

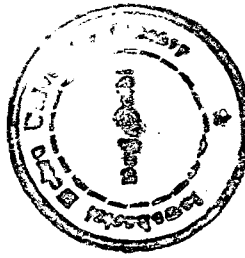
# **THE ARTIST IN HAWTHORNE'S FICTION**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
"The Artist in Hawthorne's Fiction" submitted by  
Pramesh Ratnakar in partial fulfilment of six credits  
out of total requirement of twenty four credits for  
the Degree of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) of the  
University, is his original work according to the  
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## INTRODUCTION

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D.H. Lawrence, in his Studies in Classic American Literature, portrays Hawthorne as a sort of mindless genius who seems to achieve his literary effects almost in spite of himself.<sup>1</sup> Henry James, in his Hawthorne, grants Hawthorne his due place in the history of American literature but insists on seeing him as a literary innocent who was perhaps too shy to know his own mind.<sup>2</sup> Both Lawrence and James were wrong about Hawthorne. He was a highly self-conscious artist who knew exactly what he was doing. He had carefully worked out his theoretical position, discovering, as A.N. Kaul points out, "many areas where the logic of his individual imagination, the resources of past literature, and the vital rhythms of a new culture could meet in a creative interplay".<sup>3</sup> A significant feature of his major romances is that they self-consciously reflect the literary theory that underlie their own creation. The present study is essentially concerned with this element of self-consciousness in the four major romances of Hawthorne.

It is necessary to emphasize at the very outset that Hawthorne's self-consciousness is intentional. It is very much a part of his artistic design. This is what Feidelson had in mind when he remarked that Hawthorne was interested not just in meaning but also in the process by which one arrives

at meaning.<sup>4</sup> Hawthorne's romances are not designed to pass themselves off as reflections of pre-existing reality but they deliberately call attention to themselves as works of fiction. The reason why they do this is because one of Hawthorne's major thematic concerns is the relationship between the created work and the real world and the role the artist plays in the transformation of the latter into the former. His works systematically draw attention to themselves as artefacts in order to raise questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. He explores the theory of fiction through the practice of writing it, and no reading of his works can be considered complete until and unless it takes into account this dimension of his writings.

This aspect of Hawthorne's writing seems worth studying for two reasons. Firstly, it will enable us to see a great writer at work as nothing else would. It will enable us to move in that difficult region where the mind of a writer comes to grips with his themes and concerns, where the conscious theoretical intentions of an author dissolve and reshape themselves into literary attitudes<sup>and</sup> structures. We can watch the tale unfold itself on the page, and we can also, in Poe's words, "...take a peep behind the scenes, ...at the wheels and pinions the tackle for scene shifting, the step ladders and demon traps..."<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, this aspect is worth studying because of the insight it offers into the novel as a genre. The rise of the novel has traditionally been linked with the rise of bourgeoisie in England. The series of events which include the break up of the feudal order, the rise of the nation state, the renaissance, the reformation, growth of parliamentary democracy, the civil war, the rise of prose and science, all constitute a complex chain of cause and effect. The underlying cause behind all these events, however, was the slow emergence of a new economic class, the bourgeoisie, whose interests and world view conflicted directly with those of the existing dominant class--the aristocracy. Arnold Kettle has pointed out, "The commercial bourgeoisie were revolutionaries against the feudal order because the feudal order denied them freedom. It denied them freedom physically, legally and spiritually to do what they wanted to do, to develop the way they need must develop."<sup>6</sup> The sixteenth and the seventeenth century were the critical period of transformation. But the victory of the Round-heads in the English Civil War signalled the fact that the bourgeoisie had won the struggle. By the turn of the century, the bourgeoisie was well and truly in the saddle and was free to develop in terms of its own inner compulsions.

It was at this historical moment that the novel was born. Narrative is old but this particular form of narrative was only born in the first half of the eighteenth century in England. The bourgeois mind having won its battle on the religious, political, social and economic fronts was now seeking, to borrow Feilder's phrase, 'cultural autonomy'.<sup>7</sup> It was looking for a form that would mirror its own trials, tribulations and triumphs. The historical commission of the novel, therefore, right from the beginning was mimetic. The central purpose of this new art form was realistic representation. From the beginning, therefore, the novel tried to marshal complex verbal devices to try and elicit in the mind of the reader the illusion of persons, places and events that are encountered in the external empirical world. In fact, the early novelists (like Defoe) tried their level best to give the impression that their narratives weren't fictional at all.

The idea that the novel must give realistic imitation of the empirical world can be better grasped if we keep in mind the absolute commitment of the bourgeois to empiricism. In the final analysis what distinguishes the bourgeois from the aristocrats is this commitment to empiricism. The aristocrat had legitimized his dominant social position by appeals to non-empirical codes. The feudal social order, the emphasis on religion, the concept of the Chain of being, the divine right of kings were all aspects of this non-empiricism. The



bourgeois on the other hand, whether he was buying or selling, or crossing oceans, or hoarding capital or conquering colonies, was committed to the five senses. This commitment eventually undermined the feudal world order, and led to the remarkable growth of science. Empiricism also underlies the demand that the novel (bourgeois art form) should give a realistic and objective representation of reality, that it should provide credible, engaging imitation of the social, psychological, historical and moral experience of the emerging bourgeois world.

Novels are, therefore, necessarily mimetic but mimesis, as Abrams points out, can be of two kinds.<sup>8</sup> The writer can imitate reality as it exists in the external world, or he can imitate reality as it exists within his mind. It is important for both aesthetic theory and practice whether reality is sought in its own space or by turning the eye of the mind inward. The latter leads the writer to imitate something within himself and this naturally leads art away from the public world of sense experience to intuition, introspection and self-consciousness. In his book Partial Magic--The Novel as Self-conscious Genre,<sup>9</sup> Robert Alter suggests that the entire history of the novel may be thought of as a dialectic between the self-conscious and the realistic tradition. In his later book Motives for Fiction, he distinguishes between the self-conscious and the realistic novel in the following ways:

A self-conscious novel is one that systematically flaunts its own necessary condition of artifice and that by doing so probes into the problematic between self-seeming artifice and reality... the self-conscious novelist is acutely aware that he is manipulating the schemata... and he constantly invents narrative strategies for sharing this awareness with us, so that he simultaneously or alternately creates the illusion of reality and shatters it. The realist novelist by contrast seeks to maintain a relatively consistent illusion of reality.<sup>10</sup>

He goes on to point out that the self-conscious novel "was never meant to be an abandonment of mimesis but rather an enormous complication and sophistication of it... mimesis here is focussed not on an object, place or kind of person, but on a set of cognitive process".<sup>11</sup> The mirror that was turned to nature or society is now turned to art itself and fiction instead of substantialising an existing world now offers a process of mind, as the primary object of interest.

Hawthorne's term for the form in which he wrote was romance. A close look at the distinction which he habitually draws between the 'novel' and the 'romance' will make it abundantly clear that Hawthorne belongs to the 'self-conscious' tradition.

When a writer wishes to call his work Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to have assumed, had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition

is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former--while, as a work of art it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably, so far it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart--has fairly a right to present--the truth under circumstances, to a great extent of the writer's own choosing or creation... He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and especially to mingle *Marvelous*, rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavour, than as any portion of the actual substance of the substance of the dish offered to the public. 12

According to Hawthorne, the novel is committed to empiricism. Both in terms of form and content, it provides a realistic imitation of the 'ordinary course of man's experience'. This phrase makes it clear that the novelist's subject matter lies in the external world of day-to-day realities. Romance too upholds the truth--but the truth is not ordinary, it belongs, not to the external world, but to the internal world of human heart and the form in which this truth is embodied is not derived from the external world but is created, by the writers own subjective mind ('own choosing and creation'). The ideal strategy for the romance writer, Hawthorne goes on to say, is not to discard the realistic conventions altogether, but mingle with them the 'Marvelous'. In short, the romance writer starts with the novel form which is designed to imitate the external reality but since his essential concern is not the imitation of external reality but the expression of his own

subjective mind, he takes liberties with the form and creates a new genre--the romance.

The self-conscious dimension of Hawthorne's romances has not received the critical attention it deserves primarily because for too long, criticism was pre-occupied with, what Feidelson has termed his ethical concerns. Hawthorne's pre-occupation with sin, egoism alienation and history have all been commented upon at length. But attention to the formal aspects of his work was limited to comments on his conception of romance, his use of symbol and allegory, his use of colour. The self-conscious dimension of his art has begun to receive critical attention only with the coming of the structuralists and post-structuralists on the scene.<sup>13</sup>

At this point it would be appropriate to state clearly that this study does not intend to adopt the method or the vocabulary of the structuralists and the de-construct-ionists. Admittedly, the structuralist perspective involves a new and acute consciousness of the processes that are inherent in the act of writing and reading. Yet the writings of the structuralist themselves, relying as they do on an esoteric vocabulary, are often both dull and incomprehensible. Having discarded the concepts 'value' and 'experience' of literature, the structuralist critics often seem to do away with both the intentions of the author and the needs of their own readers. The result is, that, while the processes by which

literary texts come into being are brought to light, the particularity of individual texts is lost. All writings begin to look depressingly alike when they are subjected to the elaborate analytical procedures of the structuralists.

The present study is an attempt to understand and analyze <sup>the</sup> 'self-conscious' dimension of Hawthorne's writings by concentrating on Hawthorne's use of the artist as the major character in his fiction. Hawthorne was one of the first writer to give the artist the centre spot on his fictional stage and he can, therefore, be considered an early predecessor of modern self-conscious writers like Joyce and Lawrence who too have assigned a prominent place to the artist in their fiction.

The artist appears in major and minor roles throughout Hawthorne's works. Millicent Bell in Hawthorne's View of the Artist has given an inventory of the major artist-character in his fiction.<sup>14</sup> The fact, however, is that even the non-artist in his fiction display an unmistakable relationship to his artist. Characters like Rappacini, Fanshawe, Dimmesdale, Hester, could all be described as 'refractions of the artistic nature' (Matthersen's phrase). The non-artist in his fiction inevitably possess some aspect of the artist's personality and they inevitably face situations and crises which seem a metaphorical rendering of the artist's

situation as perceived by Hawthorne. The excessive use of the artist, as Brodhead correctly points out, emphasises the distinctive feature of his artists' <sup>its</sup> self-consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

Why and how does the use of the artist lead to self-consciousness? In a sense, this entire study constitutes an answer to this question but a straight forward answer can be given at this stage as well. The use of the artist leads to self-consciousness because Hawthorne's delineation of the artist's character and situation, are necessarily based on his awareness of the processes of art and on his own experiences as a novelist writing in America in the first half of the nineteenth century. His fictional artists in their fictional world inevitably grapple with the questions which Hawthorne too was preoccupied with. How is an artist to apprehend or perceive the universe? How is he to relate to nature in general and to his immediate surroundings in particular? By what process is he to transform the objective world of phenomenon to the world of art? How is he to create a unified work of art? What form shall it take? What would be its worth? What are the difficulties involved and how is he to overcome them? What is his obligation to society and what is the nature of society's obligation to him? How is he to relate to his audience? What kind of effect should he strive for? Finally, is he himself a noble or an ignoble creature? What constitutes success for him and what is

failure? What are the indignities and rewards of being an artist? In their actions and reactions relating to Nature, society, their work and their audience, the fictional artists inevitably reflect the answers Hawthorne has arrived at to these fundamental questions. By repeatedly telling us the story of the artist and his efforts to create works of art, Hawthorne engages us in consideration of a larger subject-- the nature of mental activities through<sup>which</sup> art itself comes into being and the fiction of literature is created. His medium becomes a record of his own adventure in the imaginative recreation of reality. In Hawthorne's fiction, the mirror is held up, not so much to society or nature, as to art and if looked at closely, it becomes transparent and reveals to us the processes by which Hawthorne transforms the external world into the world of art.

All the other major prose writers of the romantic age in America--Poe, Emerson, Thoreau and Melville were also interested in defining for themselves and their audience the nature and significance of the artist and his activities. Poe addressed himself to the problem of the artist in the essay 'The Philosophy of Literary Composition'. Emerson, who helped to set the tone of the period by adapting European romanticism for local consumption, repeatedly returned to the subject of the artist in his discourses and essays. In 'The American Scholar', 'Self-Reliance' and 'Poet', he tried

to articulate<sup>a</sup> coherent programme for the nineteenth century American artist. Melville, like Hawthorne, applied himself to the problem in discursive essays as well as in his fiction. In 'Hawthorne and his Mosses' Melville also develops his own theory of literature as subterfuge. In the essay he proclaims the master genius of an American celebrates it not for the author's sake but for the sake of the nation. But he eventually advocates anonymity and even alienation as the only course available to the exceptional writer. In Moby Dick Melville's subject is not just the manufacture and the sale of sperm oil. It is also the creation of literary text. Just as the sailors change the whale to oil so Ishmail proposes to transform the real whale into the stuff of fiction. Thus he repeatedly draws attention to the labour involved in making literature out of whales and as Gilmore has remarked 'the visibility of its making is one of the most arresting features of Moby Dick as an aesthetic performance'.<sup>16</sup> The same point can be made of Walden as well. In Walden, Thoreau devotes an exclusive chapter to reading and in the chapter 'Beanfields' metaphorically writes about the composition of the text itself. But more than any of his contemporaries it was Hawthorne who was interested in the artist-figure. He applies himself to issues relating to the artist not only in his prefaces but also in his fiction through the device of the artist-figure.



The preoccupation with the artist was made necessary by the circumstances of the age in which these writers were writing. It was during the first half of the nineteenth century that American democracy and economy came of age. The economic revolution that transformed United States from an agrarian society to a commercial one proceeded at its most rapid pace during the years in which the classic works of American literature were being written. Statistics reveal the scale and the rapidity of the transformation.<sup>17</sup> Between 1820 and 1860 the population grew from about 10 million to almost 32 million while the proportion of Americans living in cities rose 8000 per cent: railroad mileage went from zero to over thirty thousand and there was five fold increase in the number of banks and of notes in circulation. Writing and Publishing developed along the same lines as the economy. Before 1820, in a vast underdeveloped continent books were difficult to produce and distribute. They remained an upper class pursuit and both the author and the audience were bound together by shared interests and knowledge. But in the next three decades all this was changed, changed utterly. Technological advances speeded up the printing process so that it was possible to bring out larger editions at lower costs. Railroad helped to bridge the vast distances and the increase in population and literacy provided a ready demand for books. By 1850, 90 per cent of the adult population could read and write and the U.S. boasted the largest reading public in the history of the English language.

In this rapidly changing society the role of the artist was seen to be specially problematic. On the one hand, the growing pride in the nation led to the demand of authentic national literature. Thus Emerson in 'The American Scholar' announced, "Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the mere remains of foreign harvests. Events actions arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves."<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the growing commercial society combined the ancient Puritan distrust of art with a new emphasis on practicality and utility that left no respectable place for the artist. In 'The Custom House' Hawthorne has described in detail the difficulties of the artist caught between the sceptical Puritan forefathers and the indifferent buyers and sellers of his own age. In such a situation, with no established tradition to fall back on, it was left to each individual writer to work out for himself his own views of his chosen vocation. Hawthorne and the other nineteenth century American writers sought to do this by repeatedly applying themselves to the theme of the artist in their writings.

In the first chapter of this study, I have tried to outline Hawthorne's basic convictions about the world, the artist, and the process by which the artist transforms the real

world into art. In subsequent chapters, through a close reading of the texts, I have tried to demonstrate not only how each one of these romances have been shaped by these convictions, but also how Hawthorne, through the use of the artist-figure, constantly reflects upon these convictions. He uses the action of the novels to both test and illustrate the validity of these convictions, and it is precisely this that gives his novels their self-conscious dimension. In a sense, I have tried to outline the central pattern of Hawthorne's fiction in the first chapter. What I have to say in later chapters is governed entirely by its relevance to this pattern. The four chapters that follow <sup>the first</sup> chapter I give detailed readings of the four major romances. I have omitted the conclusion since it would necessarily be a mere repetition of the points already made in chapter I.

I am acutely conscious of the fact that a great deal more could have been said about the novels. For instance, I have not tried to evaluate the romances separately, nor have I tried to trace the 'growth' or 'decline' of the author during the period in which he wrote these romances. I have also not commented on the relevance of Hawthorne to his times or modern times. Fogle's comment about Hawthornian criticism, written in 1950s, seems to me to have an element of truth still, 'if it has a fault, Hawthorne criticism can be accused of judging Hawthorne's art before it has been fully explained'.<sup>19</sup> Writing more recently, Kenneth Dauber echoes the sentiment, 'Have we not avoided--perhaps wilfully--what Hawthorne places

directly before us? Have we not shirked, postponing with the labour of interpretation, the shock of the responsibility entailed by recognition. Hawthorne... has yet to be known in the plainness with which he speaks.<sup>20</sup> The labour of interpretation in this study is directed towards making Hawthorne known in the plainness with which he speaks. And though this attitude prevents me from passing judgements on Hawthorne's works, I hope it enables me to see clearly what Hawthorne, the artist, was trying to do in his writings.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>D.H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (1923; rpt. Penguin Books, 1978), p.89. Lawrence writes, "All the time there is this split in the American art and art consciousness. On the top it is as nice as pie, goody-goody and lovely dovey. Like Hawthorne being such a blue eyed darling in life..."

<sup>2</sup>Henry James, Hawthorne (1879; rpt. Cornell University Press, 1975), p.3. James writes, 'He was not a man with literary theory: he was guiltless of a system...'

<sup>3</sup>A.N. Kaul, ed. Hawthorne: Twentieth Century Views (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc. 1966), p.1.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Feidelson Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), p.10.

<sup>5</sup>Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Philosophy of Composition' in The Portable Poe, ed. Philip Van Doren Stern (Penguin Books, 1977), p.551.

<sup>6</sup>Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel (1951; rpt. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1963), p.32.

<sup>7</sup>Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Stein & Day, 1966), p.32.

<sup>8</sup>M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (1953; New York: Norton Library, 1958), p.93.

<sup>9</sup>Robert Alter, Partial Magic: The Novel as Self-conscious Genre (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1975).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Alter, Motives for Fiction (Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), p.13.

<sup>11</sup> Alter, Motives for Fiction, p.16.

<sup>12</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'Preface to the House of the Seven Gables' in The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Norman Holmes Pearson, (New York: Random House Inc., 1937), p.243.

<sup>13</sup> Early commentators like Melville, James and even Lawrence emphasised Hawthorne's 'ethical concerns'. In modern times, Hawthorne's preoccupation with sin, egoism, alienation has been discussed perceptively by the following critics: F.O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (1941; rpt. New York: OUP, 1969; Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness (1958; rpt. New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1976); Richard Harter Fogle, Hawthorne's Fiction: The light and the dark (1952; rpt. Norman Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1975). Formal aspects of Hawthorne's art have been discussed by Fiedelson in Symbolism in American Literature; Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (1957; rpt. New York: Gordian Press, 1978). Michael Davit Bell, Hawthorne and the Historical Romance of New England (New Jersey, Princeton Univ. Press, 1971). The structuralists began to make their presence felt in the 1970s. An excellent study of Hawthorne belonging to this particular school of criticism is Allan Gardener Lloyd Smith, Eve Tempted: Writing and Sexuality in Hawthorne's Fiction (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> Millicent Bell, Hawthorne's View of the Artist (New York: State Univ. of New York, 1962), Preface IX.

<sup>15</sup> Richard H. Brodhead, Hawthorne, Melville and the Novel (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973), p.23.

<sup>16</sup> Michael T. Gilmore, American Romanticism and the Market Place (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), pp.119-20.

<sup>17</sup> Provided by Gilmore, pp.2-5.

<sup>18</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The American Scholar' in Anthology of American Literature ed. George McMichael (1974; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1980), p.1024.

<sup>19</sup> Fogle, Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark, p.VIII.

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Dauber, 'Hawthorne and the authority of Intimacy', The Thorean Quarterly, vol.16 (Winter/Spring, 1984), p.432.

Chapter IUNIVERSAL SIN AND THE ARTIST

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Hawthorne's major romances exist on two levels simultaneously. On the more obvious level, the four romances are preoccupied with the theme of sin. They are concerned with the predicament of man in face of the reality of evil. In the fiction of Hawthorne, the one truth available to fallen man is the reality of universal sin. But his characters out of cowardice or pride find it difficult to come to terms with this harsh reality about themselves. They spend considerable energy and ingenuity in evading or suppressing this fact about themselves. But reality by its very definition cannot be suppressed or evaded. And since the reality of evil is not given its due recognition in the conscious designs of man, it goes 'underground' and working at a hidden level it digs, as Coverdale discovers in The Blithedale Romance, 'a by way to pit from the very gates of heaven'.<sup>1</sup> At this level, Hawthorne's major concern is to bring to light the hidden workings of evil. He carefully examines the 'cavern of the human heart', 'the spring and motives of individuals', the past heritage and the contemporary realities of America, in order to show how the deepest taint of sin might be found even in the most sacred quality of



human life, working such effects that the world is only the darker for its beauty. The answer to man's dilemma lies for Hawthorne not in wilfully turning away from the reality of evil but in recognising and accepting it and discovering in this very acceptance, the magnetic chain of humanity, the sympathy of one fallen creature for another.



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On the other, deeper and more complex level, Hawthorne is concerned with the predicament of the artist and the problems that he faces in trying to cope with the peculiar demands of his profession in a sinful world. At this level, the romances self-consciously reflect, the theoretical framework that underlies their own creation.

Hawthorne's concept of universal sin is derived partly from his Puritan forefathers but it is also an issue, as Melville pointed out, from which no thinking mind is ever free.<sup>2</sup> The question of sin in Hawthorne is mostly discussed in terms of the Christian myth of the fall and the loss of Eden, but Hawthorne himself was not a practicing Christian nor was he seeking to justify the ways of God to men. After accepting the Christian account of fallen man, he devotes himself to the world as it is here and now. His concept of sin, therefore, is at one level metaphysical and universal but at another level it is deeply

connected with social processes. On the first level, this concept is abstract and de-socialised. As the baseline of explanation, it excludes historical investigation and does not yield to empirical questions about who is actually doing what to whom and with what. But, on the other level, it can be seen as part of a strategy for dealing with and articulating the negative and problematic aspects of life in America in the nineteenth century. In his fiction, Hawthorne exploits fully the similarity between the original myth of Eden and the great American myth that inspired the American settlement and shaped the American identity.<sup>3</sup> The similarity enables him to connect his discussion of the universal sinfulness of man with the currently prevalent social problems and evils. The two symbols, the cemetery and the prison, which Hawthorne habitually uses in his fiction, emphasise the dual dimension of sin in his fiction. While the cemetery symbolises the innate, inevitable limitation of man, the prison symbolises the social consequences of man's innate propensity for evil. In this study, however, I do not trace the social implication of Hawthorne's treatment of sin.<sup>4</sup> Instead, I have discussed how Hawthorne's conviction about the sinfulness of man has shaped his view of art and of the artist and also his romances.

If Hawthorne's preoccupation with sin reflects the influence of Puritanism, then his preoccupation with

the artist reflects the influence of Romanticism. Abrams in his classic study of the romantic theory The Mirror and the Lamp points out that the characteristic tendency of Romanticism was to pose and answer aesthetic questions in terms of the relation of art to the artist, rather than to external nature or to audience or to the internal requirement of the work itself. During the romantic period, the work of art came to be seen essentially as internal made external through a particular creative process. Abrams writes, 'The primary source and the subject matter of art were the attributes and action of the artist's own mind; or if aspects of the external world, then these only as they are converted from fact to poetry by the feelings and operations of the artist's mind.'<sup>5</sup> Living in New England, close to transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau, Hawthorne was obviously exposed to romantic ideas but as we shall see, he adapted them to suit his own particular ends.

In Hawthorne's fiction the concept of universal sin stands for a profoundly negative force that opposes and brings down the positives of life. In The Marble Faun, Miriam and Kenyon characterise it as a void or a chasm that swallows up and negates all human endeavours of the past, the present and the future. The good Christian Hilda objects to this depiction of evil as the original necessity but Miriam goes on to explain:

I fancy that every person takes a peep into it in moments of gloom and despondency; that is to say, in his moments of deepest insight... The firmest substance of human happiness is but a thin crust spread over it, with just reality enough to bear up the illusive stage scenery amid which we tread. It needs no earthquake to open the chasm. A footstep, little heavier than the ordinary, will serve; and we must step very daintly, not to break through the crust at any moment. By and by, we inevitably sink!... The palace of Ceasars has gone down thither, with a hollow, rumbling sound of its fragments! All the temples have tumbled into it; and thousands of statues have been thrown after! All the armies and the triumphs have marched into the great chasm with their martial music playing, as they stepped over the brink. All the heroes, the statesmen, and the poets!

Evil swallows up the temples, the palaces, the armies, the artists, the statesmen and the heroes. It marks all human efforts and human history and against its reality all human happiness is merely an illusion. For Hawthorne

sin or evil are terms for the perverse, self-destructive human tendency that works against humanity's own interests, the anti-thesis that lead to no thesis or synthesis. And this anti-truth defines man (not so much the social creature or linguistic creature man, for Hawthorne, is a sinful creature). The artist, the priest, the scientist, the judge and the criminal who is judged are all men and are, therefore, guilty and sinful. As Melville says, 'There is the grand truth about Nathaniel Hawthorne. He says No! in thunder; but the Devil himself cannot make him say, Yes. For all men who say Yes lie...'<sup>7</sup>

Man's inability to come to terms with this truth about himself forms the central dramatic motif for all of Hawthorne's fiction. Man tries to avoid facing up to this truth, for the awareness of universal sin, as Godman Brown finds out, is a heavy burden to carry. But by deliberately evading this truth man places himself in a false position and whatever he does then, is of necessity, false and hollow. In The Scarlet Letter, Dimmesdale does not have the courage to acknowledge the reality of the letter A and the falsehood slowly but surely destroys the pith and substance of his own self <sup>also of</sup> and the reality around. The author remarks 'to the untrue man, the whole universe is false--it is impalpable--it shrinks to nothing within his grasp. And he himself, insofar as he shows himself in a false light, becomes a shadow or indeed ceases to exist'.<sup>8</sup> In Hawthorne all those who deliberately

try and evade the reality of sin become hypocrites and their hypocrisy slowly but surely destroys all their vitality. The process is described in detail in The House of the Seven Gables, in the career of the Pyncheons.

There are characters in Hawthorne, like Phoebe, Hilda and Dontello, who are unaware of the reality of sin because they are essentially innocent. Since these characters are unfallen, they have a great capacity of being at one with nature and they also possess a high degree of moral clarity. But, in spite of all this, in Hawthorne, they are considered limited for their lack of awareness of the reality of sin cuts them off from the rest of the fallen humanity. Also, their ethereal splendour is shown to be tentative since they have not faced the central predicament of human existence. In the course of the novel, each of them are brought face to face with the reality of evil and they are made to go through a painful process of re-adjustment which enables them to come to terms with the reality of the fallen world. In sharp contrast are characters who have experienced the reality of sin even before the action starts, for example, Hester and Miriam. The charm of these "dark" heroines of Hawthorne lies in the fact that they have extracted an intenser being from their experience of sin and have established a deeper, more intimate connection with fallen humanity. As a result, they have full blooded, rich and vital personalities.

Although the recognition of the reality of sin is essential, it is also dangerous, for evil in Hawthorne remains something so profoundly negative that it is almost impossible to accommodate it in consciousness or existence. Many who recognise its reality end up turning away from humanity. This in turn triggers off a process of isolation and alienation which ends up destroying their moral being. Ethan Brand begins a heroic search for the unpardonable sin. He finds it but in the process ceases to partake in the universal throb. 'He had lost his hold on the magnetic chain of humanity. He was no longer brother man... he was now a cold observer looking on mankind as the subject of his experiments'.<sup>9</sup> Mr Hooper puts on a black veil in the story, 'The Minister's Black Veil'. The veil is acknowledgement of the universal sinfulness of man, but the veil poisons his existence and he leads a gloomy and alienated life. Goodman Brown cannot help recognising the truth in Devil's assertions about the essential nature of mankind and he ends up as 'a stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man'.

If the beginning of all falsehood is the desire to escape from the reality of evil, then cruelty begins when the recognition of this reality of evil leads to anger, revolt or self-righteousness. The worst fate in Hawthorne is reserved for those who make the reality of evil an excuse to turn upon their fellow beings. They become

devil themselves. In Fanshawe, Angler after chancing upon the deathbed of his mother, feels the guilty burden of the evil life that he had led. 'But his deep repentance for the misery he had brought upon his parents did not produce in him a resolution to do wrong no more. The sudden consciousness of accumulated guilt made him desperate. He felt as if no one had thenceforth a claim to justice or compassion at his hands... Thus it was that the devil wrought with him to his own destruction.'<sup>10</sup> In The Scarlet Letter Chillingworth faced with the reality of the letter A on his wife's dress turns upon Dimmesdale for revenge and ends up by "violating the sanctity of the human heart". Awareness of the reality of sin in Hawthorne inevitably provides the protagonists with the power to see through appearances put up by others and penetrate to their guilty heart. The diabolical characters abuse this power and violate the common tie that binds all of humanity. Knowledge of sin in Hawthorne is never a matter <sup>only</sup> of intellectual apprehension. It is experiential and characters come to it <sup>because of</sup> only in terms of some life experience. Also <sup>the</sup> knowledge of the hidden workings of sin: the protagonist can see more clearly into the suffering heart of humanity. The choice is then his--he can then turn away from or turn upon humanity. In both cases, he loses his own humanity. Or he can discover in the very reality of sin, the one principle, or truth that binds all of humanity together.



Characters who preserve their humanity in Hawthorne recognise the reality of sin, suffer the consequences that accompany this dark knowledge but in the end not only face up to the truth of universal sin but also accept it without rancour or rebellion. In this very acceptance, they discover the common bond of man, the sympathy and brotherhood of one fallen man for another. As A.N. Kaul puts it, "If there is any single 'message' in his work, it is the one which pleads for the wisdom of recognising the limitation of man's reach and capability and for a relaxed attitude of brotherly tolerance, love and compassion."<sup>11</sup>

The only positive value that Hawthorne's dark tales of human frailty and sorrow embody is the value of "sympathy". In the fallen world, non-awareness of the ever-present reality of evil is either limiting or falsifying. Awareness too is dangerous for it can lead to alienation, egoism, self-absorption and cruelty. The only way out for trapped humanity is that the necessary awareness of sin should lead to the value of sympathy—to the realization that all humanity is bound together in face of this reality and that if man has to preserve his humanity, he must at all time deal with himself and his fellow sinners, with compassion and gentleness. Without this sense of sympathy, whatever might be his other talents or achievements, man necessarily loses his humanity and is well on his way to becoming a devil.

Hawthorne's use of the term 'sympathy' is better understood if the nineteenth century connotations of the word are kept in mind. Abrams points out in his The Mirror and the Lamp that the term was developed in the eighteenth century, but was adopted and extended by the romantics to suit their own ends. Coleridge uses it to describe Shakespeare's genius, his ability to reconcile in his works the subjective and the objective and to do away with his own isolation and become the personality he contemplates. Hazlitt later develops the same idea. The 'capacious soul' of Shakespeare is the greatest example of 'an intuitive and mighty sympathy'. In Abrams' words, "The phenomenon of *mitfühlung* (sympathetic imagination) had been the subject of intense speculation for a century by the acutest philosophical minds in England, including Hume, Hartley, Adam Smith and Godwin. By the concept these men had sought to bridge the gap between atomistic individualism (premised by empirical philosophy) and the possibility of altruism--in Eighteenth century terms, the gap between 'self-love and social'<sup>12</sup>'. The root of all these meanings, of course, lies in the Christian concept of mercy, in Christ's ability to feel for the suffering humanity, identify with it, and finally redeem it with his sacrifice.

Except for one characteristically significant difference, the term has all the romantic connotations for Hawthorne.

In social terms, it does away with the evils of excessive individualism, egoism and alienation, by emphasising the limits of man and the brotherhood of man within those limits. In psychological terms, it emphasizes the victory of heart over the head and leads to the establishment of emotional bonds between individuals. In intellectual terms, it does away with dualism--with the division between subject and object, between feelings and intellect, that marks all knowledge and breeds coldness and lack of concern. In aesthetic terms, it enables the artist to maintain an organic and living connection with both his audience and his subject matter and thereby overcome the hazards of isolation, that go with his profession.

The difference between the romantic concept of sympathy and Hawthorne's is that in Hawthorne it is firmly grounded in the awareness and acceptance of the reality of sin. In fact, it is made a corollary of this acceptance and it is argued that it is impossible for anyone to arrive at the value of 'sympathy' without experiencing and accepting the reality of sin. Hawthorne offers the value of sympathy as an ideal but it is an ideal that cannot ever cancel or remove the negative aspects of the actual for it remains functional only through the awareness of negative reality that it is supposed to counteract. It is for this reason that Hawthorne disapproves of efforts made by gifted individuals like Hester, Holgrave or Hollingsworth, to create a

system which would completely nullify the negative consequences of man's sinful nature. In Hawthorne, sin and its attendant consequences define man and attempts to root out evil altogether are only a result of basic misunderstanding. Hawthorne repeatedly portrays utopian philanthropists, idealists, and revolutionaries as suffering from this misunderstanding. In 'Earth's Holocaust' the reformers try to do away with all the world's 'trumpery' and injustice and superstition. The sketch ends with the warning that unless some way is found to purify the heart of man, all reforms would prove in the end to have been in vain because it is from the heart that evil springs. This misunderstanding is also shown to be dangerous because it results in the denial of the one positive value that is actually within humanity's reach--the value of sympathy. Thus the reformers mostly do more harm than good and we are shown that self-absorption and egoism are the real motives behind their efforts at reformation. Hester and Holgrave, within the scheme of their respective books, become positive characters only when they have retracted from their revolutionary and idealistic positions. Hollingsworth in The Blithedale Romance persists and destroys not just his own moral being but also Zenobia, and the Blithedale experiment. In Hawthorne, therefore, the tension between sin and sympathy, the ideal and the actual, can never be resolved finally for the human being is at once the soldier, the battleground and the enemy. He must forever battle against his own negative

realities. He cannot win, but if he recognises the reality and the universality of sin and discovers the way of sympathy, he cannot lose either. In Hawthorne's scheme of things men cannot overcome the evil within themselves but neither can evil overcome them if they have forged close ties with each other, if they are eternally vigilant against its hidden operations and if they are willing to treat individual lapses with compassion and understanding. Hawthorne's plea for the recognition of the reality and universality of evil is at the same time a plea for the recognition of the universal brotherhood of sinful man and a plea for eternal vigilance in a struggle that will go on forever.

The artist can play a meaningful role in this struggle if he possesses the quality of sympathy. In 'The Custom House' chapter Hawthorne pinpoints three modes of perception available to the artist. He discusses the advantages and disadvantages associated with each and explicitly states his own preference.

If the imaginative faculty refused to act at such an hour, it might well be deemed a hopeless case. Moonlight, in a familiar room, falling so white upon the carpet, and showing all its figures so distinctly--making every object so minutely visible, yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility--is a medium the most suitable for a romance writer to get acquainted with his elusive quests. There is the little domestic scenery of the well known apartment, the chair with each its separate individuality, the centre-table, sustaining a work-basket, a volume

Or two, and an extinguished lamp; the sofa; the bookcase; the picture on the wall--all these details, so completely seen, are so spiritualized by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance, and become things of intellect. Nothing is too small or trifling to undergo this change, and acquire dignity thereby. A child's show; the doll seated in her wicker carriage; the hobby horse--whatever, in a word, has been used or played with, during the day, is now invested with a quality of strangeness and remoteness, though still almost as vividly present as by daylight. Thus, therefore, the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy land, where the actual and the imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other...

The somewhat dim coal-fire has an essential influence in producing the effect which I would describe. It throws its unobtrusive tinge throughout the room, with a faint rudiness upon the walls and ceiling, and a reflected gleam from the polish of the furniture. This warmer light mingles itself with the cold spirituality of the moonbeams, and communicates, as it were, a heart, and sensibilities of human tenderness to the forms which fancy summons up. It converts them from snow-images into men and women. Glancing at the looking glass, we behold deep within its haunted verge--the smouldering glow of the half-extinguished anthracite, the white moon beams on the floor, and a repetition of all the gleam and shadow of the picture, with one remove further from the actual, and nearer to the imaginative. Then at such an hour, and with this scene before him, if a man sitting alone, cannot dream strange things, and make them look like truth, he need never try and write Romances.<sup>13</sup>

In the above passage, the three modes of perception are symbolised by three different kinds of light. To begin with, there is the 'noon-tide' visibility through which objects

can be seen clearly as they are. Then there is moonlight which spiritualises objects by making them lose their actual substance. Finally, there is the coal fire light which throws a warm unobtrusive tinge over everything.

The noon-tide visibility is the realistic, empirical mode of perception. It is shown to be destructive for the romance writer for it destroys the soap bubble of romance. In the Hawthornian context, realism, empiricism by themselves cannot take the artist too far, for since the fall, reality as well as man's perception of it, is seen to be tainted. In 'New Adam and Eve' Hawthorne writes:

We who are born into world's artificial system can never adequately know how little in our present state and circumstances is natural, and how much is merely the interpolation of the perverted heart and mind of man. It is only through the medium of imagination that we can loosen the iron fetters of reality and make ourselves even partially sensible what prisoners we are.<sup>14</sup>

Man by nature is flawed and since he has not been able to come to terms with his limitations, history is a record not so much of man's progress as of his repeated errors. Moreover, since the present emerges out of the past unless the knot of past errors is undone the vicious cycle will continue in the future as well. In such a situation, objective and realistic representation of the fallen world will serve no useful purpose. Therefore, the artist needs to break

away from the iron fetters of empirical truth and reality and it is the faculty of imagination that offers him the chance to escape. Hawthorne in this respect is very much a romantic and it is his commitment to the romantic concept of imagination that he seeks to highlight in the repeated distinction that he draws between the 'novels' (written by Englishmen) and the 'romances' written by himself.

In the passage quoted above, moonlight symbolizes imagination. Imagination, Hawthorne says, is ideal for the romance writer. Behind the imperfect empirical world is the ideal, perfect world and the faculty of imagination by transforming the actual, by spiritualising it, making it remote and strange, enables the writer to glimpse the ideal forms underlying the actual reality. Thus even small and trifling objects when they undergo this transformation acquire dignity. It should be noted that imagination does not allow the writer to escape the grip of actuality totally and completely attain the perfect, ideal world. Rather it enables each, the ideal and the actual, to imbue itself with the nature of the other. It should also be noted that two conditions need to be fulfilled before this faculty can become operational. First, the author must retreat from the world and be alone with himself (hence 'the deserted chamber'). Secondly, he must be completely familiar with the subject that is to be spiritualised (hence the well-known apartment and its domestic scenery).



Though the moon-beam is ideal for the romance-writer, it is not sufficient in itself. The artist needs the warmer light of the coal-fire--that is, perception born of sympathy. Without sympathy, imagination remains cold and the spiritual form that it conjures up remain snow images. It is only sympathy that imparts human tenderness to these forms and converts them from snow images into real men and women.

Hawthorne's view of imagination is clearly derived from the romantics. The romantics also believed that the artist produces art not by mechanically imitating external nature but by converting aspects of external world from facts to his own subjective images, ideas and feelings through the imaginative process. The work of art is considered as essentially internal made external and much of romantic theory is preoccupied in explaining how this is brought about. Coleridge's theory of imagination, since it assimilates the various strands of romantic thought, is the most comprehensive attempt to come to grips with this problem and a brief discussion of it would help to pinpoint Hawthorne's debt to romanticism.

'We must begin' says Coleridge, with 'a truth self-grounded, unconditional and known by its own lights'. This truth is to be found in 'the sum or I AM' that 'spirit

self, and self-consciousness' which may be described 'as a perpetual self-duplication of one and the same power into object and subject, which pre-suppose each other and can exist only as anti-theses'.<sup>15</sup> The entire universe is the self-duplication of the infinite I AM, which perpetuates itself by reconciling self created oppositions. This creative process is reflected in the Primary Imagination, through which individual mind perceive the universe and it is echoed again in the secondary or recreative imagination which only the artist possesses. 'The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary imagination I consider an echo of the former... It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate...'<sup>16</sup> This secondary imagination in creating art, echoes the creative principle underlying the universe and just as the universe, in its totality, represents the infinite I AM of God, the work of art represents the finite I AM of the artist. Abrams writes, "We also find in the eighteenth century the beginnings of a more radical solution to the problem of poetic fictions, one which would sever supernatural poetry entirely from the principle of imitation, and from any responsibility to the empirical world. The key event in this development was the replacement of the metaphor of the poem as imitation, a mirror of nature' by that of the poem as heterocosm, 'a second nature' created

by the poet in an act analogous to God's creation of the world... This parallel between God and the poet, and between God's relation to his world and the poet to his poem, fostered the earliest appearance of the doctrine, so widespread today, that a poem is disguised self-revelation, in which its creator, 'visibly invisible' at the same time expresses and conceals himself'.<sup>17</sup>

The romantic artist sets this assimilative imagination in motion by withdrawing from the empirical world and through long concentrated thought transforming and modifying it in terms of his own subjective mind. Thus Wordsworth at all times endeavoured to view his subject steadily and recollected emotions in tranquility. Once the imagination is set in motion, it expresses itself in the form of a spontaneous overflow over which the poet has little or no control and the art forms that it creates possess the attributes of living and growing things.

Abrams has pointed out that Coleridge's theory of imagination was the most important channel for flow of organicism in the English speaking world.<sup>18</sup> Literary composition was earlier described in terms of imitation, or in terms of impact on the audience but from nineteenth century onwards it came to be described in terms of gestation and growth. Moved by a predominant passion, the artist now gave 'birth' to work of art which was seen as springing to

completion almost independent of the will or the conscious intention of the author. Like the living body, the art form was also a unified whole which owed its being to the co-existence and the living interdependence of its parts. The artist instead of being a maker or a craftsman became a 'creator'. Like God he invented new forms which in turn reflected his personality. And literature's essential function was not so much 'to please' or 'instruct' the audience as 'move' it emotionally. The criterion of intensity, Abrams tells us, now superseded older terms like 'truth' and 'universality' as a standard for judging artistic value.<sup>19</sup>

For Hawthorne too, art is a subjective phenomenon that transforms the empirical world and creates organic forms. He too begins with a truth 'self-grounded, unconditional and known by its own light'. His truth, however, is not the positive creativity of God which reconciles opposites into wholes but the perverse power which perpetuates oppositions and causes destruction and death. For fallen man, the universe is a manifestation not of the former but the latter and the true artist creates not in accordance with the infinite truth but in spite of the infinite truth. Although imagination, in accordance with the romantic tradition, modifies the external world, it is not sufficient in itself.<sup>20</sup> The Hawthornian artist needs something more that will take into account and counteract the negative imperatives of man's sinful condition. Hawthorne's concept of sympathy is meant

to do precisely this and this is the reason why the coal-fire light must mingle with the moonlight for the romance writer. The artist's creation can be organic and life like but the animation would come not from the cold moonlight but from the warm coal-fire. For Hawthorne, the magic power that diffuses the tone and spirit of unity, that blends, as it were, fuses each to each, is not romantic imagination but his own concept of sympathy. And so the end of art for him is not 'beauty' or 'pleasure' but the upholding of the unpleasant truth whose recognition can lead the reader to sympathy--the reality of evil. Thus in The Marble Faun, Miriam finds fault with Guido's painting which depicts 'the triumph of goodness over the evil principle'. She criticises it on the ground that the battle could never have been 'such a child's play as Guido's dapper Archangel seems to have found it'.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, Sodoma's painting of Christ bound to a pillar 'deserted both in heaven and in earth' is held up as an ideal for art. 'Sodoma in this matchless picture, has done more towards reconciling the incongruity of Divine Omnipotence and outraged, suffering Humanity, combined in one person, than the theologians ever did'.<sup>22</sup>

Hawthorne's view of the artist can be summarized in the following manner. Since the artist lives in a sinful world, mere imitation of fallen reality will not

(despite the inherent difficulties)

lead to greart art. He must, recognise the reality of sin and look beyond the empirical world by using the faculty of imagination. The artist can evoke imagination by retreating from the world and by internalising his subject to such an extent that it begins to have an independent existence in himself. However, this process is fraught with danger for the artist, because it can lead to alienation and self-absorption. These negative effects, <sup>and also the negative effects of sin</sup> can be counteracted only if imagination is allied with sympathy--the recognition of the spiritual brotherhood of man in face of sin. Once imagination and sympathy are allied, the work that artist creates, is organic because the artist has transferred his own felt life to it. When completed the art object, instead of reflecting some pre-existing reality, reflects the mind, the personality and the thought processes of its creator. And its chief value lies in the fact that it not only enables the reader to discover the truth about the world--the reality of sin, but also <sup>enables him</sup> to discover in this very recognition the spiritual bond that binds all of humanity.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance in Pearson's Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p.583.

<sup>2</sup> Herman Melville, 'Hawthorne and his Mosses' in The Theory of the American Novel, ed. George Perkins (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1970), p.73.

<sup>3</sup> See R.W.B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955).

<sup>4</sup> For sociological readings of Hawthorne, see Lawrence Sargent Hall, Hawthorne: Critic of Society (1944; rpt. Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1966), And A.N. Kaul, The American Vision: Actual and Ideal Society in Nineteenth Century Fiction (1963; rpt. Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (1953; rpt. New York: Norton Company Inc. 1958), p.22.

<sup>6</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Marble Faun in Pearson's Complete Novels and Selected Tales, pp.682-83.

<sup>7</sup> Herman Melville, Letter to Hawthorne, dt. April 1851, published in The Theory of American Novel, ed. George Perkins (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1970), p.91.

<sup>8</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter in Pearson's The Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p.170.

<sup>9</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'Ethan Brand' in Pearson's The Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p.1194.

<sup>10</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, Fanshaw in Pearson's The Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p.65.

<sup>11</sup> A.N. Kaul, The American Vision, p.149.

<sup>12</sup> M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, p.332.

<sup>13</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'The Custom House' in Pearson's The Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p.105-106.

<sup>14</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'New Adam and Eve' in Mosses from an old manse. Quoted by Allan Gardener Lloyd Smith in Eve Temple Pg. 121

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographic Literaria in Selected Poetry and Prose of Coleridge ed. Donald A. Stauffer (New York: Random House Inc., 195), pp.247-48.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.263.

<sup>17</sup> M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, p.272.

<sup>18</sup> For Coleridge's influence on America Transcendentalism see F.O. Matthiessen, "The Organic Principle: From Coleridge to Emerson", The American Renaissance, pp. 133-39. Hawthorne's debt to Romantic thought is discussed by Matthiessen in the section 'Allegory and Symbolism'. ~~Perceptive~~ Perceptive comments on the subject are to be found also in Fogle's analysis of 'The Artist of the Beautiful' in Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark.

<sup>19</sup> M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, p.134.



<sup>20</sup>For a detailed discussion of Hawthorne's view of Imagination see Matthiessen, 'The Imagination as Mirror' in American Renaissance, pp.253-64. I do not agree with Matthiessen's conclusion that Hawthorne shared the view of Emerson and other platonists and believed that individual imagination was part of divine mind. For Hawthorne, fallen man could not possibly have direct access to divinity. Imagination remains for him a human faculty that enables an individual to transform and see through the imperfect empirical reality.

<sup>21</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Marble Faun in Pearson's The Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p.696.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p.786.

Chapter IITHE SCARLET LETTER

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In the first chapter of The Scarlet Letter,<sup>1</sup> with a few masterly strokes, Hawthorne gathers up all his essential concerns. The recognition of the dark necessity of the cemetery and the prison, the black flowers of civilization, even in the midst of an alleged utopia, reflects the puritanical gloom which sees sin and corruption at the very centre of the piece of work that is man. The rose-bush represents the ideal which Hawthorne inevitably holds before us--that of sympathy born out of a realization of the brotherhood of man in face of universal sin. Hawthorne, in the very beginning, warns us that but for the rose the tale will be dark. Thus in the first chapter, Hawthorne not only introduces us to the major thematic motif of the book--the tension between the reality represented by the prison and the ideal represented by the rose-bush, but also establishes that the mode of expression will be symbolic.<sup>2</sup>

The dominant symbol in the book is the letter 'A'. It appears on Hester's dress and also probably on Dimmesdale's chest; on Pearl, and in Pearl, since she is another version of the letter; it appears magnified in the convex mirror of the governor and in the sky as a gigantic letter and is finally engraved on Hester's tombstone. At the time of the

publication of The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne had written to Fields 'I find it impossible to **relieve** the shadows of the story with so much light as I would gladly have thrown in... Keeping so close to its point as the tale does, and diversified no otherwise than by turning different sides of the same dark idea to the reader's eye, it will weary very many people and disgust some'.<sup>3</sup> This dark idea is embodied in the letter 'A' and can best be summed up as (with due apologies to Keats) Truth is Sin and Sin is Truth/that is all Ye know on earth and all Ye need to know.<sup>4</sup> The attitude of the various characters towards this letter serves to define their attitude towards the reality of evil and determines their role in terms of the overall meaning of the book.

The Puritans' attitude towards the scarlet letter shows that though they recognise the reality of evil, they are unable to accept it. Therefore, they think of the letter 'A' as a form of punishment, a badge of shame. They take pride in the fact that they live in the 'righteous colony of Massachussets where iniquity is dragged out into sunshine'.<sup>1</sup> The novelist, however, places their action in perspective when he comments, 'There can be no outrage, me-thinks, against our common nature--whatever be the delinquencies of the individual, no outrage more flagrant than to forbid the culprit to hide his face in shame' (p. 117). The novelist's criticism of the Puritans is not in theological

or even social terms. He is not debating the point whether adultery as a sin is punishable or not. His objection is only to the nature of punishment since it belies our common humanity in face of Sin.

The Puritans are portrayed as people who lack 'sympathy'. Hard and sombre, a grim rigidity inevitably petrified the bearded physiognomies of these people. Ironically, in punishing Hester, they reveal themselves to be prisoners of their own past. They had broken away from a repressive Europe to try and create a New Eden, but were becoming repressive themselves because they were fighting the universal reality of evil not with compassion but with severity. It is their severity that makes them incapable of understanding a woman's heart so that they end up perpetuating even on the virgin continent, the inequality of the sexes. At the end of the book, Hester recognises that until and unless the relation between man and woman is established on a surer ground of mutual happiness, no redemption is possible for humanity. As the suffering of Hester and also the Puritan women who come to Hester at the end of the book testify, the Puritans are very far from establishing this relation. Therefore, even in the New World, an old evil continues and the American settlement far from being a renewal of society and culture becomes a re-enactment of the older errors and mistakes.

In Hawthorne's framework the past errors will continue to repeat themselves until and unless man recognizes and accepts the reality of evil within himself. The Puritans, as their attitude to letter A shows, are unable to do this.

Complying with the harsh punishment meted out to her, Hester puts on the letter 'A' on her dress but in her heart of heart she is defiant. Hawthorne gives us brief but telling glimpses of this defiance. When she steps out of the prison, she faces the crowd 'with a burning blush and yet a haughty smile that would not be abashed' (p. 115). Her defiance, however, is most clearly expressed in the elaborate embroidery of the mark that is meant to be her punishment, the letter 'A'. It 'was so artistically done and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore... seemed to express the attitude of her spirit, the desperate recklessness of her mood, by its wild and picturesque peculiarity' (p. 115-116). For all her seeming acceptance of her punishment, the fact that Hester is not truly penitent, is brought out clearly in the pillory scene for then we are shown the real reason for her defiance. Wilson and Dimmesdale, backed by the entire Puritan crowd, exhort her to reveal the name of her lover. She not only refuses but says that she would rather be true to her love (the cause of her sin)

than to any theological consideration. 'Never... And would that I might endure his agony as well as mine' (p.124). And all through the dramatic scene, on her dress, she is wearing the gorgeously decorated letter which if it stands for adultery can also stand for Arthur.<sup>5</sup>

The attitude of outward compliance and inner defiance shows that Hester hasn't quite grasped the significance of the universal reality of sin. In social terms, her inability to understand the real significance of the letter A leads her almost to damnation. The letter 'A', on one level necessarily, isolates her from society. 'In all her intercourse with society, however, there was nothing that made her feel as if she belonged to it. Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact, implied, and often expressed that she was banished, and as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere...' (p.133). But at a deeper hidden level it connects her with humanity for it gives her a knowledge of hidden sin in others. This knowledge, because she has not been able to accept the reality of the scarlet letter on her own dress, terrifies her for it seems to her that it was the angels trying to persuade her that the 'outward guise of purity was but a lie...' (p. 135). Despite her fears, however, she cannot ignore the revelations of the scarlet letter and Hawthorne tells us that this almost causes a loss of faith that might have been her utter ruin. Hester's

situation in this respect should be contrasted with Dimmesdale's. He does not have the courage to display his letter 'A' to the world, but he never rebels against it either so that the knowledge of other's sins brought about by letter 'A' does not cause loss of faith or alienation from society but gives him 'sympathies so intimate with the sinful brotherhood of mankind, that his heart vibrated in unison with theirs...' (p.168).

Intellectually, her defiance turns Hester into a revolutionary. 'The world's law was no law in her mind. It was an age in which the human intellect, newly emancipated, had taken more active and wider range than for many centuries before... Hester Prynne imbibed this spirit' (p.181). She began to see that the whole system of society would have to be torn down and the basic nature of both men and women too would have to be changed before mankind could be truly happy. This kind of revolutionary thinking reaches its climax in the forest chapters when Hester tries to persuade Dimmesdale to leave the colony with her and unclasps the letter A from her dress and throws it away. 'The whole seven years of outlaw and ignominy had been little, other than a preparation for this hour' (p.203). Hawthorne seems to admire Hester's character and courage in arriving at this conclusion but finds it unacceptable. 'The scarlet letter' he tells us, 'had not done its office'. The subsequent action of the book, therefore, goes on to reinforce the idea embodied in letter 'A' rather than Hester's

revolt. Pearl, the scarlet letter in live form, forces Hester to put on the letter A again and Dimmesdale instead of escaping confesses his sin.

At the very end we are shown that her inner defiance in respect to the letter 'A' is over and it is only now that the double strain, the ambiguity maintained throughout the book in the depiction of her character comes to an end. Years after, she returns to her hut and voluntarily takes up her 'long-forsaken shame'. This shows that Hester finally not only recognizes but also accepts the reality of the scarlet letter and all that it signifies. And in the end, since there is no gap between her outer appearance and inner conviction, the scarlet letter, far from isolating her from society, brings her closer to the sorrows and perplexities of suffering humanity. Her earlier intellectual position of rebellion is also commented upon in light of her acceptance of the letter 'A'. She still hopes that in the future a 'new truth will be revealed' but does not vainly imagine that she might be the destined prophetess. 'The angel and apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman indeed, but lofty, pure and beautiful; and wise, moreover, not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy; and showing how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest test of life successful to such an end!' (p.240). Thus in accepting the letter 'A', Hester learns to accept the



reality of evil. She also recognizes that so long as man is what he is, evil cannot be completely removed. 'And be the stern and sad truth spoken, that the breach which guilt has once made into the human soul is never in this mortal state, repaired. It may be watched and guarded; so that the enemy shall not force his way again into the citadel. But there is still the ruined wall, and near it, the stealthy tread of the foe that would win over again his unforgotten triumph' (p.203).

If Hester's hidden defiance meant an inability to accept the real significance of the letter 'A' and if it leads her to an intellectual position which though admirable is false, Dimmesdale errs in the opposite direction. His cowardice is a similar inability to accept the letter 'A' as a symbol of universal sin. This places him in a hypocritical position which slowly but surely destroys his moral fibre.

His exhortation of Hester in Chapter 3 establishes his position in relation to the letter 'A'. 'What can thy silence do for him, except it tempt him - yea, compel him, as it were - to add hypocrisy to sin?... Take heed how thou deniest to him - who, perchance, hath not the courage to grasp it for himself - the bitter, but wholesome, cup that is now presented to thy lips' (p.124). In this scene as well as in the scene where Dimmesdale comes to the rescue of Hester, Hawthorne shows us through the reactions of little

Pearl that Dimmesdale possesses qualities which can justifiably claim our sympathies. In the first instance, she holds up her hand and later she takes up his hand and lays her cheek against it. Hawthorne comments that '...nothing is sweeter than these marks of childish preference, accorded spontaneously by a spiritual instinct, and, therefore, seeming to imply in us something truly worthy to be loved...' (p.152). These scenes establish the heights from which Dimmesdale is to fall.

Over the years, just as Hester's defiance leads her to a kind of hardening, his hypocrisy begins to eat into his moral being. 'It is the unspeakable misery of a life so false as his, that it steals the pith and substance out of whatever realities there are around us... To the untrue man, the whole universe is false--it is impalpable--it shrinks to nothing within his grasp' (p.170). The redeeming feature in his situation is the sheer honesty and intensity of his suffering. 'The only truth that continued to give Mr Dimmesdale a real existence on this earth was the anguish in his inmost soul and the undissembled expression of it in his aspect' (p.170). It is this suffering which gives him a sympathetic understanding of the sin and suffering of others. And it is the honesty of this suffering which causes the letter A to appear on his breast.

In the chapter 'The Minister's Vigil' we see the extent of the damage. In the middle of the night he is driven to the pillory to act out a 'mockery of penitence'

by the 'impulse of that Remorse which dogged him everywhere, and whose own sister and closely linked companion was that cowardice...' (P.171). At the pillory, Hester and Pearl joined him. His degeneration is revealed when he side-tracks Pearl's direct question, 'will thou stand here with mother and me tomorrow noontide?' (p.174) and also when he tells a plain lie about the phenomenon that was emblazoned across the skies. The old sexton asked him, 'But did your reverence hear of the portent that was seen last night?--a great letter in the sky...' 'No' answers the minister, 'I had not heard of it' (p.178).

By the time Hester meets him in forest, he is a physical and a mental wreck. He clings to Hester's strength unable to see that Hester's plans and suggestions will ultimately lead to his complete spiritual destruction for not only do they involve the continuing falsification of the letter A and, therefore, a continuation of his hypocrisy but also the falsification of the suffering that he has gone through. Earlier in the book, Hawthorne had remarked that had Dimmesdale once found power to smile and wear a face of gaiety, he would have been lost. Now under the influence of Hester and in the secrecy of the dark forest he is gay and he smiles and as his subsequent actions show he is almost lost. To the old and hoary deacon he wants to utter certain blasphemous suggestions about the

communion supper. He also wants to blight the young virgin's field of innocence with one wicked look. When he sees the Puritan children he wants to teach them some wicked words.

It is the supposed encounter with Mrs Hibbins that leads to an introspective self-realization which in turn culminates in his subsequent confession. 'Tempted by a dream of happiness', writes Hawthorne, 'he had yielded himself, with deliberate choice, as he had never done before, to what he knew was deadly sin. And the infectious poison of that sin had been thus rapidly diffused throughout his moral system... And his encounter with old Mistress Hibbins, if it were real incident, did but show his sympathy and fellowship with wicked mortals and the world of perverted spirits' (p.216). After the encounter, the minister himself reaches similar conclusion. 'Have I sold myself' thought the minister, 'to the fiend?...' (p.216).

This self-realization triggers off a change which makes him fling the already written pages of the Election sermon into the fire, and begin a new one. Earlier, Hawthorne had referred to this Election sermon. On finding out the date of departure, the Minister had been glad because he would have the opportunity to deliver the Election sermon which 'formed an honourable epoch in the life

of a New England Clergyman' (p.212). Hawthorne at this point had commented, 'we have had, and may still have, worse things to tell of him; but none, we apprehend, so pitiably weak; no evidence, at once so slight and irrefragable, of a subtle disease, that had long since begun to eat into the real substance of his character' (p.212). But now as he looks at the Election Sermon he 'seemed to stand apart and eye this former self with scornful pitying, but half envious curiosity. That self was gone. Another man had returned out of the forest' (p.216). The reference to change in these lines is not to the diabolic change that had come over the minister on his return ~~from~~<sup>to</sup> the forest but to the change that has come about through self-realization after the encounter with Mrs Hibbins. For Hawthorne continues, "...Another man had returned out of the forest; a wiser one; (the changes earlier were all described in negative terms) with a knowledge of hidden mysteries which the simplicity of the former never could have reached. A bitter kind of knowledge, that' (p.216).

It is this bitter knowledge which informs his subsequent actions. With confidence and sense of purpose he confesses his sin before the multitude. Even when Hester asks him 'Shall we not meet again? Shall we not spend our immortal life together?' (p.236). He is unable to reassure her. His answer is grounded in the fact that as a mere mortal he cannot see that far into eternity. He cannot presume to interpret God's purpose and, therefore,

can hold on to, can reiterate the only truth available in the world--the truth that had all along been embodied in the letter 'A' and which had been so awfully revealed--the reality of sin". The fact that the entire novel is grounded in this same bitter knowledge is borne out when Hester returns and voluntarily puts on the letter 'A'.

If Hester cannot accept the reality of the scarlet letter out of defiance and Dimmesdale out of cowardice, then Chillingworth is not able to accept it out of pride. Returning from wilderness, the first thing that he encounters is the glittering letter 'A' on his wife's bosom and this wounds his pride. After rationalizing about it, however, he realizes that it is not entirely Hester's fault that the letter 'A' is on her dress. This realization, instead of leading him to an acceptance of the universality of sin, leads him to fix all the blame, and, therefore, all his hatred, on the unknown lover. Moreover, since no one knows the identity of the lover, it seems a challenge to his intellectual powers to try and find out the identity of the lover. This intellectual pride leads him to apply methods of scientific investigations on human problems and he goes on to commit what in Hawthorne is the unpardonable sin--the violation of the sanctity of the human heart and he slowly but surely becomes a devil. His hideous vengeance on Dimmesdale becomes a crime against all humanity because

he coldly and deliberately punishes him for that which the latter shares with every other human being.

Pearl helps to give the novel its self-conscious dimension.<sup>6</sup> The Scarlet Letter, unlike the other three major romances, does not have an artist figure yet the theme of the artist is central to the book. Hawthorne repeatedly tells us that Pearl is the scarlet letter itself in a live and active form. But Pearl as a symbol represents not just the letter A on Hester's dress but also the novel itself. This argument can best be summed up by suggesting that when Hawthorne says of Pearl, 'It was the scarlet letter endowed with life' (p.143), he has in mind not just the letter on Hester's dress but also the title of the book itself. Through this device of the novel within the novel the novelist is able to show us that he is not just writing the story of Hester Prynne but is also watching himself write it; that even as he is telling the story of Hester Prynne he is also telling the story of its literary composition.<sup>7</sup> Through Pearl, Hawthorne is not only able to incorporate into the text his own theory of fiction but is also able to dramatize and articulate the nature of effort that has resulted in the fiction itself.

There are many important clues which give us the sense that Pearl as a symbol is equated with the novel

in Hawthorne's mind. Pearl's preoccupation with letter 'A' parallels the novel's preoccupation with it. In the novel Pearl is almost always associated with terms which Hawthorne habitually uses in his discussion of romance-- light and shadow and fairies, flowers, unreal airiness, an ability to flit and skip. The dressing up of Pearl in bizzare colours reflects Hawthorne own dressing up of the novel with 'deep hues'. Hawthorne used his observations of his daughter Una in describing and characterising Pearl. The novel too is the child of his brain. There is a demonic element in Pearl. She is the demon child-- both for Puritans and Hester. Hawthorne called his novel the 'hell fired story'. In Chapter 5 Hawthorne describes Pearl's hostility towards the visionary throng that she had created herself. This reminds one of Hawthorne's own dissatisfaction with his literary creations. He is reported to have burnt his earlier stories.<sup>8</sup> Finally, in the novel Pearl is associated with the written word. In the crucial forest chapter, Hawthorne tells us, 'She had been offered the world, these seven years past, as the living heiroglyphic,... all written in this symbol--all plainly manifest...' (pp.206-207).

The personification of an art object was also made easy by the organic element in the romantic theory that was current in his time. In The Mirror and the Lamp, Abrams



defines organicism as the aesthetic philosophy 'whose major categories are derived metaphorically from the attribute <sup>of</sup> living and growing things'.<sup>9</sup> In organic theory, some of the qualities that characterise living beings are transferred to works of art. Through Pearl, Hawthorne performs the neat trick of reversing the process. He uses the organic qualities shared by the work of art and living being to personify his novel in the character of Pearl. Later in his career, Hawthorne uses the same device explicitly by personifying in Donatello an aesthetic object—the statue of the Marble Faun.

Abrams outlines the main features of organicism. The living plant, Abrams tells <sup>us,</sup> ~~us,~~ was the 'principle paradigm' governing the description of the organic work of art. Like the plant, the organic work of art grows and in growing assimilates diverse elements of earth, air and water. But in assimilating these elements, it transforms them and spontaneously organises them into a structure of organic unity that is all its own. The evolution is spontaneous and the organic work of art comes into being almost independent of author's intention. Its creation is seen as a spontaneous overflow which is not entirely within the author's control.<sup>10</sup>

Pearl, throughout the novel, is associated with the living plant, 'that little creature, whose innocent life had sprung by the inscrutable decree of providence,

a lovely and immortal flower...' (p.136). Like an organic work of art, while growing Pearl too imbibes 'her soul from the spiritual world and her bodily frame from its material of earth' (p.137). Thus the warfare of Hester's spirit is perpetuated in her. However, like the organic work of art, though she had assimilated all this, she was 'a being whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder, or with an order peculiar to themselves, amidst which the point of variety and arrangement was difficult or impossible to be discovered' (p.137). Like the organic work of art, she too possesses a creativity of her own. 'The spell of life went forth from the ever creative spirit, and communicated itself to a thousand objects... the unlikeliest materials--a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower--were the puppets of Pearl's witchcraft, and without underdoing any outward chance became spiritually adapted to whatever drama occupied the stage of her inner world' (pp.239-240).

If Pearl is indeed the novel within the novel, then as a character her actions and reactions must always be in accordance with the central vision of the book. In a sense she cannot be considered an independent character since her point of view must at all points be the same as the novel's view point. If we examine the role of Pearl in the book, we will find that this is indeed so. She is

the living hieroglyphic in which the real meaning of the novel is made plain. Her actions become a living commentary on the central argument of the book.

For the Puritans the recognition of the reality of sin does not lead to sympathy and compassion. Instead, it leads to cruelty. Therefore, for them Pearl is a 'half-fledged angel of judgement--whole mission was to punish the sins of rising generations' (p.144). All through the novel, her attitude to the Puritans is consistently hostile. She is a living reminder that in the novel's scheme of things sin is not an offence that should lead to forced isolation. According to Hawthorne, Hester is in danger of not recognizing and accepting the reality of sin because of the cruel punishment imposed by society and because of her own inner defiance. In relation to Hester, Pearl has two main functions to perform. She saves Hester from the perils of isolation and also from the perils born of her inner defiance of the letter A. Hester tells Governor Bellingham, 'Pearl keeps me here in life! Pearl punishes me too! See ye not she is the scarlet letter...' (p.150). Pearl's other function is to check Hester's defiance by keeping alive in her the consciousness of the letter A. Thus the very first object which Pearl seems to become aware of is the letter A. And all through the novel with an oddly conscious look in her eyes she keeps playing with the letter to the infinite 'torture of Hester'.

Despite Pearl, and the letter 'A' on her bosom, Hester reaches the intellectual position of rebellion which is in opposition to the dark idea embodied in the scarlet letter. Hawthorne shows us that Hester is on the wrong track through Pearl. In Chapter 15 (that is, immediately after Hawthorne had discussed the changes that had come in Hester in course of seven years) Hester's integrity is tested. Pearl after putting on the letter A on her own dress (in green) asks Hester with uncharacteristic earnestness '...mother dear, what does this scarlet letter mean? - and why dost thou wear it on the bosom? - and why does the minister keep his hand over his heart?' (p.190). Hester at that particular moment seems to recognize the significance of the letter 'A' on Pearl's bosom and her strange earnestness. Pearl, thought Hester, might be seeking to establish a meeting point of sympathy. 'If little Pearl were entertained with faith and trust', she thought, 'might it not be her errand to soothe away the sorrow that lay cold in the mother's heart...' (p.191). But despite this realization, Hester Prynne lies to Pearl and Hawthorne comments, 'some new evil had crept into it (her heart) or some old one had never been expelled' (p.191). This lie coming at the end of the chapter parallels the lie which Dimmesdale tells earlier to the old sexton and which reflects his moral degeneration. Hawthorne further drives home the point when

Hester getting angry at Pearl's insistence speaks with an 'asperity she had never permitted to herself before'. 'Do not tease me, else I shall shut thee into the dark closet' (p.191). The scarlet letter had indeed failed to do its office for in threatening Pearl with imprisonment Hester has come a full circle since the day she stepped out of the prison.

Later, the rebellious Hester throws off the scarlet letter and Pearl forces it back upon her. The scene is complex and elaborate symbolism is used. The forest with all its wild vital sympathies, symbolizes untamed nature which is neither immoral nor moral but simply a-moral. Thus its shifting shadows reflect the mental condition of the protagonist. For Hester 'it imaged the moral wilderness in which she had so long been wondering' (p.192), but for Pearl 'the great black forest--stern as it showed itself to those who brought the guilt and the trouble of the world into its bosom--became the playmate of the lonely infant...' (p.205). When Hester and Dimmesdale decide to escape and Hester throws off the scarlet letter, the lovers experience a sense of release. The amoral forest shares their bliss. The brook symbolizing life and time is also amoral and, therefore, it also shares the joy of the two lovers. But both the brook and forest also support Pearl who has an entirely different attitude to the scarlet letter. Thus

when she insists that Hester should put the letter back where it belongs, she is in 'close sympathy with the antique wood'. The crucial difference, however, is that when the forest sympathizes with Hester and Dimmesdale, it sympathizes as the wild heathen forest which had never been 'subjugated by human law or illumined by higher truth' (p.205). But its sympathy for Pearl is expressed through the adornment of flowers which helps to create in her the spiritualised self which in turn is reflected by the brook. 'Just where she had paused, the brook chanced to form a pool, so smooth and quiet that it reflected a perfect image of her little figure, with all the brilliant picturesqueness of her beauty, in its adornments of flowers and wreathed foliage, but more refined and spiritualized than reality' (p.207). The vital sympathies of amoral nature and the movement of life and time support both Pearl and the lovers. The dividing line between the two lies in the different attitude that is adopted towards the reality of sin. When the lovers throw off the whole burden of sin and decide to live their life away from the issue of sin they experience joy, freedom, and release. But Pearl, who preserves a true instinctive awareness of the reality of sin and who forces the letter 'A' back on Hester's dress, is also supported by the forest and the brook and their support is expressed in the creation of a spiritual self which is even more real and more beautiful than the actual self. The forest provides the flowers and

foliage for the adornment of Pearl while the brook reflects her spiritualized image.

Pearl standing at the edge of the brook can be seen as a vivid personification of Hawthorne's own conception of his book. Adorned with an imaginative recreation of natural reality and committed to the truth symbolized in the letter A, Hawthorne hoped that his romance, like Pearl, would have a spiritual essence that would be more beautiful than any form of empirical beauty. The romance, like Pearl would derive its spirituality and its beauty through the correct attitude to sin and its chief value would lie in its embodiment of the truth which marks both life and time--the universal brotherhood of man despite the reality of sin.

The forest scene makes clear Hawthorne's attitude to sexuality. Hawthorne sees it as an amoral not immoral vitalising force. Without it, Chillingworth is seen to be cold and deformed. To begin with, Hester possesses rich, voluptuous, oriental beauty and an impulsive, passionate nature. But her isolation and intellectual revolt makes her so hard that 'there seemed to be no longer anything in Hester's face for love to dwell on'. However, in the forest when she throws off the letter A and lets her hair down, her features recover their softness. 'Her sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty came back from what men call the irrevocable past and clustered themselves, with her

maiden hope, and a happiness before unknown, within the magic circle of this hour' (p.209). Love, Hawthorne says, must always create sunshine but it cannot do away with the problem of evil. Hester throws away the letter A but what is she to do with the letter A in live form? The reality of evil, precisely because it is real, cannot be ignored, and Hester's attempt to do so, for all the attendant joy and release does not succeed. Also, in the joys of love there is a temptation for dangerous self-absorption. The decision of the lovers to get rid of the letter A and come together falsifies not just the reality of Pearl but also that of the Christian world of which they too are a part. Thus the nature which sympathizes with the lovers is wild heathen nature 'never subjugated by human law, nor illumined by higher truth'. In Hawthorne's scheme of things, this joy is a temptation that will lead to damnation not grace. Vitality that accompanies sexuality must be allied with sympathy--which is not possible without a genuine acceptance of the reality of evil. If it is not accompanied by sympathy, it will become a destructive force, that will merely re-enact past mistakes. For Hawthorne, Hester and Dimmesdale are not renewing their love. Rather they are re-enacting their earlier sin of passion but this time with 'principle and purpose'.



Dimmesdale is unable to accept the reality of sin because of cowardice. Therefore, with Dimmesdale Pearl's endeavour is to save him from the destructive consequences of his own cowardice and hypocrisy. In the beginning, she sympathizes with him but as falsehood begins to eat into his being, she becomes hostile. At the Pillory she wouldn't let Dimmesdale hold her hand because he refused to come out into the open with Hester and herself. Little later, she mocks him 'Thou wast not bold!--thou wast not true!--Thou wouldst not promise to take my hand, and mother's hand, tomorrow noontide!" (p.177). In the forest she would not acknowledge the minister and when the latter kisses her she runs to the brook and washes her forehead 'until the unwelcome kiss was quite washed off'. Later, after the minister had made his great confession, he asked Pearl, 'dear little Pearl, wilt thou kiss me now? Thou wouldst not, yonder, in the forest! But now thou wilt?' And Pearl 'with tears falling upon her father's cheek kissed his lips.' (p.236)

Thus Pearl forces Hester and Dimmesdale to recognize and accept the reality of the letter A. And in face of that reality makes them characters well deserving of our sympathy. Appropriately, as a character she herself grows by learning to sympathize. Like the letter A, which through misunderstanding becomes a mark of devil, but which if

properly understood defines the limitations of humanity and opens the door to new and potent sympathies, Pearl too is poised between the demoniac and the human. She has drunk at the turmoil and anguish that had pervaded her mother's system and to the Puritan as to Hester herself, she seemed at times, a 'demon child'. But as Hester recognises at a critical juncture in the novel, 'In the little chaos of Pearl's character there might be seen emerging-- and could have been, from the very first--the steadfast principles of an unflinching courage--an uncontrollable will--a sturdy pride, which might be disciplined into self respect--and a bitter scorn of many things, which, when examined, might be found to have the taint of falsehood in them' (p.190). All that she needed was something which some people wait for throughout life--'a grief that should deeply touch her, and thus humanize and make her capable of sympathy' (p.193). The last great scene where Dimmesdale confesses and forces everyone else to acknowledge the reality of sin, develops her sympathies in precisely this manner. 'A spell was broken. The great scene of grief in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upto her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it. Towards her mother, too, Pearl's errand as a messenger of anguish was all fulfilled' (p.236). It is in this development of

her sympathies that Pearl comes to differ so much from Chillingworth. She had performed the same function in respect of Hester that Chillingworth performed in respect to Dimmesdale. But Chillingworth without these sympathies ended up committing the unpardonable sin while Pearl embodying the only possible positive value the novel can offer relieves the darkening close of this tale of human frailty and sorrow. That Hawthorne intended this to be so is clear from the fact that all along the track of the story Pearl has been associated with the rose-bush first mentioned in the opening chapter.

Pearl's role in the action of the novel confirms the idea that as a symbol she represents the novel itself. This gives the novel, as said earlier, its self-consciousness dimension. Hawthorne uses the device to articulate in the text his views on the origins and aims of art. At one point in the novel, Pearl asks Hester who created her and Hester answers hesitantly that it is the heavenly father who has sent her but Pearl does not agree. 'He did not send me. I have no heavenly father' (p.142). At Governor Bellingham's house, Mr Wilson asks Pearl the same question and she answers that she had been plucked by her mother off the rosebush of the wild roses that grew by the prison door' (p.150). The little scene, if we accept Pearl as novel within the novel dramatises, Hawthorne's critique of romantic theory. In romantic theory a work of art is seen as second

nature created by poet in an act analogous to God's creation of the world. Hawthorne, with his Puritanical heritage, could not accept this. For him, work of art was not a repetition in the finite mind of infinite principle of creation. It was rather a result of sympathy born of the consciousness of universal sinfulness of man. Significantly, the rose-bush mentioned by Pearl was explicitly associated by Hawthorne with the value of sympathy in the first chapter.

Unlike the romantic work of art, the Hawthornian work of art is designed not so much for the pleasure of the audience as to bring home to him the rather unpleasant truth about the reality of sin. The function of art for Hawthorne is very clearly the spiritual education of the reader by enabling him to come to terms with the negative realities of humanity. Thus in The Marble Faun he singles out Guido's painting of Beatrice and Sodoma's painting of Christ for special praise. Pearl, like the book, is shown to be conscious of the reality of sin symbolized by letter <sup>'A'</sup> right from the beginning. Her role in the book (as we have already seen), is the same as the function which the book itself is supposed to serve as a work of art. Committed to truth, she brings all those with whom she comes into contact, to accept the reality of sin. In the final analysis she embodies Hawthorne's conviction regarding the positive role which art can play in the fallen world. Not only does she connect the sinful creator with the rest of humanity but she, like all

art objects, born of the consciousness of sin, becomes the symbol, a living hieroglyphic, of the idea that sin instead of leading humanity to damnation might actually lead it to redemption by enabling it to discover its common bond.

How strange, indeed! Man had marked this women's sin by a scarlet letter, which had such potent and disastrous efficacy that no human sympathy could reach her save it were sinful like herself. God, as a direct consequence of the sin which man thus punished, had given her a lovely child, whose place was on the same dishonored bosom, to connect her parent forever with the race and descent of mortals and to be finally a blessed soul in heaven!

(p.136)

Through the device of the novel within the novel, Hawthorne is able to give us insights into the difficulties which the author faces while writing. The work of art, as said earlier, begins to have an independent existence in the mind of the writer. Occasionally much to his discomfiture, it seems entirely out of his control. Hester's situation in respect to Pearl parallels the writer's situation in respect to his book. Mindful of her own errors, Hester tries to impose a 'tender discipline' on the infant mortality that was in her charge but fails entirely. This naturally causes her much agony which the author too must have felt in relation to his book. 'Hester sometimes burst into passionate tears... Brooding over all these matters the mother felt like one who has evolved a spirit,

but by some irregularity in the process of conjuration, has failed to win the master word, that should control this new and incomprehensible intelligence' (p.138).

A particularly distressing consequence for the author is that this independent work of art, since it is committed to truth begins to reflect even those aspects of the author's personality which the latter would rather not face. In The Marble Faun Miriam's paintings reflect the revengeful thoughts that haunt her. In The Scarlet Letter, Hester the creator, sees reflected in the created object, Pearl, not only turmoil anguish and despair but also her own hatred of the Puritans. 'It appalled her, nevertheless, to discern here again a shadowy reflection of that evil that had existed in herself' (p.139). But even more disturbing is the fiendlike face which Hester sees in Pearl's eyes. Thus Hester looking for her own image in the black mirror of Pearl's eyes often sees another face, 'fiendlike, full of smiling malice, yet bearing the semblance of features that she had known fully well, though seldom with smile and never with malice in them' (p.141). The face described here can only belong to Dimmesdale and it seems fiendlike because Pearl's eyes are reflecting the hidden unconscious hatred which both Hester and Dimmesdale despite all their love, feel for each other. Thus Hester leaves Dimmesdale in the hands of Chillingworth for seven

long years '...or perhaps in the misanthropy of her own trouble, she left the minister to bear what she might picture to herself as a more tolerable doom' (p.198).

On his part, Dimmesdale envies Hester her chance to 'work out an open triumph over evil within'. Thus when the two meet in the forest, 'it was with fear... and, as it were, by a slow reluctant necessity, that Arthur Dimmesdale put forth his hand, chill as death, and touched the chill hand of Hester Prynne' (p.197). Later, when Hester tells him that she will accompany him if he decides to escape, his spontaneous reaction is a kind of horror at her boldness. The fiendlike look mirrored in Pearl's eyes becomes real, when Hester tells Dimmesdale about Chillingworth. 'The minister looked at her for an instant, with all that violence of passion, which... was in fact the portion of him which the Devil claimed, and through which he sought to win the rest. Never was there a blacker or a fiercer frown than Hester now encountered. For the brief space that it lasted, it was a dark transfiguration' (p.199).

At the end of the book, Hawthorne moralizes, 'It is a curious subject of observation and enquiry whether hatred and love be not the same thing at bottom'. D.H. Lawrence in his essay on The Scarlet Letter has given a miraculous analysis of this hidden current of hostility between the two lovers. <sup>||</sup> Undoubtedly, Hawthorne knew disagreeable things in his soul and the novel, whether he likes it or

not, reflects them all, just as the black mirror of Pearl's eyes reveal to Hester her own innermost drives.

Hawthorne knew that a work of art should be sincere. But if <sup>it</sup>were to be totally sincere, it could easily express too much. Expressive art has the advantage of authenticity but what it reveals might be too dangerous to confront. In The Marble Faun, Kenyon is afraid of his statue of Cleopatra and Donatello is terrified of what he sees reflected in Mirriam's paintings. In The Scarlet Letter, Hester is afraid of what she sees reflected in Pearl and thinks of her as the child of a devil. Hawthorne too expressed similar fear and hostility towards his own work when he described The Scarlet Letter as a 'hell-fired story'.

Feidelson in his Symbolism and American Literature argues that symbolists necessarily depict the mind of the writer at the creative pitch. Although Feidelson thinks of Hawthorne as someone caught between allegory and symbolism, in The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne emerges as a perfect symbolist who can tell a tale, as well as the story of the tale's creation, at the same time.



Notes

<sup>1</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter in The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne ed. Norman Holmes Pearson, pp.112-13. All quotations refer to this edition; the page number is given in parentheses.

<sup>2</sup>For illuminating symbolic reading of The Scarlet Letter, see Q.D. Leavis, 'Hawthorne as a poet' in Twentieth Century Interpretation ed. A.N. Kaul, pp. 43-52; Hyatt H. Waggoner, A Critical Study (1951 rev. 1963 rpt. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 126-60.

<sup>3</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, Letter to Fields, Jan 20, 1850, quoted by Stewart in Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography (1848; rpt. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1949), pp.94-95.

<sup>4</sup>Feidler in Love and Death in the American Novel points out that the letter A represents 'the beginning of all things and in New England Primer's stood for Adam's fall" in which we sinned all", p.230.

<sup>5</sup>The exactness of the parallel is increased by the fact that the original Scarlet letters were AD. For details see Smith's Eve Tempted, p.29.

<sup>6</sup>Pearl has attracted critical attention right from the beginning. Discussion started with Mrs Anne W. Abbot's article in The Northern American Review, in July 1850. Reprinted in J.D. Crowlee ed. Hawthorne: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p.166; James finds Pearl's characterisation too fanciful, pp.92-93; Lawrence devotes the last four pages of his article on The Scarlet Letter to Pearl, pp.103-107; with Waggoner, the discussion shifted to the symbolic function of the child. See also Ann Marie McNamara, 'The Character of Flame: The function of Pearl in The Scarlet Letter', American Literature, XXVII (Jan. 1956), pp.537-53.

<sup>7</sup>See Marie Oliver Kiely Bell, 'The Personified Authors in Fiction: Hawthorne, Warren and Fowles', Dissertation Abstracts, 40(1979), 2659A (North Carolina).

<sup>8</sup>See Stewart, Hawthorne: A Biography (1948; rpt. Yale Univ. Press, 1949), p. 29.

<sup>9</sup>Abrams, p.168.

<sup>10</sup>Abrams, pp.171-77.

<sup>11</sup>D.H. Lawrence, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne and The Scarlet Letter' in Studies in Classic American Literature, pp.89-107.

Chapter IIITHE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES

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In The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne had stated in unambiguous terms that for humanity there cannot be any escape from past sin. But determined to write a more cheerful novel, Hawthorne in The House of Seven Gables shows in Hepzibah and Clifford, a partial repair of the breach which guilt has once made into the human soul, and in Phoebe and Holgrave, a complete repair. Concerned with the relationship of the present with the past, Hawthorne in this novel is trying to show that though the present is inextricably linked with the past, that though the past tends to re-enact itself in the present, it is still possible for the inheritors to undo the knot of the past and chart out a future which is not a re-enactment but a renewal.

The past in The House of the Seven Gables is both the Biblical past of all mankind and the Puritan past of the Pyncheons and the Maules. When Matthew Maule built his house, he chose an Arcadian spot, 'a natural spring of soft water--a rare treasure on the sea grit peninsula, where the Puritan settlement was made--had early induced (him) to build a hut...<sup>1</sup> But the original innocence of the spot is

violated by the abuse of Maule's right as the first owner and by his unjust persecution as a supposed wizard, by Colonel Pyncheon. Thus when the house of the Seven Gables is built, the spring turns brackish and the house itself becomes a symbol of the original guilt which is passed from generation to generation. 'If so, we are left to dispose of the awful query, whether each inheritor of the property--conscious of the wrong, and failing to rectify it--did not commit anew the great guilt of his ancestor and incur all its original responsibilities' (p.254). The house also becomes the focus of resentment for the succeeding Maule generations. This resentment culminates in the hideous revenge extracted by Mathew Maule on Alice Pyncheon.

The present in The House of the Seven Gables is being lived by Hepzibah, Clifford, Holgrave and Phoebe and it is shown to be intimately linked to the past by the concept of inheritance. Hepzibah and Clifford inherit the great house and with it the guilt that isolates them from the rest of the society and destroys their vitality. Judge Pyncheon inherits not only the features of Colonel Pyncheon but also his temperament and his ruthless acquisitiveness. The judge's character shows 'that the weakness and defects, the bad passions, the mean tendencies and the moral diseases which lead to crime are handed down from one generation to another by a far surer process of transmission than human

law has been able to establish in respect to the riches and honours which it seeks to entail upon posterity' (p.314). Holgrave inherits the mysterious Maule eye and also the hidden hostility of the Maule's for the Pyncheons. Phoebe, though she comes from outside, bears the ancestral relation to Alice Pyncheon and like her she too is essentially innocent. The garden of the house described as 'Eden of a thunder smitten Adam' also reflects the biblical past that underlies this Puritan tale. Because of the remarkable continuity, the present is seen as virtual prisoner of the past and the mistakes of the past generations threaten to repeat themselves again in the present. In the case of Judge Pyncheon, the past does re-enact itself completely. Not only does he pursue wealth and power with the energy and ruthless unscrupulousness of the old colonel, but he also meets a similar fate. He too dies in his hour of triumph, his beard saturated with blood. Hepzibah and Clifford, Holgrave and Phoebe are, however, shown to escape from the trap of their inheritance. Hepzibah and Clifford regain at least part of their humanity while Holgrave and Phoebe transfigure the earth and make it Eden again. It is by concentrating on this movement of renewal that we will be able to unravel the intricacies of action and arrive at the core of the book's meaning.<sup>2</sup>

The movement of renewal in Hepzibah begins when forced by necessity she opens a shop in the house. The unhealthy house embodying the Pyncheon guilt is exposed by this act of Hepzibah to the healthy influences of the outside world. As Holgrave her first customer tells her, 'Hitherto the life blood had been chilling in your veins as you sat aloof... Henceforth you'll at least have the sense of healthy and natural effort for a purpose, and of lending your strength--be it great or small--to the united struggle of mankind' (p.269). The truth of what Holgrave has said is borne out later when Hepzibah receives her first copper coin. Hawthorne describes the coin as a talisman which had a subtle effect on Hepzibah 'both in body and in mind'. After receiving the coin 'she felt the novelty of her position, but no longer with disturbance or affright. Now and then, there came a thrill of almost youthful enjoyment. It was the invigorating breath of fresh outward atmosphere, after the long torpor and monotonous seclusion of her life... The healthiest glow Hepzibah had known for years had come now... ' (p.275).

Later in the novel, though weak and timorous, she confronts Judge Pyncheon in the shop and proves more than a match for him. However, the escape from the house and the journey of the two owls is the final break from the past, "At last, therefore, and after so long estrangement

from everything that the world acted or enjoyed, they had drawn into the great current of human life, and were swept away with it, as by the suction of fate itself' (p.397). Clifford, Hepzibah's brother, and the other owner of the venerable mansion, is shown to be even more helpless and in a different way even more vain than Hepzibah about his past. Clifford is characterised as an abortive lover of the beautiful. A nature like Clifford's, Hawthorne points out, is always 'selfish in its essence' and this selfishness, despite its imprisonment is clearly visible in the instinctive way in which he turns away from Hepzibah just because she was old and ugly. Such was his inherent selfishness that Hawthorne finds it necessary to comment, 'It is even possible that if Clifford, in his foregoing life, had enjoyed the means of cultivating his taste to its utmost perfectibility, that subtle attribute might before this period, have completely eaten out or filed away his affection'. And from this point of view, even his long confinement had its advantages; 'shall we venture to pronounce, therefore, that his long and black calamity may not have had a redeeming drop of mercy at the bottom'? (p.310).

Clifford's cure too is seen in terms of ending his isolation and confinement within the house. When a political procession passes on the Pyncheon street, it seemed to Clifford that 'it was a mighty river of life'

and he feels if he were to join it, he would become another man. 'He needed a shock or perhaps he required to take a deep plunge into the ocean of human life, and to sink down and be covered by its profoundness, and then to emerge, sobered, invigorated, restored to the world and to himself' (p.342).

His escape from the house, after Judge Pyncheon's death, and his travel on the railroad is seen as just such a plunge. The railroad is described as 'life itself' and during the journey Clifford displays uncharacteristic initiative, energy and intellectual vigour as he develops his cyclic view of history.

Finally, after the house has been restored to a Maule and the 200 year old burden of guilt has been removed, we are shown a Clifford who has recovered a part of his faculties and who also has it in his heart to be kind to uncle Venner. The author comments:

The first effect of his freedom, as we have witnessed in Clifford's aimless flight, was tremulous exhilaration. Subsiding from it he did not sink into his former intellectual apathy. He, never, it is true, attained the full measure of what might have been his intellectual faculties. But he recovered enough of them to light up his character...'

(p.432)



Phoebe, the ancestral descendant of Alice Pyncheon, is characterised as unfallen and innocent. She comes to stay in the house of the Seven Gables from a rural New England village so she is not directly associated with the Pyncheon crime against the Maules. Her presence lightens the gloom of the dreary mansion and her genial temperament is the daily comfort of her two forlorn relatives. But because her innocence implies a non-awareness of the reality of sin, during the course of the action she has to go through a painful process of education that enables her to come to terms with the reality of the house in which she is living. It is only after she has recognised and accepted the reality of sin that she can play her part in the creation of New Eden at the end of the book.

The author makes it clear that Phoebe's innocence is a limitation in the context of the book. She is very good for Clifford but we are told that she is incapable of understanding his real self because 'her sphere lay too much in the actual'. This limitation is made even more visible in her assessment of Judge Pyncheon's character. When Hepzibah warns her that the Judge is wicked, she does not believe her and concludes that the latter's judgement was coloured by the family feud. 'A wider scope of view and a deeper insight may see rank, dignity and station all proved illusory, so far as regards to their claim to

human reverence, and yet not feel as if the universe were thereby tumbled into chaos. But Phoebe, in order to keep the universe in its old place, was fain to smother, in some degree, her own intuitions as to Judge Pyncheon's character...' (p.322).

It is this blindness about the negative forces operating beneath the surface of things that makes her such an easy victim of Holgrave's mesmerism. In the earlier era, Alice had put blind faith in her own innocence and purity and had come to grief falling under Maule's spell. Phoebe too would have been lost, but for the fact that Holgrave, at a critical point, is able to resist the temptation of establishing his control over her. In the course of action, it is this preconceived optimism, this easy faith in world's goodness, which Phoebe loses. She tells Holgrave before she leaves for the country, 'I have grown a great deal older, in this little time. Older, and, I hope, wiser, and--not exactly sadder--but certainly with not half so much lightness in my spirits!' (p.372). Holgrave puts her 'loss' in perspective by commenting 'you have lost nothing worth keeping, nor which it was possible to keep'. He goes on to say that in the development of the soul it is only by losing the 'shallow gayety of youth' that one recovers profounder happiness. The book records precisely such a growth in Phoebe. When she returns from the country sojourn, we are told that she is not like the Phoebe who

had arrived earlier. 'Though not altogether so blooming as when she first tripped into our story--for, in the few intervening weeks, her experience had made her graver, more womanly and deeper eyed, in token of heart, that had begun to suspect its depths' (p.422). And it is this grown and changed Phoebe who with Holgrave later transfigures the earth into another Eden, overthrowing the mighty hold of the past on the present.

Holgrave, the revolutionary, is shown to have an enquiring and analytical mind both ego-centric, and in human terms, cold. When Phoebe refuses to pry deeply into Clifford's soul, Holgrave asserts, 'had I your opportunities, no scruple would prevent me from fathoming Clifford to the full depth of my plummet line' (p.350). The same cold analytical mind is clearly reflected in the reasons which he gives for his irrational involvement with the fate of the two Pyncheons:

It is not my impulse, as regards these two individuals, either to help or to hinder, but to look on, to analyze, to explain matters to myself, and to comprehend the drama which for almost two hundred years has been dragging its slow strength over the ground where you and I now tread. If permitted to witness the close, I doubt not to derive a moral satisfaction from it go matters how they may.

(p.373).

Phoebe is appalled at this and she begins to doubt whether Holgrave is a friend or an enemy. She points out that he seems to be looking at Hepzibah's and Clifford's misfortunes as if it was all part of a tragedy. 'I do not like this'. She goes on to say categorically, 'the play costs the performers too much and the audience is too cold hearted' (p.373).

Mathew Maul, in an earlier era, had displayed a similar cold arrogance in his treatment of Alice Pyncheon. The past suddenly catches up with Holgrave when Phoebe, listening to his story, is nearly mesmerised. He could see as he finished his story 'that with one wave of the hand and a corresponding effort of his will he could complete his mastery over her' (p.370).

The temptation to do so is enormous and Hawthorne deliberately links the temptation to the qualities Holgrave had inherited from his past, his cold enquiring mind and his egoistic desire to exercise power over others. 'To a disposition like Holgrave, at once speculative and active, there is no temptation so great as the opportunity of acquiring empire over the human spirit, nor any idea more seductive to a young man, than to become the arbiter of a young girl's destiny' (p.370). That Holgrave is able to overcome this temptation is a victory over the negative self that he had inherited from the past. His complete emergence

from the past, however, is possible only when he can realise that as an audience he is not all that distant, that his cold hearted observation of the Pyncheon drama was actually destroying him too. After the death of Judge Pyncheon, his arrogance melts away in the face of precisely this realization and he is able to surrender fully to the rejuvenating love of Phoebe.

The presence of the yonder dead man threw a great black shadow over everything; he made the universe, so far as my perception could reach, a scene of guilt and of retribution more dreadful than <sup>the</sup> guilt. The sense of it look away my youth. I never hoped to feel young again! The world looked strange, wild, evil, hostile; my past life, so lonesome and dreary; my future, a shapeless gloom, which I must mould into gloomy shapes! But Phoebe, you crossed the threshold; and hope, warmth and joy came in with you! The black moment at once became a blissful one. It must not pass without the spoken word. I love you.

(p.427)

It is his love for Phoebe that finally helps him to emerge out of the prison of his own ego. Holgrave's later recapitulation of his own radical position, however, unconvincing or unsatisfactory it might seem to the reader, is seen by Hawthorne as something positive because it marks the complete surrender of his ego and, therefore, the snapping of the last link with the dead past.

Cutting across the action of the novel are the two other major thematic concerns of Hawthorne: contemporary American history and sexuality. The lessons drawn from the reality of sin are applied to the particular historical situation of America and to the emotional life of individuals.

The contrast between Hepzibah and Clifford, who are the direct inheritors of the Pyncheon guilt and the comparative outsiders, Phoebe and Holgrave, is deliberately developed by Hawthorne as a contrast between old gentility and the rising democracy. Phoebe's self reliance, her vitality and her ability to manage the kitchen and the school are credited to the fact that her father married beneath his rank; while Hepzibah's genteel helplessness, her inability to merge with human sympathies, is seen to be a result of 'her deeply cherished and ridiculous consciousness of long descent, her shadowy claim to princely territory' (p.291). It was, Hawthorne goes to state explicitly 'a fair parallel between New Plebianism and old Gentility' (p.291).

Reinforcing the contrast is the presentation of Holgrave as a representative young American. Homeless, continually changing his whereabouts and his occupation, he nevertheless possesses an identity of his own and also a conscience. He thinks of himself as a thinker who wants to discover his own path. Summing him up, Hawthorne writes:

Altogether in his culture and want of culture, in his crude, wild misty philosophy, and the practical experience that counteracted some of its tendencies, in his magnanimous zeal of man's welfare and his recklessness of whatever the ages had established in man's behalf; in his faith and infidelity, in what he had and what he lacked--the artist might fitly enough stand forth as the representative of many compeers in his native land.

(p.351)

And as a representative American he hates the past and looks forward to the future. He tells Phoebe:

...Just think a moment, and it will startle you to see what slaves we are to by gone times--to Death, if we give the matter the right word. A dead man, if he happens to have made a will, disposes of wealth no longer his own... A dead man sits on all our judgement seats; and living judges do but search out and repeat his decisions. We read in dead man's books! We laugh at dead men's jokes, and cry at dead men's pathos! We are sick of dead men's diseases, physical and moral, and die of the same remedies with which dead doctors killed their patients! We worship the living deity according to dead man's forms and creeds. Whatever we seek to do, of our own free motion, a dead man's icy hand obstructs us! And we must be dead ourselves before we can begin to have our proper influence on our own world, which will then be no longer our world, but the world of another generation, with which we shall have no shadow of a right to interfere...

(p.353)

He repeatedly reiterates the advantages of democracy and frowns upon the older aristocratic system. He tells Hepzibah, 'These names of gentleman and lady had a meaning in the past history of the world and conferred privileges, desirable or otherwise, on those entitled to bear them. In the present--and still more in the future condition of society--they imply, not privileges, but restrictions' (p.269).

The significance of rising democracy and healthy advantages for mankind associated with it are made apparent not just through the representative figures of Phoebe and Clifford, but also through the actions and reactions of Hepzibah and Clifford. After opening the shop and regaining part of her humanity, even Hepzibah begins to entertain a sentiment of virulence towards the idle aristocracy to which it had been so recently been her pride to belong' (p.275). And Clifford at one dramatic moment, wants to end his isolation once and for all by joining a passing political procession.

Although the superiority of the democrats vis-a-vis the older, feudal gentility is stressed, Hawthorne is conscious of the limitations that go with democratic individualism and his representative characters have to face and overcome these limitations before they can create a new Eden. Phoebe has to grow out of her settled and easy optimism and come to terms with the harsh realities around, while Holgrave has to rise above the perils of egoism and has to learn to



treat human beings as human beings and not as objects of cold-hearted enquiry.

Parallaling this is the presentation and analysis of the other major force that was shaping contemporary American society--the ownership of private property and the lust for wealth that went with it. In the Preface, Hawthorne had commented on the folly of 'tumbling down an avalanche of illgotten gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity, thereby to maim and crush them...' and in the book, this theme is reiterated continuously.

It is because of this sustained criticism of the ownership of private property and all that it brings in its wake that the conclusion of the book seems so dissatisfying. In the end, we see Phoebe, Hepzibah, Clifford and Holgrave happily driving off into the sunset after inheriting the property of the villainous judge. The judge, being a reincarnation of the old Colonel stands as a type for the ruthless crafty, immoral and greedy individual who would do anything to accumulate wealth and his legacy cannot be cleansed merely by handing it over to one of his victims. In the interests of poetic justice, Hawthorne seems to have overlooked the fact that in bestowing illgotten gain on all those who had been previously deprived of it, he was sowing all over again, the same seeds of evil.

Mattheissen seeks to explain the contradiction by emphasising Hawthorne's faith in the continuation of the democratic opportunity. Mattheissen writes, 'He (Hawthorne) took for granted that in democratic society, the domineering influence of private wealth would not be able to hold the evil sway that it did in the narrow aristocratic era of the Colonel Pyncheon'.<sup>3</sup> Alan Lloyd Gardener Smith sees in the ending 'the least attractive ideology of the American Renaissance'--a yet another attempt to reconcile economic inequality by imposing a symbolic reading of wealth.<sup>34</sup>

This problematic ending, however, highlights one of the major weaknesses in all of Hawthorne's writings. His conviction about the reality of evil being the only truth available to man enables him to penetrate the front put up by individuals and society and identify all that is going wrong--but the same conviction undercuts his ability to suggest any effective countermeasure that would cure the ills that he has himself pinpointed. His writings are full of radical perceptions but there are no radical remedies. Because he tries to demonstrate the truth of evil as the only truth and because in his framework it is neither possible nor desirable for man to try and cure the original cause of all that is wrong, in terms of the day-to-day world of buying and selling, he is automatically left upholding the status quo. This weakness is particularly noticeable--

and irksome--in this novel because he has provided it with a 'happy ending'. His other romances, in accord with his dark, imaginative logic, close darkly.

The contrast between the guilty and the less guilty, between old gentility and new plebianism is worked out in terms of sexuality as well. Hepzibah and Clifford, isolated in their mansion and living utterly in the past, are entirely devoid of any sexuality. Phoebe and Holgrave are, on the other hand, vital and sensual. Holgrave is portrayed as young and energetic with a forceful and energetic personality which attracts Phoebe. While Phoebe for all her innocence, rouses some form of sexual desire in the Judge and even in the decrepit Clifford. Sexuality in the book is, therefore, seen as both vitalising and humanising. But inherent in his treatment of the theme is the acute realization that without sympathy, sexuality would degenerate into a vicious war of the sexes, the desire of the male to dominate the female, and the effort of the female to resist the domination.

The most striking illustration of Hawthorne's consciousness of what sexuality can degenerate into is his description of the sex life of the Puritans and their treatment of their wives. In tracing the similarities between Colonel Pyncheon, the original progenitor, and Judge Pyncheon his later reincarnation, Hawthorne writes:

The Puritan--if not belied by some singular stories, murmured even at this day, under the narrator's breath--had fallen into certain transgressions to which men of his great animal development, whatever their faith or principles, must continue liable, until they put of impurity, along with the gross earthly substance that involves it... The Puritan, again, an autocrat in his own household had worn out three wives and, merely by the remorseless weight and hardness of his character in the conjugal relation, had sent them, one after another, broken hearted, to their grave... The judge had wedded but a single wife, and lost her in the third and fourth year of their marriage. There was a fable... that the lady got her death blow in the honeymoon, and never smiled again, because her husband compelled her to serve him with coffee, every morning at his bedside, in token of fidelity to her liege and master.

(p.317)

The phenomenon of mesmerism lends itself easily to discussion of sexuality and it is through mesmerism that Hawthorne analyzes the nature of conflict inherent in man and woman relationship, both in The House of the Seven Gables and The Blithedale Romances. In this novel, Alice and Maule are attracted to each other but because of the pride of the former, and the revengefulness of the latter, the attraction degenerates into a conflict between 'woman's might' and 'man's might' which as Hawthorne points out, is a 'match not often equal on the part of woman'. Alice loses, becomes a plaything of the Maule and dies a horrible death, Phoebe too feels the animal magnetism of Holgrave's personality and

is exposed to the same danger as Alice. The effects of mesmerism are once again described in terms of sado-masochistic sexual surrender.

With the lids drooping over her eyes,  
 ...she leaned slightly towards him, and  
 seemed almost to regulate her breath by  
 his... His glance, as he fastened it  
 on the young girl, grew involuntarily  
 more concentrated; in his attitude there  
 was the consciousness of power, investing  
 his hardly mature figure with a dignity  
 that did not belong to this physical  
 manifestation.

(p.370)

Unlike Maule, Holgrave possessed the high quality of reverence for another's individuality. Though severely tempted, he does not repeat the mistake of Mathew Maule. In the end it is Phoebe's love that saves him by enabling him to shed his coldness and his egoism.

In the novel, Hawthorne self-consciously examines problems concerning the American artist in particular and artists in general. In the grasping and materialistic nineteenth century American, the artist was generally an isolated and misunderstood figure. In his story 'The Artist of the Beautiful', Hawthorne had given full expression to the conflict between the artist OwenWarland and his hostile environment. In The House of the Seven Gables, the same theme is echoed once again for Clifford is characterized

as an abortive lover of the beautiful who because of his aesthetic temperament is utterly helpless before the grasping energy of the materialistic judge. Hawthorne states explicitly that any conflict between them is like flinging a procelian vase, with already a crack in it, against 'a granite column'. Through this unequal math, Hawthorne depicts how the hard competitive drives that underlie the growing commercialism turn against and crush potentially richer aesthetic existence.

In this book, however, all is not well on the aesthetic front either. Unlike Owen Warland, Clifford is not idolised and Hawthorne uses him to pinpoint the weaknesses and defects that can underlie the artistic temperament. Through Clifford he shows that the excessive fondness of beauty can easily lead one away from the chaotic human existence and the isolation can breed a selfish demand for the gratification of one's own need. Clifford's partial redemption begins only after he had plunged into life by his escape on the railroad, and after he had learned to value uncle Venner's simplicity and goodness. Significantly, all these changes in Clifford are linked to his growing awareness of the working of sin in human history in general and his own history in particular. 'You are aware, my dear Sir,' he tells the old gentleman on the train, 'that all human progress is in a circle... While we fancy ourselves going straight forward, and attaining, at every step, an entirely new

position of affairs, we do actually return to something long ago tried and abandoned... The past is but a coarse and sensual prophecy of the present and future'. Applying his new found wisdom to his own particular situation, he goes on to say, 'what we call real estate--the solid ground to build a house on--is the board foundation on which nearly all the ~~quiet~~<sup>guilt</sup> of the world rest. A man will commit almost any wrong--he will heap up an immense pile of wickedness, as hard as granite, and which will weigh as heavily upon his soul, to eternal ages--only to build a great, gloomy dark chambered mansion, for himself to die in, and for his posterity to be miserable in' (p.401). In short, Clifford's partial redemption as the lover of the beautiful is directly linked to his growing awareness of the workings of sin and resultant growth in sympathy as manifest in his treatment of both Hepzibah and Venner.

Through Holgrave, Hawthorne highlights some of the other dangers that can beset the artist. Holgrave, being a photographer, is a practitioner of an empirical art-form but his claims for his art rest on non-empirical romantic ideals.

There is wonderful insight in Heaven's broad and simple sunshine. While we give it credit for only depicting the surface, it actually brings out the secret character, with a truth, that no painter could ever venture upon, even if he could detect it.

(p.298).

As an artist, therefore, he is exposed to the dangers inherent in both empirical and imaginative modes of perception. Obviously, Hawthorne too must have felt exposed to the same dangers; since he too as a romantic writer sought to bring together the ideal and the actual. As an empirical artist, he is exposed to the danger of becoming a mere cold hearted observer of life. He thinks of the actual lives being lived by the Pyncheons as a play and is such a cold hearted observer that Phoebe actually begins to doubt whether he is a friend or an enemy. As a romantic artist, he is exposed to the danger of self-absorption.

There is in the book a fresh look at the romantic aesthetics of reception. A major criterion of judging the excellence of a work of art in the romantic period was that of intensity, its capacity to cast a spell on its audience and move it to its very depths. In Hawthorne, however, any phenomenon that gives one individual power over others is suspect. Hawthorne dramatises and analyses the dangers inherent in the romantic aesthetics of reception through the phenomenon of mesmerism. Holgrave tells Phoebe the story of Mathew Maule and Alice. He tells it in such a way that he ends up exercising full control over his audience. So much so that he could have with just a little extra effort, once again perpetrated the crime of Mathew Maule. Unlike Mathew, Holgrave resists the temptation and goes on to create



with Phoebe's help a new Eden. Significantly, Holgrave's movement of renewal also begins only after he had shed his coldness and his habit of detached observation, and only after he had discovered in the love of Phoebe the value of surrendering the self rather than holding on to it egoistically.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, The House of the Seven Gables in The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Norman Holmes Pearson, p.246. All subsequent quotations refer to this edition; the page number is given in parentheses.

<sup>2</sup>Fogle in his discussion of the book in Hawthorne's Fiction: The light and the dark, seems to have missed this point completely. He writes, 'The House of the Seven Gables is concerned with the effects of evil action... As in The Scarlet Letter the act cannot be recalled; in the world there is no annullment, no wiping the slate clean...'p.150.

<sup>3</sup>Matthiessen, 'The House of the Seven Gables' in Hawthorne: Twentieth Century Views, ed. A.N. Kaul, p.150.

<sup>4</sup>Allan Gardner Lloyd Smith, Eve Tempted, p.47.

Chapter IVTHE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE

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In The Blithedale Romance, like in the other two romances, there are four major characters trying to come to terms with the reality of universal sin. Hollingsworth is egocentric and is totally absorbed in himself and in his schemes, Zenobia is proud and rebellious; Priscilla is innocent and ignorant and Covardale, as an active participant, is the superfluous man frittering away his energies because he seemingly lacks 'purpose'. The setting too is in many ways familiar. The farm where the idealists conduct their experiment of community living is given an Edenic dimension while the idealists themselves are repeatedly identified with Puritan forefathers. In this romance, Hawthorne once again exploits the similarity between the Edenic myth and the myth of America that inspired its settlement to give his fiction a universal as well as an immediately relevant social dimension. The eventual failure of the nineteenth century idealists at Blithedale becomes emblematic of the failure of mankind in general and that of the American experiment in particular.

The idealists fail because in their transcendental and democratic enthusiasm they ignore the reality of universal

sin. 'Altogether, by projecting our minds outwards, we had imparted a show of novelty to existence, and contemplated it as hopefully as if the soil beneath our feet had not been fathom deep with the dust of deluded generations, on everyone of which, it had imposed itself as hitherto unwedded bride' (p.515). In the Hawthornian scheme of things, unless man recognizes and accepts his own limits he will merely re-enact past mistakes. Renewal is possible only in terms of the recognition of the universal brotherhood of man.

Ironically, the idealists believe in the brotherhood of man above all things. At the Blithedale they were trying to evolve a social system which would be governed by this belief. But their belief is suspect because it is not grounded in a realistic awareness of the limits of man. In the absence of this awareness, despite their sincerity, their idealism and their good intentions, become merely a pose and their experiment becomes playacting, a masquerade, a counterfeit Arcadia. On the Edenic farm, the past mistakes are once again repeated. In nineteenth century America, the fall of Adam and the Puritan lapses are re-enacted and what ought to have been the truth is once again lost.

Significantly, the collapse of the Blithedale experiment is signalled by the symbol which Hawthorne habitually uses to signify the sinful condition of man--the cemetery. Once Coverdale jokingly tells Hollingsworth: 'And I shall

never feel as if this were real, practical, as well as poetical system of human life, until somebody has sanctified it by death... would it not be well, even before we have the absolute need of it, to fix upon a spot for a cemetery' (p.516). The hidden truth in his remark is borne out later when the need to choose a spot for burial ground delivers a mortal blow to the experiment itself. Zenobia's suicide tolls the knell of the Blithedale experiment for the reasons that led to her death also led to the failure of the Blithedale experiment.

The single most important reason for the death of Zenobia was the fact that she along with the Blithedale idealists had not really outgrown her past habits of thought. Surprising himself with his own orphic wisdom, Coverdale once tells Priscilla, 'No summer ever came back, and no two summers were ever alike... Times change, and people change; and if our hearts do not change as readily, so much the worse for us' (p.523). In The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne had shown the present as a prisoner of the past in terms of guilt for social and economic crimes. In The Blithedale Romance he shows the tragic consequences of the persistence of the past modes of thought and behaviour in terms of emotional responses of men and women.

The Blithedale farm is characterized as a place where the 'tender passion' rules. 'While inclining us to the soft affections of the golden age, it seemed to authorize

any individual of either sex to fall in love with any other, regardless of what would elsewhere be judged suitable and prudent. Accordingly, the tender passion was very rife among us, in various degrees of mildness and virulence...' (p.481). The persistence of past, outmoded patterns of behaviour is shown through the contradictory emotional responses of the various characters. Zenobia projects herself as someone who would raise her voice 'in behalf of woman's liberty' but <sup>she</sup> falls helplessly in love with the man who would not hesitate to call upon men to use their superior physical force 'that unmistakable evidence of sovereignty' to scourge women back within their proper bounds. Coverdale would have women run the government and the church but falls in love, not with the 'new' women Zenobia but with the clinging Priscilla 'the type of womanhood, such as man has spent centuries in making' (p.511). Hollingsworth projects himself as the man of iron who is completely devoted to the singleminded pursuit of an exalted purpose. But he prefers the blind, uncritical veneration of Priscilla to Zenobia's combination of beauty and brains, when the latter obviously would have been of much greater help to him. Thus, even in the free and liberated Blithedale farm, where the idealists are trying to lay the foundations of a new society, old emotional patterns continue. Both the men cannot help falling in love with Priscilla who fits the traditional stereotype of the clinging woman and both the women cannot help

falling in love with Hollingsworth who fits the traditional stereotype of the assertive, aggressive and chauvanistic male. Naturally, the chauvanistic male and the clinging woman come together, while Zenobia and Coverdale are left in the cold. Zenobia commits suicide while Coverdale goes on to lead a desolate, lonely life and ends up becoming the romancer who pens The Blithedale Romance .

Zenobia, horribly petrified, is flushed out of the stream in which she had drowned herself. Her death emphasizes the tint of Arcadian affectation that had characterised life at Blithedale. The author tells us, 'Zenobia... was not quite simple in her death. She had seen pictures, I suppose, of drowned persons in lithe and graceful attitudes. And she deemed it well and decorous to die as so many village maidens have, wronged in their first love, and seeking peace in the bosom of the old, familiar stream... But in Zenobia's case there was some tint of the Arcadian affectation that had been visible enough in all our lives for a few months past' (p.579). Later, Westerwelt makes the same point more forcefully.

The tint of Arcadian affectation in Zenobia and in Blithedale community once again has to be seen in terms of the persistence of the past in the present. Since the past is merely re-enacting itself in different ways--the present loses its authenticity and becomes mere playacting,

a masquerade. The past in Hawthorne, however, includes not just the immediate past of the characters, not just the Puritanic past of America but also the Adamic past of all of mankind. History for Hawthorne begins with the fall and any real renewal in the present is possible only if man has faced and countered the original cause of the fall-- the real existence of evil within man himself. Both the Blithedale idealists and Zenobia fail to do so. Thus the Blithedale experiment degenerates into a game for the adults and eventually fails.

Despite being a feminist of sorts, when the cruch comes Zenobia betrays Priscilla to Westervelt, and finally acting the part of tragic queen, kills herself. This, as the author points out, takes nothing away from the tragedy. 'For has not the world come to an awfully sophisticated past, when, after a certain degree of acquaintance with it, we cannot even put ourselves to death in a whole hearted way' (p.579).

In The Blithedale Romance, the burden of self-consciousness is carried by actor, spectator, narrator - Coverdale. In the action that he describes, Coverdale is an active participant, the spectator as well as the writer. To demonstrate how Hawthorne uses the artist figure to give his text the self-conscious dimension we will examine how Hawthorne portrays Coverdale's character in the three roles mentioned above.



Coverdale's marginal role as an active participant in the action of the novel serves to highlight the problematic situation of the artist in the American society. The Blithedale farm is presented as a miniature version of America and parallels are constantly drawn between the little community and the larger nation. Like the pilgrim forefathers who helped to settle America, the idealists too are seen as people who had broken away from a corrupt social system; they are also seen as people who were trying to set up a social system inspired by the ideal of the democratic brotherhood of man which, like America itself, would serve as an example for the rest of mankind.

We had left the rusty framework of society behind us; we had broken through many hinderances that are powerful enough to keep most people on the weary treadmill of the established system, even while they feel its irksomeness almost as intolerable as we did... It was our purpose to give up whatever we had heretofore attained, for the sake of showing mankind the example of a life governed by other than false and cruel principles on which human society has all along been based.

And, first of all, we had divorced ourselves from pride, and were striving to supply its place with brotherly love. We meant to lessen the laboring man's great burden of toil, by performing our due share of it at the cost of our own theives and sinews. We sought our profit by mutual aid...

The artist, however, finds himself increasingly isolated and alienated even in the midst of so much familiar love. When Coverdale first arrives at Blithedale, his reputation as a poet precedes him. While welcoming him, Zenobia tells him that she has learnt some of his poetry by heart and she shall most certainly sing his verses on summer evenings. But praise apart, once life settles down into a routine at Blithedale, it becomes increasingly apparent that Coverdale is not taken seriously by his friends precisely because he is a poet. Zenobia far from singing his verses, actually makes fun of him; 'I am afraid you did not make a song today while loading the cart, as Burns did when he was reaping barley... Ah, I see, in my mind's eye, what sort of an individual you are to be, two three years hence. Grim Silas Forster is your prototype... I do not know what his brain is made of, unless it be savoy cabbage; but yours may be cauliflower, as a rather more delicate variety' (pp.477-478). Hollingsworth, Coverdale's other friend, is glad that the life of toil has knocked off 'nonsense and fancy work' out of Coverdale. Although Coverdale has worked as hard as him in the fields, he goes to state categorically, 'Miles Coverdale is not in earnest, either as poet or a labourer' (p.478). Even at this early stage Coverdale is hurt by the remarks of his friends.

In the course of the action, we see that Coverdale is slowly isolated. Zenobia, Hollingsworth and Priscilla, Coverdale's closest associates at Blithedale, form a circle of their own with Coverdale on the periphery. In the chapter 'Eliot's Pulpit', we are shown the equations established between the four friends and also Coverdale's frustration and bitterness at being left out in the cold. In the discussion regarding the position of women, both Priscilla and Zenobia succumb to what Coverdale rightly calls Hollingsworth's 'intensity of masculine egotism' and Coverdale is left contemplating his own bad luck.

I smiled--somewhat bitterly, it is true--in contemplation of my own ill luck. How little these two women care for me, who had freely conceded all their claims, and a great deal more, out of the fulness of my heart; while Hollingsworth, by some necromancy of his horrible injustice, seemed to have brought them both to his feet.

(p.512)

Matters, however, come to a head when Hollingsworth asks Coverdale to join him in his great enterprise. 'Be with me or be against me! There is no third choice for you' (p.519), he tells Coverdale. Hollingsworth's great contempt for Coverdale's vocation as an artist comes through even as he asks the latter to join him. The underlying assumption behind the offer is that left to his own, Coverdale will waste his life in pursuit of idle beauty, but if he were

to join forces with Hollingsworth, he would be able to do something useful and substantial. 'Your peculiar faculties, as I shall direct them, are capable of being so wrought into this enterprise that not one of them need lie idle... There may be no more aimless beauty in your life; but, in its stead, there shall be strength, courage, immitagable will-- everything that a manly and generous nature should desire' (p.518). Hollingsworth dismisses Coverdale's commitment to the Blithedale experiment by saying that it has given him theme for poetry and what more could he possibly ask from it? In other words, Hollingsworth suspects Coverdale's commitment to both life and to Blithedale just because the latter is an artist.

Coverdale refuses Hollingsworth's offer and it immediately affects his relationship with both Priscilla and Zenobia. 'I stood on other terms than before, not only with Hollingsworth but with Zenobia and Priscilla' (p.521). His loneliness begins to eat into him, so much so that he decides to leave Blithedale farm for a short while and go to town:

But your heart will not so easily rest satisfied. It incesantly remonstrates, though, most of the time, in bass note, which you do not separately distinguish; but, now and then, with a sharp cry, importunate to be heard, and resolute to claim belief. "Things are not as they were!" It keeps saying. "You shall not impose on me! I will never be quiet!"

I will throb painfully! I will be heavy,  
and desolate, and shiver with cold! For  
I, your deep heart, know when to be miser-  
able, as once I knew when to be happy.  
All is changed for us. You are beloved  
no more!

(p. 21)

Even in the town, Coverdale is as isolated as he was in the countryside. He sits alone in his room reading his book and his loneliness is contrasted to the love and affection that the family man receives when he returns from work. It was while he was in his hotel room that he looks across into Zenobia's room and the latter delivers the 'pitiless rebuke' by dropping the curtain. Coverdale's isolation which began at the Blithedale farm is now complete and as he sits meditating in his rocking chair, it becomes clear to him that he has ended up where he was only because his friends had failed to understand his temperament and behaviour as determined by his vocation:

For, was mine a mere vulgar curiosity?  
Zenobia should have known me better than  
to suppose it. She should have been able  
to appreciate that quality of the inte-  
llect and the heart which impelled me  
(often against my own will, and to the  
detriment of my own comfort) to live in  
other lives, and to endeavour--by  
generous sympathies, by delicate in-  
tuitions, by taking note of things too  
slight for record, and by bringing my  
human spirit into manifold accordance  
with companions whom God assigned me--  
to learn the secret which was hidden even  
for themselves.

(p. 533)

Later, Coverdale visits Zenobia and tries to explain his position but Zenobia thinks of him merely as a 'transcendental yankee'. She had earlier made fun of him as an artist, and now that he had broken away from Hollingsworth, she becomes hostile and gives the worst possible interpretation to his motives. She states clearly what she thinks his duty signifies.

Bigotry; self-conceit; an insolent curiosity; a meddling temper; a cold blooded criticism, founded on shallow interpretation of half-perceptions; a monstrous scepticism in regard to any conscience or any wisdom, except one's own; a most irreverent propensity to thrust providence aside, and substitute one's self in its awful place--and out of these and other motives as miserable as these comes your idea of duty.

(p.540)

Zenobia's suspicions and hostility represent the hostility and suspicions of the larger American community towards the artist. This is brought out later at the farm when the masqueraders chase him in the name of queen Zenobia. Deliberately, the masqueraders are made to represent the entire American community. Among them there is an Indian chief, a Negro, a Kentucky woodsman, a shaker elder and also Puritans, Cavaliers revolutionary officers. With mock hostility, the entire group chases Coverdale. 'The whole fantastic rabble forthwith streamed off in pursuit

of me so that I was like a mad poet hunted by chimeras' (p.563). The chase is a striking metaphoric rendering of the situation of the artist in America. It also highlights the isolation and alienation imposed upon Coverdale by his own friends just because he is a poet.

Coverdale's isolation forces him into the role of a mere observer. Throughout the text, we find him watching, prying, and analysing, fingering and teasing the sensibilities of his friends trying to make them give up their secrets. He himself emphasizes his spectorial role, 'My own part in these transactions was singularly subordinate. It resembled that of the chorus in a classic play' (p.496). Zenobia takes him to task for his voyeurism and readers too have found this to be the most displeasing aspect of his personality. However, what is often not realized is that this spectorial role is, in a way, forced upon him. The suspicions regarding the artist isolate him so completely that there is little that he can do except sit and watch.

As an artist, he necessarily possesses faculties for close observation, but the tendency to pry grows in direct proportion to the extent he is isolated. Coverdale himself is aware of the dangers inherent in his role as a mere observer. '...That cold tendency between instinct and intellect which made me pry with speculative interest into

people's passions and impulses, appeared to have gone far towards unhumanizing my heart' (p.530). Despite his awareness, given the fact of his alienation, there is little that he can do except observe the action as if it were a play. And his role as a spectator is supplemented by the fact that the Blithedale idealists were actually putting up a show. 'The presence of Zenobia caused our heroic enterprise to show like an illusion, a masquerade, a pastoral, a counterfeit Arcadia, in which we grown up men and women were making a play day of our years that were given us to live in' (p.451).

A.G. Lloyd Smith makes an interesting point that Coverdale in his sPECTORIAL role represents the reader as well and that through this device Hawthorne incorporates into the text his own reception aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> He suggests that the reader necessarily shares with Coverdale his voyeurism and that Zenobia implicitly indicts the reader as well as Coverdale when she says, 'This long while past, you have been following up your game groping for human emotions, in the dark corners of the heart' (p.565).

But, more important, through Coverdale, Hawthorne has fictionalised his acute awareness of the predicament of the artist in nineteenth century America. In his Culture and Society, Raymond Williams has argued that during the romantic era, ideas of art, of artist and of their place in society changed radically. Although his perceptive discussion



is specifically related to the situation of the romantic artist in England, many of the points that he makes are applicable to the situation of the American artist as well. William argues that because the third and the fourth decade of the eighteenth century saw the emergence of a new middle class reading public, the system of patronage was replaced by general commercial printing and the artist became a professional who earned his livelihood through writing. In other words, 'a writer's actual relations with the society and his audience was governed by the institution of the market'.<sup>3</sup> As a result of mass printing, the market in turn got divided into the educated cultured, minority readers who were interested in 'serious' literature and the vast majority who wanted escapist, pulp literature. The division, according to Williams, had obvious implications for both literary theory and practice. The serious writers sought to compensate for their rejection by the majority by emphasizing the superiority of art and the special attributes of the artist. Both were seen as opposed to the commercial, mechanical civilization that was being inaugurated and both were, therefore, also seen to be partly incomprehensible to the average man. 'Implicit in all organic, romantic thinking is a criticism of the mechanical and the rationalist principle underlying industrial revolution and the market.'

William goes on to point out that the emphasis on the superior reality of art was, therefore, in many ways a mode of defence. 'The height of artists claim is also the height of his despair'.<sup>4</sup> As the huge changes inexorably manifested themselves not only did the condemnation of society become specialised, self-conscious and partly unreal, but also the idealisation of the art and the artist became a form of escape from an unpleasant reality about which the writer could do nothing. 'Under pressure art became a symbolic abstraction for a whole range of general human experience: a valuable abstraction because indeed great art has thus an ultimate power--yet, an abstraction nevertheless, because a general social activity was forced into a statue of department or province and actual works of art were, in part, converted into a self-pleading ideology. There is high courage and actual utility, if also simplification, in romantic claims of imagination... In practice, there were deep insights and great works of art, but in continuous pressure of living, the freeplay of genius found it increasingly difficult to consort with the freeplay of the market, and the difficulty was not solved, but cushioned by an idealisation.'<sup>5</sup>

Raymond William's remarks obviously apply to the American situation as well. As already mentioned, nineteenth century America not only witnessed the rise of the commercial publishing but also the division of reading public into what

Melville called the 'people' and the 'public'. Also the major writers of the romantic age inevitably idealized both art and the artist. Hawthorne too is fully conscious of the conflict between the artist and the majority and in stories like 'The Artist of the Beautiful' and the 'Devil in the Manuscript', he not only dramatizes this conflict but also idealises the artist. By the time he came to write his major romances, however, Hawthorne seems to have started questioning the idealization findings many a chink in the grand front that the romantics had built up for the artist. Thus in both The Scarlet Letter and in The House of the Seven Gables, he recognises the harmful effects of enforced social isolation, but he also pinpoints negative aspects of the artists personality. Pearl, despite her commitment to truth, is seen to be partly diabolic while Holgrave for all his democratic commitments, almost violates the sanctity of a human heart. However, in both the books, the artists still manage to preserve some of their halo. In The Blithedale Romance the portrait of the artist is completely non-idealized. It is clinical and objective and no special favours are granted to Coverdale. The question of the artist's relation to society is faced squarely, and the difficulty is not sought to be cushioned by an idealization. Coverdale is determined by (and, therefore, enmeshed in) social processes as much as anyone else and his special artistic attributes are unable to lift him above these processes. In 'The Artist

of the Beautiful' Warland negates the effects of alienation by transferring his humanity to the art object and by winning, through the intensity of his artistic endeavour, a spiritual repose that seems to negate the need for other human beings. For Coverdale, no such triumphant release is possible and he suffers fully from the consequences of the isolation imposed upon him.

Yet Coverdale is not totally lost for despite his isolation, his dehumanization, and his prying, he manages to write The Blithedale Romance. The failure of the Blithedale experiment, the death of Zenobia, his own loneliness and his growing awareness of the problematic situation of the writer ultimately transforms him into a Hawthornian romancer. His progressive disclosure makes sense only if <sup>we</sup> you see him as someone who, to begin with, wanted to write essays for 'The Dial' or poetry 'that would have the notes of wild birds twittering through it of a strain like the wind anthems in the wood' (p.447), but who eventually penned the romance embodying the dark moral that there is a byway to the pit from the very gates of heaven.

There is no comfortable and easy idealization of the artist in The Blithedale Romance but the portrait is not entirely negative. Coverdale's last remarks about himself should be taken with a pinch of salt for there are obvious discrepancies. He tells us that lack of purpose, has led him

to waste his life, that he has given up writing poetry and that he lacks any serious social commitment. In the year that follows Blithedale experiment, Coverdale might not have written any poetry but he does manage to write a romance and though he is not willing to take up a sociological cause he has been true to his artistic cause brooding over his story for years and years. There are, in fact, two Coverdales in the book, the romantic poet who sets off in the storm with high hopes for man and his destiny and the romancer who broods over the exploded scheme of paradise for thirteen long years and who ultimately writes the romance. In the final analysis, Coverdale's self-presentation shows us how the book itself came to be written.



On arriving at Blithedale, Coverdale falls ill.

When he is feverish, he suffers because his mind is fixed on the idea like 'the nail in Sisera's brain' while 'innumerable other ideas go and come, flutter to and fro, combining constant transition with intolerable sameness'. This feverish fixation anticipates what becomes his obsession with the three friends. While he is in this state, in his dream he manages to perceive the future sequence of events. His position here is very much like that of a writer who in a moment of inspiration has conceived his plots, chief incidents and its catastrophe. 'Had I made a record of that night's half waking dreams, it is my belief that I would have anticipated

several of the chief incidents of the narrative, including a dim shadow of its catastrophe' (p.460). Thus, in the very beginning, we are shown that the story being told is not a historical record in the ordinary sense. Coverdale's role as a writer is being emphasized and it is being made clear that displacement of time and Coverdale's peculiar imaginative faculties put him in the position of the chronicler free to reimagine, even to reinvent his own history. Coverdale himself describes the process when he reports the conversation between Westervelt and Zenobia, '...other mysterious words, besides what are above written, they spoke together, but I understand no more, and indeed even question whether I fairly understand so much as this. By long brooding over our recollections we subtilize them into something akin to imaginary stuff and hardly capable of being distinguished from it' (p.501).

The process by which the stuff of life is made into the stuff of art by Coverdale is described in the text and it self-consciously parallels Hawthorn's own techniques as a romancer. First of all, there is Coverdale's obsession with his three friends. In 'The Custom House' chapter, Hawthorne had said, 'My eyes fastened themselves upon the old scarlet letter and would not be turned aside' (p.102). Coverdale too is unable to turn his eyes away from his friends. Like the letter A, the three characters draw his whole mind

and being, and just as Hawthorne felt obliged to work out an interpretation of the symbol, so too Coverdale finds in the three 'the indices of a problem which it was my business to solve'. Hawthorne's efforts in the moonlit room to get to know his illusive guests by calling up imaginary scenes also has its equivalent in Coverdale's experience. He converts his friends into 'characters of my private theatre'. Hawthorne's efforts lead to his isolation and alienation and so do Coverdale's. Finally, as was the case with Hawthorne, the success and failure of Coverdale's enterprise depends on whether his imaginary transformations are informed by 'sympathy' or not.

As said earlier, the value<sup>of</sup> sympathy in Hawthorne is always directly connected with the awareness of sin and the events at the Blithedale farm (as shown earlier in the chapter) foster precisely this awareness. In fact, the foremost difference between Coverdale the romantic poet and Coverdale the romancer is that the latter possesses this awareness. And that this awareness has led to sympathy is made clear through the contrast that is systematically developed between Coverdale and Westervelt.

Mesmerism in The Blithedale Romance is clearly equated with the romance. Like the romancer, the exhibitor also tries his very best through 'all the arts of mysterious arrangement, of picturesque disposition and artistically contrasted light and shade... to set the performance in the

strongest attitude of opposition to ordinary facts' (p.441). Once again, like the romancer, the exhibitor casts a spell and claims to articulate spiritual truths that are unavailable to ordinary modes of perception. Westervelt practices this art without sympathy and he is, therefore, with his serpent like stick and his indecorous countenance, the very image of the devil. Coverdale remains, at worst, an erring human being. The similarity as well as the difference between the two is brought out most clearly after the death of Zenobia. We find Coverdale sharing Westervelt's opinions but not his essential attitude. Westervelt is cold, objective, unmoved and utterly unsympathetic. Coverdale, though he recognises the truth of Westervelt's remarks, is neither cold nor unsympathetic. Zenobia's death moves him profoundly and he is, in fact, outraged at Westervelt's lack of sympathy. That Coverdale does not lack sympathy is also made clear by the fact that there is no self-absorption or ego-centricity in his narrative. In fact, Coverdale cuts the sorriest figure in his own narrative.

Hawthorne's distance from Coverdale is not a consistent one. As a participant and as a spectator, Coverdale cuts a sorry figure. However, as a narrator and story teller, he draws very close to Hawthorne for he lives up to the ideals that could easily be Hawthorne's own.



And now when the event has long been past I retain the same opinion of my fitness for the office. True I might have condemned them. Had I been judge as well as witness, my sentence might have been stern as that of destiny itself. But, still no trait of original nobility of character, no struggle against temptation, no iron necessity of will, on the one hand, nor extenuating circumstances to be rived from passion and despair, on the other, no remorse that might co-exist with error, even if powerless to prevent it, no proud repentance that should claim retribution as a need--would go unappreciated. True again, I might give my full assent to the punishment which was sure to follow. But it would be given mournfully, and with undiminished love. And, after all was finished, I would come, as if to gather up the white ashes of those who had perished at the stake, and to tell the world--the wrong being now atoned for--how much had perished there which it had ever yet known how to praise.

(p.534).

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance in The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne ed. Norman Holmes Pearson, p.51<sup>2</sup>,

<sup>2</sup> A.G. Lloyd Smith, Eve Tempted, p.86.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams, Culture and Society: 1780-1950 (1958 rpt. Penguin Books, 1963, p.50)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.57

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.63

Chapter V

## THE MARBLE FAUN

In The Marble Faun the ideal of the golden age is repeatedly juxtaposed with the reality of sin, sorrow, death and decay and the action of the novel once again revolves around the efforts of the characters to come to terms with the reality of the fallen world. The statues in the Sculpture Gallery in the Capitol in Rome, where we first meet the characters of the books, are described as, 'shining in the undiminished majesty and beauty of their ideal life, although the marble that embodies them is yellow with time, and perhaps corroded...'<sup>1</sup>

The contrast between the antique idol and the yellow marble is further emphasised in Hawthorne's description of the statue of the Faun. '...all the pleasantness of sylyan life, all the genial and happy characteristics of the creature that dwell in woods and fields, will seem to be mingled and kneaded into one substance, along with the kindered qualities in the human soul. Trees, grass, flowers, woodland streamlets, cattle, deer and unsophisticated man. The essence of all these was compressed long ago, and still exists, within that discoloured marble surface of the Faun of Paraxiteles (p.596).

Donatello, the Marble Faun, 'miraculously softened into flesh and blood' (p.595) in the course of the novel, has to come to terms with the reality signalled by the discoloured stone. In the Borghese gardens, Donatello is shown in his original state. Being a representative of the golden age, he is at one with nature. But the impossibility and infeasibility of the simple, direct and joyous relationship with nature in the present is indicated by the numerous references to falseness, imitation and death that the chapter contains. The final charm of the garden is bestowed by Malaria. 'For if you come hither in summer, and stray through these glades in the golden sunset, fever walks arm in arm with you and death awaits you at the end of the dim vista. Thus the scene is like Eden in its loveliness; like Eden, too, in the fatal spell that removes it beyond the scope of man's actual possession' (pp.631-632). Later, Miriam and Donatello sport together until they seem to be creatures of '...the Golden age, before mankind was burdened with sin and sorrow, and before pleasure had been darkened with those shadows that bring it into high relief, and make it happiness' (p.637). But the Sylvan Dance too is annihilated by a strange figure that shook its fantastic garments in the air and pranced before them. It was the Model. The immediate result of his dance is that the spell which Donatello had cast earlier is broken and what was Golden age and Arcadia once again becomes the old tract of pleasure ground; '...a tract where

the crimes and calamities of ages, the many battles, blood recklessly poured out, and deaths of myriads, have corrupted all the soil, creating an influence that makes the air deadly to human beings' (p.641).

In his presentation of Donatello's lost gift of speech with the animals, Hawthorne once again contrasts the ideal of the Golden age with the reality of the fallen world. In the fountain grove at Monte Beni, Donatello is almost able to recapture his lost language. 'The sound was of a ~~murmurous~~ character, soft, attractive, persuasive, friendly. The sculptor fancied that such might have been the original voice and utterance of the natural man, before the sophistication of the human intellect formed what we now call language' (p.732). However, the only creature that responds to Donatello's voice is a brown lizard, a venomous reptile and Donatello is left sobbing 'Death! Death! They knew it' (p.733).

The repeated juxtaposition of the ideals of Golden age with death and decay serve to emphasise what from the very beginning had been the central thematic movement of the book--a cancellation of the Golden age for which is substituted the reality of sin and death. The Arcadia is replaced by the chasm, that pit of blackness that swallows up all human positives--all the heroes, the statesmen, the poets, and human history. In the course of the novel, each character in his own way has to come to terms with this reality.

The accidental encounter with the Model in the catacomb serves to drive home the point that the issue of sin cannot be avoided. By making the act that connects Miriam with the Model precede the action of the novel and by deliberately leaving it ambiguous, Hawthorne is able to use the Miriam-Model connection to raise the issue of sin in general rather than particular terms. Though we have no knowledge of the specific act that unites Miriam with the Model, we do know that it was a crime of some sort and that it constitutes a fatal entanglement of both. The repeated reference to Cenci story hints at both incest and murder.

Donatello's eventual murder of the Model is a shadowy re-enactment of Miriam's original crime and it suggests the same structural techniques as The Scarlet Letter in which the forest scene re-enacts the adultery, and The House of the Seven Gables in which Holgrave almost repeats Mathew Maule's crime against Alice.

As in the earlier novels, the re-enactment of a past crime, reveals the inadequacy of the attitudes of the various characters to the reality of the original crime. In this, the characters become emblematic of all of humanity which too has failed to come to terms with the reality of the original fall. The secondary action establishes once and for all that humanity has to learn to accept the reality of

evil if it is to be saved.

In The Marble Faun the murder of the Model foregrounds the problem of universal sin. 'It is a terrible thought that an individual wrong-doing melts into the great mass of human crime and makes us--who dreamed only of our own little separate sins--guilty of the whole. And thus Miriam and her lover were not an insulated pair, but members of the innumerable confraternity of guilty ones, all shuddering at each other' (p.692). And as Hilda later discovers, it is immaterial and who is guilty and who is innocent; both suffer equally. 'It is very dreadful. Ah! now I understand how the sin of generations past have created an atmosphere of sin for those that follow. While there is a single guilty person in the universe, each innocent one must feel his innocence tortured by that guilt. Your deed, Miriam, has darkened the whole sky' (p.712).

The re-enactment of the earlier crime shows that the various characters had not learnt to recognise and accept the presence of evil within themselves. Therefore, after the crime, all four characters change and grow. Miriam was full of pride, anger and hatred directed against men, before the crime. But afterwards, she becomes meek and humble. So much so that Kenyon could not but marvel 'at the subjection into which this proud and self-dependent woman had wilfully flung herself, hanging her life upon the chance of angry or

favourable regard from a person who, little while before, had seemed the plaything of a moment' (p.754). The amoral Donatello, after the crime, begins to acquire a spiritual consciousness of right and wrong while Keyon grows by learning to truly sympathise at the plight of the sinners. Hilda also changes after witnessing the murder. She not only loses her unrealistic moral severity but also learns to love Keyon. At the very end, the novel poses the paradox of the fortunate fall: can sin actually work for the betterment of humanity? Miriam asks, 'Was the crime--in which he and I were wedded--was it a blessing, in that strange disguise? Was it means of education, bringing a simple and imperfect nature to a point of feeling and intelligence which it could have reached under no other discipline... The story of the fall<sup>of</sup> man! Is it not repeated in our romance of Moute Beni--and may we follow the analogy yet further? Was that very sin--into which Adam precipitated himself and all his race--was it the destined means by which, over a long pathway of toil and sorrow, we are to attain a higher, brighter and profounder happiness than our lost birthright gave? Will not this idea account for the permitted existence of sin, as no other theory can' (p.840).

In The Marble Faun art and life are juxtaposed in such a way that art repeatedly reveals the hidden faces of both its creators and observers.<sup>2</sup> Donatello is seen as an incarnation of the statue of the Marble Faun. Later his



murderous self is revealed through the idle working of clay in Kenyon's hand and his spiritual growth is reflected by the incomplete marble bust. Both Hilda and Miriam appear as subjects of paintings and both are seen to resemble Guido's portrait of Beatrice Cenci. The Model appears in Miriam's paintings and also in Guido's painting as the Devil. Kenyon is revealed through his sculptures and also through the broken up statue he discovers in the end. The novel itself goes on to reflect Hawthorne's view of art. Hawthorne uses this aspect of art to re-examine the theories of expressive and mimetic art in light of his concept of universal sin and also to question the value of much that passes for great art.

In The Marble Faun, painting is presented as an expressive art while sculpture is presented as a mimetic art form. All through the book, the two art forms are contrasted in these terms. When Miriam visits Kenyon's studio, she compares her own art form which according to her is 'too nervous', too passionate and too full of agitation' with that of Kenyon's which is calm and cool. She goes on to say, 'sculptors are, of necessity, the greatest plagiarists in the world' (p.661). Kenyon does not agree with her but cannot contradict her either.

The several separate stages of production of works in both the arts are described in detail to bring out the

expressive and mimetic features of each. In her studio, Miriam explains to Donatello how the expressive artist works. 'We artists purposely exclude sunshine, and all but a partial light, because we think it necessary to put ourselves at odds with Nature before trying to imitate her. That strikes you very strangely, does it not? But we make pretty pictures sometimes with our artfully arranged light and shadow' (p.613).

The significance of the sketches in expressive art is highlighted later in the chapter 'The Aesthetic Company'. The sketches we are told are valuable because they reflect, more accurately than even the finished painting, the mind of the artist at the creative pitch. 'But this hasty rudeness made the sketches only the more valuable because the artist seemed to have bestirred himself at the pinch of the moment, snatching up whatever material was nearest, so as to seize the first glimpse of an idea that might vanish in the twinkling of an eye. Thus by the spell of a creased, soiled and discolored scrap of paper, you were enabled to steal close to an old master, and watch him in the very effervescence of his genius' (p.669).

Miriam's sketches also reveal her personality. She shows Donatello two sets of sketches and both reveal aspects of her personality. One set of sketches show images of common life but in the other set of sketches there was the idea of woman 'acting, the part of a revengeful mischief

towards man'. Miriam explains to Donatello that they are 'ugly phantoms that stole out of my mind; not things I created, but things that haunt me' (p.615).

Because she is an expressive artist and because she has had experience of sin, it is Miriam who pinpoints the central problem which all expressive artists face. Given the sinful reality of the world, if the individual artist is to base his art only on his own experience he can be in no way certain that the principle of goodness will triumph over that of evil. In fact, in all honesty, his art should demonstrate the exact opposite. Miriam criticises Guido's painting of Michael destroying the devil precisely for this reason. 'With what half-scornful delicacy he sets his pretty sandalled foot on the head of his prostrate foe! But, is it thus that virtue looks the moment after its death struggle with evil? No, no, I could have told Guido better... the battle never was such a child's play as Guido's dapper Archangel seems to have found it' (p.696). She goes on to say that if she were to paint the painting she would have done it differently: 'The picture would have its share of truth I assure you, ...but I am sadly afraid the victory would fall on the wrong side. Just fancy a smoke blackened, fiery-eyed demon, bestriding that nice young angel, clutching his white throat with one of his hinder claws; and giving a triumphant whisk of his scaly tail, with poisonous dart at

the end of it. That is what they risk, poor souls, who do battle with Michael's enemy' (p.696).

The stages of production of sculpture emphasise its essentially mimetic nature. First come some hastily drawn figures on the white wash of the walls. Next, there are roughly modelled figures in clay or plaster. Then there is the exquisitely designed shape of clay from which the plaster cast is made which is then transformed into a statue in marble. The essentially mimetic and mechanical nature of art is emphasised by the fact that the final product is created not by the artist but by skilled craftsmen.

The problem with mimetic art is that art objects begin to replace life breeding coldness and lack of sympathy in the artist. Thus Kenyon, when he falls in love with Hilda, sculpts her hands. 'The sculptor sighed as he put away the treasure of Hilda's marble hand into the ivory coffer, ...He dared not even kiss the image that he himself had made: it had assumed its share of Hilda's remote and shy divinity' (p.660). The inhumanity and the falsification inherent in this attitude becomes apparent when Kenyon is faced with the issue of sin. While sculpting the statue of Cleopatra, he has, as Miriam points out, seen far into womanhood, but when it comes to helping out a real, suffering woman, he is found wanting. When Miriam wants to tell him about her troubles he is reserved and alarmed and Miriam

tells him, 'You are cold and pitiless as your own marble... As for my griefs, I know how to manage them. It was all a mistake. You can do nothing for me unless you petrify me into a marble companion for your Cleopatra there' (p.664).

Significantly, Kenyon's growth as a sympathetic character is illustrated in the scene when he finds the broken up statue of the goddess Venus. As Kenyon himself puts it: 'What a discovery is here! I seek for Hilda and find a marble woman' (p.833). It was a discovery which made the world richer than it was, by something far more precious than gold. But Kenyon who had been guilty of replacing life with art has outgrown the weakness since then. After discovering the statue, Kenyon 'strove to feel at least a portion of the interest which the event would have inspired in him a little while before. But, in reality, he found it difficult to fix his mind upon the subject. He could hardly, we fear, be reckoned a consummate artist, because there was something dearer to him than his art; and, by the greater strength of human affection, the divine statue seemed to fall asunder again, and become only a heap of worthless fragments' (p.834).

The other problem with mimetic art is that since it is committed to a one to one representation, it finds it almost impossible to record the process of spiritual growth. Kenyon confronts this problem when he tries to make Donatello's bust. 'He had never undertaken a portrait bust which gave

him so much trouble as Donatello... he was chiefly perplexed how to make this genial and kind type of countenance the index of the mind within. His acuteness and his sympathies, indeed, were both somewhat at fault in their efforts to enlighten him as to the moral phase through which the Court was now passing (p.746).

It is only by accident that the bust eventually succeeds in reflecting the growing moral power of Donatello. As Hilda points out, 'Forgive me, but I question whether this striking affect was brought about by any skill or purpose on the sculptor's part. Is not perhaps, the chance result of the bust being just so far shaped out in the marble, as the process of moral growth had advanced in the original? (p.809). The success shows up the limitation of mimetic art for the effect could never have been captured in the finished statue.

Hilda is portrayed as someone who has the gift of discerning and worshipping excellence in a most unusual measure. She admires the worth of the mighty old masters to such an extent that she gave up painting herself and became a copyist. Referencing these wonderful men so deeply, she was grateful for all they bestowed upon her, too loyal and too humble, in their awful presence, to think of enrolling herself in their society. Beholding the miracles of beauty which they had achieved, the world seemed already rich enough in

original designs, and nothing more was so desirable as to diffuse those self-same beauties more widely among mankind' (p.622). Hilda is also shown to be the ideal spectator of art. 'No other person, it is probable, recognised so adequately, and enjoyed with such deep delight, the pictorial wonders that were here displayed. She saw--no, not saw, but felt--through and through a picture; she bestowed upon it all the warmth and richness of a woman's sympathy; not by any intellectual effort, but by this strength of heart, and by this guiding light of sympathy, she went straight to the central point, in which the master had conceived his work' (p.622).

The accuracy of Hilda's eyes is related to the accuracy of her moral perception. She is equated with doves all through the novel and has to keep Virgin's lamp alight. After her inevitable encounter with sin, her moral stand point and aesthetic vision are both seen to be inadequate. After witnessing the murder of the Model, Hilda not only loses the gifted simplicity of vision but also loses her enjoyment of art. 'For the first time in her life, Hilda now grew acquainted with that icy demon of weariness who haunts great picture galleries' (p.783). Hawthorne uses Hilda's disillusionment to pinpoint the limitation of most great art in face of sin.

The love of art... if art had not strayed away from its legitimate paths and aims, it ought to soften and sweeten the lives of worshippers... But, of its own potency,

it has no such effect, and it fails, like wise, in the other test of its moral value which poor Hilda was now involuntarily trying upon it. It cannot comfort the heart in affliction, it grows dim when the shadow is upon us.

(p.786)

The great masters are now criticised for their lack of truth.

...She saw beauty less vividly, but felt truth, or the lack of it, more profoundly. She began to suspect that some, at least, of her venerated painters, had left an inevitable hollowness in their works because, in the most renowned of them, they essayed to express to the world what they had not in their own souls. They defied their light and wandering affections, and were continually plaything off the tremendous jest... of offering the features of some venal beauty to be enshrined in the holiest of places.

(p.785)

Later in the book, Hilda comes to terms with the reality of sin and returns to her customary occupations. But her attitude to art had changed.

She now saw with a deeper look into heart of things... Instructed by sorrow, she felt that there is something beyond all which pictorial genius has produced, and she never forgot those sad wanderings from gallery to gallery and from church to church, where she had vainly sought a type of the Virgin Mother, or the Saviour, or saint or martyr which a soul in extreme need might recognise as the adequate one.

(p.806)



The narrator himself goes on to give the reason why modern art had failed Hilda. 'How indeed should she have found such? How could holiness be revealed to the artist of an age when the greatest of them put genius and imagination in the place of spiritual insight, and when from Pope, downward, all christendom was corrupt?' (p.806).

The works which are offered as exception to this general failure in art give a clue to the kind of ideal of art that Hawthorne is upholding. There is Fra Angelico's painting of the Angel. Perugino's painting of Virgin and Sodoma's painting of Christ bound to a pillar. All these paintings are inspired by sincere feeling which borders on the religious. 'Fra Angelico... must have breathed a humble aspiration between every two touches of his brush in order to make the finished picture such a visible prayer as we behold it...' 'Perugino was evidently a devout man...' and Sodoma 'beyond a question both prayed and wept while painting his fresco ...' It is this deep religious feeling which helps these painters to make the kind of paintings that 'may still help a struggling heart to pray' (p.785).

Of all these paintings, it is only Sodoma's painting that is discussed in detail. In this picture, Christ is depicted as worn out, tired, exhausted and utterly lonely. But despite all this, the son of God remains divine. And so 'Sodoma, in this matchless picture has done more towards

reconciling the incongruity of Divine omnipotence and outraged suffering humanity, combined in one person than the theologians ever did' (p.786). By presenting Christ's Divinity, Sodoma has shown that it is possible to conceptualise and create the image of the highest good even in the midst of most intense suffering. This, as Hawthorne says, cannot but inspire the suffering humanity. In short, the ideal artist in Hawthorne is to be inspired neither by imagination, nor by empiricism, but by an almost religious feeling which will enable him to recognise and depict the suffering and guilt of humanity without losing sight of that which is good and just.

Waggoner in his chapter on the Marble Faun correctly points out that 'Hawthorne's whole career had prepared him to write The Marble Faun<sup>3</sup> and that 'if he had told this story many times before, he had never told it quite so directly...'<sup>4</sup> Waggoner, however, looks upon the book only as the story of the fall of man. 'There is too much about Rome and too much about art. They are a burden the story is incapable of carrying.'<sup>5</sup> In fact, as we have already seen, The Marble Faun is as much about art as about fall of man and Hawthorne is direct and explicit both about art and about man's sinful condition. In Donatello he presents the picture of the unfallen man coming to terms with the fallen world and in Kenyon, Hilda and Miriam, three different kinds of artists coming to terms with the reality of sin.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Marble Faun in The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne ed. Norman Holmes Pearson, p.593. All subsequent quotations are from this edition; the page number is given in parentheses.

<sup>2</sup> Harry Levin, Power of Blackness: Hawthorne Poe Melville (1958, rpt. Chicago: Ohio Univ. Press 1980), p.91. Levin writes, 'Cross reference to works of art is a technique of characterisation in The Marble Faun...'

<sup>3</sup> H.H. Waggoner, Hawthorne: A Critical Study, p.208.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.211.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.223.

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