefore, Hawthorne uses Major Molineux as a representation of the colonial loyalists and masters. Robin faces significant challenges in his search for his kinsman; he sets out in the night in an isolated and estranged journey. His journey is a representation of America's struggle for independence and the dark moments that characterized this effort. Meanwhile, the protagonist's departure from his father's purview and control is characteristically a deviation from the past domestic and spiritual authority (Fossum, 175).

When Robin's kinsman is finally brought to him towards the end of the narrative, Robin must decide which direction he will follow. He must choose whether he will deviate from tradition and sever all ties with his kinsman and fatherland; hence becoming free and independent or join his kinsman, consequently asserting his allegiance to his homeland. However, his decision is influenced by the crowd's excitement over their triumph against their oppressors. Robin identifies his feelings with those of the crowd, where he joins the crowd in humiliating his kinsman, " he sent forth a shout of laughter that echoed through the street" (Baym and Levine 385). Therefore, his feelings for his fellow countrymen exceed those of his Kinsman, Major Molineux. Robin's actions are symbolic to America's rebellion against the

dependence on Britain leading to the revolution and struggle for independence.

While, the awakening of America to the revolution dawn is significant to the realization of independence; there were dire consequences of the actions taken towards this end. Major Molineux represented the suffering and pain of those who were opposed to the impending new era, “ his face was pale as death” (Baym and Levine 385). Hawthorne inherently reveals the call and the advent of the revolution in the struggle for America’s independence from Britain. Therefore, Robin is characteristically the embodiment of young American nation separating itself from being dependent on Britain to a self sustaining independent nation. However, while the traders, craftsmen, country people, tavern and marines represent the economic diversity of America; there are other forces at work whispering in the corners spreading the word and recruiting for the impending revolution.

Hawthorne uses the man, “ who stood near the door, holding whispered conversation with a group of ill-dressed associates” (Baym and Levine 376) to demonstrate the growing conspiratorial behavior and suspicion against strangers who were thought to sympathize with the British. Meanwhile, the evil looking man undergoes a transformation where his appearance has been symbolically altered, “ One side of the face blazed an intense red while the other was black as midnight” (Baym and Levine 380). The man’s dual colored face is symbolic to the impending war, which is a prelude to death and mourning as represented through the use of red and black colors respectively. The subsequent war and mourning are the consequences that

the British will suffer and the price that the Americans will pay in order to gain independence.

The representation of the impending revolution, war, death, pain and mourning through the use of the war personified horseman (Baym and Levine 385) indicates the psychological preparation of the American people in undertaking the task at hand. While, the horseman represents war and mourning, the people are excited at the prospect of fighting for their independence;; therefore, they are ready to make personal sacrifices towards the realization of their collective and individual goals in defeating their colonial masters. Major Molineux represents the colonial sympathizers and overlords who have benefitted from the servitude of the people. His face amidst the crowd represents the defeat of tyranny, oppression and the rise of the new American era.

The watchman is used to illustrate the awakening and transition towards independence. The watchman's night patrols represent a sleeping people unaware of the events around them. Additionally, the watchman's semi-conscious state from sleep is indicative of a transition period between the servitude past and freedom in the future, more so a defining point between self assertion and colonial submission (Fossum 176). When the watchman becomes fully awake and self aware, he sees and understands the events hidden in the blackness of the night; as such he becomes aware of the critical areas calling for his attention.

Similarly, the uprising of the Americans during the initial days of the revolution can be equated to the watchman's predicament. As such America

becomes self aware and endeavors to take charge of her own affairs through revolt. After Robin disowns his kinsman, the stranger urges Robin to remain in the city, and contribute to his own progress without anyone's aid (Fossum, 176). In every emerging society, there are those who believe change can only be realized through violence while there are others who pursue a more peaceful approach in conflict resolution. The stranger represents the voice of reason and the diplomatic side of the revolution.

The revolution and the subsequent struggle for independence were significantly violent; however, diplomacy was the ultimate tool in its finality. Hawthorne in his narrative describes the factors that led to the American Revolution; thus he employs what appears to be a straightforward narrative illustrating the search for liberty through the abandonment of theocentric traditions and embracing change in an evolving society. Robin is symbolic to an eagle that is ready to take flight and explore the many possibilities in the world; consequently, so does America which is ready for the revolution and the subsequent independence from colonial Britain. Hawthorne weaves Robin's journey in the narrative to depict the mood and the circumstances which led to the revolution and eventually the declaration of independence.

Conclusion

Hawthorne through the narrative, " My kinsman Major Molineux" wishes to present the American Revolution as a moment of pride, enlightenment and evolution for the American people. Therefore, the revolution afforded the Americans a significant degree of pride; however, it was characterized by vicious acts of violence, which led to human suffering, and death. Major

Molineux is a representation of American loyalists who were in support of the British regime and its rule. Consequently, Hawthorne's narrative shows the prevalent mood and feelings that culminated to the revolution.

Consequently, a significant number of Americans joined the revolution in order to liberate themselves from the yokes of colonialism; however, there are those who remained loyal to the British and consequently suffered Major Molineux's fate. While the declaration of independence was as a result of a victorious revolution, it does not take into account the plight and self interest of loyalists. The declaration of independent is both symbolic to the bright American future and a gloomy past.