

RELIGION AS A FACTOR IN THE LITERARY CAREER
OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to evaluate various religious elements in Nathaniel Hawthorne's life in relation to his career as a literary artist. The moral seriousness of this author at once strikes us as being something closely akin to religious sentiment, but he refused to endorse any specific dogma or to subscribe to any one organized faith. We know from his work that he had a religion, but his silence leaves ample room for conjecture if we wish to "label" him, or decide which of those religions that he contemplated was most congenial to his nature.

Much work has already been done by various scholars and critics regarding Hawthorne's relation to his Puritan past. No attempt has been made in this study to enlarge upon the number of available facts with respect to Puritanism; however, a new interpretation of these facts has been ventured.

A great deal has been said previously regarding Hawthorne's distaste for Unitarianism. Again, this study has not attempted to enlarge upon the comments that have already been made, but to integrate this phase of his religious thinking with the earlier Puritan phase and a later Catholic one.

Very little has been published regarding Hawthorne's flirtation with Catholicism. This is strange since his European notebooks abound with references to it. The Marble Faun, too, is a valuable source for the author's impressions of the Roman faith. Both his admiration and his misgivings with respect to Catholicism are presented in this thesis; and an attempt is made to evaluate the results of Hawthorne's contacts with Catholicism as a possible explanation for the last phase of his literary career.

CHAPTER II

THE ANCESTRAL MIND

Salem in the 1820's was a bustling seaport town, but Nathaniel Hawthorne managed to forego its more lively corners in favor of its dead houses and decaying wharves. Van Doren maintains with Austin Warren that Salem was in those days still a town very much alive; Warren points out that "the Salem that Hergesheimer has brought to colorful life in his Javahead, the Salem of the East India trade and the China, was the Salem of Hawthorne's youth."¹ (Yet Hawthorne pictured it as filled with "old wooden houses, the mud and dust, the chill east wind and the chillest of social atmospheres."²)

Such being the features of my native town, it would be quite as reasonable to form a sentimental attachment to a disarranged checker-board. And yet, though invariably happiest elsewhere, there is within me a feeling for old Salem, which, in lack of a better phrase, I must be content to call affection. The sentiment is probably assignable to the deep and aged roots which my family has struck into the soil. It is now nearly two centuries and a quarter since the original Briton, the earliest emigrant of my name, made his appearance in the wild and forest-bordered settlement which has since become a city. And here his descendants have been born and died, and have mingled their earthy substance with the soil, until no small portion of it must necessarily be akin to the mortal frame wherewith, for a little

¹Austin Warren, Nathaniel Hawthorne, p. xi.

²Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's Works, Vol. VI, The Scarlet Letter, Old Manse Edition, p. 26.

while, I walk the streets. In part, therefore, the attachment which I speak of is the mere sensuous sympathy of dust for dust.³

This feeling of "dust for dust" was indeed typical of Hawthorne's mind. It had an easily explained origin in Hawthorne's immediate family. (His earliest ancestors, John and William Hathorne, had been citizens of great eminence;) but the clan since their day had fallen into obscurity and ill fortune, as if a curse had fallen upon them--as indeed it had long ago in the 1630's. (Hawthorne's father had died on a sea voyage leaving his family in the sort of mean circumstances to which the Hawthornes had grown accustomed for some generations. They fed upon the glories of the past, and doubtless taught Nathaniel that he must at least sustain his pride, even if the old wealth and influence lay buried with his ancestors.) Young Nathaniel was greatly impressed with his progenitors and frequently let his fertile imagination dwell upon them. They became spectres which haunted his daylight hours and invaded his sleep; he tells us that William

. . . was a soldier, legislator, judge; he was a ruler in the church with all the Puritan traits both good and evil. He was likewise a bitter persecutor, as witness the Quakers in their histories relate an incident of his hard severity towards a woman of their sect, which will last longer, it is to be feared, than any record of his better deeds, although they were many. His son too [John] inherited the persecuting spirit and made himself so conspicuous in the martyrdom of the witches, that their blood may fairly be said to have left a stain upon him . . . I know not whether these ancestors of mine bethought themselves to repent and ask pardon of Heaven

³Ibid., p. 9.

for their cruelties; or whether they are now groaning under the heavy consequences of them, in another state of being. At all events I, the present writer, hereby take the shame upon myself for their sakes, and pray that any curse and baneful influence of past curse incurred by them---as I have heard, and as the dreary and unprosperous condition of the race, for many a year back, would argue to exist--may be now and henceforth removed.⁴

These are powerful words of confession for any man; and, in Hawthorne's case, they indicate that the author had actually been moved by a sense of identity with these early ancestors. The curse incurred by them had burned into his very soul; for, indeed, Van Doren points out that he never on any other occasion made a confession of any sort.⁵ (These ancestors imposed upon him a compulsion to dwell upon the past, a preoccupation which, for the most part, was painful to him; but it was the source of his art's deepest and most compelling themes.) (In the introduction to The Scarlet Letter, he sketched a picture of this earliest ancestor which was destined to appear and reappear again as Hawthorne's portrait of the solemn Puritan:)

The figure of that first ancestor, invested by family tradition with a dim and dusky grandeur, was present to my boyish imagination, as far back as I can remember. It still haunts me, and induces a sort of home-feeling with the past, which I scarcely claim in reference to the present phase of the town. I seem to have a stronger claim to a residence here on account of this grave, bearded, sable-cloaked and steepled crowned progenitor,--who came so early with his Bible and his sword, and trode the unworn street with such stately port, and made so large a figure, as a man of war and peace,--a stronger claim than for myself, whose name is seldom heard and my face hardly known.⁶

⁴Ibid., pp. 10-11. ⁵Mark Van Doren, Hawthorne, p. 6.

⁶Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 10.

Here, then, Hawthorne summed up beautifully and briefly almost the sum of the Puritan influence upon his art. The crux of the matter was these (ancestors, who gave him his somber conception of the Puritans, his notion of the "baneful influence of the past," the idea of the sins of one generation reaching into subsequent ones, and the device of a family curse.) It is, perhaps, the appearance of all these things in The House of the Seven Gables plus the reconciliation of all of them with the contemporary setting (something which Hawthorne as a man and artist was obliged to do constantly) that led him to say that this book was the one which best represented his mind.

The story of John Hathorne and how he justly incurred the family curse is a fascinating one; and it is not difficult to see how it impressed Hawthorne so indelibly during childhood. Neither is it difficult to see why it horrified him. The story is related by Morris in The Rebellious Puritan.

John Hathorne inherited the sober prosperity of his father. His impeccable leadership and industry was crowned with an appointment as judge in 1692. In that same year, a group of girls--some quite young, others mature and married--met in the home of Doctor Samuel Parris for the purpose of practicing divination under the leadership of Tetuba, the Parris' Indian servant. A sudden and mysterious malady broke out among them. They were racked by contortions and such fits of impiety that their behavior became a public scandal. The

town doctor said they were bewitched. Parris was interrupted in offering a public prayer for their recovery by the ribald shouts of the affected. He gathered all the neighboring ministers at his home for a day of meditation, prayer, and fasting in an attempt to undo the "spell," but the behavior of the girls was horrible during the entire day; thus they knew the mystery of the Devil's work, and a great witch-hunt got underway. The names of several women were obtained from the girls. Three of the women were brought before Judge Hathorne and Jonathan ^{Cornwall} Curwen, who were sitting as magistrates. They were sent to trial. Two aged women were next accused, Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse, both of whom had hitherto led blameless lives. A five-year-old child named Dorcas Good was accused with them. Accusation spread all over the community. Terror gripped everyone, for accusations ran wild, and casual accusation was equivalent to indictment. "Tales were circulated of aged folk who sped forth at night upon broomsticks to attend black masses in near-by forests, of children who impishly tortured their playmates in the dark of night, of reputable citizens who perpetrated crimes upon bodies of their neighbors."⁷ Rebecca Nurse and her husband Francis were grandparents. Ann Putnam (a twelve-year-old child) and Abigail Williams, the minister's niece, testified that Rebecca had bewitched them. Two score of her

⁷Lloyd Morris, The Rebellious Puritan, pp. 21-22.

neighbors signed a petition proclaiming Rebecca's innocence. But she was dragged in front of Judge Hathorne. In front of the great magistrate, she was forced to stand with outstretched arms, her aged body unsupported, despite her husband's protest on the grounds that she might fall. His request to hold her hand was denied by the Judge. The two girls who had accused her could not stand her presence and fell into a fit when they met her gaze. Her husband protested against the cruelty of the proceedings but was ordered by Hathorne to be silent. The woman could only proclaim her innocence in face of the "evidence." She was tried in a special court convened by the governor, Sir William Phips, upon the advice of Increase Mather. Some fifty persons were tried by this court. Rebecca was once more brought before Judge Hathorne and his colleagues. She was found innocent by a jury twice, but the court was not satisfied and finally obtained a conviction in the third hearing because she could not explain what she had meant by some remark she had made in a previous examination. She was sentenced to death by hanging; and, when the sentence was read, she turned to Judge Hathorne and "solemnly cursed him and his posterity to the last generation."⁸ A week later she was hanged in the presence of an agitated mob on Gallows Hill, Judge Hathorne suffered financial reverses during the ten years of life which remained to him; two of his children died, and he was laid away much embittered by his reverses.

⁸Ibid., p. 24.

In the height of his prosperity he had bought a tract of land in Maine; but, when his heirs wished to claim this property, the title had unaccountably disappeared.⁹ The Pyncheon family in The House of the Seven Gables suffered an identical disaster with respect to lands they owned in Maine.

-If, then, Hawthorne gave us only a partial view of his Salem, it was that part which he found relevant--the part which was connected with the dead terror and splendor of Hathornian aristocracy. If there were shining piers where the spices of the Far East were being unloaded, he preferred to explore the rotting and worm-eaten wharves where Worthy-William, or John, might once have stood; if there were new houses jubilant with the laughter of children, he preferred the old, dark oak-panelled, many-gabled ones haunted by the cackles of solitary old women; if there were lively discussions among the young men of Salem regarding new adventures upon the seas, he preferred the legendary yarns of the old salts as they illuminated the past. If there were breathless talk of the new transcendental theology, he preferred to reflect upon the time-honored sternness of Calvinism.

Van Wyk Brooks points out in his The Flowering of New England that the Salem of the 1820's had, in fact, fallen into what amounted to torpid idleness when contrasted to the activity there before the War of 1812. The War had brought calamity to Salem and its neighboring ports; but, unlike

⁹Ibid., pp. 21-25.

Salem, the other ports had turned subsequently to manufacturing when sea commerce failed. Salem, however, (perhaps by virtue of the conservative Hathornes buried in her soil) clung tenaciously to her old ways.¹⁰ Many of the spinsters, the sailors, the old men, and the charcoal-burners told stories about the earliest days of Salem--"the stocks of Endicott, the magistrates who daily cropped an ear or slit a nostril, of stripping and whipping a woman at the tail-end of a cart, or giving her a stout hemp necklace or a brooch in the form of a scarlet letter."¹¹ Tales, too, were told of the Gray Champion, who emerged from nowhere in time of need. Hawthorne looked down the prodigiously long finger of many a Salem ancient while he heard tales of grave-yards, spider-webs, and witches playing their roles in supernatural dramas which carried with them the force of some terrible moral and were at least half or three-quarters believed by many of the inhabitants. These stories were generally told, not in the newer sections of Salem, but in the shadowy households "where symbols and realities were much the same."¹² Mesmerism was at the time fashionable among the young people who knew the difference between fact and fancy; yet while toying with this medium, even they were sometimes convinced that they had seen a ghost.¹³

¹⁰Van Wyk Brooks, The Flowering of New England, p. 210.

¹¹Ibid., p. 212. ¹²Ibid., p. 213. ¹³Ibid., p. 216.

The Hathornes themselves, living in an old house on Herbert Street, under the shadow of the family curse, were frequently troubled by an apparition that seemed to haunt their yard.¹⁴ Nathaniel was fascinated by mesmerism as a sort of modern witchcraft and tried several times to make it a forceful device in his romances (notably in the hands of the Mauks in The House of the Seven Gables) but usually without great success.

Hawthorne's mind was absorbed in the past of Salem and of his family for as far back as he could remember. Brooks points out that his mind never changed from its childhood trends. All he could recall was that his early thoughts were intensified by his reveries during the free and happy out-door days spent in Raymond, Maine. There he heard more tales and legends including one about a Father Moody of York who had worn a black veil over his face. (Hawthorne liked things veiled in mystery---"chimneys in the rain . . . a mountain with its base enveloped in fog while the summit floated aloft . . . a yellow field of rye veiled in a morning mist") a sunbeam passing through a cobweb or lying in the corner of a dusty floor . . . trees reflected in a river, reversed and strangely arrayed as if transfigured . . . the effects wrought by moonlight on a wall . . . moonlight in a familiar sitting-room investing every object with a strange remoteness . . . so that instead of seeing these objects, one

¹⁴Ibid., p. 216.

seemed to remember them through a lapse of years."¹⁵ Also, Brooks tells us, he used to stand in the shadows of his room on Sunday morning, watching the church across the street as the sun crawled down its steeple, ". . . touching the weathercock and gilding the dial, till the other steeples awoke and began to ring. His mind played about this conversation carried on by all the bells of Salem. At twilight he would still be standing there watching the people on the steps after the second sermon. Then, as dusk set in, with a feeling of unreality, as if his heart and mind had turned to vapour, he ventured out into the street."¹⁶ He enjoyed going occasionally to Boston, where he "rambled over Endicott's Orchard Farm, over the witchcraft around and Gallows Hill . . . He would sit on top of a cliff and watch his shadow gesturing on the sand far below."¹⁷

These aspects of his environment upon which Hawthorne chose to fix his attention have a certain poetic beauty, but are all alike in that they are pale, ghostly figures smiling dimly like spectres out of the past. It is the ancestral mind of Hawthorne which prefers these things to the elements of today's broad daylight. He neglected the brighter aspects of contemporary Salem because, perhaps, its decadent elements symbolized in his mind's eye the parallel decay of his own race; it spoke to him of his ancestors, in the primordial dawn of Colonial New England.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 217. ¹⁶Ibid., p. 218. ¹⁷Ibid., p. 219.

(Surprisingly enough, objective scholarship such as that of Perry Miller shows that he also gave us a fragmentary picture of Puritanism. Due primarily to the distortions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we are inclined to think that the dark sin-obsessed picture given by Hawthorne is the whole of the Puritan temperament. We find from Miller, however, that Puritans were not radically different from the Anglicans from whom they divorced themselves:)

If we take a comprehensive survey of the whole body of Puritan thought and belief as it existed in 1630 or 1640, if we make an exhaustive enumeration of ideas held by New England Puritans, we shall find that the vast majority of them were precisely those of their opponents . . . Puritanism was a movement toward certain ends within the culture and state of England; it centered about a number of concrete problems and advocated a particular program. Outside of that, it was part and parcel of the times, and its culture was simply the culture of England at that moment . . . if we wish to take Puritan culture as a whole, we shall find, let us say, that about ninety per cent of the intellectual life, scientific knowledge, morality, manners, and customs, notions and prejudices, was that of all Englishmen.¹⁸

and:

. . . it was the habit of proponents for the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment during the 1920's to dub Prohibitionists "Puritans," and cartoonists made the nation familiar with an image of the Puritan: a gaunt lank-haired kill-joy, wearing a black steeple hat and compounding for sins he was inclined to by damning those to which he had no mind. Yet any acquaintance with the Puritans of the seventeenth century will reveal at once, not only that they did not wear such hats, but also that they attired themselves in all hues of the rainbow, and furthermore that in their daily life they imbibed what seems to us prodigious quantities of

¹⁸Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, The Puritans, p. 7.

alcoholic beverages, with never the slightest inkling that they were doing anything sinful.¹⁹

(Hawthorne, it seems, is much closer to the cartoon than the truth in the picture he presented of the Puritan's dress. Some of the New Englanders were sober in their dress to avoid the sins of vanity and immodesty. The Puritans even had laws against flashy garments, but much evidence has been amassed to show that these laws were generally ignored without fear of penalty.²⁰) It is probable that Hawthorne's ancestors were among those who approved of such laws and abided by them.

(In the matter of theological dogma, again we see in Hawthorne only the dark side of Puritanism.) It is true that the Puritans subscribed to the unhappy views of the Geneva theologian, John Calvin; they believed in original sin --"In Adam's fall, we sinned all"; they believed in the depravity of all human hearts. Salvation, they were assured, could be had only by divine election. This divine election was strictly up to God and could not be achieved by earnestly working for it.²¹ The Puritans subscribed to all of this, as Hawthorne pointed out many times.

This somber doctrine was, however, amended in New England by an elaboration of the Calvinist doctrine generally spoken of as the "Covenant Theology" or the "Federal Theology"²² which comprised a much sunnier view than the

¹⁹Ibid., p. 2. ²⁰Ibid., p. 388. ²¹Ibid., p. 56.

²²Ibid., p. 58.

above creeds unamended would have been. Miller says:

The covenant did not alter the fact that those only are saved upon whom God sheds His grace, but it is made very clear and reasonable how and why certain men are selected, and prescribed the conditions under which they might reach a fair assurance of their own standing. Above all, in the covenant God pledged Himself not to run athwart human conceptions of right and justice.²³

(In Hawthorne's works, we see with clarity the concept of original sin, universal depravity, the futility of struggling against fate, and all of the gloom of the Calvinistic doctrine; but there is not so much as a hint of the redeeming idea of the covenant.) It was a happy amendment which meant nothing to him. Melville once said of him:

"Behind those eyes . . . there was a blackness ten times black," a "great power of blackness that derived from Hawthorne's peculiar Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free . . . perhaps no writer has ever wielded this terrific thought with greater terror than this same harmless Hawthorne."²⁴

(The Scarlet Letter is generally conceded to be the best of Hawthorne's books, the author's preference for The House of the Seven Gables notwithstanding. It is here that he shows best his delicate understanding of the endless ramifications of sin.) Most of his ideas concerning it are painted in this work with unparalleled vividness and strength. The sin themes are pitted against each other with such compelling artistry that the ending of the book, far from being

²³Ibid.

²⁴Van Doren, op. cit., p. 179.

forced, or unconvincing, is fate itself. Given all the circumstances to be what they were, it could have ended in no other way. The people in the drama are snared in a web of destiny, where, despite their earnest hopes and struggles, they remain ensnared until devoured by the inevitable chain of events.

In the throng gathered around the market place in the opening scene, we see the familiar

. . . bearded men, in saddened colored garments and gray steeple-crowned hats . . . the grim rigidity that petrified the bearded physiognomies of these good people would have argued some awful business in hand .

.

 It could have betokened nothing short of the anticipated execution of some noted culprit, on whom the sentence of a legal tribunal had but confirmed the verdict of public sentiment. But, in that early severity of the Puritan character, an inference of this kind could not so indubitably be drawn. It might be that a sluggish bond-servant or an undutiful child, whom his parents had given over to the civil authority, was to be corrected at the whipping post.²⁵

Hawthorne began his masterpiece, then, by setting for us a tone of gray somberness and Puritannical sobriety. The tone is perfectly sustained throughout, an artistic accomplishment not uncharacteristic of Hawthorne's work. When he wrote at his best, it was with a purity of tone and a singularity of effect rivaled only by Poe. He has, however, (as shown) misrepresented "Mr. Average Puritan" from the top of the ancestral steeple-hat down to the tip of the stern beard. The average Puritan not only avoided this joyless

²⁵Hawthorne, op. cit., pp. 65, 68.

appearance but avoided also the implied over zealousness in punishing lawbreakers. Miller contends that they were "less severe than in England."²⁶ Their punishments were, to be sure, extreme from a modern point of view; but this was because they belonged to the seventeenth century, and not, as explained by Hawthorne, because of the "severity of Puritan character." (At the risk of being repetitious, it must be pointed out that Hawthorne focused upon his own selected fragment of the truth about the Puritan mind because he was obsessed with the dark vision of his own ancestors.) To him everything about them was dark. His inherent and extremely delicate sense of right and wrong (was stunned and horrified by the knowledge) (imparted very early by his mother) that people of his own blood had actually judged those accused of witchcraft, condemning the convicted to death and bringing down upon the Hawthorne family an eternal curse. (To him these ancestors were the center of Puritanism and imparted to it all of the dark properties which he describes and re-describes in practically all of his fiction.) They gave his mind that "blackness ten times black" which was noticed by Melville. Their terrifying reality gave him his insight into Calvinism. He forcefully described this black old doctrine because he believed it. He believed it because he was obliged to live with it whether he liked it or not. (Being so stricken and haunted by the black deeds of his ancestors, he

²⁶Miller, op. cit., p. 386.

could not fail to believe in the power of sin, nor in its capacity for being passed from one generation into the next.) Occupied with the thought of the curse for a lifetime, he should most probably wonder if and how it might be broken; and this would inevitably germinate in his mind an interest in the nature of unpardonable sin. Were the transgressions of the early Hathornes never to lie buried in the past? How he might have come to be so obsessed needs consideration, and will receive it. At any rate the notion of an "ancestral mind" as the heart of Hawthorne explains more of the facts than some alternative explanations. He was not interested in Puritanism as such, or he would have given a more representative picture of it. It could not, then, be an explanation of his mind. He was not interested in presenting an accurate picture of Salem. Both the geography of Salem and the facts of Puritanism were distorted out of their true proportions; after distortion, both harmonized with Hawthorne's concept of his ancestors and the haunting terror of the curse. Most important of all, this interpretation accounts for the central preoccupation with sin, guided by a healthy moral and ethical sense, but without the slightest trace of assent to any theological dogma. There is a constant undertone of terror and melancholia--a dissatisfaction with Salem, the past, Puritanism, and the whole business of his art which suggests a dangerously chronic frustration. Far from being a religion to which Hawthorne could assent for the health of

his own soul, Puritanism--his phase of it--was a malignity of the mind, the cure of which was his life's quest. His monomania threatened constantly to send his sanity tottering, and he knew it. Finding a cure that would be emotionally and intellectually acceptable became increasingly a matter of life and death.

His mental state was especially precarious just before he published The Scarlet Letter, for it was at that time that several great external pressures were brought to bear upon him simultaneously. Because of the Whig victory of 1848 he lost his position as surveyor in the Salem custom house. His political enemies (led by Charles Upham) had brought charges against him of corruption in office, which he was trying to answer. He was angry, upset; and his unemployment in 1849 precipitated an unparalleled financial crisis.

The summer of 1849 was for Hawthorne, as he himself later described it, a time of "great diversity and severity of emotion." He was angry at his political enemies and chagrined and frustrated by his inability to defeat them. He was very properly anxious about the support of his family. He was distressed, moreover, by the rapidly failing health of his mother and was grief-stricken at her death on July 31.²⁷

On July 29th, Hawthorne visited his mother's bedside, and left the following very revealing account in his notebook:

At about five o'clock, I went to my mother's chamber, and was shocked to see such an alteration since my last visit, the day before yesterday. I love my mother; but there has been, ever since my boyhood, a sort of coldness of intercourse between us, such as is apt to

²⁷Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne; A Biography, pp. 89-90.

come between persons of strong feelings, if they are not managed rightly. I did not expect to be much moved at the time--that is to say, not to feel any overpowering emotion struggling, just then--though I knew that I should deeply remember and regret her. Mrs. Dike was in the chamber. Louisa pointed to a chair near the bed; but I was moved to kneel down close by my mother, and take her hand. She knew me, but could only murmur a few indistinct words--among which I understood an injunction to take care of my sisters. Mrs. Dike left the chamber, and then I found the tears slowly gathering in my eyes. I tried to keep them down; but it would not be--I kept filling up, till, for a few moments, I shook with sobs. For a long time, I knelt there, holding her hand; and surely it is the darkest hour I have ever lived. Afterwards, I stood by the open window, and looked through the crevice of the curtain. The shouts, laughter, and cries of the two children had come up into the chamber, from the open air, making a strange contrast with the death-bed scene. And now, through the crevice of the curtain, I saw my little Una of the golden locks, looking very beautiful; and so full of spirit and life that she was life itself. And then I looked at my poor dying mother; and seemed to see the whole of human existence at once, standing in the dusty midst of it. Oh what mockery, if what I saw were all, --let the interval between extreme youth and dying age be filled up with what happiness it might! But God would not have made the close so dark and wretched, if there were nothing beyond; for then it would have been a fiend that created us, and measured out our existence, and not God. It would be something beyond wrong--it would be insult--to be thrust out of life into annihilation in this miserable way. So, out of the very bitterness of death, I gather the sweet assurance of a better state of being.²⁸

For a man of Hawthorne's reserve to speak of a lifetime "coldness of intercourse" when she lay dying very probably indicates a long and deep-rooted contrariety between himself and his mother. "It would have taken very little," says Cantwell, "to transform this reserve into a sense of deeper estrangement."²⁹ His confession that he "did not expect to

²⁸Ibid. ²⁹Robert Cantwell, Nathaniel Hawthorne, p. 313.

be moved at the time" would certainly serve to verify this suspicion of an old psychological battle between Hawthorne and his mother.

(His early family life gives us a picture of abnormality and gloom. In 1808, when Hawthorne was four years of age, his father died.) A sister Louisa was born that same year; and he had a sister, Elizabeth, who was two years older than he.³⁰ The death of the father meant that Nathaniel was the only male in his family, a bad situation in any case, but one which was rendered worse by the manner in which his mother chose to live thereafter; Cantwell observes that it was unfortunate for Hawthorne that "so much of his life was spent among women." He goes on to say:

His early stories deal often with the rather mortifying masculine experience of encountering women whose sexual experience is greater than his own. The theme comes again and again into his work, sometimes in a comic, or at least an ironic sense, and more often with its tragic implications, setting in motion the doubts, the self-distrust and the doubts of others that may lead to tragedy. Yet coupled with this wry acknowledgment of his perennial innocence, there was a perception of feminine tenderness deeper and more poignant than that expressed by any other American writer. The sisters in "The Wives of the Dead", Hester in The Scarlet Letter, the Quaker's wife in The Gentle Boy, the farmer's wife in The Canterbury Pilgrims, and the hundreds of simple women who appear in his works, working, sacrificing themselves, and making their simple statements that reveal the unconscious heroism of their lives, are a people of such purity and innocence that worldly wisdom and malicious humor are the last qualities that could be attributed to them.

At every turn in the story of Hawthorne's life one comes upon the poignant figure of his mother. In his manhood, the thought of the tragic emptiness of

³⁰Ibid., p. 383.

her life was unbearable to her son. She did nothing, nothing at all. She spent her girlhood in her father's house, married a sea captain who lived next door, and then, after his death, vanished from the world as completely as if she too had taken one of those mysterious voyages to Surinam. Except for the few years in Raymond, she lived in an upstairs room and seldom left it. She bought no new clothes, but continued to wear the old-fashioned dresses, the costumes of before the War of 1812, that she had worn when her husband was alive. Thus she lived for forty years.

Around her the household changed, her sisters and brothers grew older, her children grew older, the town of Salem changed, the ships disappeared, the stage-coaches no longer ran, and one after another of the great families that had dominated the town left it forever. From time to time her brothers sought her out, for her signature was needed on the deeds when they sold another tract of land in Maine. She left proof of her continued existence in the office of the land records of Cumberland County in Portland. There were two volumes of them. Otherwise the world might well question whether she ever had a real being, and was not an imagined figure to fulfill the requirements of the romantic story of the time.

(She was twenty-eight when her husband died, though her seclusion had probably begun before. At sixty-seven she took her first meal with the family--and not with her family, but with Hawthorne, his wife and his children.³¹)

(This mother imposing upon herself a living-death to commemorate her husband's passing must have given the house a "death scent" which the nostrils of little Nathaniel were quick to perceive.) Here in front of his youthful eyes was a woman living in the past--or rather not living at all. The horror of such an existence stayed with him for life. "Hawthorne could not bear to think about her life,"³² says Cantwell, recalling the notebook's account of the author's visit to his dying mother's bedside. Reviewing in his

³¹Ibid., pp. 30-31.

³²Ibid., p. 384.

mind his mother's strange and completely empty existence, he thought if this were all there was to her life, that God must be a fiend.

Hawthorne had said that his mother was strong-willed.³³ (We find evidence scattered here and there throughout his life, that he was, in fact, dominated by this strange lady; and we have reason to believe that she had a strong hold upon him which he resented. (In a letter to his mother which was written March 7, 1820,) after he had returned from Raymond to Salem in order to prepare for College, (he said desparingly, "the happiest days of my life are gone . . . Why was I not a girl that I might have pinned all my life to my mother's apron?"³⁴))

When (as very much of an adult) Hawthorne went to Brook Farm, there are letters extant to indicate that the females of his family still smothered him with a possessive sort of love. They worried about little Nathaniel's working in the hot sun; they feared that he was not taking care of himself; his mother was outraged by the amount of work that the farm was imposing upon him.³⁵

As if the weird isolation of his mother, and this stifling female domination were not enough to misshape his childhood, fate struck another blow at Hawthorne in the form of

³³Ibid., p. 31. ³⁴Van Doren, op. cit., p. 15.

³⁵Cantwell, op. cit., p. 335.

a foot injury:

(The femininity of Hawthorne's world was increased when, at the age of nine, he injured his foot. The circumstances of the injury are vague. It was said that one foot ceased to grow and that he was threatened with lameness. At any rate, it was plain that he could not go to school. He was delighted and made the most of the mysterious ailment to stay at home.³⁶)

The external world, filled mostly with people whose backgrounds were as far removed from Hawthorne's as can be imagined, must have presented a confusing and even frightening strangeness to Hawthorne. He was always glad to avoid it when possible. With no other place to turn, he escaped into solitude, into a dream world of his own creation. Unequipped for a normal life and repelled as he was by the unwholesome atmosphere and female dominance in his own home, he could do nothing else.

No other family in the world would have made so few demands on one's sociability as this family in which seclusion, now that Elizabeth and Louisa had fallen into their mother's ways, was the very principle of household ritual--this family in which meals were rarely eaten in common, and most frequently served in the privacy of separate bedrooms. Here one could believe, almost without effort, that the realities of the nineteenth century were no realities at all, but vague and dubious rumors, less substantial than the presences of one's Puritan forebears, less credible than the men and women of romance, less urgent than the voices of one's own quixotic dreaming.³⁷

If the visions he encountered there were even darker than the realities of his homelife, they at least had the inestimable advantage of being visions. In this world

³⁶Ibid., p. 33.

³⁷Newton Arvin, Hawthorne, p. 35.

Hawthorne could be his own boss and manipulate his phantoms to suit himself. Other explanations have been offered for his retreat--that he merely followed the example of his family, that he wished to preserve his artistry from the roughness of life--, but he himself dislike the "cursed, habit of solitude"; there seemed to be an element of compulsion in it which he himself failed to understand. He wrote in a letter to Longfellow:

By some witchcraft or other--for I really cannot assign any reasonable why and wherefore--I have been carried apart from the main current of life and find it impossible to get back again. Since we last met [at college], . . . I have secluded myself from society; and yet I never meant any such thing . . . I have made a captive of myself, and put me into a dungegn, and now I cannot find the key to let myself out.³⁸

It was, of course, while he was wrapped in the shroud of solitude that he created from his visions the tales and romances which made him famous. It has already been suggested that a monomaniacal fixation upon his own ancestors was the common denominator of all his thoughts. The question of why he might have become so obsessed must now be considered. It has already been shown (on page five) that Hawthorne said "the figure of that first ancestor, invested by family tradition with a dim and dusky grandeur, was present to my boyish imagination as far back as I can remember." The solitary circumstances in which the Hawthornes lived suggest

³⁸Warren, op. cit., pp. xiii-xiv.

that he could have received the chronic exposure to this tradition so necessary for impressing a young mind only from his mother. It is probable from what we know about her great sorrow upon the occasion of her husband's death and her resultant solitude--that her mind reverted to "the good old days" of the Hathorne family. In her poverty and obscurity, she could at least have taken comfort in family pride. This contention is strengthened by the fact that her brothers, Richard and Robert Manning, were enjoying a substantial prosperity concurrent with her own poverty. Richard operated a stage line, was a justice of the peace, and a store keeper. He kept servants and lived in considerable luxury.³⁹ It was Robert who built the large and pretentious home at Raymond, Maine, known to the village as "Manning's Folly."⁴⁰ Robert planned and subsidized Hawthorne's education,⁴¹ a fact which must have been humiliating both to Hawthorne and to his mother. The mother's pride in the Hathorne ancestry was the only wealth which her more fortunate brothers could not share, so it is not surprising that Hawthorne's earliest recollection of the family tradition was imbued with a "dim and dusky grandeur." He doubtless heard of the persecutions perpetrated by these ancestors and the resultant curse from the same source, but "grandeur" was emphasized by his mother.

³⁹Cantwell, op. cit., p. 40. ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 37.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 44.

As a result of his estrangement toward his mother and her living exemplification of the baneful effects of the past, his mind settled upon the curse. Was it, possibly, a subconscious rebellion against his mother which led him to be obsessed with the dark side of his ancestry?

Certainly, as he himself pointed out, his ancestors had rendered many useful and kindly services to their community. An objective evaluation of their behavior might lend credit to the thought that their persecuting spirit was, after all, a product of the times. But Hawthorne was sure that the influence of their black deeds far outlasted that of their good ones. He elected that attitude at the expense of remembering their eminence. It is doubtful that he consciously did so, for this association of his kinsmen with the spilling of innocent blood was painful to him. He felt on the strength of it that the Hathornes deserved to be cursed. But by renouncing them, and painting them as villains, he deprived his mother of all she had left. He thus asserted the independence of his own will.

(His earliest reading also contributed something to his consciousness of grim Puritan ancestry. He read Pilgrim's Progress at the age of six;⁴² the first book he bought was The Faerie Queen.⁴³ The first of these, particularly, imparted the gloom of his Puritan New England.) Both reflected

⁴²Van Doren, op. cit., p. 10. ⁴³Ibid.

the rigid moral codes of the Puritans, and both gave him models for his art form. Here he saw his own kind of allegory; for the place and people of Bunyan and Spenser are not places and people at all, but the symbols of various virtues and vices. (Hawthorne also found Cotton Mather's The Ecclesiastical History of New England, or The Magnalia.⁴⁴ Here he found mention of his own ancestors William and John as assistant magistrates of New England. The Magnalia says a great deal concerning witchcraft and the persecution of the accused.) It discusses at some length how some who were accused were acquitted because it was officially proclaimed that often demons and devils took on the shape of the finest people in the community and then went about their mischief, as seen in Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown. Some, however, insisted that God would not permit "an innocent person to come under such a spectral representation; and that a concurrence of so many circumstances would prove an accused person to be in confederacy with daemons thus afflicting of the neighbours."⁴⁵ It is also evident from already quoted passages of the introduction to The Scarlet Letter that Hawthorne had one further rationalized reason for his pathological fixation upon the family curse. It was a convenient explanation, not only for generations of misfortune in the

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 70.

⁴⁵Cotton Mather, Magnalia, Vol. I, p. 209.

family, but more specifically, for his own keenly-felt obscurity as a writer.

Those who knew him intimately never failed to recognize a certain duality in his nature. Austin Warren says:

The undeniable gloom of Hawthorne's imagination belied his personal temper. The devil indeed got into his inkpot when he sat down to write his best things; but no devil lacerated the man--on the point, his family testify truly. Hawthorne's personal temperament was quiet, pensive, but not morose; cheerful, even, in an autumnal fashion.⁴⁶

and:

"He was almost as much a puzzle to himself," says an English biographer, "as he was to anyone else." He seemed, in fact, to be two men; and the one was constantly in the attitude of watching and commenting on the other. He walked through the world like one both in it and not in it--very much present, for everybody remarked upon his good hard sense, yet noticeably absent too.⁴⁷

(There were, then, "two Hawthornes"; one was the artist who in defiance of female domination "locked himself in a dungeon," there to lose himself in dreams, to become obsessed with the family curse and the Puritannical darkness surrounding it; the other was the healthy Hawthorne who wondered why he had taken such a course when he had no conscious intention of doing so.) It was the strain of health in his complex mind which rebelled at the twelve years of isolation he imposed upon himself after Bowdoin. He saw the

⁴⁶Warren, op. cit., p. xv.

⁴⁷Van Doren, op. cit., p. 220.

dangers of living away from the traffic of common affairs; but in the war with his dark twin,-- his "other self" -- he could never muster the strength necessary for final victory. (It was his awareness of danger, perhaps, which introduced the notion that isolation brings in its wake a "sensation of moral cold that makes the spirit shiver as if it had reached the frozen solitudes around the poles."⁴⁸ Brooks says that Hawthorne's solitude gave his genius its unique caste, but threatened at the same time to undo him.) "He was threatened with melancholia and knew it."⁴⁹ He generalized this fear regarding himself into a mistrust of science. In the cold objectivity of its method, he saw the death of the warm human heart. Deliberate violation of the sanctity of a human heart was, then, the one unpardonable sin--or so the rational Hawthorne decided. All through his fiction a warfare between these two sides of Hawthorne is visible; on the one hand, the old obsession with the evils of the past, the universality of sin, and fixed destiny. On the other, a healthy suspicion of isolation, belief in the sanctity of every human heart, and a desire to establish warm contact with the chain of human affairs. These latter themes are best exemplified in

⁴⁸Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's Works, Vol. V, "The Artist of the Beautiful," Moses From an Old Manse, Old Manse Edition, p. 307.

⁴⁹Brooks, op. cit., p. 22.

such tales as "Wakefield," "The Man of Adament," "Ethan Brand," "Rapaccini's Daughter," and "The Artist of the Beautiful." They represent a desire for personal rather than intellectual reform. (A consciousness of the evil of isolation and a respect for the sanctity of the heart are perfectly at home with a belief in original sin, predestination, hidden guilt, and the notions of the past's being evil.) They are emotionally compatible too, since Hawthorne (incorporated them into some of the best of his works without relieving their Puritannical darkness in the slightest.) They are simply the watchdogs of sanity.

Occasionally Hawthorne engaged in composition which released his imagination from the ancestral dungeon; but when he did, out hopped something inferior, or even vulgar, like "Mrs. Bullfrog." Some of his sketches, like "A Rill from the Town Pump" and "Little Annie's Ramble" are well written prose, but really of little consequence. His masterly works were purchased at the price of an internal tension which was slowly pulling him apart.

(Hawthorne's marriage was an attempt to escape, both from the domination of his family and from the hell imposed upon him by the nightmares of his solitary visions.) Once the wedding became imminent, (there seemed to be no longer any fear on Hawthorne's part but that he was a citizen of

reality, and . . . a happy one."⁵⁰) His delight in having, at last, found a warm human contact was very apparent when he wrote to Sophia:

(I never, till now, had a friend who could give me repose; all this disturbed me, and, whether for pleasure or for pain, it was still disturbance. But peace overflows from your heart.⁵¹)

(His family had not lost their hold on him, for he had to "nerve himself to tell his mother and his sisters of his plans."⁵²) Elizabeth wrote a very cool note to Sophia, expressing her indignation at having been kept for so long in ignorance of the arrangement.⁵³ (This marriage was probably never agreeable to any of them; the last words of his mother were a plea to take care of his sisters, despite the fact that he had a family of his own by that time and was wondering how he was going to support them.) It is to be remembered, too, in appraising the attitude of the family that Louisa -- despite Hawthorne's earnest entreaties -- came to visit him after his marriage only once.⁵⁴ She, his younger sister, was perhaps closer to his heart than either Elizabeth or his mother. This visit was made only after many letters of entreaty. At the end of the summer, Hawthorne and Sophia visited his family. The visit was not a pleasant one.

⁵⁰Cantwell, op. cit., p. 336.

⁵¹Van Doren, op. cit., p. 100.

⁵²Cantwell, op. cit., p. 336.

⁵³Van Doren, op. cit., p. 103.

⁵⁴Louise Tharp, The Peabody Sisters of Salem, p. 159.

Hawthorne's mother refused to break her solitude to welcome Sophia, and Elizabeth was extremely hostile toward her.⁵⁵

Later the Hawthornes had financial trouble and were obliged to leave the Old Manse so that the owner, who needed his house, could move in. Hawthorne could not live with Mrs. Peabody and Elizabeth; so on August 24, 1845, Sophia wrote Louisa asking to come to the Hawthorne residence. She received no answer.⁵⁶

On September 1, Sophia wrote a note of panic. Ripley wanted them out of the house within the week. Louisa wrote this time, telling Sophia that she could have the parlor and Nathaniel his old boyhood room.⁵⁷ In May of 1846, the Hawthornes moved to Boston.

Again, when Sophia was expecting her second child, she wrote asking Louisa to come and help out. She received no reply.⁵⁸

(Hawthorne married a woman whose temperament was diametrically opposed to that of his mother. "The beliefs she held led her to seek constantly for a higher type of being and a better kind of life than she could find."⁵⁹) ^{p. 136} Of her stay in Cuba before she met Hawthorne, Cantwell says:

Slowly a tropical strain was woven into the plain fabric of her New England experience and never left it,

⁵⁵Ibid., ⁵⁶Ibid., p. 178. ⁵⁷Ibid., p. 179.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 182. ⁵⁹Cantwell, op. cit., p. 254.

something vivid and exotic, a Latin-American duskiness and humor, a zest for life, and a frankness and freedom in enjoying it.⁶⁰

and:

In the early days of their marriage, Sophia danced the "Cach a Cha" for Hawthorne. This was a dance she had seen the Cuban girls do but had never dared dance herself before. With its conclusion, Hawthorne observed that she deserved John the Baptist's head.⁶¹

It is difficult to imagine Hawthorne's mother dancing a "Cach a Cha." Certainly, then, Sophia was well qualified to give Hawthorne welcome relief from his mother's personality. He could appreciate her "zest for living" without agreeing with the ideas she had.

He thought her wonderful, and yet he thought her view of life was wrong, and the problem he set for himself was that of making credible to her the unreality of that visionary island she had lived in.⁶²

Hawthorne had promised Sophia that he would base a story on her Cuban diary. The outcome was "Edward Randolph's Portrait" in which Sophia appears as Alice, "an ethereal girl always dressed in white as Sophia was, a girl with artistic gifts, educated abroad, with something wayward and childlike about her."⁶³ It is interesting to notice that this story dwelling as it does upon an essentially mental experience that Sophia had in Cuba (painting an effective portrait of a young Don Fernando and then spoiling it) is not powerfully

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 252. ⁶¹Tharp, op. cit., p. 156.

⁶²Cantwell, op. cit., p. 254. ⁶³Ibid., p. 255.

written as are his tales extracted from pain; yet the fact that the subject is Sophia, his medium of escape, called vaguely to his mind the reflections of his old horrors. He moved the scene from Cuba back to old New England and included in it "the awful weight of a people's curse," a portrait whose expression reveals some "hidden guilt,"⁶⁴ the ability of passing time to impart to the portrait a more intense depth and darkness of expression.⁶⁵ Hutchinson, who made a fatally bad decision under the eye of the grim portrait, died "crying out that he was choking on the blood of its victims,"⁶⁶ while taking on "the expression of the portrait on the wall."⁶⁷

Here was the old curse trying to torture Hawthorne, even at a time of great happiness; but that it failed to do so is evidenced by the lack of conviction with which he manipulated his familiar "stage properties." Indeed, Hawthorne found the whole period immediately following his marriage unproductive and could not understand it.⁶⁸ He devoted his energies to collecting some of his old manuscripts under the title of Mosses from an Old Manse and doing hack-writing.⁶⁹ The curse was not to be denied

⁶⁴Ibid. ⁶⁵Ibid., p. 256. ⁶⁶Ibid. ⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 396. ⁶⁹Ibid.

indefinitely, however; it merely sat down to await the propitious moment.

The opportunity for the curse to re-assert itself came when he was composing (The Scarlet Letter). (The death of his mother, the loss of his job, and the attack of his political enemies, all bearing down upon him at once must surely have made him feel that the family curse had singled him out as its favorite victim.) He could certainly believe in the doctrine of original sin now, for just as Adam's sin had been visited upon the whole of mankind, so the sins of the Hathorne "Adams" of the New World seemed to be striking out at him after two hundred and twenty years. His struggle was a hopeless fight against the unalterable course of fate. Circumstances over which he had no control were crushing him. (His great despondency was fed particularly, perhaps, by the death of his mother which symbolized so clearly to him the aimlessness of life.) The occasion of her death brought unexpected tears of compassion to the eyes of Hawthorne; she still had a hold upon him in spite of the years he had struggled to release himself; he was so moved as he sat beside her holding her hand that it was, he confessed, the darkest moment of his life. It so distressed him that he fell into a sort of "brain fever."⁷⁰ (The remorse he felt on this occasion was the result of a deep

⁷⁰Stewart, op. cit., p. 91.

seated feeling of guilt; even while he rebelled against the domination of his mother and his ugly childhood, he loved her--or tried to do so. Perhaps the depths of his spirit whispered gruffly to him that he hated his mother.) If so, this was an intimate guilt and one which he would prefer to carry within him rather than to confess--even to himself. It might account, along with the reasons already cited, for his preoccupation with the guilt of his ancestors; it reached conscious expression in that guise. It would certainly account for Hawthorne's insistence upon the destructive powers of "secret sin."

His defense against the three-fold agonies of 1849 was again the escapism of composition. Again (he traded real tragedy for the imaginary and, as always, dressed up his own frustrations in the dreary cloth of his ancestral Puritanism.) (This time he transformed the old monomania into a masterpiece.) His mind, to be sure, was greatly agitated; it probably reverted for a time to the sort of horror and madness he had described years earlier in The Haunted Mind as:

" . . . this nightmare of the soul; this heavy sinking of the spirits; this wintry gloom about the heart; this indistinct horror of the mind."⁷¹

This is the dark, unhealthy side of Hawthorne; while this side of his nature imparts its tone to The Scarlet

⁷¹Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's Works, Vol. II, The Haunted Mind, Twice-Told-Tales, Old Manse Edition, p. 98.

Letter and determines its outcome, it is, however, subdued with the restraint and delicacy necessary to make the final effect devastating. (Hawthorne managed in spite of his state of mind to control the black fruits of his anguish with sanity. The theme is sin in all of its familiar forms.)

(In Hester, it is the sin of the broken law.) Hester is as aware as anyone else that she has committed a sin. In the sympathetic picture given of her, Hawthorne made no effort to deny the importance of her transgression. (He (rather) seemed to say that the deed, having been committed, is destined to have endless reverberations.) (The narrowness of the Puritan morality which made life so difficult for Hester in Boston is condemned, but the fact of her sin is her real tragedy.) She could never have left it behind her by leaving Boston. At her own request, the scarlet letter follows her to the grave. (The sin is too deeply impregnated for her ever to relieve herself of it.) The insufficiency of good works is pointed out by her ceaseless helpfulness wherever needed, accompanied always by the glow of the scarlet letter. (Here, then, is a Calvinistic consciousness of the reality of sin and its undying consequences, ideas neither new nor strange for Hawthorne; but in Hester they are humanized to a degree never to be achieved by Hawthorne in any other place.)

(Hester, unlike Dimmesdale, had sufficient strength to bear the burden of sin.) ("As always with Hawthorne's women," observes Van Doren, "she has more courage than the man with

whom her lot is joined."⁷²) (Hawthorne, perhaps, depicts this strength in women as a result of his own domination by them in childhood.)

The child Pearl and her relation to Hester is best described by Hawthorne:

But it was a remarkable attribute of this [red] garb, and, indeed, of the child's whole appearance, that it irresistibly and inevitably reminded the beholder of the token which Hester Prynne was doomed to wear upon her bosom. It was the scarlet letter in another form; the scarlet letter endowed with life! The mother herself--as if the red ignominy were so deeply scorched into her brain that all her conceptions assumed its form--had carefully wrought out the similitude; lavishing upon it many hours of morbid ingenuity, to create between the object of her affection and the emblem of her guilt and torture. But in truth, Pearl was the one as well as the other; and only in consequence of that identity had Hester contrived so perfectly to represent the scarlet letter in her appearance.⁷³

This identity of a love object and an emblem of guilt is interesting. It may point to Hawthorne's tangled feelings with respect to his mother. He later asserted that love and hatred may at the bottom be the same thing.⁷⁴

Dimmesdale embodied both secret guilt and the hunger for confession; this identifies him with Hawthorne himself, as does also his tendency toward solitude. (He is an essentially pious man but lacks the courage necessary for sharing with

⁷²Van Doren, op. cit., p. 154.

⁷³Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, Vol. VI, p. 144.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 376.

Hester her public censure.)

He tortures but cannot purify himself. And there is no man for whom purity is more important, no man who more loves truth and loathes the lie. Yet he maintains the lie and so diminishes his very existence. "It is the unspeakable misery of a life so false as his," says Hawthorne at one point, "that it steals the pith and substance out of whatever realities there are around us, and which were meant by Heaven to be the spirit's joy and nutriment . . . The only truth which continued to give Mr. Dimmesdale a real existence on this earth was the anguish of his inmost soul, and the undissembled expression of it in his aspect. Had he once found the power to smile, and wear a face of gayety, there would have been no such man."⁷⁵

(Chillingworth is a stock Hawthorne villain; he is the aged and misshapen scientist who is consumed by his desire for revenge.) He probes Dimmesdale for the secrets of his soul. After he had found the minister's secret emblazoned on his bosom over the heart, he became an actor in Dimmesdale's visions. He drove his patient into fits of terror and fright. Shortly Dimmesdale began to keep vigils and to fast; he made a little whip and lashed himself each night. None of these measures dispelled his terrors or purified him. Chillingworth is the only one, then, who commits the unpardonable sin of coldly and deliberately violating the sanctity of a human heart. (He is unique as this type of villain, however, in that he is Hester's husband and therefore has an acceptable human motive for his conduct.)

Even the crowd fits into the tone of the book and plays a functional part:

⁷⁵Van Doren, op. cit., p. 153.

The crowd here is the whole of society which when it appears, as Constance Rourke has said "appears mainly as a mob under strong emotion" No crowd in Hawthorne is like this one, either at the beginning, around Hester's scaffold, or at the conclusion on election day. Again the reason lies in the fierceness of its relevance to his individuals. Hester and Arthur Dimmesdale have all of life for their audience. They want no audience, yet they need one too. They have it, ironically, in this mob whose repulsive is equal to its attractive power.⁷⁶

The Scarlet Letter is a picture of unrelieved Puritanical gloom. It points out the dire need for true repentance and confession, but it leaves the question of what happens after that unanswered. Confession soothes the soul in this world, but what does it provide for in the next? In the final scene on the scaffold Hester beseeches the minister for comfort, saying, "surely, surely, we have ransomed one another with all this woe!"⁷⁷ But he bids her think only about the law that they broke. "It may be," he said, "that, when we forgot our God,-- when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul,-- it was henceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion. God knows; and He is merciful!"⁷⁸

The past was fate and the future in the next world is fearful to contemplate. These were the dark conclusions of The Scarlet Letter. Hawthorne and his publisher felt that

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 160.

⁷⁷Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, Vol. VI, p. 371.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 371-372.

the story was too lacking in sunshine to sell well, but the book was an immediate success--partially, perhaps, because of its theme, regarded at the time as "shocking," but mostly because of the great power and sincerity of the story.

Hawthorne suspected the worst from the public because he himself found the book so cheerless. Perhaps it frightened him a little to realize that he had written it; at any rate, he planned never again to tread so deeply in despair.) He said:

. . . my old native town will loom upon me through the haze of memory . . . Henceforth it ceases to be a reality of my life. I am a citizen of somewhere else . . . for--though it has been as dear an object as any, in my literary efforts, to be of some importance in their eyes, and to win myself a pleasant memory in this abode and burial place of so many of my forefathers--there has never been, for me, the genial atmosphere which a literary man requires in order to ripen the best harvest of his mind. I shall do better amongst other faces.⁷⁹

Hawthorne apparently felt that he had delved for long enough in the burial place of his forefathers. He had never enjoyed being there; now, having pulled from it his purest drop of misery, he wished to turn elsewhere, to forget these ancestors by leaving their graveyard.

This desire to escape from his grim visions into a wholesome world of reality was a constant concern of his mind.

(The House of the Seven Gables was pre-eminently an effort of Hawthorne to purge his restless soul of the family curse and the past.) In it, he pointed out the baneful influence of

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 63-64.

the past, the evil of living in close conjunction with it. (By might and main, he manipulated his plot to end the curse and bring about a happy state of affairs for the contemporary generation of Pyncheons. In the course of the story, he condemned old houses, old books, dead men's decisions, and generally rebuked the hold which the past always has upon the future. Perhaps he felt that bringing the Pyncheons-- who were really Hathornes in every detail -- to happiness through absolution from the old curse upon them, that he could relieve his mind of the great weight it felt.

Years before this "heyday" of The Scarlet Letter and The House of the Seven Gables he had entertained thought of another scheme for ending the curse:

In 1831, he was in New Hampshire, whence he wrote to Louisa and others that the Shakers at Canterbury had so interested him that he thought seriously -- just how seriously is now impossible to say -- "about becoming a member of the society."⁸⁰

Van Doren thinks that Hawthorne was jesting when he wrote this, but he may not have been. In a moment of desperation he may have felt that the only way to relieve the human race of its burden of old sins was annihilation. The Shakers despite their profound ignorance had been so aware of our depravity as to believe this; they therefore forbade within their cult marriage as it is usually understood. If the understanding of Hawthorne's mind here advanced is correct,

⁸⁰Van Doren, op. cit., p. 39.

he may very well have been intrigued by such a remedy. At any rate, his interest was deep enough to produce two tales, "The Canterbury Pilgrims" and "The Shaker Bridal." He later decided that he had not the slightest use for the Shakers, but this decision would not necessarily belie the possibility of a former genuine interest.

It might be well to conclude by gathering together the far-flung conjectures of this paper with respect to Hawthorne's life and mind: He had a dreary childhood, the character of which proceeded from the death of his father and his mother's subsequent isolation. As the only male member of the family he went into isolation and the escapism of a dream world in order to elude his home environment and domination by his mother. His fancy fell upon the ancestral curse because of the Hawthorne tradition heard from the mother and because his early reading centered upon it; and because by emphasizing the sins rather than the virtues of his ancestors, he could further rebel against his mother. The ancestors account for the dark tone of his Puritanism and for his preoccupation with sin, and his faith in the undiluted sorrow of Calvinism. His rebellion against his mother produced his theme of "hidden guilt." He imposed upon this the notions of the sanctity of the human heart and the evil of isolation in an effort to return to normality, i.e., to save his sanity.

This then, is the Hawthorne who turned to the past; it is also the Hawthorne who was obliged to face the broad daylight of everyday affairs.

CHAPTER III

BROAD DAYLIGHT

While Hawthorne sat with his pen and visions under the eaves of his weird household (the "Castle Dismal"¹ as he always called it), New England folk on the outside bustled right along without his aid or abatement. Hawthorne and his neighbors had one thing in common; they all felt the stifling pessimism of their Puritan heritage. Hawthorne's distinction from the others lay in the fact that he had become too obsessed with bygone days to surrender certain of their Calvinistic dogmas, however unpleasant they might be to him personally. A web of unfortunate circumstances in his life and temperament had forced him to believe them. The rest of New England felt merely a discomfiture which they were now maneuvering to relieve through new religious thinking and new intellectual horizons. Thus it was that the general theology shifted under Hawthorne's nose from Puritanism to Unitarianism, leaving him a solitary mourner in the old ancestral blackness. During Hawthorne's lifetime, Unitarianism shifted its emphasis several times, but remained the champion theology of the New England progressives. By 1840, it was the

¹Louise Tharp, The Peabody Sisters of Salem, p. 142.

rage in Boston, and had also found an early and enthusiastic audience in Salem. While Hawthorne plodded along in his solitary walks, his Salem and Boston neighbors enlivened their fireside conversations with praises of Channing's latest sermon.

The name "Unitarianism" is derived from the belief in the oneness of God the Father as opposed to the older belief in the Trinity. The real significance of the movement, however, lay in its teachings concerning mankind, nature, and the work of Jesus Christ. The movement was an old one by the middle of the nineteenth century. It had its beginnings on the continent of Europe but was first called "Unitarianism" in England. In 1792, the "upstart" Unitarian Church sent a petition to Parliament asserting its right to read and interpret the Holy Scriptures and to declare the results of its findings publicly.²

The movement had always had, both in its English and American forms, a two-fold emphasis: First, as implied above, it embodied a demand for personal freedom, the manifestation of which was first seen in England as the Act of Uniformity (1662). This was a Parliamentary law which deprived some two thousand clergymen of their livings because of their "dangerous" ideas. Richard Baxter was one of these; he was cast out because he sought to decrease the number of

²"Unitarianism," Encyclopedia Britannica, edited by Franklin H. Hooper, Vol. XXII, 14th ed., p. 709.

essentials in the matter of orthodoxy, to free religious thinking somewhat in order to permit each individual the luxury of his own views in certain matters. This idea found an audience and fathered English Unitarianism. Secondly, Unitarianism insisted upon clear, distinct, and coherent thought and teaching.³ Some of the ejected clergy, in exercising their newly-declared freedom, decided that the "Trinitarian Scheme" was no essential part of Christianity. By the doctrine of the Trinity they meant not only the idea of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but the whole scheme of salvation as well, with its doctrines of inherited guilt, eternal punishment, and vicarious atonement. The advocacy of this new "unity" by Joseph Priestly and the withdrawal of Theophilus Lindsey from the Church of England resulted in the founding of the first Unitarian church in London in the year 1774. The movement first placed its sole emphasis upon the Bible and upon freedom to interpret it; but as a result of the growth in scientific and historical knowledge during the nineteenth century, the need for supplementing the Bible with other sources was recognized as necessary to developing a timely theology. This broadening of scope was brought about through the influence of Theodore Parker and William Ellery Channing in New England, and by Tayler, Thom, and James Martineau in England. Through the influence of

³Ibid.

these men, Unitarians began to supplement the Bible with religious history and experience; they interpreted the meaning of Scripture with the aid of reason and conscience.⁴

In America, the church passed through the same stages as in England: Armenianism, Arianism, and anti-tritheism, to rationalism and a modernism. Their new theology was based on a broad-minded acceptance of the results of the scientific and comparative study of all religions. First official acceptance of Unitarianism in the United States was by the King's Chapel in Boston in the year 1782. By 1803, William Ellery Channing occupied the pulpit of the Federal Street Congregational Church in Boston. He quickly became the leader of the movement in America. He identified himself with the "Catholic Christians," who aimed at bringing Christianity into harmony with the progressive spirit of the times.⁵

Hawthorne lived through two important periods in the development of American Unitarianism. The first extended from 1800 through about 1835, and was largely a formative period. It was influenced mainly by English philosophy and semi-supernaturalism. It was imperfectly rationalistic and devoted primarily to practical Christianity. Channing was the distinguished exponent of Unitarianism at this time. The second period extended roughly from 1835 through 1885

⁴Ibid., pp. 709-710.

⁵Ibid.

and was profoundly influenced by German idealism. It was increasingly rationalistic, though its theology was still flavored by mysticism. The leaders during this second period were Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker.⁶ Oddly enough, Channing, Parker, and Emerson were all three brought into contact with Hawthorne. It was not by the choice of anyone concerned, but rather by what Hawthorne would probably call "fate."

Channing was a kindly, affectionate man with very strong moral sentiments and a "straight forward rectitude of purpose and action."⁷ He was bitterly opposed to slavery and his opposition to Calvinism was so great that in 1812, he declared "the existence a curse if Calvinism be true."⁸ He was a strong advocate of spiritual and intellectual freedom. His theology was relatively simple. He believed in "the goodness of God, the essential virtue and the perfectibility of man, and the freedom of the will with its consequent responsibility for action."⁹ He asserted that a child enters the world free of sin.¹⁰ These doctrines he preached with a force residing

⁶Ibid.

⁷"Channing," Encyclopedia Britannica, edited by Franklin H. Hooper, Vol. V, 14th ed., p. 233.

⁸Ibid., p. 234. ⁹Tharp, op. cit., p. 40.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 320-321.

in his person and delivery. He was short and slight. He had very large compelling eyes and a clear voice. He was not a great pastor because he lacked social tact; but he was adored by his close friends.¹¹ The Peabody family of Salem admired him greatly; most especially was this true of Elizabeth, Sophia's older sister, who attached herself to Channing as a sort of unofficial secretary, preparing his sermons for publication. This was a typical experience for Elizabeth, because she derived from it great personal satisfaction and no pay. Channing became for her a sort of "father confessor" to whom she went for advice and spiritual comfort. Channing objected to the name "Unitarian" because it was to him as abstract as "Trinity." He wished to express the close fatherly relation which he felt existed between God and man. In his latter days, he strongly protested against the growth of "Unitarian orthodoxy" and its increasing narrowness. He believed in historic Christianity and the story of the resurrection. He thought of the Scriptures not as inspired, but as the record of inspiration. In most controversies, he displayed a broad mind; he felt that the differences in the various New England churches were largely verbal. He eyed the new ideas within Unitarian circles with suspicion and took great pains to refute young Theodore Parker, who had

¹¹"Channing," Encyclopedia Britannica, edited by Franklin H. Hooper, Vol. V, 14th ed., p. 233.

denied all the miracles in the Bible. He assured Elizabeth that "to believe in them was the simplest act of faith."¹²

Farker was rather chronically antagonistic toward the theology of his day. He had been ordained at West Roxberry in 1837 and preached there until 1846. On May 19, 1841, he preached in Boston on "the transient and permanent in Christianity," wherein he presented the germ of most of his later rationalistic thought. Boston Unitarian clergy (particularly Channing) denounced him, deciding that he should be "silenced." This opposition notwithstanding, he lectured in Masonic Hall during the winter of 1841-42; and beginning in 1845, he preached to the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society of Boston.¹³ He was a friend of the Peabody family. He shared membership with Elizabeth in the radical "Hedge's Club." Margaret Fuller, Emerson, Hedge, Alcott, Ripley, Francis, and James F. Clark were also members.¹⁴

It was, perhaps, Ralph Waldo Emerson who assumed the greatest degree of leadership in the second phase of Unitarian thinking. He too was a friend of the Peabodys at the time that Hawthorne began his courtship with Sophia. Elizabeth was the one, of course, who had first "discovered" Hawthorne

¹²Tharp, op. cit., p. 208.

¹³"Parker," Encyclopedia Britannica, edited by Franklin H. Hooper, Vol. XVII, 14th edition, p. 310.

¹⁴Tharp, op. cit., p. 139.

and forced him to exchange his solitude for the frivolities of a Peabody open house. To Hawthorne's horror, Elizabeth immediately took his future welfare upon her own back. She carried his Twice-Told Tales to Emerson while visiting Concord.

Much to her disappointment, Emerson had preferred the mad poet, Very, and found Hawthorne hopelessly wordy, impossible to read. (She did not tell him that Hawthorne felt the same way about Emerson's philosophy.)¹⁵

Emerson was later a neighbor to Sophia and Hawthorne at Concord. They were still contrary minds, of course; but Hawthorne could admire Emerson and feel the power of his charm without agreeing with him. Emerson's followers, however, were quite another thing.

Emerson's light, said Hawthorne, attracted not only "uncertain, troubled, earnest, wanderers through the midnight of the moral world" but -- and these were the majority -- "bats and owls." "Never was a poor little country village infested with such a variety of queer, strangely dressed, oddly behaved mortals, most of whom took upon themselves to be important agents of the world's destiny, yet were simply bores of the first water."¹⁶

Concord assailed Hawthorne with all sorts of radicals. He met Thoreau whom he found to be "ugly as sin, long-nosed, and queer-mouthed."¹⁷ On occasions, Thoreau was "a healthy and wholesome man to know,"¹⁸ but at other times, he was

¹⁵Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁶Mark Van Doren, Nathaniel Hawthorne, p. 120.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 121. ¹⁸Ibid.

"an intolerable bore."¹⁹ The "gnome, yclept Ellery Channing . . . was but little better than an idiot."²⁰

(This was the poet nephew of the great Unitarian minister.)

Of the people he met in Concord Hawthorne was congenial only with Melville, who perceived the same moral gloom in the world that haunted him. Even this friendship was not of long duration.

Emerson had been too remote, William Ellery Channing too erratic, and Thoreau, who came the closest of the Concord group, had really seemed to prefer the society of woodchucks.²¹

Sophia adored Emerson, and must have prompted a friendship between her husband and him. She doubtlessly encouraged the walks they sometimes took together, but she knew that the effort to unite their spirits had failed and took the defeat with customary optimism.

"Mr. Emerson delights in him," she wrote her mother, "he talks to him all the time and Mr. Hawthorne looks answers. He seems to fascinate Mr. Emerson. Whenever he comes to see him, he takes him away . . . Miss Hoar says that persons about Mr. Emerson so generally echo him, that it is refreshing to him to find this perfect individual, all himself and nobody else."²²

It certainly would have been strange had these two men been able to understand each other, for just as Hawthorne's genius was for gloom and unhappiness, so Emerson's was for

¹⁹Ibid. ²⁰Ibid. ²¹Tharp, op. cit., pp. 196-197.

²²Van Doren, op. cit., p. 123.

sunshine and happiness.

If Emerson had read any of Hawthorne's great stories, he would have supposed that their author was only pretending to take guilt and sorrow seriously; for to Emerson such matters as original sin were outmoded -- "the soul's mumps and measles," he called them in 1841. Emerson sang anthems to Solitude, the very soul of whose name soothed him and made him beam. It terrified Hawthorne . . . solitude for Hawthorne was not an idea, it was a fact with which he lived . . . he had wrestled with it in his art, and he did not throw it down. He would never throw it down and did not expect to . . . it was the dark angel whom no Puritan had conquered either; it was the vacuum of ennui and despair which no religion had ever filled -- indeed, to recognize it was what religion was for.²³

Emerson's own supreme task was "to befriend and guide the inner life of men."²⁴ He was greatly influenced by Coleridge, Swendenborg, Wordsworth, and Carlyle. Emerson always lived in the sunshine, denying the reality of shadows. He admired self-reliance, directness, and moral courage, asserting that all the good or evil that can befall a man is contained within himself.

"There is a correspondence between the human soul and everything that exists in the world; more properly, everything that is known to man. Instead of studying things without, the principles of them all may be penetrated from within him . . . The purpose of life seems to be to acquaint man with himself . . . The highest revelation is that God is in every man." This is the essence of that intuitional philosophy called Transcendentalism . . . Something in his imperturbable kindly presence, his commanding style of thought and speech announced him as the possessor of the great secret

²³Ibid., pp. 125-126.

²⁴"Emerson," Encyclopedia Britannica, edited by Franklin H. Hooper, Vol. VIII, 14th edition, p. 392.

which many were seeking -- the secret of a freer, deeper, more harmonious life.²⁵

It was his lectures which won Emerson fame. Like Channing and Parker, he liked to talk whether he was in the pulpit or sitting informally with friends. He spoke at the Masonic Temple in Boston in late 1835 and early 1836. He talked to the graduating class in the divinity school of Cambridge in 1838. His subject was "the defects of historical Christianity." In the course of this discussion he made his plea for self-reliance and a new inspiration of religion.

"In the soul," he said, "let redemption be sought . . . Cast conformity behind you, and acquaint men at first hand with the Deity . . . The infinitude of the private man" was always Emerson's theme. His works are always fused with a steady glow of optimism.²⁶

Unitarianism is, then, a doctrine of "sunshine and light." No one is born in sin; sin itself is merely "the soul's mumps and measles." There is no such thing as determinism since this cannot be reconciled with a free will; a man has within himself a capacity for choosing his own destiny in terms of good or evil; only after choosing must he take inevitable consequences. God is good and loves mankind as a father loves his son, only infinitely more.

Could such a doctrine have possibly been intellectually acceptable to Hawthorne? It was this same Hawthorne of whom Austin Warren says:

Hawthorne's habitual determinism was not so dark as Chillingworth's. In Italy he confronted Michael

²⁵Ibid. ²⁶Ibid.

Angelo's painting of the Three Fates and was drawn in retrospect to a copy of it he had seen in boyhood. He recalled "being struck, even then, with the terrible, stern, passionless severity, neither loving nor hating us, that characterizes these ugly old women. If they were angry, or had the least spite against human kind, it would render them the more tolerable. They are a great work, containing and representing the very idea that makes a belief in fate such a cold torture to the human soul. God give me the sure belief in his Providence!"

This striking meditation invites comment. Is Hawthorne contrasting the fatalism of others with his own belief in Providence? or is he contrasting the cold fatalism which, in fact, habitually tortures him with that reassuring belief which (because he has it not) he prays God to give him? The latter seems surely the obvious exegesis. But a belief in Providence may itself be determinism; between the (to him) depressing belief in a relentlessly abstract and impersonal operation of law and the (to him) cheering belief that a God in some degree human and personal controlled the destinies of mankind. "Had Hawthorne been as skeptical of Providence as he was of men he would have been helplessly melancholy."

Hawthorne's deterministic belief in a Providence which works out its purposes as much in spite of men's righteousness as of their crimes, emerges notably in a letter written from Liverpool to his philanthropic sister-in-law, Miss Peabody: "I only know that I have done no good -- none whatever. Vengeance and beneficence are things that God claims for Himself. His instruments have no consciousness of His purpose; if they imagine they have, it is a pretty sure token that they are not His instruments. The good of others, like our own happiness, is not to be attained by direct effort, but incidentally. All history and observation confirm this . . . God's ways are in nothing more mysterious than in this matter of trying to do good."²⁷

Warren also aptly sums up Hawthorne's obsession with

sin:

The New England conscience prevails in Hawthorne's characteristic writing -- sometimes to morbidity. It discerns sin everywhere -- in the open sinner, and

²⁷Austin Warren, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Introduction, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

almost exultantly, in those whom men deem good and holy.²⁸

Hawthorne could not be a fatalist who discerned sin everywhere and still open his arms to Unitarianism. His unhappy gospel insisted, as already shown, upon confession and repentance. Even when the sinner had confessed and repented, Hawthorne could offer him no assurance. That Hawthorne wished to find some such assurance is altogether likely, but it is no wonder that he could not find it among men and doctrines which denied what to him was the center of reality. He had to find his comfort in some other doctrine which recognizes these grim realities, recognizes man's inability to effect any real good of his own, and still finds the road to salvation.

Hawthorne went to Brook Farm because it offered a home for him and his bride-to-be. As presented to him by the founder, George Ripley, it was to be a place in which he would farm for about three hours a day and write the rest of the time. As it so turned out, he labored in the fields from sunup to sundown; and he was too tired at night to write anything. Closeness to the soil was a nauseatingly uninspiring business. He did manage to fill his notebook with observations while there. He scrutinized his colleagues with a detachment that made them feel like bottled spiders. They

²⁸Ibid., p. xxxix.

could never feel that Hawthorne was one of them, as, indeed, he was not.

His letters to Sophia, who had doubtless influenced him toward Brook Farm, indicated his tongue-in-cheek attitude toward the project.

"I . . . I went to see our cows foddered yesterday afternoon. We have eight of our own and the number is now increased by a Transcendental heifer belonging to Miss Margaret Fuller. She is very fractious, I believe, and apt to kick over the pail. Thou knowest best whether in these traits of character she resembles her mistress."²⁹

His mind was not attuned to the intellectual hum which went on there.

Margaret Fuller, an occasional guest, held Conversations on Perfection and other topics; but Hawthorne was more interested in "a little seamstress from Boston, about seventeen years old," who came in October and delighted him with her vivacious ways."³⁰

By the spring of 1842, Hawthorne decided to leave in spite of entreaties by the others to stay. He was regarded as an excellent worker by the others, but the honors and offices they bestowed upon him in the organization could not dissuade him from his feeling that Brook Farm was not the answer to his prayers. The place had grown "queer" to him.

Hawthorne did not leave to posterity any necessity for speculating on his attitude toward Unitarianism. Some of

²⁹Van Doren, op. cit., p. 110.

³⁰Ibid., p. 114.

his tales -- especially "The Christmas Banquet" and "The Celestial Railroad" -- make his attitude quite clear:

"The Celestial Railroad," composed at the Old Manse, so caustically satirized religious liberalism that it was immediately reprinted by an Evangelical tract society and has never ceased to circulate as weapon against the wiles of the modernists. Here Hawthorne, taking his stand with his old and constant favorite, Bunyan, for the strait and narrow way, ridicules all manner of modern improvements in religion. The Transcendentalists, in their abundance of catholicity, had supplemented the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures with the bibles of other religions, and eked out these ancient testimonies to "natural religion" with the philosophy of Kant and Cousin and Coleridge. The old, Slough of Despond has been filled up with "volumes of French philosophy and German rationalism; . . . extracts from Plato, Confucius, and various Hindoo sages, together with a few ingenious commentaries upon texts of Scripture (explaining away their obvious sense), all of which by some scientific process, have been converted into a mass like granite." No longer is St. Paul a true witness in his assertion that "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty are called." Unitarianism has changed all that; and "Instead of a lonely and ragged man with a huge burden on his back plodding along sorrowfully on foot while the whole city hooted after him, here were parties of the first gentry and most respectable people of the neighborhood setting forth towards the Celestial City as cheerfully as if the pilgrimage were merely a summer tour." At the end of the Valley of the Shadow, where dwelt, in Bunyan's day, Pope and Pagan, there now lurked the Giant Transcendentalist, a German by birth, who fattened his victims on "smoke, mist, moonshine, raw potatoes, and sawdust," and who spoke so strange a jargon as to be unintelligible. Vanity Fair, once the county seat of worldliness, has turned ecclesiastical: almost every street has its church, and "the reverend clergy are nowhere held in higher respect than at Vanity Fair." Here labor -- not for the salvation of souls (for souls are naturally good), but, shall we say? for their polishing -- the Rev. Messrs. Shallow-deep, Stumble-at-truth, "that fine old clerical character, the Rev. Mr. This-to-day, who expects shortly to resign his pulpit to the Rev. Mr. That-to-morrow; together with the Rev. Mr. Bewilderment, the Rev. Mr. Clog-the-Spirit, and, last and greatest, the Rev. Dr. Wind-of-doctrine." Arrived at Death's dark river, the

the travellers find a steam ferry awaiting to transport them.³¹

and:

One of the wretched guests at "The Christmas Banquet" was a clergyman, once "apparently of the genuine dynasty of those old Puritan divines whose faith in their calling and stern exercise of it, had placed them among the mighty of the earth," who yet had surrendered the dogmas of Calvinism for the insubstantial theories and sentiments of the Transcendentalists. Yielding to "the speculative tendency of the age, he had gone astray from the firm foundation of an ancient faith, and wandered into a cloud region, where everything was misty and deceptive, ever mocking him with a semblance of reality, but still dissolving when he flung himself upon it for support and rest. His instinct and early training demanded something steadfast; but looking forward, he beheld vapors piled on vapors . . ."³²

Neither the forces of his environment nor his love for his wife were sufficient to divorce Hawthorne from his old convictions.

Hawthorne nowise more strikingly exhibits his detachment from his own day than in his aversion to the Transcendentalist movement which garnered into its harvest most of the high-minded idealists of his day. It met him on every turn: at Brook Farm, at Concord: in the persons of Ripley, Jones Very, Emerson, Alcott, Thoreau. At most intimate range, he met it in his wife's family, the Peabodys, and in his wife. Sophia Peabody was a reader of Plato and Fenelon, an admirer of Very, a venerator of Emerson; she thought Emerson "the greatest man that ever lived. As a whole, he is satisfactory . . . He is indeed a 'Supernal Vision' . . . Pure Tone." Ecstasy could scarcely go farther. But Hawthorne's intellectual independence was not to be weakened even by the ardors of his wife. He loved her devotedly without making any effort to share the religious and philosophical views proper to the atmosphere in which she had grown up.³³

³¹Ibid., pp. xxii-xxiv. ³²Ibid., p. xi.

³³Ibid., pp. xl-xli.

Where Hawthorne perceived sin in man, the Unitarians saw transcendent goodness. Where Hawthorne saw determinism, they saw free will; where he saw the futility of man's struggle, they saw progress through self-reliance. Where he saw gloom, they saw light; where he dreaded isolation, they welcomed solitude; where he beheld secret guilt, they saw positive potentiality; while he dreaded a God of wrath, they embraced a God of love.

His courtship and his life association with Sophia and the other members of the Peabody family could bring Hawthorne forth from the darkness of dreams into the realities of broad daylight, but they could not force him to accept them. Hawthorne blinked with incredulity in the bright sunshine of Unitarianism; this "real world" which he had sought for so long was a world of illusion indeed. It solved problems only by denying them. He hated it, and shuttled back into the darkness of Puritanism, there to wait for some more acceptable way out of his dilemma.

CHAPTER IV

THE WILD ROSE

When Hawthorne published The Blithedale Romance in 1852, he expressed his distaste for Unitarianism, Transcendentalism, and reform in general. He also produced a book which by its very nature was dated almost at once. It dealt with affairs which were entirely the products of the day and was therefore doomed to be of temporary interest only. His expression of displeasure for the blind optimism of the Unitarians in no sense lessened his own feeling of isolation and sadness. He still could see no escape from the grip of fate or the problem of sin.

His labor henceforth was to be a search for some deep secret he never found. Or, perhaps some shallow secret. It was a heroic search. It became a tragedy itself.¹

(Hawthorne had escaped the unpleasant realities of his childhood by entering the world of his own dark visions. He, in turn, had spent most of his life trying to escape from the dreamworld into a world of warm reality. That was why he married; that was why he had written The House of the Seven Gables.) But the ancestral curse still guided his destiny. It had dealt him external misfortunes and

¹Mark Van Doren, Nathaniel Hawthorne, p. 191.

was still manifesting itself diabolically by trapping his soul in the old Puritan cell block of his imagination. It had pulled him into its darkest recesses to produce for him The Scarlet Letter. So unrelieved was the gloom of his masterpiece, that Hawthorne stooped by the old prison door where his story had its beginning to pluck a wild rose, offering the blossom to the reader in the hope that it "might relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow."² Would that the symbol might offer him relief from the gloom and point the way to the deep, warm secret of living happily in the present.

(How successfully marriage warded off the madness of his Puritan-hell is a mere matter of conjecture, for it is impossible to predict what might have happened had he not married. X But it may be said with certainty that it did not release him; it served only to relieve the pressure for a time.) The life, energy, and optimism of Sophia cheered Hawthorne. (The warmth of her happy nature may have served to thaw an icicle or two in Hawthorne's soul, but hers was the secondary warmth of radiation.) It never entered into his blood stream, nor could it sustain him when his thoughts carried him far away from its source. He always judged Sophia's happiness to be the result of the same sort of

²Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's Works, Vol. VI, The Scarlet Letter, Old Manse Edition, p. 67.

irrational, unjustifiable optimism that cheered so many others of his day. He neither sought to change her nor to put his own mind in harmony with hers. His solution -- his wild rose of comfort -- would have to be a doctrine intellectually acceptable, fully recognizing the problem of sin, the inescapability of fate, and the need for repentance and confession. It could only be a form of optimism which translates cold "fate" into a pleasing providence.

During his years in Europe, he certainly expected to find no answer. He went to Italy in 1858 largely upon the insistence of Sophia, who wished to realize her girlhood ambition to see the many masterpieces of art which resided there. He toured the city with her, glumly at times, but with enough interest to record meticulously his observations in the notebook.

The three months that he spent in Rome made him aware of the existence of a world of which he had hitherto been all but ignorant; a world that, by contrast, made his previous environment even meager, vulgar, and provincial; a world whose tones of richness and splendor moved him profoundly in spite of his confessed incapacity to completely assimilate and possess them. Rome aroused his dormant creative impulse, and furnished it with its most impressively significant materials.

Rome, with its antiquity, its cathedrals, and its Catholic faith slowly wooed him; and, while he made a reluctant suitor, Rome made herself heard. Here was her church

³Lloyd Morris, The Rebellious Puritan, p. 320.

blooming forth like the rose at the prison door, offering to the condemned Hawthorne the thought that "the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him."⁴ It too had, "by a strange chance, been kept alive in history"⁵ watching the decline of the Roman Empire, its invasion by barbarians, and, finally its death.

He wandered through all of her cathedrals, recording -- usually with the objectivity of a cub-reporter -- their miracles of richness, vastness, and mystery. Much of it he disapproved of, much he admired, and most he did not understand. Many of those that he did not like aroused a religious sentiment however. He said in his Italian Notebook:

Looking over what I have said of Sodoma's Christ Bound, at Siena, I see that I have omitted to notice what seems to me one of its striking characteristics, -- its loneliness. You feel as if the Saviour were deserted, both in heaven and earth; the despair is in him which made him say, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Even in this extremity, however, he is still Divine, and Sodoma almost seems to have reconciled the impossibilities of combining an omnipresent divinity with a suffering and outraged humanity. But this is one of the cases in which the spectator's imagination completes what the artist merely hints at.⁶

Reconciling these "impossibilities" he mentioned was, of course, the major religious need of Hawthorne. To do it

⁴Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, Vol. VI, p. 66.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's Works, Vol. XXII, Notes of Travel, Old Manse Edition, pp. 311-312.

would require a church with power to soothe and the insight to grant the reality of sin.

On February 19, 1858, he wrote in the notebook, "I felt what an influence pictures might have upon the devotional part of our nature."⁷

Hawthorne expressed his admiration for painting as a mode of conveying religious ideas and the tremendous mystery of religious emotion much more emphatically than the two previous quotations indicate. The following quotation was also an entry in Hawthorne's notebook, but does not appear in the published version because of the editorship of his wife. After his death, she took the liberty of making unlimited deletions and emendations. Lloyd Morris in preparing The Rebellious Puritan had access to such of the original manuscripts as are still extant through the courtesy of the Morgan Library.⁸ All passages quoted from Morris are not included in the Riverside Edition of Hawthorne's works. All such passages show a strong admiration for Catholicism, and we can only assume that Sophia deleted them from the published version because she did not wish them known. Her probable reasons for these withholdings will be discussed later.

⁷Ibid., p. 225.

⁸Morris, op. cit., Acknowledgment, p. vii.

Occasionally today, after a visit to a gallery, I was sensible of a certain degree of emotion in looking at an old picture; as, for example, by a large, dark, ugly picture of Christ, bearing the Cross and sinking beneath it, when somehow or other, a sense of His agony and the fearful wrong which mankind did (and does) its Redeemer, and the scorn of His enemies and the sorrow of those who loved Him, came knocking at my heart and got entrance there. Once more I deem it a pity that Protestantism should have entirely laid aside this mode of appealing to the religious sentiment.⁹

An entry in the notebook which typifies Hawthorne's general impressions of St. Peter's Cathedral runs as follows:

Again I went to the Cathedral this morning, and spent an hour listening to the music and looking through the orderly intricacies of the arches where many vistas open away among the columns of the choir . . . This Cathedral has certainly bewitched me, to write about it so much, effecting nothing with my pains . . . I never shall succeed even in reminding myself of the venerable magnificence of this minster, with its arches, its columns, its cornice of popes' heads, its great wheel-windows, its manifold ornament, all combining in one vast effect, though many men have labored individually . . . ¹⁰

Hawthorne's fondness for these cathedrals was always modified by his reluctance to become too impressed with them. It is apparent in frequent bursts of enthusiasm that they filled him with awe and gave to him for the first time a sense of closeness to the Diety, but he denies that this sense is anything "real" and tells himself over and over that he is not impressed.

⁹Ibid., p. 315.

¹⁰Hawthorne, Notes of Travel, Vol. XXII, pp. 276-277.

All the time we were in the church some great ceremony had been going forward; the organ playing and the white-robed priests bowing, gesticulating, and making Latin prayers at the high altar, where at least a hundred wax tapers were burning in constellations. Everybody knelt except ourselves, yet seemed not to be troubled by the echoes of our passing footsteps, nor to require that we should pray along with them. They consider us already lost irrevocably, no doubt, and therefore right enough in taking no heed of their devotions; not but what we take so much heed, however, as to give the smallest possible disturbance. By and by we sat down in the nave of the church, till the ceremony should be concluded; and then my wife let me go in quest of yet another chapel, where either Cimabue or Giotto, or both, have left some of their now ghastly decorations. While she was gone I threw my eyes about the church, and came to the conclusion that, in spite of its antiquity, its size, its architecture, its painted windows, its tombs of great men, and all the reverence and interest that broods over them, it is not an impressive edifice. Any little Norman church in England would impress me as much, and more. There is something, I do not know what, but it is in the region of the heart, rather than in the intellect, that Italian architecture, of what ever age or style, never seems to reach.¹¹

In so far as the externals of "the Popish Faith" are concerned, Hawthorne in his frequent visits to the masses could not have missed the symbolism involved in it.

To see the world in terms of allegory or in the light of symbols, was second nature to him. At twelve, his grandfather gave him a notebook and asked him to write his impressions out--a few every day. He described a child named Betty Tarbox as "flitting among the rosebushes, in and out of the arbour, like a tiny witch."¹²

(Virtually everything in Catholicism is a symbol.) Its robes, its pageantry, its art, its pope, the mass itself all

¹¹Ibid., pp. 132-33.

¹²Van Wyk Brooks, The Flowering of New England, p. 214.

stand for spiritual meanings which cannot be exactly expressed in a visible manner. Hawthorne's symbolism is, perhaps, his most constant and distinguishing feature as an artist. It is probable when one considers the difficulty he always had in distinguishing between his symbols and reality that he found it a charming idea to consider the blessed bread and wine of the Catholic communion to be the actual body and blood of Christ. At least, the church argued with him in his own language and rooted itself in an antiquity far exceeding that of the Puritan past which had exerted such a hold upon his imagination.

Hawthorne expressed the effect of these externals upon the New England mind in The Marble Faun through their impact upon Hilda:

One afternoon, as Hilda entered St. Peter's in sombre mood, its interior beamed upon her with all the effect of a new creation. It seemed an embodiment of whatever the imagination could conceive, or the heart desire, as a magnificent, comprehensive, majestic symbol of religious faith. All splendor was included within its verge, and there was space for all. She gazed with delight even at the multiplicity of ornament. She was glad at the cherubim that fluttered upon the pilasters, and of the marble doves, hovering unexpectedly, with green olive-branches of precious stones. She could spare nothing, now, of the manifold magnificence that had been lavished, in a hundred places, richly enough to have made world-famous shrines in any other church, but which here melted away into the vast sunny breadth, and were of no separate account. Yet each contributed its little all towards the grandeur of the whole.¹³

¹³Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's Works, Vol. X, The Marble Faun, Old Manse Edition, pp. 196-97.

She had visited the cathedral before without being impressed. Her artist's eye had rebelled against the church's unsuccessful efforts to reconcile its rich adornment and its spaciousness. It gave Hilda the impression of a greatly magnified jewel-casket. It got in its own way; one could see an aisle or a transept, the nave or the tribune; but because of the many obstructions it was impossible to get an impression of wholeness.¹⁴

(As Hilda thought of these objections, the great church seemed to smile, saying, "'Look at me' in endless repetition."¹⁵ As she experienced the breathless excitement of really perceiving these beauties, she realized that "if you choose to see these things, they present themselves; if you deem them unsuitable and out of place, they vanish, individually, but leave their life upon the walls."¹⁶

In order to demonstrate Hawthorne's enthusiasm for these externals of Catholicism, these impressions of Hilda have been shown.)

(In order to apply these reactions in any way to Hawthorne personally, it must be shown, of course, that the author was letting his character speak his own sentiments.) That she probably was will be shown later by comparing Hilda's impressions with Hawthorne's as seen in the

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 195-196.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 196.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 197.

remaining manuscript of the notebook. Many of the passages are exactly the same, not only sentiment for sentiment, but word for word.

(If, then, Hawthorne found the externals of Catholicism attractive, did he also find its content -- its dogma -- intellectually and emotionally acceptable? It might be well to consider the compatibility of Hawthorne's major ideas with the declared views of Catholicism.)

Hawthorne's contempt for the efforts of man to progress on his own initiative have already been seen in the preceding chapter. In reply to those who subordinate everything else to the purpose of "going ahead," Hawthorne's inevitable question is "where is ahead?"

And was going there more important than "standing still or going to sleep?" He asked this question in the last book he published, but it was always with him. Its earlier form had been something like the following -- How do those who chafe and fret to change the world know that the particular change they desire is the one most needed next -- And can they be sure that if brought about it will not upset some balance, some providential equilibrium, of which no person can possibly be aware . . . He was not certain what things were worth defending, what things were due to be done anew. If the picture of Hawthorne in his times is the picture of a bewildered man, hesitating and guessing, and sometimes blundering, the reason is an imagination that never abdicated in favor of phrases or causes.¹⁷

and:

"No human effort on a grand scale has ever resulted according to the purpose of its projectors. The

¹⁷Van Doren, op. cit., p. 115.

advantages are always incidental. Man's accidents are God's purposes."¹⁸

The artist, too, is a tool of God. If he does not feel this Superior Power, the results of his work are inferior:

When he saw the Houses of Parliament in London he decided with some disappointment that the architect had felt no power higher and wiser than himself, making him its instrument, and therefore had missed the crowning glory -- that being a happiness which God out of his pure grace, mixes up with only the simple-hearted, best efforts of men.¹⁹

Sometimes Hawthorne's readers are given occasion to doubt that it is possible for us as individuals to regard the Will of God as providential; in The House of the Seven Gables, he said that Hepzibah Pyncheon felt:

" . . . the wretched conviction that providence inter-meddled not in these petty wrongs of one individual to his fellow, nor had any balm for these little agonies of a solitary soul; but shed its justice and its mercy, in a broad, sunlike sweep, over half the universe at once. Its vastness made it nothing."²⁰

(Changing this attitude toward God's providence into a personal thing that is capable of focusing its concern upon the individual is the only sort of reformation that might have given Hawthorne's mind a deep-seated acceptance of life and an excuse for optimism.)

(Obviously, the Catholic Church, with its elaborate

¹⁸Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 146.

²⁰Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's Works, Vol. VII, The House of the Seven Gables, Old Manse Edition, p. 357.

means of conveying the wishes of men to God) -- through prayers of the priests and the intervening saints -- with its denial of the possibility of salvation apart from the church, and with its institution of the confessional, could have little use for Emerson's views on "self-reliance," or the efforts of reformers to change God's world. (In the matter of a belief in God as the sole worker of realities, Hawthorne and the Catholics agree. The difference between them lies in the fact that the Catholic Church provides a means of establishing relations between man and God, thus giving man peace and assurance in the knowledge that he is one with God through the church.)

Closely related to this idea of God as the worker of realities is the attitude toward conscience. Hawthorne had little faith in the public reputation of a man as an index to the condition of his soul. In Judge Pyncheon, Hawthorne showed us a man who was undeservingly praised by his community. Moreover, the judge's conscience, which should have been writhing in agony, was entirely dormant.

The judge, beyond all question, was a man of eminent respectability. The church acknowledged it; the state acknowledged it . . . His conscience, therefore, usually considered the surest witness to a man's integrity, -- his conscience, unless it might be for the little space of five minutes in the twenty-four hours, or now and then, some black day in the whole year's circle, -- his conscience bore an accordant testimony with the world's laudatory voice.²¹

²¹Ibid., p. 332.

(The Catholic Church too) recognized the inadequacy of conscience, if conscience means "natural law" alone as Hawthorne intended. The church defines conscience as "the voice of God within Man"²² and embraces in its concept of conscience not only an inherent sense of right and wrong but revealed law of the church as well.) Natural conscience remains a valid guide post in moments of doubt -- in situations not specifically covered by church law,²³ but the extensiveness of this law indicates that the church shares Hawthorne's suspicions. Judge Pyncheon could not have read his catechism undisturbed, had he been a good Catholic.

Hitherto, Hawthorne had found nothing to soften the cruelty of his determinism. (That "the ways of God are mysterious" and beyond our scrutiny was the only chilly comfort to be found in Calvinism. The distance between the Omnipotent God and frail man was vast indeed. Some intervening link vast enough to be close to both man and God seemed necessary.) Catholicism had the answer:

Hilda saw peasants, citizens, soldiers, nobles, women with bare heads, ladies in their silks, entering the churches individually, kneeling for moments, or for hours, and directing their inaudible devotions to the shrine of some saint of their own choice. In his hallowed person, they felt themselves possessed of an own friend in heaven. They were too humble to approach the Deity directly.) Conscious of their

²²Louis Morrow, My Catholic Faith, p. 171.

²³Ibid.

unworthiness, they asked the mediation of their sympathizing patron, who, on the score of his ancient martyrdom, and after many ages of celestial life, might venture to talk with the Divine Presence, almost as friend with friend. Though dumb before its Judge, even despair could speak, and pour out the misery of its soul like water, to an advocate so wise to comprehend the case, and eloquent to plead it, and powerful to win pardon, whatever the guilt. Hilda witnessed what she deemed to be an example of this species of confidence between a young man and his saint. He stood before a shrine, writhing, wringing his hands, contorting his whole frame in an agony of remorseful recollection, but finally knelt down to weep and pray. If this youth had been a Protestant, he would have kept all that torture pent up in his heart, and let it burn there till it seared him into indifference.

Often and long, Hilda lingered before the shrines and chapels of the Virgin, and departed from them with reluctant steps. Here, perhaps, strange as it may seem, her delicate appreciation of art stood her in good stead, and lost Catholicism a convert. If the painter had represented Mary with a heavenly face, poor Hilda was now in the very mood to worship her, and adopt the faith in which she held so elevated a position. But she saw that it was merely a flattered portrait of an earthly beauty; the wife, at best, of the artist; or, it might be, a peasant-girl of the Campagna, or some Roman princess, to whom he desired to pay his court. For love, or some even less justifiable motive, the old painter had apotheosized these women; he thus gained for them, as far as his skill would go, not only the need of immortality, but the privilege of presiding over Christian altars, and of being worshipped with far holier fervors than while they dwelt on earth. Hilda's fine sense of the fit and decorous could not be betrayed into kneeling at such a shrine.

She never found just the virgin mother whom she needed. Here, it was an earthly mother, worshipping the earthly baby in her lap, as any and every mother does, from Eve's time downward. In another picture, there was a dim sense, shown in the mother's face, of some divine quality in the child. In a third, the artist seemed to have had a higher perception, and had striven hard to shadow out the Virgin's joy at bringing the Saviour into the world, and her awe and love, inextricably mingled, of the little form which she pressed against her bosom. So far was good. But still, Hilda looked for something more;

a face of celestial beauty, but human as well as heavenly, and with the shadow of past grief upon it; bright with immortal youth, yet matronly and motherly; and endowed with a queenly dignity, but infinitely tender, as the highest and deepest attribute of her divinity.²⁴

Above all the intervening saints at the disposal of Catholics, (Hawthorne envied most of all their idea of the Blessed Virgin.) This may be seen in The Blithedale Romance, before his visit to Rome:

Oh, in the better order of things, Heaven grant that the ministry of souls may be left in charge of women! The gates of the Blessed City will be thronged with the multitude that enter in, when that day comes. The task belongs to woman -- God meant it for her -- He has endowed her with the religious sentiment in its utmost depth and purity, refined from that gross, intellectual alloy with which every masculine theologian -- save only One, who merely veiled himself in mortal and masculine shape, but was, in truth, divine -- has been proven to mingle it -- I have always envied the Catholics their faith in that sweet, sacred Virgin Mother, who stands between them and the Deity, intercepting somewhat of his awful splendor, but permitting his love to stream upon the worshipper more intelligibly to human comprehension through the medium of a woman's tenderness.²⁵

Hilda in her "dangerous errand" of discovering how closely the "popish faith applied itself to human occasions"²⁶ is haunted constantly by recollections of her dead mother. Her hesitance and her enthusiasm for this strange faith are both prompted by undertones of her

²⁴Hawthorne, Marble Faun, Vol. X, pp. 191-2.

²⁵Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's Works, Vol. VIII, The Blithedale Romance, Old Manse Edition, pp. 172-3.

²⁶Hawthorne, Marble Faun, Vol. X, pp. 190-1.

mother's influence.

"Ah, thought Hilda to herself, "why should not there be a woman to listen to the prayers of women? a mother in heaven for all motherless girls like me? In all God's thought and care for us, can he have withheld this boon, our weakness so much needs?"²⁷

As she approached the confessional, it was as if she were returning to the comfort and understanding of a mother's love:

If she had heard her mother's voice from within the tabernacle, calling her, in her own mother-tongue, to come and lay her poor head in her lap, and sob out all her troubles, Hilda could not have responded with a more inevitable obedience. She did not think: she only felt. Within her heart was a great need. Close at hand within the veil of the confessional was the relief.²⁸

As Hilda prepared for her visit to the confessional, the ghost of her mother seemed to be prompting her to be cautious:

Hilda dipped her fingers, [in holy water] and had almost signed the cross upon her breast, but forebore, and trembled, while shaking the water from her finger tips. She felt as if her mother's spirit, somewhere within the dome, were looking down upon her child, the daughter of Puritan forefathers, and weeping to behold her ensnared by these gaudy superstitions.²⁹

(It is interesting to notice -- especially if we identify Hilda with Hawthorne himself -- that this infatuation with Catholicism is all tied up with these reflections upon her Mother. The mother serves to pull her both ways. She is drawn to the church seeing it as a substitute for

²⁷Ibid., p. .

²⁸Ibid., p. .

²⁹Ibid., p. .

the Mother-love her soul craves, but is at the same time repelled from it by Puritan conscience in the form of a stern warning from the spirit of her mother.)

(Hawthorne had been disappointed in his own Mother. She had failed to give him the kindness and understanding he needed. She had managed and bossed him without surrendering that isolation which established between her son and herself that "coldness of intercourse.") Her loyalties were misspent. Instead of devoting herself to her children, she had locked herself up with the memory of her dead husband, managing the externals of her children's affairs and permitting their hungry spirits to shift for themselves.

(Hawthorne had depicted a mother-son relationship which paralleled his own in "The Gentle Boy.") The mother of Ilbrahim had wandered "on a mistaken errand, neglectful of the noblest trust which can be committed to a woman."³⁰ She had devoted herself to martyrdom in the Quaker sect rather than the care of her son. The boy was adopted by kindly Puritan folk, but they could not sustain him against the miseries of isolation and persecution which he suffered in their community.

Sometimes at night and probably in his dreams, he was heard to cry "Mother! Mother!" as if her place, which a stranger had supplied while Ilbrahim was

³⁰Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's Works, Vol. II, Twice-Told-Tales, "The Gentle Boy," Old Manse Edition, p. 9.

happy, admitted of no substitute in his extreme affliction.³¹

This was (one of Hawthorne's early stories,) which appeared in (Twice-Told-Tales) in 1837. Perhaps (he was hopeful that his mother might see the point as it applied to herself when Ilbrahim's mother saw her mistake in a flash of insight.)

By the words she uttered, it would seem that the indulgence of natural love had given her mind a momentary sense of its errors, and made her know how far she had strayed from duty in following the dictates of a wild fanaticism.³²

This mother said:

" . . . son, son, I have borne thee in my arms when my limbs were tottering, and I have fed thee with the food that I was fainting for; yet I have ill-performed a mother's part by thee in life, and now I leave thee no inheritance but woe and shame. Thou wilt go seeking through the world, and find all hearts closed against thee and their sweet affections turned to bitterness for my sake. My child, my child, how many a pang awaits thy gentle spirit, and I the cause of all!"³³

(Hawthorne resented the misspent life of Catherine and her failure to provide Ilbrahim with love. He resented the same thing in his own mother, and spent his life trying to fill the void of spiritual coldness which she left in his soul.) That he looked for an antidote in religious faith is indicated by his treatment of Hilda and by many passages in the notebook. For example, he had just seen a picture of Jesus "not looking in the least like the Savior of the

³¹Ibid., p. . ³²Ibid., p. . ³³Ibid.

world," but judging the damned while grim-looking saints looked on with pleasure, and demons whisked the people away before they were scarcely awake. Hawthorne was horrified. This was not what religion must show him at all:

It would be a very terrible picture to one who should really see Jesus, the Saviour, in that inexorable judge; but it seems to me very undesirable that He should ever be represented in that aspect, when it is essential to our religion to believe Him infinitely kinder and better towards us than we deserve. At the last day -- I presume, that is, in all future days, when we see ourselves as we are -- man's only inexorable judge will be himself, and the punishment of his sins will be the perception of them.³⁴

(There is a remarkable shortage of mother-son relationships in Hawthorne's fiction,) but had they been abundant, they probably would have followed the Catherine-Ibrahim pattern. (Thinking about his own relation to his mother was always painful to him.) He preferred to sublimate the difficulties involved in it into creative fancy. The probability that his obsession with secret guilt had its deepest roots in his feeling toward his mother has already been discussed. The passage just quoted shows his idea of hell to be perceiving his own sins for what they are. He had always avoided this by reverting to writing. The guilt complex has been shown to be related also to his identity with ancestors and his serious respect for the curse hurled down upon him. In Italy, during the twilight of his life he

³⁴Hawthorne, Notes of Travel, Vol. XXI, p. 375.

still retained his fear of curses. On May 24, 1858, he wrote in his notebook:

We left Rome this morning, after troubles of various kinds, and a dispute in the first place with Lalla, our female servant, and her mother . . . Mother and daughter exploded into a livid rage and cursed us plentifully, -- wishing that we might all break our necks or die of apoplexy, -- the most awful curse that an Italian knows how to invoke upon his enemies, because it precludes the possibility of extreme unction.³⁵

and again on October 17, 1858:

In the afternoon, I walked with Rosebud to the Medici Gardens, and, on our way thither, we espied our former servant, Lalla, who flung so many and such bitter curses after us, on our departure from Rome . . . Thank God, they have not taken effect.³⁶

(He called the Italians "superstitious" for their belief in such things as curses and "evil eyes" but he took his place beside them temperamentally and even employed their methods of avoiding "evil eyes":

I walked into town with J _____ this morning, and, meeting a monk in the Via Fornace [monks presumably possessed evil eyes], I thought it no more than reasonable, as the good father fixed his eye on me, to provide against the worst by putting both hands behind me, with the forefingers and little fingers stuck out.³⁷)

(His burden of secret guilt, so intimately connected with his mother and the family curse, led Hawthorne to an unreserved admiration for the confessional. . . Here was

³⁵Ibid., p. 394. ³⁶Ibid., Vol. XXII, p. 308.

³⁷Ibid., p. 384.

the only means in his experience whereby the sinner could unburden the soul.) Were a sin to become known by the preacher in his New England churches, it would very likely become public scandal before very long. (The average sinner is, like Dimmesdale, too weak to reveal his sin when he knows that his confession of it would mean public censure.) His fears persuade him to lock it up in his breast where it grows and feeds upon his soul until it destroys him. (Dimmesdale was faced constantly with the need to confess. He did, in fact, confess to Hester in the forest interview, but this was insufficient. Until he resigned himself to his fate and joined Hester upon the scaffold, he was not able to make his prayer heard by God; and God must hear it if the confession is to afford the soul relief.) (Randall Stewart points out that Hawthorne toyed with the idea of permitting Dimmesdale to confess to a Catholic priest, but probably dropped the idea because Boston's shortage of priests in the 1630's made the episode unconvincing.³⁸)

Kenyon said in The Marble Faun that "intercourse with nature" is good for "all ordinary cares and griefs," but that "her mild influences fall short in their effect upon the ruder passions and are altogether powerless in the dread fever-fit or deadly chill of guilt."³⁹

³⁸Randall Stewart, Hawthorne: A Biography, p. 198.

³⁹Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, Vol. X, p. 121.

On February 20, 1858, Hawthorne recorded in the notebook:

. . . I strolled round the great church, and find that it continues to grow upon me both in magnitude and beauty, by comparison with the many interiors of sacred edifices which I have lately seen. At times, a single, casual, momentary glimpse of its magnificence gleams upon my soul, as it were, when I happen to glance at arch opening beyond arch, and I am surprised into admiration. I have experienced that a landscape and sky unfold the deepest beauty in a similar way . . . Passing near the confessionals for foreigners today, I saw a Spaniard, who had just come out of the one devoted to his native tongue, taking leave of his confessor, with an affectionate reverence, which -- as well as the benign dignity of the good father -- it was good to behold . . . 40)

Sophia deleted Hawthorne's most extravagant admiration for the confessional. The following passage is an example:

St. Peter's offers itself as a place of worship and religious comfort for the whole human race, and in one of the transepts I found a range of confessionals, where the penitent might tell his sins in the tongue of his own country whether French, German, Polish, English, or what not -- If I had a murder on my conscience, or any great sin, I think that I should have been inclined to kneel down there and pour it into the safe secrecy of the confessional. What an institution that is! Man needs it so it seems as if God must have ordained it. The popish religion certainly does apply itself most closely and comfortably to human occasions; and I can not but think that a great many people find their spiritual advantage in it who would find none at all in our formless mode of worship. You can not think that it is all a farce when you see peasant, citizen, and soldier coming into the church each on his own hook and kneeling for moments or for hours, directing his silent devotion to some saint who stands beside the Infinite Presence. In the Church of San Carlos, yesterday, I saw a young man standing before a shrine, writhing and wringing his hands in an agony of contrition. If he had been

⁴⁰Hawthorne, Notes of Travel, Vol. XXI, pp. 226-27.

a Protestant, I think he would have shut all that up within his heart and let it burn there until it seared him.⁴¹

Hilda pursued this admiration farther than Hawthorne did -- or at least, if Hawthorne went so far as Hilda, there remains no proof of it. (Hilda actually confessed, and it would be interesting to know if Hawthorne ever did. Perhaps he might have during the four months of Una's illness. He was under too much pressure to keep his notebook at that time; and he may very well have found the same comfort that he permitted Hilda. Certainly, he felt, as Hilda did, that the Catholics should not be the sole possessors of the Confessional.

Around this portion of the church are ranged a number of confessionals. They are small tabernacles of carved wood, with a closet for the priest in the centre; and, on either side, a space for a penitent to kneel, and breathe his confession through a perforated auricle into the good father's ear. Observing this arrangement, though already familiar to her, our poor Hilda was anew impressed with the infinite convenience -- if we may use so poor a phrase -- of the Catholic religion to its devout believers.

Who, in truth, that considers the matter, can resist a similar impression! In the hottest fever-fit of life, they can always find, ready for their need, a cool, quiet beautiful place of worship. They may enter its sacred precincts at any hour, leaving the fret and trouble of the world behind them, and purifying themselves with a touch of holy water at the threshold. In the calm interior, fragrant of rich and soothing incense, they may hold converse with some saint, their awful, kindly friend. And, most precious privilege of all, whatever perplexity, sorrow, guilt, may weigh upon their souls, they can fling down the dark burden at the foot of the cross,

⁴¹Lloyd Morris, The Rebellious Puritan, pp. 313-314.

and go forth -- to sin no more, nor be any longer disquieted; but to live again in the freshness and elasticity of innocence.

"Do not these inestimable advantages," thought Hilda, "or some of them at least, belong to Christianity itself? Are they not a part of the blessings which the system was meant to bestow upon mankind? Can the faith in which I was born and bred be perfect, if it leave a weak girl like me to wander, desolate, with this great trouble crushing me down?"

A poignant anguish thrilled within her breast; it was like a thing that had life, and was struggling to get out.

"Oh, help! Oh, help!" cried Hilda; "I cannot, cannot bear it!"⁴²

After Hilda had confessed, the great burden was gone:

And, ah, what a relief! When the hysteric gasp, the strife between words and sobs, had subsided, what a torture had passed away from her soul! It was all gone; her bosom was as pure now as in her childhood. She was a girl again; she was Hilda of the dove-cote; not that doubtful creature whom her own doves had hardly recognized as their mistress and playmate, by reason of the death-scent that clung to her garment!⁴³

Hilda wished to borrow the confessional on her own terms. She refused absolution on the grounds that only God could forgive her sins. Hawthorne inserted into the general kindness of Hilda's priest a professional craftiness whereby he sought unsuccessfully to convert her. The old priest shook his head in dismay, unable to understand her hesitancy after receiving so much comfort from her confession. He stretched forth his hands in the act of benediction, and

⁴²Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, Vol. X, pp. 201-203.

⁴³Ibid., p. 206.

Hilda "knelt down and received the blessing with as devout a simplicity as any Catholic of them all."⁴⁴

Hawthorne so projected himself into Hilda's adventure that he could not resist interpolating some of his own reservations. He said:

⊗ To do it justice, Catholicism is such a miracle of fitness for its own ends, many of which might seem to be admirable ones, that it is difficult to imagine it a contrivance of mere man. Its mighty machinery was forged and put together, not on middle earth, but either above or below. If there were but angels to work it, instead of the very different class of engineers who now manage its cranks and safety-valves, the system would soon vindicate the dignity and holiness of its origin.⁴⁵

He may have been picturing a part of his nature that he could not reconcile to Catholicism in Kenyon. Kenyon had observed Hilda's confession and been greatly disturbed. He resolved to "save" her from "that mass of unspeakable corruption, the Roman Church."⁴⁶ He said of the Cathedral:

Daylight, in its natural state, ought not to be admitted here. It should stream through a brilliant illusion of saints and hierarchies, and old scriptural images, and symbolized dogmas, purple, blue, golden, and a broad ~~flame~~ of scarlet. Then it would be just such an illumination as the Catholic faith allows to its believers. But, give me -- to live and die in -- the pure, white light of heaven!"⁴⁷

Hilda explained her pilgrimage to the confessional in terms of the heavy need to unburden her soul. She told Kenyon that she had little reason to believe that she would

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 213. ⁴⁵Ibid., p. 189.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 218. ⁴⁷Ibid., p. 219.

ever suffer such need again and predicted that she would never return. She became introspective, trying to convey her beliefs to Kenyon:

"Really, I do not quite know what I am," replied Hilda, encountering his eyes with a frank and simple gaze. "I have a great deal of faith, and Catholicism seems to have a great deal of good. Why should not I be a Catholic, if I find there what I need, and what I cannot find elsewhere? The more I see of this worship, the more I wonder at the exuberance with which it adapts itself to all the demands of human infirmity. If its ministers were but a little more human, above all error, pure from all iniquity, what a religion would it be!"⁴⁸

This sounds, of course, very much like Hawthorne's own dilemma. He appears to be answering himself from the mouth of Kenyon.

"I need not fear your conversion to the Catholic faith," remarked Kenyon, "if you are at all aware of the bitter sarcasm implied in your last observation. It is very just. Only the exceeding ingenuity of the system stamps it as the contrivance of man, or some worse author; not an emanation of the broad and simple wisdom from on high."⁴⁹

Hilda seized Kenyon's idea of the inappropriateness of white light in a Catholic cathedral and recalled the lost seven-branched golden candlestick, the holy candlestick of the Jews. Removing all doubt of her identity with the author, she said:

"When it is found again . . . the whole world will gain the illumination which it needs. Would not this be an admirable idea for a mystic story or parable, or seven-branched allegory, full of poetry, art,

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 221. ⁴⁹Ibid.

philosophy and religion? It shall be called 'The Recovery of the Sacred Candlestick.' As each branch is lighted, it shall have a differently colored lustre from the other six; and when all the seven are kindled, their radiance shall combine into the intense light of truth."⁵⁰

Some of Kenyon's remarks, irreverent though they be, were based upon the notebook. But they are not recorded originally by Hawthorne with any similar degree of irreverence. On February 7, 1858, he recorded:

I have been four or five times to St. Peter's, and always with pleasure, because there is such a delightful, summer-like warmth the moment we pass beneath the heavy, padded leather curtains that protect the entrances. It is almost impossible not to believe that this genial temperature is the result of furnace heat, but, really, it is the warmth of last summer, which will be included within those massive walls, and in the vast immensity of space, till, six months hence, this winter's chill will just have made its way thither. It would be an excellent plan for a valetudinarian to lodge during the winter in St. Peter's, perhaps establishing his household in one of the papal tombs.⁵¹

Kenyon says the same thing, but the tone is altogether different:

"The best thing I know of St. Peter's," observed he, "is its equable temperature. We are now enjoying the coolness of last winter which a few months hence, will the warmth of the present summer. It has no cure, I suspect, in all its length and breadth, for a sick soul, but it would make an admirable atmospheric hospital for sick bodies . . . Winter and summer are married at the high altar and dwell together in perfect harmony . . . These architectural tombs of the popes might serve for dwellings, and each brazen sepulchral doorway would become a domestic threshold. Then the

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 225-226.

⁵¹Hawthorne, Notes of Travel, Vol. XXI, pp. 192-193.

lover, if he dared, might say to his mistress, 'Will you share my tomb with me?' and, winning her soft consent, he would lead her to the altar, and thence to yonder sepulchre of Pope Gregory, which should be their nuptial home. What a life would be theirs, Hilda, in this marble Eden."⁵²

(The criticisms of the Catholic church visible in The Marble Faun sound like the rationalizations of an irresolute convert. Hawthorne rejected the church because its ingenuity suggests that it could be only of human origin, though the advantages he finds in it have suggested that it could be only of divine origin; he objected to the fact that it is operated by human agents, although he certainly realized that it is not unique as a church in this respect and could hardly be directly under the celestial thumbs of archangels.) His grumbling about its human frailties run all through the notebook. The following examples of his remarks are typical but by no means exhaustive:

Yesterday forenoon my wife and I went to St. Peter's to see the pope pray at the chapel of the Holy Sacrament. . . His holiness should have appeared precisely at twelve, but we waited nearly half an hour beyond that time; and it seemed to me particularly ill-mannered in the pope, who owes the courtesy of being punctual to the people, if not to St. Peter. . . . I am very glad I have seen the pope, because now he may be crossed out of the list of sights to be seen.⁵³

(He sometimes inferred that the benefits derived from confessionals are incidental to how well the penitent's

⁵²Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, Vol. X, pp. 222-223.

⁵³Hawthorne, Notes of Travel, Vol. XXI, p. 298.

remarks are audited by the sweating priests.) The people, too, were disappointing at times:

Yesterday morning, in the Cathedral, I watched a woman at confession, being curious to see how long it would take her to tell her sins, the growth of a week perhaps. I know not how long she had been confessing when I first observed her, but nearly an hour passed before the priest came suddenly from the confessional, looking weary and moist with perspiration, and took his way out of the Cathedral. The woman was left on her knees. This morning I watched another woman, and she too was very long about it, and I could see the face of the priest behind the curtain of the confessional, scarcely inclining his ear to the perforated tin through which the penitent communicated her outpourings. It must be very tedious to listen, day after day, to the minute and commonplace iniquities of the multitude of penitents, and it cannot be often that these are redeemed by the treasure-trove of a great sin. When her confession was over the woman came and sat down on the same bench with me, where her broad-brimmed straw hat was lying. She seemed to be a country woman, with a simple, matronly face, which was solemnized and softened with the comfort she had obtained by disburdening herself of the soil of worldly frailties and receiving absolution. An old woman, who haunts the Cathedral, whispered to her and she went and knelt down where a procession of priests were to pass, and then the old lady begged a crazia of me, and got a half-paul. It almost invariably happens, in a church or cathedral, that beggars address their prayers to the heretic visitor, and probably with more unction than to the Virgin or saints. However, I have nothing to say against the sincerity of this people's devotion. They give all the proof of it that a mere spectator can estimate.⁵⁴

and:

The cool, dusky refreshment of these holy places, affording such a refuge from the hot noon of the streets and piazzas, probably suggests devotional ideas to the people, and it may be, when they are praying, they feel a breath of Paradise fanning them. If

⁵⁴Ibid., Vol. XXII, pp. 271-272.

we could only see any good effects in their daily life, we might deem it an excellent thing to be able to find incense and a prayer always ascending, to which every individual may join his own. I really wonder that the Catholics are not better men and women.⁵⁵

Hawthorne declared that the Catholic mode of worship even may lead the people into sin at times:

As one instance of the little influence the religion of the Italians has upon their morals, he [Mr. Powers] told a story of one of his servants, who desired leave to set up a small shrine of the Virgin in their room -- a cheap print, or bas-relief, or image, such as are sold everywhere at the shops -- and to burn a lamp before it; she engaging, of course, to supply the oil at her own expense.

By and by, her oil-flask appeared to possess a miraculous property of replenishing itself, and Mr. Powers took measures to ascertain where the oil came from. It turned out that the servant had all the time been stealing the oil from them, and keeping up her daily sacrifice and worship to the Virgin by this constant theft.⁵⁶

He looked with eyes of suspicion upon the priests:

While we were in the Cathedral, we saw several persons kneeling at their devotions on the steps of the chancel and elsewhere. One dipped his fingers in the holy water at the entrance: by the by, I looked into the stone basin that held it, and saw it full of ice. Could not all that sanctity at least keep it thawed? Priests -- jolly, fat, mean-looking fellows, in white robes -- went hither and thither, but did not interrupt or accost us.⁵⁷

Running true to the old patterns of his mind, Hawthorne found the nuns more agreeable vessels of holiness.

Between the nave and the rest of the church there is a high railing, and on the other side of it were two kneeling figures in black, so motionless that I at first thought them statues; but they proved to be two

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 148.

⁵⁶Ibid., p.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 97.

nuns at their devotions; and others of the sisterhood came by and joined them. Nuns, at least these nuns, who are French, probably ladies of refinement, having, the education of young girls in charge, are far pleasanter objects to see and think about than monks; the odor of sanctity, in the latter, not being an agreeable fragrance. [They had gone the day before to the Capuchins?]. But these holy sisters, with their black crape and white muslin, looked really pure and unspotted from the world.⁵⁸

(The obsession with antiquity was still with Hawthorne during the European travels. Just as he was interested primarily in the old and deep-rooted elements in the Salem culture, so he dwelt upon the much more remote pasts of London and Rome.) He was horrified by the British Museum, but compelled by a force he could not deny to visit it many times. As he looked at the museum's "old shells out of which human life has long emerged,"⁵⁹ he wondered how the future could stagger on under the growing weight of the past.

(As the result of personal experience, he always thought of the past as a curse. While in England, he went to a market place in Uttoxeter to seek out the very spot in which Samuel Johnson had stood to confess publicly the sin which had burdened his conscience.⁶⁰)

(The antiquity of the Catholic Church did not, of course, escape Hawthorne. It lent its doctrine the respectability which he always associated with age, but, at the

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 133-134. ⁵⁹Van Doren, op. cit., p. 209.

same time, it led him to think of it in an unpleasant light and to suspect that the life had gone out of it:

The ecclesiastics of old time did an excellent thing in covering the interiors of their churches with brilliant frescoes, thus filling the holy places with saints and angels, and almost the presence of the Divinity. The modern ecclesiastics do the next best thing in obliterating the wretched remnants of what has had its day and done its office. These frescoes might be looked upon as the symbol of the living spirit that made Catholicism a true religion, and glorified it as long as it did live; now the glory and beauty have gone from one and the other.⁶¹

(He was too observing, however, to miss the fact that its established rituals exerted a tremendous influence upon its believers.) He voiced his fear of disaster for those who uproot themselves from the religion to which they were born:

This morning too we went to the Cathedral, and sat long listening to the music of the organ and voices, and witnessing rites and ceremonies which are far older than the ancient edifice where they were exhibited. A good many people were present, sitting, kneeling, or walking about, -- a freedom that contrasts very agreeably with the grim formalities of English Churches and our own meeting-houses . . . The people of whatever class are wonderfully tolerant of heretics, never manifesting any displeasure or annoyance, though they must see that we are drawn thither by curiosity alone, and merely pry while they pray. I heartily wish the priests were better men, and that human nature, divinely influenced, could be depended upon for a constant supply and succession of good and pure ministers, their religion has so many admirable points. And then it is a sad pity that this noble and beautiful cathedral should be a mere fossil shell, out of which the life has died long ago. But for many a year yet to come the tapers will burn before the high altar, the Host will be elevated, the incense diffuse its fragrance, the confessionals be open to receive the penitents. I saw a father entering with two little bits

⁶¹Hawthorne, Notes of Travel, Vol. XXII, p. 3.

of boys, just big enough to toddle along, holding his hand on either side. The father dipped his fingers into the marble font of holy water, -- which, on its pedestals, was two or three times as high as those small Christians, -- and wetted a hand of each, and taught them how to cross themselves. When they come to be men it will be impossible to convince those children that there is no efficacy in holy water without plucking up all religious faith and sentiment by the roots. Generally, I suspect, when people throw off the faith they were born in, the best soil of their hearts is apt to cling to its roots.⁶²

These final lines voicing Hawthorne's mistrust of throwing off the faith of one's birth are especially interesting. They show not only that he is possibly interested in making a change himself at the time he wrote this but also that he fears to do so. (His attempts to explain away his interest in Catholicism were never quite successful. He could never quite close his eyes to the benefits which the faithful derive from the Roman Church. Like Hilda, he was just a "poor heretic" looking enviously at the comforts and peace of the Catholics:)

I suppose there was hardly a man or woman who had not heard mass, confessed, and said their prayers; a thing which -- the prayers, I mean -- it would be absurd to predicate of London, New York, or any Protestant City. In however adulterated a guise, the Catholics do get a draught of devotion to slake the thirst of their souls, and methinks it must needs do them good, even if not so sure as if it came from better cisterns, or from the original fountain head.⁶³

He marveled at the singularity with which Catholics applied themselves to their devotions:

⁶²Ibid., pp. 272-273. ⁶³Ibid., Vol. XXI, p. 237.

When I first came to Rome, I felt embarrassed and unwilling to pass, with my heresy, between a devotee and his saint; for they often shoot their prayers at a shrine almost quite across the church. But there seems to be no violation of etiquette in so doing.⁶⁴

and:

Kneeling against many of the pillars there were persons in prayer, and I stepped softly, fearing lest my tread on the marble pavement should disturb them, -- a needless precaution, however, for nobody seems to expect it, nor to be disturbed by the lack of it.⁶⁵

(Hawthorne could not refrain from making comparisons between Protestantism and Catholicism; the former usually suffered in the comparison.)

A number of persons were sitting or kneeling around; others came in while I was there, dipping their fingers in the holy water, and bending the knee, as they passed the shrines and chapels, until they reached the one which, apparently, they had selected as the particular altar for their devotions. Everybody seemed so devout, and in a frame of mind so suited to the day and place, that it really made me feel a little awkward not to be able to kneel down along with them. Unlike the worshippers in our own churches, each individual here seems to do his own individual acts of devotion, and I cannot but think it better so than to make an effort for united prayer as we do. It is my opinion that a great deal of devout and reverential feeling is kept alive in people's hearts by the Catholic mode of worship.⁶⁶

(The privilege of confession always remained the most coveted possession of the faith), and lead him to remark on May 1, 1858, that ("Protestanism needs a new apostle to convert it into something positive."⁶⁷) Here was the only

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 194. ⁶⁵Ibid., p. 199. ⁶⁶Ibid., p. 235.

⁶⁷Van Doren, p. 126.

practical element in Hawthorne's experience for dealing with man's deepest and most troublesome problems. It had indeed, for him, something "positive."

Whatever positive elements the old New England faith might have had were totally unperceived by Hawthorne. The type of fellowship which it presented consisted largely of such artificialities as hand-clasping, restrained smiles, and perceptions of sin in other people. This sort of thing could never warm Hawthorne's sympathies for his fellow man or serve to make him feel that he was a part of the race. It is probably safe to conjecture that he preferred the Catholic mass, for here was a world-wide fellowship of souls. The mass does not depend upon the personality of the priest for its character and is in that sense relieved of human frailties. It is conducted in precisely the same manner in every land and has for centuries remained essentially unchanged. In its observance, there is an abstract union between men living, men dead, and men yet unborn, brought into a warm sympathy with each other through God and the church. It is a union unspoiled by the treachery of human perverseness; it is the only kind of union of which Hawthorne was capable.

(In leaving Rome, he felt he was leaving behind the only city he had ever found that was truly congenial to his nature. He left his heart on the high altar of St. Peter's, but resolved to forget about it.)

. . . I looked at everything as if for the last time; nor do I wish ever to see any of these objects again, though no place ever took so strong a hold of my being as Rome, nor ever seemed so close to me and so strangely familiar. I seem to know it better than my birthplace, and to have known it longer; and though I have been very miserable there, and languid with the effects of the atmosphere, and disgusted with a thousand things in daily life, still I cannot say I hate it, perhaps might fairly own a love for it. But life being too short for such questionable and troublesome enjoyments, I desire never to set eyes on it again.⁶⁸

(But he did not forget about it; he found his mind wandering back to Rome whether he willed that it should or not; in France during May of 1859, he recorded his impressions of the cathedrals there; he found them to be an anti-climax after his visitation in Italy:)

. . . much else that would have been exceedingly interesting before I went to Rome. But Rome takes the charm out of all inferior antiquity as well as the life out of human beings.⁶⁹

In June during a visit to Geneva, he blamed the inhospitality there on its Protestantism. He went again to a cathedral.

This being a Protestant country, the doors were all shut, -- an inhospitality that made me half a Catholic. It is funny enough that a stranger generally profits by all that is worst for the inhabitants of the country where he himself is merely a visitor. Despotism makes things all the pleasanter for the stranger. Catholicism lends itself admirably to his purposes.⁷⁰

Even after his return to England, he found his feet carrying him through cathedrals, his mind absorbed with the

⁶⁸Ibid., Vol. XXII, p. 342.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 353.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 375.

confessional:

. . . I walked to Warwick yesterday forenoon, and went into St. Mary's Church, to see the Beauchamp Chapel. . . On one side of it were some worn steps ascending to a confessional, where the priest used to sit, while the penitent, in the body of the church, poured his sins through a perforated auricle into this unseen receptacle.⁷¹

(The most vivid of his after-impressions of Rome, of course, was The Marble Faun.) The idea was conceived and partially developed in Rome, but written in its final form after his return to England. On April 18, 1858, he jotted down the germ of an idea, born out of his interest in the Faun of Praxiteles.

. . . a Faun, copied from that of Praxiteles, and another who seems to be dancing, were exceedingly pleasant to look at. I like these strange, sweet, playful, rustic creatures, . . . linked so prettily, without monstrosity, to the lower tribes . . . Their character has never, that I know of, been wrought out in literature; and something quite good, funny, and philosophical, as well as poetic, might very likely be educed from them. . . The faun is a natural and delightful link betwixt human and brute life, with something of a divine character intermingled.⁷²

On April 27, he returned to the gallery where the Faun again commanded his attention. The idea for a story progressed;

We afterwards went into the sculpture-gallery, where I looked at the Faun of Praxiteles, and was sensible of a peculiar charm in it; a sylvan beauty and homeliness, friendly and wild at once. The lengthened, but not preposterous ears, and the little tail, which we infer, have an exquisite effect, and make the spectator smile in his very heart. This race of fauns

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 406-407. ⁷²Ibid., Vol. XXI, p. 327.

was the most delightful of all that antiquity imagined. It seems to me that a story, with all sorts of fun and pathos in it, might be contrived on the idea of their species having become intermingled with the human race; a family with the faun blood in them having prolonged itself from the classic era till our own days. The tail might have disappeared, by dint of constant inter-marriages with ordinary mortals; but the pretty hairy ears should occasionally reappear in members of the family; and the moral instincts and intellectual characteristics of the faun might be most picturesquely brought out, without detriment to the human interest of the story. Fancy this combination in the person of a young lady!⁷³

(A first draft of the story was actually completed in Italy by January of 1859, but Una's long illness, which had started in the preceding October diverted his mind; and he was unable to put it into any publishable form.⁷⁴ The guess that Hawthorne might himself have gone to confession during the troubled months of Una's illness has already been ventured.) He could not, apparently, retreat from this trouble into composition. (His mind had been tinged by Catholicism and his moral convictions lacked the sharpness and singularity of former days. Possibly his doubts concerning his own relation to Catholicism made this retreat too difficult.) (This confusion is reflected even in the final version of The Marble Faun. The emphasis is diffused as New England gloom is intermingled with Roman sanctuaries.) Through the vagueness a view of sin never before suggested by Hawthorne emerges:

⁷³Ibid., pp. 334-335.

⁷⁴Van Doren, op. cit., pp. 222-223.

Is sin then -- which we deem such a dreadful blackness in the universe -- it it, like sorrow merely an element of human education through which we struggle to a higher and purer state than we could otherwise have attained? Did Adam fall that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier Paradise than his?⁷⁵

(This was not a new idea to Hawthorne, for he had read Paradise Lost in childhood; but he apparently felt in his Roman environment that it was an idea which deserved his attention. Fate, at last, had become Providence; and what had formerly seemed to Hawthorne the blackest of realities was in some mysterious way destined by God to yield the race good.)

(The speculation that he may have referred his secret sins to the confessional during Una's illness is strengthened by Hilda's insistence that she was carried thence only by a great burden and her own weakness.) She told Kenyon that she probably would never again be faced with a problem of similar magnitude and hence would probably never return to confession. (If it is permissible to identify her once more with Hawthorne, the inference that Hawthorne interpreted Una's illness as a visitation of the curse and the fruits of his own sins at once presents itself.) Una's death, which for a time seemed imminent, was certainly the darkest hour in his life. (Doubtlessly, when he thought about it, he viewed it in light of past misfortunes -- the

⁷⁵Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, Vol. X, p. 212.

death of his mother, the death of Louisa, financial reversals, his struggles for literary recognition, the attacks upon his name. All these he had associated with the curse and his own apportionment of guilt.) (He had never), like Samuel Johnson, or his own Dimmesdale, (faced the realities of sin as they applied to him personally;) he had never confessed them in a manner acceptable to God.) He may, then, in this supreme hour of tribulation have decided that he must do so. (If he did make such a decision and act upon it by going to confession, he was at least reassured by events, for Una recovered.) This would have made it possible for him to formulate a happier view of sin -- not by lessening its tragedy, but by sanctifying it with a new meaning.

(The Puritanism of The Scarlet Letter is not only a matter important to the book, but it is the central fact in the book. This is not true of the Catholicism in The Marble Faun.) The chapter devoted to Hilda's pilgrimage to St. Peter's are, in fact, beside the point so far as the main narrative is concerned. (It would seem that this flirtation with Catholicism was included simply because such matters were much on the author's mind. Hawthorne was thinking out loud in terms of all the good and bad things he could say about it, trying to make up his mind just where he stood. It would appear from Hilda's irresolution that Hawthorne was unable to force an answer, one way or

the other.) Instead of crystallizing the answer, he merely mirrored his problem.

(It is interesting that it was Hilda whom Hawthorne sent to confession. This weakened the chapter, because she really had had nothing to do with the crime apart from her knowledge of it. Why was it not Donatello or Miriam? Although Donatello lacked the sense of sin, either he or Miriam would have been better because it was they who shared the guilt of taking a man's life.) The burden was theirs and if anyone cried out for comfort from the church, it should have been one of them.)

Hawthorne's choice of Hilda was not the dictates of common sense or artistry. Having her feel guilt because of the mere knowledge of the sin was not absurd to the author, however; for he had been similarly affected by the crimes of his ancestors. Hilda had been presented as an incarnation of sweetness and light -- Hilda of the dovecote, adored by the pigeons and doves. This congeniality with nature, a sure index of sterling character, was expressed in the meticulous strokes of her paint brush upon the canvas. Unlike her adventures in the dove-cote, her artistry was not a direct acquaintanceship with nature; she was not able to originate her own canvasses; she could merely copy the work of other artists, but this she could do flawlessly. This pale virtue at once suggests that he patterned this unusual and most remarkable character after Sophia. The superficialities of Hilda's

portrait definitely fit her, but Hilda's infatuation with Catholicism is not Sophia's. As Morris pointed out:

Through the narrow streets shambled ill-kempt brown-garbed monks, and Penitents with faces concealed under pointed hoods; Sophia bridled at the thought of their superstition and warned her children against contamination by their doctrine.⁷⁶

She was a good New England Unitarian and detested Catholicism with all the zeal that blind prejudice could afford her. This probably accounts for her heated denials in America that Hawthorne had patterned Hilda after her. She would certainly not want Elizabeth or her friends to suspect her of Catholicism. Hawthorne could scarcely hope to embrace it himself and find the comfort he so much desired as long as his own timidity was coupled with the unrelenting opposition of Sophia. (In choosing Hilda as the vessel of conversion, he may not only have given his own thoughts expression, but he may have subconsciously or consciously considered his wife's conversion as well. To find courage for such a major alteration, he would have needed a woman's strength to lean upon.) We can only assume from Sophia's deletion of his Catholic sentiments in the notebook that he did not find it. She doubtlessly told him how confused he was, and contributed whenever possible to the misgivings he had about what she considered the Roman superstitions.

She always encouraged Hawthorne to cultivate "sunny"

⁷⁶Morris, op. cit., p. 312.

individuals like Emerson. She wanted him to become a person that he could never be. It is probable that she engineered the dissolution of Hawthorne's friendship with Melville. In Melville, she recognized the gloom of temperament which she sought to dispel in her husband; she doubtlessly considered Melville's company a bad influence. It is important to notice in connection with her attitude toward Melville, that she deleted a very important passage in the notebook pertaining to a visit that the author of Moby Dick paid the Hawthornes at Liverpool. In it Hawthorne described the state of Melville's soul. What he said concerning it was equally applicable to his own. He displayed marvelous insight into Melville's agonies because he shared them himself.

"Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had 'pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated;' but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists -- and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before -- in wandering to and fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe nor be uncomfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality. ~~than~~ most of us."⁷⁷

(It is difficult to assign any one cause to Hawthorne's

⁷⁷Van Doren, op. cit., p. 214.

failure to become a Catholic,) although it is probable that Sophia's opposition was the greatest single factor. (Hawthorne had never been quick to join anything. His experiences at Brook Farm and his other Unitarian contacts had proved discouraging. Perhaps he feared that membership in the Roman Church would prove finally to be only one more disillusionment.) His first-hand exposure to it had come late in life, and he had always been suspicious of change -- even when it was for the better. (His soul was tortured and Catholicism seemed to be the answer, but he felt that he must be cautious; before embracing it he must know whether it was a cure or merely an opiate as his marriage may have been.) Would it serve to give him peace, or would it have reverberations that might destroy him? His Puritan roots were deep, and he doubtless felt like a country gentleman infatuated with a street-walker. His common sense told him that it would never do to take such a step. (This hesitancy to reach conclusions is reflected in Hawthorne's reaction to his friend Hiram Powers, a Roman sculptor. Powers had evidently devoted much earnest thought to matters that bothered Hawthorne, but Hawthorne said Powers was apt to let an idea crystallize into a theory before he could have sufficient data for it.⁷⁸) Hawthorne avoided this mistake, but made a worse one.

⁷⁸Morris, op. cit., p. 324.

He returned to Wayside in 1860 a reluctant Protestant. He had lost his love for the United States while in Europe. Like his old friend Franklin Pierce, he regarded the Civil War as a senseless tragedy. He had lost his faith in his so-called "romance" as an acceptable art form, and by this time the confusion in his mind regarding moral issues had grown enormously. His political attachments and opinions helped to estrange him from society, and intensified his doubts and emotional tensions.

His efforts in composition were all crowned with failure after returning to Wayside. (He no longer knew the way ahead. His confusion over the Catholic issue might well account for it.) He still was turning the conflict over in his mind. (At one moment the Catholic Church seemed in all its splendor to be the way, the truth, and the light. Then again, when viewed in the light of his faith in simplicity, its structure seemed monstrously artificial)-- an opiate to the dark side of his nature. The down-to-earth New England side of Hawthorne could not accept its massive antiquity as the truth. Nor could he find any real fundamental objection to it. He could never again focus his mind upon anything that he could call a real conviction. He now substituted the contraptions of Gothic romance for direct discussion of his basic themes. He lost his moral compass in Europe and found himself "adrift." Van Doren says:

. . . the mysterious portrait, the moldy parchment, the deformed villain, the secret crime, the illicit elixir, the esoteric research, the devil's laugh, the gleaming eye, the portentous word. He was seldom free enough of these contraptions; at the end, indeed, when his powers were failing, he fell back into them as into a pit. But at his best he made them serve him willingly and well; he forced them, that is, to do moral and metaphysical work.⁷⁹

(His notebooks had changed function entirely since he had first started keeping them. The rift between the allegory and setting were apparent in The Marble Faun. Rome had been too significant in itself for Hawthorne to blend his impressions of it with the story. Much of his description was borrowed without change from the notebook; Rome was simply interpolated into the book and not blended with the story.) Once back in Concord he was more dependent upon his notes than ever. Van Doren says:

His first aim had been to store his fire where he could get at it when he needed; his last aim was to provide a substitute for the fire. He began by making notes between periods of active composition; the notes themselves became at last an activity, hoping against hope to justify its own effort.⁸⁰)

(He made four fragmentary attempts to write a romance based upon findings in England.) (He wished to achieve a contrast between America and her mother culture.) In it there was to be an old estate with an ancestral curse, visibly manifesting itself in the form of a bloody footprint at the castle door. He hoped to make the footprint a symbol of

⁷⁹Van Doren, op. cit., p. 34.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 46.

growing beauty under his hand, but he had no idea what it ought to symbolize. (His efforts to use this theme became progressively more and more feeble.) The second of the fragments, Dr. Grimshaw's Secret, is representative. By the time he made this effort he was completely lost.

Anguish? The term is not extravagant. Nobody, then, and least of all Sophia, knew how many words Hawthorne was pouring out in his lonely tower; for he was lonely again, and in a worse sense than before, and lost -- definitely lost. When Julian published the second fragment in 1883 and called it Dr. Grimshaw's Secret, he did not disclose, nor did he fully know, how many starts his father had made on this one work alone. Two drafts of it survive, as well as six preliminary studies. | A total of thirty-one such studies and drafts for all the fragments is clear proof that Hawthorne had lost his confidence. Formerly he had written with fair speed, straight along, finishing a work in the same winter in which it had been begun; for he wrote mainly in cold months. Now his handwriting became crabbed; he crowded his pages; he blotted and scratched. He did not know any longer where straight ahead was. Whereas he once had played with his reader, suggesting multiple explanations of some singular fact, fact now played with him; he could not choose among his images, none felt to him like fact at all. Nothing fitted firmly into place, nothing stayed put, nothing seemed good enough to go on with. Had he lost his moral bearings? Had he ceased to believe, as sometimes he said he had, that romance was an acceptable product? Had his environment evaporated? Had the "fairy precinct" become a foolish myth? It is hard to select an answer.⁸¹

Interestingly enough, (the villain of Dr. Grimshaw's Secret, the master of Braithwaite Hall, is a Catholic.) Hawthorne tried to make the Catholicism an integral part of his wickedness. (Van Doren assumes that his earlier

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 239-240.

flirtation with Catholicism had now dissolved,⁸² but it seems more likely that Hawthorne bitterly resented what Catholicism was doing to him. He still found it attractive, but impossible to accept. It had destroyed his literary powers, and now so plagued him that it threatened his sanity.) (Again, he could make no specific charge against the faith; he offered only an implied evil in identifying it with his villain.) The panic he suffered in trying to characterize this man indicates that he no longer knew what wickedness was. The marginal notes in the manuscript include the following clues to his mental state:

"The Lord of Braithwaite Hall shall be a wretched, dissipated, dishonorable fellow . . . Something monstrous he must be, yet within nature and romantic probability -- hard conditions! A murderer -- 'twont do at all. A Mahometan -- pish! . . . Nothing mean must he be, but as wicked as you please. Shall he be preternatural? Not without a plausible explanation. What natural horror is there? A monkey? A Frankenstein? A man of straw? A man without a heart, made of machinery? . . . Nonsense! . . . A resurrection-man? What? What? What? A worshipper of the sun? A cannibal? a ghoul? a vampire? a man who lives by sucking the blood of the young and the beautiful? . . . Now for it! How? At any rate, he must have dreadful designs on Elise -- dreadful! dreadful! dreadful! . . . ye Heavens! . . . What habit can he have? Perhaps that of having a young child, fricasseed, served up to him for breakfast every morning."⁸³

A letter written by Sophia to Hawthorne in July of 1862, throws an interesting light upon his mental anguish and the

⁸²Ibid., p. 239.

⁸³Ibid., pp. 241-242.

loss of his physical health. Upon Sophia's recommendation Hawthorne had journeyed with Julian to the seashore in hope that the salt air might restore his health. Sophia's letter said:

"Of all the trials, this is the heaviest to me, to see thee so apathetic, so indifferent and hopeless, so unstrung. Rome has no sin for which to answer so unpardonable as this of wrenching off thy wings and hanging lead upon thine arrowy feet. Rome and all Rome caused to thee, what a mixed cup is this to drink."⁸⁴

Tharp supposes this to refer to Una's illness, but this seems to be a rather weak conjecture when the "cure" proposed by Sophia later was a return trip to Rome.⁸⁵ It appears more likely that the cause of his illness was precisely what Sophia said it was -- Rome.

(By 1853, Hawthorne was avoiding his neighbors with more than customary zeal, because he was afraid they might read in his face his fear that he was losing his mind.⁸⁶) He assented to the idea of going back to Europe as he felt it might restore his mental well-being. (Had Una's illness in itself been the sole cause of his mental collapse, it is very unlikely that he could have weathered the crisis of her gravest danger, written a book as good as The Marble Faun, and returned to Concord only to find his delicately balanced mind collapsing there) -- long after Una's recovery.

⁸⁴Tharp, The Peabody Sisters of Salem, p. 295.

⁸⁵Ibid. ⁸⁶Ibid., p. 296.

In the light of Hawthorne's history, it would seem more reasonable to suppose that his latter days represented the hard-won victory of elements which had pounded at his sanity since childhood.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, an attempt is made to explain the major facts of Hawthorne's life and the major themes of his fiction in terms of his relationship to religion. This relationship has been traced from the important influences of his childhood to the senile irresoluteness of his latter days.

His failure to find the security of his mother's love and his consequent feeling of rejection pushed him into his Puritan world of escapism. The dark shadows he saw there became a monomania, with hidden guilt, his ancestors, and a curse as their central realities. They created a horror which he struggled to escape, but reversals in his life forced him to believe in the powers of these shadows. He forced his way into the world of reality through marriage. He joined a general revolt against the Puritan past only to find himself in the arms of Unitarianism which he found even less congenial than Puritanism. Intellectually speaking, he had no place to go, no position to take by the time he journeyed to Europe. Here was real loneliness and isolation. His position was an impossible one. Then he too found his wild rose of comfort blooming in even more

unlikely soil than that by the prison door. The Catholic Church of Rome whispered to him, "look at me!", and he found in her countenance everything his soul had longed for. She shared his deepest and darkest convictions and yet translated them into something beautiful and hopeful. This rose was not without its thorns, however; his inhibitions would not permit him to assert himself. They bade him to be cautious, and the curse of old Rebecca, at last, reaped its fullest harvest. His hesitancy to embrace this long-sought stranger, a stranger, and yet more of a friend than Salem, lost him his only chance of intellectual salvation.

After his return to America, he realized that he was lost forever. A loneliness blacker than any he had known settled upon him. His position was now utterly and completely hopeless. As this horrible realization grew within him and tortured him, the string of sanity, held taut for so many years, snapped; and Hawthorne was no more. This time there was no way for relief, much less for cure. Composition had sustained him in former years, but now even that was impossible. Here was the perfect fulfillment of the ancestral curse.

Along with his mental collapse, Hawthorne suffered mysterious physical ailments. There was, according to the testimony of examining physicians, no disease to explain the tottering weakness, the loss of appetite, the pain,

and the loss of flesh.¹ We are left only with the suggestive diagnosis of Roger Chillingworth, made in reference to Dimmesdale, a patient not unlike Hawthorne:

A bodily disease, which we look upon as whole and entire within itself may after all be but a symptom of some ailment in the spiritual part.²

Although Una's life was spared in Rome, the curse was not idle in the next generation. His son Julian served a term in prison, and his daughter Rose, as if to overcompensate for her father's failure to join the Catholic Church, was the sacrificial lamb -- she became a nun.³

¹Van Doren, op. cit., p. 259.

²Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, Vol. VI, p. 194.

³Randall Stewart, Hawthorne, p. 199.

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