

Aminadab in "The Birth-mark": The Name Again

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The name *Aminadab*, which Hawthorne gave to the scientist Aylmer's clod-like assistant in "The Birth-mark," has intrigued a number of commentators. They explain Hawthorne's choosing this particular name in two sharply different ways, and within each camp there is further disagreement on what the supposed choice implies, about both Aminadab and his master. Yet these interpretations have all been notable for their heavily labored ingenuity; and none of them, I think has been sound. I want to argue here that both accounts of the name's origin are unconvincing in themselves, and that both have fostered exaggeration of a minor character's importance, and hence distortion of the overall meaning of "The Birth-mark." And finally, I want to suggest at least one other possible source for Hawthorne's Aminadab, a source consistent with his pointedly simple nature and role in the tale.

The first, larger group regards the character as a namesake figure, traceable to the author's Bible reading.¹ *Aminadab*, which in Hebrew means "my people are willing," appears twelve times in the Old

¹W.R. Thompson, "Aminadab in Hawthorne's 'The Birth-Mark,'" *MLN*, 70 (1955), 413-15; Roy R. Male, *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision* (1957; rpt. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1964), pp. 81-82; Jean Normand, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: An Approach to an Analysis of Artistic Creation*, trans. from 1st ed. by Derek Coltman (1964; rpt. Cleveland and London: Case Western Reserve Univ. Press, 1970), p. 379; Hugo McPherson, *Hawthorne as Myth-Maker: A Study in Imagination* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 222. As precedent for their view of Aminadab as a subverted priest, Thompson, Male, and Normand all cite Robert B. Heilman's "Hawthorne's 'The Birth-Mark': Science as Religion," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 48 (1949), 575-83; a central topic in this perceptive article is the scientist Aylmer's usurpation of religious prerogatives. But Heilman never tries to inflate Aminadab's role to a priestly one, by imagining that he once exercised those prerogatives himself; the article follows the standard critical view that he is simply an emblem of earthiness, or "man's physical nature" (p. 580).

All references to "The Birth-Mark" are parenthesized in my text by page numbers from *Mosses From an Old Manse*, Centenary Edition of Hawthorne's Works (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1962-), X (1974), 36-56.

Testament and twice in the New—although only here, in Matthew 1.4 and Luke 3.33, is the name spelled as in “The Birth-mark,” with a single “m”. This spelling discrepancy is only the first of several difficulties, for *Am[m]inadab* designates at least two different Israelite patriarchs widely separated in Biblical history, perhaps as many as four; but this group of commentators blurs the distinctions between them, as if Aylmer’s servant had had only one prototype. Moreover, the commentators go on to treat their composite figure metaphorically—not as a patriarch, but as a priest—on the tenuous grounds that two of the chieftains who bore the name *Am[m]inadab* led the Levites, a tribe that King David was to charge with special religious duties. It is far from clear that Hawthorne himself would have thought of any of the original *Am[m]inadabs* as priestly, in this merely figurative way; the meager Biblical references never identify them as anything but family heads, some of whose kinsmen and descendants eventually helped the priests to safeguard the Ark of the Covenant.²

But the Scriptural argument would remain dubious even without these objections—and even if Hawthorne’s other fiction offered more than a few atypical instances where he may have chosen Biblical names for his characters in this way, with pointed Old or New Testament parallels in mind, the way Melville named Ishmael, Ahab, and Elijah in *Moby-Dick*.³ For greater difficulties arise when supporters of the priestly analogy try to apply it in the tale itself. All of them convey in one way or another that the ostensible namesake figure in “The Birth-mark” represents religion too, religion that has been discredited in a

²In fact the Bible distinguishes clearly between Aminadab’s Levite kinsmen who protected the Ark and the actual members of the priesthood; the two groups had separate religious responsibilities. “David called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and for the Levites. . . . So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves . . . and the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded . . .” I Chron. 15. 11–15.

³Other Hawthorne characters who have been viewed as namesakes, with significant links to Biblical prototypes, include Esther and David in “An Old Woman’s Tale,” Reuben, Cyrus, and Dorcas Bourne in *Roger Malvin’s Burial*,” Ethan Brand, and Hester Prynne (Arlin Turner, “Hawthorne’s Literary Borrowings,” *PMLA*, 51 [1936], 561; W.R. Thompson, “The Biblical Sources of Hawthorne’s ‘Roger Malvin’s Burial,’” *PMLA*, 77 [1962], 92–96; Ely Stock, “The Biblical Context of ‘Ethan Brand,’” *AL*, 37 [1965], 116–120; Normand, p. 379). Of these, I find only the Thompson and Turner analogies very persuasive, although a few other more or less plausible namesake characters could doubtless be added to the list—certainly “the new Adam and Eve,” for example, and perhaps the newlyweds Mathew and Hannah and the merchant Ichabod Pignort in “The Great Carbuncle.” But I contend that even if such a list could be trebled or quadrupled, scores of Hawthorne characters would remain, who despite their scripturally derived names have no affinities worth mentioning with the original bearers of those names.

new, scientific age. W.R. Thompson and Hugo McPherson have strained this analogy farthest, I think: in their readings, the sub-human Aminadab takes on something of a priest's depth and complexity of character, although in glaringly different ways. Thompson, the earliest commentator to argue for the name's Biblical inspiration, sees Hawthorne's figure as a sympathetic "priest without votaries," who even in decline remains capable of "a greater respect for the human personality" than Aylmer in his "amoral science" can feel. Understandably, this interpretation makes the most of Aminadab's muttered aside, when Aylmer begins his research to remove the tiny birthmark-blemish from his wife's cheek: "If she were my wife, I'd never part with that birth-mark" (43). Thompson calls this "a remark rooted in compassion," and strongly intimates that in this spirit, the right-minded servant would "assault the bastion of science" and rescue Georgianna if he could.⁴ But even at this early point in the story, such a view of him is hardly tenable. Neither Aminadab's "vast strength" nor "his great mechanical readiness, and the skill with which . . . he executed all the practical details of his master's experiments" (43) bespeak a priest of faded authority and troubled sensibilities, who has been displaced somehow from his true vocation. Little though he may like or fathom what his master makes him do, Aminadab is plainly in the one imaginable role he is "admirably fitted" for (43); doing Aylmer's bidding is this brute-servant's true vocation. And what is more important, Thompson disregards Aminadab's obvious pleasure during the experiments that follow, pleasure that grows until his "hoarse, chuckling laugh" announces Aylmer's final defeat, and his victim-patient's death (56). Nothing about Aminadab suggests that he feels compassion for her, except a fancied connotation in the name.

Hugo McPherson begins similarly, but follows this connotation in another direction. Noting that the Biblical name "suggests the leader of a priestly family," he credits Aminadab with an apposite "knowledge of human imperfection," hence a full "awareness of Aylmer's delusion." To McPherson, in fact, this conjectured awareness suggests not just that the servant "is intuitively in touch with nature," but that he is "wiser than his master."⁵ The commentator does not support

⁴"Aminadab in Hawthorne's 'The Birth-Mark,'" pp. 414-15.

⁵*Hawthorne as Myth-Maker*, pp. 23, 222, 222n. In fairness to McPherson, it should be made clear that he never directly equates Hawthorne's Aminadab with a subverted priest, as Thompson, Male, and Normand do. But when he begins his contrast between Aylmer "the over-intellectual scientist" and the wise, intuitive servant by reminding us, to repeat, that Aminadab's

these arguments, but presumably he like Thompson has in mind Aminadab's muttered disapproval when the experiments begin, and probably also his laughter when they fail. Yet surely neither of these responses shows that he has the rarefied mental or spiritual gifts McPherson claims for him. The most that we can safely infer from Aminadab's aside about the birthmark, for example, is that for better and for worse he is too narrowly a "thing of the senses" (55) to understand his idealist master's fastidiousness, or share it; indeed, remembering the author's insistence on the servant's "indescribable earthiness" (43), we may even speculate that he finds the birthmark the most attractive thing about Georgianna. At any rate, where Thompson now goes on to picture Aminadab as humane but helpless, McPherson instead gives the supposed priestliness a distinctly sinister tinge. All the knowledge, intuition, and wisdom that he sees in the character smack of the occult. McPherson ends by classifying Aminadab provisionally as a "Moon Wizard"—that is, a formidable figure like Dr. Rappaccini and the Artist of "The Prophetic Pictures," who wield dark authority over the unsuspecting, and can turn vengeful "if their magic is denied."⁶ What all this implies is that Aminadab has black arts and more than one kind of insight at his own disposal, and deliberately and single-handedly sabotages Aylmer's visionary project with them. It is true that the underling seems to relish Aylmer's failure as much *as if* he had engineered it, but Hawthorne leaves no doubt that Aylmer himself "flung away [his] happiness" (56); the failure lies in his original, fatal misconception, not in some alchemic revenge scheme contrived against him by his servant. On the contrary, this alleged wizard simply carries out the laboratory instructions he is given, even though he is "incapable of comprehending a single principle" behind them (43), and his scrupulous obedience earns Aylmer's full approval (55). Finally, then, McPherson's rather Gothic view of Aminadab as a hyper-acute, monkish necromancer is no more convincing than Thompson's sentimental one, of a tender-minded ex-pastor subverted by the Enlightenment.

To the second group, *Aminadab* is not a sacerdotal emblem but an anagram. They argue that the ingenious reader should reverse the letter sequence and split it. Supposedly the resulting English-Latin hybrid phrase *bad anima* then proclaims the servant's nature, like a broken code: "evil spirit," or "bad soul." Thus for R. DeHayes, the

"Old Testament name suggests the leader of a priestly family" (p. 222), it seems to me that McPherson is pointedly encouraging us to draw the subverted priest analogy for ourselves.

⁶ *Ibid.*, chart facing p. 218; p. 245 s.v. Aminadab; Moon Wizard quotation is from p. 230.

tell-tale anagram exposes Aminadab as "an evil spirit who, serpent-like, helps to corrupt Dr. Aylmer."⁷ There is even less corroboration here than for the earlier arguments, for nothing in "The Birth-mark" hints that the servant could ever have influenced the master, who obviously holds him in indifferent contempt. Still, DeHayes's statement follows plainly enough from the *bad anima* premise, and we might expect the other commentators in this group to agree with him, that Aminadab really is evil. But Edward L. Van Winkle, who also believes in the anagram, interprets it much more tortuously, with ideas that sometimes recall Thompson's, and sometimes McPherson's. Van Winkle sees Aminadab as a "bad anima" merely in name "in name . . . not in reality"; this time Aylmer is the corrupter, or "Satanic symbol," although there is no more evidence on this side than on DeHayes's. The scientist "virtually owns Aminadab," and also acts from monstrous intellectual pride; ergo, the ownership is the outward sign of the pride, whereby he "can be said . . . to have a 'bad soul.'" But this seems to be the only sense in which we are to consider Aminadab bad. To Van Winkle, he is "basically a good, kind, albeit dumb [sic] and harmless figure"; so once again he evidently grasps the baneful implications of his master's science at least intuitively, and does God's work in defeating him. But whether Aminadab succeeds here—that is, plays his part in killing Georgianna—because of his kindness and harmlessness or despite them, Van Winkle does not make clear; he offers us only the convoluted proposition that "the 'bad anima' that is Aminadab . . . triumphs over the 'bad anima' that grips Aylmer." This commentator goes on, however, to wring still another meaning from the anagram: in effect the malign scientist, playing Dr. Frankenstein to the servant, has *animated* him. Van Winkle notes that Aminadab is called a "clod" or "earthly mass" (55); that "in [Aylmer's] grasp, the veriest clod of earth assumed a soul" (49); and that the tale abounds in other such references to the soul, the spiritual element, breaths of life and of air, and fragrances, all of them etymologically linked to the word "anima," which originally meant *air breathed in*. We should accept the anagram, then, as another of these references, and Aylmer as Aminadab's "virtual creator." This half of the argument at least looks to the

⁷"Charting Hawthorne's Invisible World," *CEA Critic*, 27 (1965), 6; moreover DeHayes sees Aylmer as a cover term for "Malrey," which he translates as "bad king." See also Karl P. Wentersdorf, "The Genesis of Hawthorne's 'The Birthmark,'" *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien*, 8 (1963), 184*n*, and Edward S. Van Winkle, "Aminadab, the Unwitting 'Bad Anima,'" *American Notes & Queries*, 8 (1970), 131–33.

text for support, but it clashes with the other half: for given this account of the servant's blasphemous creation and incriminating name, why are we to believe in his basic innocence? Secondly, it might not greatly distort Hawthorne's conception to imagine that sometime before "The Birth-mark" began, Aylmer had "breathed the breath of life into [Aminadab's] inert shape" at least figuratively, "in subverting his servant to do his will." But I see few grounds for this embellishment, if it is one, in Hawthorne's statement that Aylmer could make "the veriest clod of earth" assume a soul.⁸ The context by no means establishes that Hawthorne meant this fairly abstract phrase to allude to Aminadab in particular, or even necessarily to include him. As I will shortly argue, all the specific references to this character convey that he has no spiritual nature whatever—no "anima" for us to call either bad or good, beyond the mere stipulation that he is alive.

But even if the DeHayes or Van Winkle arguments for the anagram squared persuasively with Aminadab's traits and actions, the "bad anima" premise itself would remain wildly far-fetched. The very mediocrity of this particular neologism argues that it is not Hawthorne's. There is no evidence that he had an anagrammatic, puzzle-maker's turn of mind, much less that he ever used it, substituting cleverness for artistry, to concoct names with willfully hidden meanings for his characters. But it strains credibility most to take the other steps that faith in the anagram calls for. It is not enough to believe just that Hawthorne first coined an English-Latin hybrid phrase to expose the servant's nature, and then for some reason decided to mask his meaning after all, in reverse spelling; we must also assume that when the new sequence turned out by coincidence to form a name found in the Bible, Hawthorne decided to stand by the result anyway, and let whatever connotations the reader's experience might find for him in "Amindab" divert him from the secretly intended ones of "bad anima." Perhaps, then, the anagram hypothesis should have been offered as a variation on the Scriptural one, rather than in flat opposition to it. Still, this change would have made the author's plan seem, if possible, even more labyrinthine and bizarre.

I have presented some of these interpretations at length because no two are alike enough to refute on quite the same grounds. But despite their different starting points, and still greater differences in their conclusions, all the commentators from both groups err finally in the same way. They all seek to give Aminadab a damned or healthy "soul," or

⁸Van Winkle, pp. 131–133

some equally imposing set of the higher human faculties, in order to enlarge his role at the expense of Aylmer's; and doing this in turn alters the meanings of both figures, in ways that trivialize the whole narrative. At first it might seem that it "adds somewhat to the texture of a richly complex tale," as Thompson says of his own interpretation,⁹ to view Aminadab as the cold-hearted Aylmer's first victim, a lost priest who still clings abjectly to his old virtues—or for that matter, to view him as Aylmer's devilish tutor, or as an untutored sage, or a vindictive wizard of the occult, or a rough-hewn but kindly innocent whose appearance is against him. But of course all these are stock images, much inferior to Hawthorne's own freshly grotesque conception of the servant. What they add factitiously, to a tale that is already dangerously freighted with melodrama, is only more theatricality.

In contrast, commentators less preoccupied with the name's origin have seldom misinterpreted Aminadab, for they base their appraisals more firmly on what he does and how Hawthorne describes him. Thus to Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, he is "the earthy, gross side of man's nature"; to Arlin Turner, an "earth creature"; to Terence Martin, "earth unrefined, the flesh without the word"; to Robert H. Fossum, "the primal physical nature which serves man's intellectual will."¹⁰ This language echoes the tale's own. Aylmer calls the servant a "thing of the senses," "man of clay," "human machine," and mere "Matter" without "Spirit" (51, 55), and direct auctorial comments reinforce this description. True, Hawthorne himself never pronounces on Aminadab's nature as unequivocally as Aylmer does. Instead, suggestions of deformity about the servant, along with his great strength, his shaggy, coarse look, and "the indescribable earthiness that encrusted him" (43), bring similes to the author's mind. With his usual guardedness, he presents them without flatly vouching for them. Aminadab's mumblings are "more like the grunt or growl of a brute than human speech" (46); paired with Aylmer, in whom Hawthorne sees an "apt . . . type of the spiritual element," the servant "seemed to represent man's physical nature" or "the gross Fatality of Earth" (43, 56). But although these are "only" similes, the critics are surely right to trust them, and not look somewhere outside the tale for the real truth

⁹"Aminadab in Hawthorne's 'The Birthmark,'" p. 415.

¹⁰Cleanth Brooks, Jr. and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction* (New York: Appleton, 1943), p. 105; Arlin Turner, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: An Introduction and Interpretation* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961), p. 126; Terence Martin, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965) p. 70; Robert H. Fossum, *Hawthorne's Inviolable Circle: The Problem of Time* (Deland, Fla.: Everett/Edwards, Inc., 1972), p. 79.

about what Aminadab means or is; he never reveals any larger nature than the similes assign him. Rather, Hawthorne's guarded phrasing leaves us free to view the servant as either a freakish, brutish creature of flesh and blood or an allegorical embodiment of "clay"—or even to leave the question of which he is unsettled—so long as we recognize the ultra-narrow limits of his nature. Sensate but soulless, that nature is pointedly incomplete, one-sided, subhuman. It simply complements Aylmer's, as a sturdy, dexterous body obeys commands from the brain—or as Martin puts it, paraphrasing Hawthorne, "Aylmer and Aminadab together would make up one human being."¹¹

Presumably the author chose a name to reinforce these few impressions of the servant—not a name that he felt would work against them, with the august clerical and ethical meanings the scripturalists and anagrammatists contend over, but one that harmonized somehow with his conception of the character as cloddish, grotesque, more "brute than human" (46). At any rate I think that *Aminadab* does harmonize in several ways with this conception, and with other features of the tale as well. I would like, then, to speculate briefly here about a few connotations that Hawthorne may have found in the name. My guesses of course are only that; and even if they could be confirmed, they could not tell us how quickly or deliberately he made this particular choice. But if nothing more, they are meant as reminders that *Aminadab* has a wider range of connotations than the two current name-theories have allowed for.

Wherever he may have happened upon it first—presumably in the Bible—Hawthorne surely understood that the name had originated there; even today's readers commonly assume that, although most of them make their first and last acquaintance with *Aminadab* in "The Birth-mark." And I take it that ordinarily, to the American or English ear, all relatively obscure Scriptural names like this one have somewhat the same archaic, outlandish ring—and perhaps had it even when the Bible was more widely read. It may be then, that Hawthorne valued this Hebraic word partly for its very strangeness; its strong hints of exoticism and the past certainly contribute effectively to the general atmosphere of his romantic apologue, which unfolds at some shadowy remove "in the latter part of the last century" (36), in a mysterious, unspecified setting. But the distinctive sounds of *Aminadab* may have given Hawthorne two reasons to consider it an especially apt name

¹¹Nathaniel Hawthorne, p. 70.

for the freakish servant in particular—a more evocative name than, say, that of some other minor Hebrew patriarch chosen at random would have been.

Repeated signs that Shakespeare's *The Tempest* influenced the tale figure in the first reason, and perhaps indirectly in the second also. Among other parallels between the two works, Karl P. Wentersdorf has noted many resemblances between the laboratory assistant and Caliban, the sensual, brutish "man-monster"¹² whom Prospero forces to serve him. Both of these clod-creatures are darkly ugly, strong but stunted in growth, well-suited to their menial labors, and covertly critical of their masters; these masters in turn use "earth" and kindred epithets to describe them both, and stress the predominance of animality and the physical in their common nature; even Caliban's lewd chuckling, when he remembers his attempt to rape Miranda (I.ii.349–51), seems a foreshadowing of Aminadab's "gross hoarse chuckle" as he watches the sleeping Georgianna's face (55), and his imagining, "If she were my wife . . ." (43). Similarly Aminadab's barely intelligible talk, which Hawthorne likens to the noise brutes utter, recalls Caliban's gabbling "like / A thing most brutish" before he is taught to speak (I.ii.356–57); and finally, as Wentersdorf points out, the servant's "misshapen" speech tones (46) recall the description of Caliban as a "misshapen knave" (V.i.268).¹³ In the light of all these similarities, I suggest that another, more oblique one may not be wholly accidental, between the names themselves: *Aminadab* repeats the vowel sequence of *Caliban* and two of its four consonants. Perhaps then these echoes influenced Hawthorne's choice, if only subliminally; at any rate it can be argued that the marginal resemblance in names is consistent with his other transmutations of the source figure in the play. Second, the servant's grotesque utterances bring more to mind, as Hawthorne describes them, than just the inspiration they evidently owe to Caliban's "gabble." For although this too may be only an accident, something of their roughness and distortion is evoked by the servant's very name. Its two initial, unstressed nasals carry suggestions of the "mumbling" and "grunting" that mark Aminadab as subhuman (51, 46), and the succession of four syllables is also long enough to set up an unfamiliar, rather rasping sound pattern—one with teasing resemblances to Anglo-

¹²*The Tempest* III.ii.14 in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. W.J. Craig (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1943), p. 13. Subsequent Shakespeare citations, parenthesized in the text, are from this edition.

¹³"The Genesis of Hawthorne's 'The Birthmark,'" pp. 183–84.

American speech, perhaps, but sufficiently different to qualify as “harsh,” “uncouth,” even “misshapen.” Whatever its other connotations, then, it is possible to consider *Aminadab* a more or less onomatopoeic term like “barbarian,” which names a speaker simply for the way he sounds.

It is true that Hawthorne might well have had very different reasons from these for choosing the name—for example, an occasional reader may find a serviceable hint of “animal” in “Aminadab.” But in arguing that the servant’s name has other affinities with his nature than the two groups of commentators recognize, my aim is not to speculate about every possible connotation that Hawthorne might have found useful, and I have only one more set of guesses to hazard, this time about his source. If the priestly and *bad anima* explanations are weak on this point too, where outside the Testaments might he have found this Hebraic word?

Doubtless the priest-theory is right that Hawthorne read most or all of the Bible references at least once over the years before 1843, when “The Birth-mark” was published. But how strongly the name impressed him from these references alone is much less clear. The mere fact that the laboratory assistant has no plausible suggestion of either a patriarch or a priest about him hardly tells us how much Hawthorne remembered about the original Am[m]inadabs; for as I have noted, he did not often base characters with Biblical names on Biblical prototypes. As for why he used the rare single “m” spelling rather than the standard Old Testament version of the name, which appeared six times as often, that too might be explained in several ways, without settling whether Scripture or some other source prompted him to call the servant *Aminadab*.

But if Hawthorne knew the Bible too well for us to rule it out as his only likely source, no arguments in its favor from the tale’s text are very compelling either. This being the case, some possible sources outside the New Testament are worth pointing out, where he could have found the name spelled as he would later spell it—and with connotations more suggestive of the servant’s traits in the tale. In an age when the clergyman-presidents of American colleges were christened for Bible figures no more prominently cited than Eleazar, Eliphalet, and Zephaniah,¹⁴ there is every possibility that Hawthorne

¹⁴Eleazar Wheelock (1711–1779), first president of Dartmouth, 1770–1779; Eliphalet Nott (1773–1866), fourth president of Union, 1804–1866; Zephaniah Swift Moore (1770–1823), first president of Amherst, 1821–1823.

knew *Aminadab* too as a Christian name still used occasionally in New England. For that matter, he might also have seen it used this way in some recent or current British source, or even as an all-but-forgotten relic of colonial times. Hawthorne might have found the name reprinted, then, in anything from a newspaper or town directory to a volume of travel biography, Cromwellian politics, or Massachusetts history borrowed from the Salem Athenaeum during his "solitary years."

But among many such possibilities, perhaps the most interesting and least conjectural is *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773). On the earlier eighteenth century English stage, *Aminadab* had been used to designate a Quaker so often that the name became a minor comic convention.¹⁵ There is no evidence that Hawthorne read or saw any plays with this sectarian usage, and certainly his own conception of the servant does not reflect it. But the shadings of provincial coarseness and smugness that *Aminadab* evidently took on from these plays outlived the narrowly Quaker connotation, when Goldsmith used the name in his own great comedy—a work that Hawthorne very probably did know.

In its opening scene, Tony Lumpkin's mother tries vainly to persuade the well-born but boorish youth to stay home for one night; but as he explains, the company at the alehouse is too good to miss: "There's Dick Muggins, the exciseman, Jack Slang, the horse-doctor, little Aminadab, that grinds the music-box, and Tom Twist, that spins the pewter platter."¹⁶ This "low, paltry set" of "shabby fellows" appear only once in the play, in the following scene at The Three Pigeons. Here they carouse with Tony at his expense, affecting gentility, and cheering his drinking song "bekeays he never gives us nothing that's low." They agree that Tony has it in him to become as fine a gentleman as his father, who "kept the best horses, dogs, and girls, in the whole country." (Of the foursome, only Muggins and Slang are directly identified; but it must be Aminadab who earns his living with a dancing bear, taking pains to play only "the genteelest of tunes" for him).¹⁷ Their common dread of the "low" of course stresses the marvellous vulgarity of these backwoods louts all the more, and the cloddishness of Squire Tony, their patron.

¹⁵ Clarence L. Barnhart, ed., *The New Century Handbook of English Literature* (New York: Appleton, 1956), p. 35.

¹⁶ *She Stoops to Conquer* I.i.90–93, in *British Dramatists From Dryden to Sheridan*, ed. George Henry Nettleton et al., 2nd ed., rev. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), p. 760.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I.i.89; I.ii.stage directions, 1–61, pp. 760–62.

I have found no clear-cut references to *She Stoops to Conquer* in Hawthorne's writings, but he was almost certainly familiar with the play, for Goldsmith had been one of his favorite eighteenth-century authors from boyhood. Moreover, from his tales of the late 1830s to *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne alluded often to details of Goldsmith's career, and to a number of his prose works and poems, at times even echoing the exact phrasing of relatively minor pieces such as "A Reverie at the Boar's Head Tavern in East Cheap."¹⁸ Thus it seems likely that in 1842 and 1843 Hawthorne was also reasonably familiar with this favorite author's best play, especially its widely and justly praised opening scenes. No case for an influence here can be pressed very hard, of course; but at the very least, Goldsmith's repetition of the name reminds us that by Hawthorne's time, *Aminadab*'s connotations were no longer wholly exalted and biblical; they had shifted toward the coarse, earthy nuances that would match the laboratory assistant's nature in "The Birth-mark." It may be, then, that "little Aminadab" the low-comedy figure contributed along with Shakespeare's Caliban to the "earthiness" of the Hawthorne character, and even to his "low stature" (43). After the heady intricacies of the earlier name-theories, such a plain notion as this can only seem anticlimactic; but perhaps the very plainness argues in its favor.

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¹⁸As a boy, Hawthorne owned a copy of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, now in the possession of Bowdoin College; after his death, his widow gave another volume of Goldsmith from Hawthorne's library to Longfellow, as a memento of their friendship (Randall Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne, a Biography*, 1948; rpt. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1961, p. 239). For Hawthorne's allusions to Goldsmith, see Frank Durham's "Hawthorne and Goldsmith: A Note," *Journal of American Studies*, 4 (1970), 103-105; the Centenary Edition, I (1962), 108; III (1964), 75; X (1974), 408, 486, 487; and Hawthorne's *English Notebooks*, ed. Randall Stewart (New York and London: MLA and Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), pp. 204, 236, 272.