'TROUBLED JOY' : THE PARADOX OF THE FEMALE FIGURE IN NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S FICTION

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
Prefatory Note	.. .. ..	i
Abstract	.. .. ..	ii
Introduction	.. .. ..	1
I	Background: The Figure of Woman in Nineteenth Century America ..	5
II	Woman's Fatal Flaw: The Tales ..	25
III	Hester Prynne	57
IV	Zenobia and Priscilla	77
V	Miriam and Hilda	96
Conclusion	.. .. ..	115
Bibliography	.. .. ..	121

PREFATORY NOTE

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

The style of presentation is primarily in accordance with the *MLA Handbook* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1977), but some features of style, notably the use of single quotation marks for quotations of words, phrases or short prose passages, have been determined by the Style Sheet of the Department of English, University of Tasmania.

ABSTRACT

The figure of woman is of central importance to the whole presentation of meaning in Nathaniel Hawthorne's fiction. In comparison to other writers of the nineteenth century, and especially his male compatriots, Hawthorne grants the female figure a remarkable degree of prominence and significance in his works. His presentation of woman is noteworthy not only for the depth and subtlety with which his female characters are portrayed but also for the unique way in which he manipulates the standard female stereotypes to explore through symbolic suggestion the whole purpose of woman's existence and the foundations of her relations with man. This thesis attempts to show how Hawthorne's symbolic method consistently points towards the importance of accepting women as complex, multi-dimensional human beings. Paradoxically, in Hawthorne's language, this acceptance means that women can fulfil a super-human purpose. They operate as a unifying force in his works, providing the key to harmony and the means by which man can re-establish his relations with man.

My first chapter considers the contemporary context of Hawthorne's work, the role of woman in nineteenth century America, the way that role was perceived in fact and fiction, and the kinds of influence which were likely to affect Hawthorne's personal vision of womanhood. Chapter II examines the women of Hawthorne's short stories, the ways in which he develops a distinct 'family' of characters who reappear throughout his corpus, and the symbolic language which informs his whole presentation of woman's role. Chapters III, IV and V deal respectively with *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Blithedale Romance*, and *The Marble Faun*, concentrating specifically upon the female characters -

their significance in these works and in relation to Hawthorne's vision as a whole. My conclusion attempts to draw the threads together, to show how the very individuality of Hawthorne's dark ladies and fair maidens is representative of a common promise of 'troubled joy', and to show how Hawthorne applied this promise to the future of his country and of the whole human race.

INTRODUCTION

Hawthorne stands out from his male contemporaries among writers of the American 'Renaissance' because he does not hesitate to give women a prominent place in his fictional works. Whereas writers like Cooper and Melville were primarily concerned with the problems of a predominantly male world, Hawthorne was vitally concerned with the role woman had to play in the development of his country. In Hawthorne's major works women are at least as important as men, if not more so. Hawthorne presented the first great heroines of American literature, heroines who rival the creations of England and Europe in their depth and subtlety of portrayal.

Hawthorne likewise stands out from the mass of female writers in nineteenth century America, whose novels presented a syrupy succession of stereotyped heroines for the consumption of a predominantly female audience. He stands out, not because he did not use the stereotypes, but because he played with them. He used them as an integral part of his symbolic method, revealing the flaws of any attempt to label a human being, whilst consciously manipulating the many associations that such labels could yield.

Hawthorne created a unique 'family' of characters which grows and develops throughout his works. His whole approach to fiction was symbolic and hence his characterization depends upon a multitude of associations which range far beyond human character. The mad scientists, the religious fanatics, the struggling young artists, and the dark and fair women all gain their significance from Hawthorne's characteristic manipulation of familiar images. To come close to an understanding of Hawthorne's contribution to literature it is necessary to enter his world - to see his individual works and characters within the context of his whole corpus.

This applies particularly to the women of his tales and romances. Hawthorne constantly reworks the images and motifs which surround and sometimes obscure the role of woman. From the flat, purely representative women of his earlier stories to the multidimensional 'dark ladies' of his novels, the same undercurrents of association are constantly at work. The real complexity of Hawthorne's presentation of the female figure can only be appreciated within the context of this symbolic language. It is a language far removed from the realities of feminism and political struggle; at times it is even at odds with a realistic presentation of character, yet it enabled Hawthorne to suggest concepts more radical than anything contemplated by the feminists of his day, and it allowed him to explore hidden depths of character which no amount of realism could discern.

My approach to this topic has been primarily determined by the motifs which seem to link Hawthorne's female characters together. I have therefore chosen to discuss the tales which most aptly demonstrate these motifs, and have dealt with them in an order which attempts to reflect the way their symbolic associations interact. The novels have been examined according to their order of publication, with the exception of *The House of the Seven Gables*. The latter has not been discussed at length because it is the one romance in which the female figure is not of central importance. *The House of the Seven Gables* does offer another perspective on some of Hawthorne's familiar characters and themes, and these are dealt with in my conclusion. However, the romance lacks the tension between dark and fair female characters which is the focus of this discussion. Phoebe Pyncheon is an important unifying force in the novel. She is a fair maiden whose lack of imaginative intellect is compensated for by a liberal dose of charm and sweetness, but her bland domestic sunshine lacks

both depth and significance.

Before we can adequately assess Hawthorne's presentation of the female figure, it is necessary to gain some idea of the influences which shaped his attitudes to women and to their presentation in fiction. To this end, my first chapter deals with the general ideas held by Hawthorne's contemporaries with regard to woman's nature, place, and function in society. It attempts to show what women were like in both fiction and reality, how they were taught to view themselves, and how they learned to behave. It also considers the sorts of impressions Hawthorne was likely to receive from the women he knew and some of the personal opinions about the role of woman which can be gleaned from his letters and journals.

Although it is necessary to understand the social context of Hawthorne's life and work, it is equally important to be wary of any attempt to measure his fiction, and particularly his fictional women, in social terms. Hawthorne's whole approach is aimed at an exploration of his characters' inner worlds, and the aim of any critical appraisal should be to follow the same path.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND : THE FIGURE OF WOMAN IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

The images of womanhood which Hawthorne presents are transformations of the conceptions of womanhood of his time. In America as elsewhere in the nineteenth century a woman's place was in the home. This seemingly irrefutable fact of life was fundamental to the whole fabric of nineteenth century culture and society. With hindsight, however, we can see that the role of woman was not immune to the enormous social and economic upheavals of the century. The position of woman was undergoing a subtle change and in literature we can trace a growing concern to define and justify the female role.

Whilst in England and America the same sorts of attitudes, theories and developments grew simultaneously in response to the problem of the position of woman, certain aspects of the American experience ensured that the American woman became a unique figure by the end of the century. Americans tended to exaggerate some facets of the attitudes and culture of nineteenth century England, whilst rejecting others. They tried to deny the class system which placed the lady in a sphere far removed from ordinary existence, and yet embraced all the myths of lady-like behaviour. They are often accused of being 'more Victorian than the Victorians'. The sentimentalism that often surfaces in Dickens found a secure home in American hearts, and the sugary ideals of Victorian womanhood were wholeheartedly embraced. Americans developed the cult of 'the angel in the house' even more enthusiastically than the British; women were the saviours of mankind and mothers were revered as sacred entities. It was America that

gave us 'Mother's Day'.

The myths of womanhood were reinforced by America's experience as a new country pushing its way further and further into the wilderness. Men, busy forging new lives and careers were happy to leave much of the business of civilization, culture and moral refinement to their womenfolk; such things necessarily came second to building houses, towns and cities. The end result was that American women seem to have been accorded a quite marked level of superiority in certain areas and the concept that women had an important moral and civilizing function within society gained a much firmer foothold in America than elsewhere.

Whilst Americans adopted wholeheartedly many of the ideas and attitudes of Victorian England, they possessed a concurrent proud awareness of their country's independence. There was a general feeling that America was the land of social experimentation; the old class distinctions of Europe had been thrown aside and a new and better society was taking shape.[1] This atmosphere was bound to affect attitudes to women, and the nineteenth century saw the emergence of the first organized feminist movement and a very strong concomitant conservative reaction. Strangely enough the greatest influence for change was probably the conservative backlash - the immensely high pedestal upon which American women were placed proved the perfect oratorical platform.

Economic developments provide an important key to understanding the position of woman in the nineteenth century and the urgent need many felt to justify her role. Ann Douglas coins the term 'Feminine Disestablishment' to describe the plight of America's female population.[2] Before the Industrial Revolution had made its mark, women had played

1. A.N. Kaul, *The American Vision: Actual and Ideal Society in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963), p. 5.

2. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), pp. 49-50.

an important and visible role in the economic life of the community. Women fed and clothed their families with the products of their own labour, and cottage industries flourished. Once manufacturing industries developed, however, and subsistence-orientated agriculture gave way to commercial farming, woman's role shifted from that of primary producer to full-time consumer. Whilst it would be rash to claim that women were better or worse served because of this change, it is clear that in the nineteenth century, and especially in North Eastern America, the value of women's work plummeted to an all-time low. Females in the workplace had to endure low wages and often appalling conditions, and social prestige was attached to the leisured lady, whose 'only' task was to supervise her servants and children. It was this new class of leisured or 'disestablished' women which had to be given purpose and direction, and literature took up the task of assigning meaning to middle-class woman's existence.

Of course not all women found time at their disposal; marriage involved a fair amount of drudgery for poor and rich alike, and individual experience varied immensely. The only real option in life, however, for all women was marriage, and once this was achieved, all a woman's duties, cares and happiness revolved around the home. Men built up a vigorous new economy whilst their women stayed at home and provided a purpose, both emotional and monetary, for their work. The whole upbringing of women was geared towards this one ultimate goal. A career was largely out of the question and social restrictions made the prospect of spinsterhood a very dreary one indeed. Society thus placed a great deal of emphasis upon youth; young women were the subject of most popular fiction and in real life the years before marriage were probably the most exciting for any woman of reasonable station and appearance. Foreign travellers often commented upon the

relative freedom of American girls;[1] youth was indulged because, after all, the business of finding a husband was a woman's whole vocation.

The obvious need for middle-class women to have some means of occupying their time brought about some quite significant changes for women in the field of education. Women like Catherine Beecher, educator and author of the popular *The American Woman's Home*, argued that improvements in education were essential to making women better wives, companions, and mothers.[2] Such a position was relatively easy for even the most conservative elements of society to accept and girls were educated accordingly.[3] Despite the momentous effects this change eventually brought about, however, only a few exceptional women gained more than a superficial gloss from their educational excursions. Women became experts in homemaking and childrearing and they dabbled in art, literature, and music. Only towards the end of the century did the more masculine doors to knowledge slip ajar. The one profession which did become available to women quite readily - teaching - was regarded as suitable only because the business of childcare fell neatly within a woman's 'sphere'. Even here the privilege of employment was won at the expense of adequate remuneration; women were paid about a third as much as men throughout the century,[4] and their work was regarded as either a tempoary stage before marriage or as a undignified substitute.[5]

Nineteenth century America therefore produced a large number of

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1. Ernest Earnest, *The American Eve in Fact and Fiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), p. 47. See also Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), Vol. II, pp. 237-42.
2. Carol Ruth Berkin and Mary Beth Norton, *Women of America: A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), p. 145.
3. June Sochen, *Herstory: A Woman's View of American History* (New York: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), pp. 137-8.
4. Sochen, p. 102.
5. Sochen, p. 141.

literate women whose possibilities for self-fulfilment were limited to the daily routine of household management. In consequence many turned to books and magazines for amusement, escape, or simply to occupy the time. These women formed a new and powerful reading public with clearly defined tastes. Girls and their mothers read voraciously, and it became a standard requirement for any published work that it should not offend or mislead its most innocent reader. A reciprocal relationship developed in which the requirements of the huge feminine reading public determined the type of material published, and in which the type of material published helped to mould and shape its public. The best-sellers of the day were written by women for women and, according to Ann Douglas:

> The stories they read and wrote were themselves courses in the shopping mentality, exercises in euphemism essential to the system of flattery which served as the rationale for the American woman's economic position. [1]

The popular women writers combined in their works all the vicarious excitement of romantic adventure with a conscious attempt to confirm traditional moral values:

> While the women activist-reformers tried to change values, the women writers spoke for the majority and enforced the traditional social attitudes. Christian virtues were always upheld; sin was punished and virtue rewarded. [2]

Whilst it is quite possible that many girls ignored the didactic tracts supplied for the purposes of their education, they could hardly escape the more subtle influence of women's magazines or of sentimental fiction. This material not only told them how to behave; it gave them models to follow - idealized heroines with whom any girl would want to identify. The whole business of creating a feminine ideal was intimately associated with fashion and with the absolute

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1. Douglas, p. 62. For the exceptions which highlight the general malaise see two recent collections of stories by nineteenth century U.S. women writers - *Old Maids*, comp. Susan Koppelman (Boston : Pandora Press, 1984) and *Daring to Dream*, comp. C.F. Kessler (Boston: Pandora Press, 1984).
2. Sochen, p. 143.

necessity of gaining a husband. If society considered that delicate submissive women were attractive to men then the pressures to conform to this ideal were immense. In consequence nineteenth century America produced many women who, outwardly at least, seemed to justify its vision of femininity.

A composite picture of the ideal nineteenth century woman can be sketched quite simply: she was pale, fragile, beautiful, virtuous, submissive in everything except the moral arena, quick to blush or faint, sexless, and spiritually elevated. Although the picture might change in certain aspects, its foundation remained the same for many years - women were regarded as the weaker sex physically and intellectually, but in compensation they had greater powers of intuition, feeling, and religious response. A woman's role in life was to guide and to protect her man's soul from the rigours of the outside world, to provide within the home a haven from the rigours of a growing capitalist system, and to gently radiate her moral influence upon family, friends, and acquaintances.

Any protest that women deserved a wider field of interest was inevitably countered by reference to their obvious physical weaknesses. In the area of women's health the reciprocal relationship between society's image of women and the actual state of affairs is at its most apparent. Nineteenth century America revelled in the concept of feminine weakness and exaggerated women's physical inferiority to ridiculous extremes. In fiction and poetry the contemplation of a sick or dying woman became a morbid preoccupation with writers and readers alike:

> I saw a maiden young and fair,
> Laid on a snow-white bed;
> I should have deemed her sleeping there -
> But they told me, she was dead! [1]

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1. 'The Maiden', Quoted in Robert F. Riegel, *American Women: A Story of Social Change* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated Univ. Presses, Inc., 1970), p. 38.

We have only to consider America's reaction to Dicken's 'poor little Nell', or Harriet Beecher Stowe's success with little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to see the hold this image had upon the public mind.

Early in the century heroines of fiction were constantly subject to 'sick headaches, nervous headaches, and all kinds of headaches'[1] and in real life many women followed suit. Of course much of what was said about women's ill-health was based on fact. Bad nutrition, limited medical knowledge, lack of exercise and fresh air, extreme prudishness with regard to the female body, and restrictive, impractical clothing, all contributed to a very real health problem.[2] At the same time the images presented in poetry and prose encouraged women to cultivate their ailments, to swoon at precisely the right moment, and to retire to a darkened room with smelling salts and a damp cloth whenever agitated or upset.

Closely linked with this concept of feminine delicacy was the whole Victorian ethos of feminine piety and modesty. Whilst our familiar image of the woman who blushes at the mention of a piano leg is probably an exaggerated stereotype, there is no doubt that writers and readers were under enormous pressure to conform to the prudish standards of their day. Heroines of fiction maintained impeccable standards of purity and virtue and their physical weakness lent supernatural powers to their moral strength. Nowhere could a girl inspire her public more than from her death-bed:

> The child lay panting on her pillows, as one exhausted - the large clear eyes rolled up and fixed. Ah, what said those eyes, that spoke so much of heaven? Earth was past, and earthly pain; but so solemn, so mysterious, was the triumphant brightness of that face, that it checked even the sobs of sorrow. They pressed around her, in breathless stillness.
> 'Eva,' said St.Claire, gently.
> She did not hear.
> "Oh Eva, tell us what you see! What is it?' said

1. Riegel, p. 37. 2. Riegel, pp. 40-50.

her father.
A bright, a glorious smile passed over her face,
and she said, brokenly - 'Oh! love, - joy, - peace!'
gave one sigh and passed from death unto life! [1]

The preoccupation with frail, wilting heroines did, however, wane as the century progressed. Concurrent with the general trend towards secularization, writers and moralists gradually placed more emphasis upon woman's power to exert practical moral influence rather than upon the more ephemeral spiritual inspiration of the fading violet. The emergence of the cult of 'the angel in the house' was largely responsible for this change. This response to the confusion and dissatisfactions surrounding woman's role glorified her place within the domestic arena and created the fiction of the perfect housewife. In the terms of such an ideal, a propensity to hysteria or chronic illness was impractical, so, although the dead or dying wife could still be used to great sentimental effect, heroines grew to be made of sterner stuff.

The ideal girl displayed all the qualities which would one day make her the perfect wife and mother - she was fair, pious, sensible, modest, truthful, and industrious; and she was associated with all the comforts of home and fireside:

Great feelings hath she of her own,
Which lesser souls may never know;
God giveth them to her alone,
And sweet they are as any tone
Wherewith the wind may choose to blow.

Yet in herself she dwelleth not,
Although no home were half so fair;
No simplest duty is forgot.
Life hath no dim and lowly spot
That doth not in her sunshine share.

She doeth little kindnesses,
Which most leave undone, or despise:
For naught that sets one heart at ease,
And giveth happiness or peace,
Is low-esteeméd in her eyes.

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1. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. Kenneth S. Lynn (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 302.

She hath no scorn of common things,
And, though she seem of other birth,
Round us her heart intwines and clings,
And patiently she folds her wings
To tread the humble paths of earth. [1]

The ideal American woman thus became a domestic angel. In novels and poetry she dispersed sunshine and joy from within the busy world of her happy home. Magazines likewise responded to the trend, and popular women's journals like *Godey's Lady's Book* constantly preached the dignity of housework and the divinity of motherhood:

> ... the whole process of home-making, housekeeping and cooking, which ever has been woman's special province, should be looked on as an art and a profession, since these duties properly performed require the exercise of the best qualities of mind and heart. [2]

The moral strength which all good Americans imbibed in childhood from their 'Ma' was meant to sustain them throughout life. To denigrate this figure was tantamount to blasphemy, for in addition to providing moral and spiritual nourishment, women were supposed to inspire their husbands and children to fulfil their nation's promised destiny.[3] This elevated vision of womanhood inevitably presented many problems to the writers of fiction. No American angel could be associated with passion, or exposed to the more compromising situations of a romantic adventure; hence another type of female heroine had to be used.

Ralph P. Boas labels this figure 'the romantic lady'.[4] In contrast to the innocent fair maiden destined for hearth and home, these women 'are dark and beautiful, they love violently, they are

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1. J.R. Lowell, 'My Love', in *Poems of James Russell Lowell*, ed. Henry Frowde (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1912), pp. 7-8.
2. Ruth E. Finley, *The Lady of Godey's: Sarah Josepha Hale* (New York: Arno Press, 1974), p. 218.
3. William Wasserstrom, *Heiress of all the Ages: Sex and Sentiment in the Genteel Tradition* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1959), p. 25.
4. Ralph P. Boas, 'The Romantic Lady', in George Boas, ed., *Romanticism in America* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), p. 66.

loved violently, and they suffer'.[1] The main distinguishing feature of the romantic lady is the fact that she is capable of feeling passion; unlike her fair virginal sisters, she exudes sexuality, unsettles the male, and thus inevitably courts disaster. Whilst this fair/dark dichotomy is an age-old tradition, its employment in nineteenth century American fiction provided a particularly apt method of side-stepping the many paradoxes of current attitudes to woman's sexuality.

According to William Wasserstrom, nineteenth century America fostered a new conception of marriage:

> In Europe you preferred your mistress to your wife whom it was a social and filial duty to marry. But in America your wife was your mistress whom it was both wrong and right to desire and whose duty was to discourage desire but to submit.[2]

The American male was supposed to find 'the true sphere and controlling law of his passional emotions within marriage'.[3] The problem was, however, that the ideal wife was supposed to maintain her innocence and purity by finding the sexual act little short of abhorrent. Whereas the problems created by this myth of woman's sexlessness were no doubt resolved in many real-life relationships, in fiction the answers were not so simple. To steer a course through the glaring inconsistencies of current prudish attitudes required a very wide set of blinkers indeed. On the one hand was the theory that women, being on a higher plane of moral awareness than men, could elevate them beyond their baser appetites; and on the other was the tradition which equated women with sex and sin in the role of the temptress. The paradox was further complicated by the contradiction between the belief in woman's inherent distaste for sex and the oft-quoted argument that women needed protection from the ever-present danger of a

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1. Boas, p. 70.
2. Wasserstrom, p. 28.
3. Wasserstrom, p. 28.

moral lapse.

The easiest way around these problems was the postulation of two distinctly different types of women and hence, especially in the first half of the century, the two stereotypes were constantly repeated. The dark sultry lady was typically of exotic birth or descent, subject to tumultuous emotions, and fated to a tragic end. The fair maid was American through and through, religious, placid, and fated to marry the hero. This division provided a very insipid prospect for the married hero and an extremely arbitrary fate for the romantic lady, but few authors attempted to resolve the paradox until the civil war urged a more realistic way of viewing women and a more practical perspective on the place and meaning of sex.[1]

At first glance the female characters of Nathaniel Hawthorne appear to epitomize these stereotypes. Two of his novels, *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Marble Faun*, employ the traditional contrast between the fair and the dark woman, and his other two novels, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* yield, respectively, a dark passionate heroine and a fair sunny homemaker. The closer we look at Hawthorne's presentation of women in his novels and short stories, however, the more his deviations from the stereotype become apparent. Hawthorne had nothing but scorn for the 'scribbling females'[2] who flooded the market with sentimental pot-boilers and eulogies of domestic life. His novels deal with wider concerns and deeper truths, and within this expanded framework they consistently question the sorts of assumptions about women that other writers took for granted. It is the argument of this thesis that Hawthorne's fiction reveals an awareness of many of the paradoxes inherent in

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1. Wasserstrom, p. 30.

2. Hawthorne's famous outburst against female writers is quoted in Herbert Ross Brown, *The Sentimental Novel in America 1789-1860* (New York: Pageant Books, Inc., 1959), p. 104.

current attitudes to women and that in much of his work he issues a veiled challenge to the attitudes he appears to adopt.

Hawthorne's approach to the presentation of the female figure was, of course, most influenced by the women he knew and lived with. Contrary to the images of popular prose and fiction these women were complicated, multi-dimensional human beings with differing assessments of their role and purpose in life. Although the most important women in his life firmly upheld their traditional feminine roles, Hawthorne lived in an environment which was prepared to question and debate its assumptions. He was closely associated, through the Peabody family, through Margaret Fuller, and through the 'socialists' of Brook Farm,[1] with America's embryonic feminist movement. Some reformers were beginning to protest against the restrictions which denied women the right to be educated, to vote, to work, and to control their own property;[2] women who were brought up upon the idea of their own moral superiority wanted the power and the opportunity to translate their strengths into action, and Hawthorne learned, perhaps too well, the zeal of the female reformer.

Hawthorne first met Elizabeth Palmer Peabody in November 1837, having been invited with his sisters to visit the Peabody home in Salem.[3] Although Hawthorne eventually married her younger sister, Sophia, the evidence suggests some sort of prior involvement with the indomitable Lizzie Peabody, which laid the foundations for a

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1. An experimental co-operative community with which Hawthorne was involved for a short period before his marriage, and which provided a subject for *The Blithedale Romance* (1852). See 'Backgrounds and Sources' in *The Blithedale Romance*, ed. Seymour Gross and Rosalie Murphy (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), pp. 231-65.

2. Andrew Sinclair, *The Emancipation of the American Woman* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 83-109.

3. James R. Mellow, *Nathaniel Hawthorne in his Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1980), p. 3.

somewhat stormy relationship throughout their lives.[1] Whatever the truth of the matter was, Hawthorne was certainly treated to many of Elizabeth's expositions on reform, both before and after his marriage, and must have heard on several occasions her views on women's rights.

Elizabeth opened a bookstore in Boston in July 1840, which for a few years became a centre of intellectual life in the city. It was here that Margaret Fuller held her 'conversations', with a view towards drawing together 'well-educated and thinking women',[2] and it was here that Sophia fell under her spell. At this time Sophia and Hawthorne were secretly engaged, and although Hawthorne's letters to his fiancée contain several jocose remarks at Miss Fuller's expense,[3] the three were to remain on friendly terms for many years.

Elizabeth Peabody and Margaret Fuller were both dedicated reformers with forceful and sometimes alienating methods of attack. Elizabeth was 'the champion of every liberal effort, a worker for every reform',[4] but also fussing, pedantic, meddlesome, and persistent. Margaret likewise fought against oppression, and argued forcefully for increased opportunities for women, yet she too was disliked by many and accused of arrogance and insensitivity.[5] Hawthorne's attitude towards these women was equally ambivalent. He regarded reformers with characteristic suspicion - an attitude which comes to the fore in *The Blithedale Romance*. Elizabeth's pamphlets on abolition provoked a typical response:

> No doubt it seems the truest of truth to you; but I do assure you that, like every other Abolitionist, you look at matters with an awful squint, which distorts everything within your line of vision; and it is queer, though natural, that you think everybody squints except yourselves. Perhaps they do; but certainly *you* do.[6]

1. Mellow, p. 146.
2. Mellow, p. 174.
3. Mellow, p. 182.
4. Mellow, p. 128.
5. Sinclair, p. 52.
6. Mellow, p. 469.

Hawthorne was always conscious of the personal, psychological motives which informed the reformer's fervour.[1] Despite his earlier attitude of friendly tolerance towards Margaret Fuller his criticism was scathing after her death:

> It was such an awful joke, that she should have resolved - in all sincerity no doubt - to make herself the greatest, wisest, best woman of the age; and to that end, she set to work on her strong, heavy, unpliable and in many respects, defective and evil nature, and adorned it with the mosaic of admirable qualities, such as she chose to possess .... [2]

Hawthorne was more interested in personalities than the theories they espoused; nevertheless it is possible, and his novels would seem to suggest, that his contact with women like Elizabeth and Margaret urged a deeper consideration of the whole place and function of woman in society.

A much stronger case can be made for the influence of the major women in Hawthorne's life - his mother, his sisters, and his wife. Hawthorne spent most of his life exclusively in the company of women. He was only four when his father died, and he grew up in a predominantly feminine environment. His mother believed in the traditional roles assigned to women and led the largely secluded life expected of a faithful widow. She devoted her life to the upbringing of her children, to the extent that it was extremely difficult for them to break away from home. The three children inherited their mother's retiring habits and were often dependent upon each other for company. For Hawthorne this entailed a great deal of criticism and encouragement from his intellectual sister, Elizabeth, and the friendly companionship of his younger sister, Louisa, until such time as he found a wife to replace them both.[3]

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1. Paul John Eakin, 'Margaret Fuller, Hawthorne, James and Sexual Politics', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 75 (1976), 331.

2. Quoted in Julian Hawthorne, *Hawthorne and his Wife*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1885), I, 261.

3. Mellow, pp. 14-64.

Sophia Peabody is often seen as the archetypal frail, adoring wife of her age.[1] In early life she was plagued by migraine headaches, and was brought up as the invalid of the family. She endured a never ending round of doctors and drugs and by all accounts grew to become a gentle, uncomplaining, and pious young woman. After deciding that her health could withstand the stresses of marriage, she attacked her new role with firm principles and great enthusiasm. A dedicated wife and mother, she could not agree with the feminist viewpoint put forward in Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, despite her former admiration for the authoress:

> What do you think of the speech which Queen Margaret has made from the throne? It seems to me that if she were married truly, she would no longer be puzzled about the rights of woman. This is the revelation of woman's true destiny and place, which never can be *imagined* by those who do not experience the relation. In perfect high union there is no question of supremacy. Souls are equal in love and intelligent communion, and all things take their proper places as inevitably as the stars their orbit. [2]

Sophia felt that her marriage was a success and was fiercely proud and protective towards it. She shared with her husband a very traditional view of the marriage contract and together they presented a perfect image of marital bliss, complete in every detail. In Sophia we can trace nearly all the major characteristics of the ideal nineteenth century woman - she had a weak constitution but a strong moral character, she guided and uplifted her husband but refrained from criticism or interference in business matters, she was fair and loyal - and apparently illustrated her purity by existing mainly on white bread, milk and chicken breasts.

It is easy to see why Sophia is so often cited as the model for Hawthorne's fair idealized heroines. Such interpretations, however,

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1. For example, Wasserstrom, p. 40.
2. Quoted in Julian Hawthorne, *Hawthorne and his Wife*, Vol. I, p. 257.

presuppose a clear-cut distinction between fair and dark characters which places all good on one side and all evil on the other. It is hardly credible that Hawthorne viewed his wife, or women in general, in such simplistic terms, and the evidence of both his works and his letters surely indicates otherwise. Hawthorne's love-letters to Sophia, in particular, show that he recognized and fully appreciated her as a woman capable of sexual passion. The fact that Sophia, quite understandably, preferred not to expose the more intimate details of their life to the world, should not lead to the assumption that she was prudish or sexless in private. In fact the many letters which Hawthorne wrote to her both before and after their marriage indicate quite the opposite:

> Ownest Dove,
>
> ... did you get home safe and sound, and with a quiet and happy heart? How could you go without another press of lips? Yet Providence acted lovingly towards us on Tuesday evening, allowing us to meet in the wide desert of this world and mingle our spirits in a conjugal embrace ... I want you very much in my arms tonight. I mean to dream of you with might and main. How sweet those kisses were on Tuesday evening! [1]
>
> Thou canst have no imagination how lonely our house is. The rooms seem twice as large as before... And then our great lonesome bed at night - the scene of so many blissful intercourses - now so solitary. [2]

Hawthorne saw his wife as both angel and woman.[3] Although he esteemed her uplifting moral and spiritual influence, he also treasured her humanity:

> You looked like a vision, with the width of the room between us - so spiritual that my human heart wanted to be assured that you had an earthly vesture on, and your warm kisses gave me that assurance. [4]

Such comments indicate that Hawthorne would have been as unhappy with

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1. Quoted by Mellow, p. 166.
2. Quoted by Mellow, p. 288.
3. Randall Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1948), p. 56.
4. Stewart, p. 56.

a carbon copy of the conventional fair maiden as with the disturbing figure of the temptress. In Sophia he felt he had found a perfect mixture of both. The one thing Hawthorne certainly learnt from his wife was that women were immensely more complex human beings than the conventional stereotypes would allow. This knowledge informs the characterization of his heroines, and it is here that we experience the true measure of Sophia's influence.

Hawthorne's sensitivity towards women did not extend towards any marked sympathy for the feminists. He shared his society's opinion that women were morally and spiritually superior to men and that to stay that way they should keep within their proper sphere of domestic affection. He once wrote to his publisher:

> Mrs. Hawthorne altogether excels me as a writer of travels. Her descriptions are the most perfect pictures that ever were put on paper; it is a pity they cannot be published; but neither she nor I would like to see her name on your list of female authors. [1]

Hawthorne did not approve of women who attempted to compete with men in the workplace; he felt that it degraded their finer feminine qualities. Yet, even though this attitude has not stood the test of time, if seen in perspective it is illustrative more of his respect for women than otherwise. Hawthorne differed from his contemporaries in that he seriously believed that the areas in which women were accorded superiority were the most important. He did not believe that women would gain anything by taking part in the sordid world of men's affairs. His ideal involved a different set of priorities for both men and women:

> It is as if the virginal relation between man and nature were restored in my case, and that I were to look exclusively to her for the support of my Eve and myself ... The fight with the world - the struggle of a man among men - the agony of the universal effort to wrench

1. Stewart, p. 190.

> the means of life from a host of greedy competitors - all this seems like a dream to me. [1]

Hawthorne was happiest during the early period of his married life, tucked away from the cares of the world, and in blissful communion with his wife and the countryside surrounding them. This taste of paradise was essentially the type of ideal future he envisaged for all mankind and it lives as a constant standard throughout his works.[2] Concurrent with his vision of human happiness is an equally consistent skepticism towards the solutions proposed by proponents of reform. He doubted the efficacy of any outward social or political reform and he saw positive harm in the single-minded fanaticism of men and women devoted to a cause. According to A.N. Kaul:

> He shared something of the land-of-promise hope together with a great deal of doubt whether any lands of promise are to be ever discovered anywhere - unless it be in the altered hearts of men. [3]

Hawthorne placed his emphasis upon the need for inner change, upon the ultimate challenge of accepting our brotherhood with all men and women. Within this wider frame of reference Hawthorne's presentation of women takes on a very real and timeless significance. He was no more concerned with any political fight for equal rights within a world of 'greedy competitors' than he was concerned to present a realistic account of his society's outward behaviour. Instead he was interested in his characters' inner worlds. He used symbolic suggestion and 'the slight, delicate and evanescent flavour' of the 'marvellous'[4] to explore the more subtle problems of human relationships - the

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1. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *American Notebooks* (The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. 8), p. 332.

2. See for example 'The New Adam and Eve', in *Mosses from an Old Manse* (The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. 10), pp. 247-67.

3. A.N. Kaul, *The American Vision* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963), p. 154.

4. Preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, introd. Roy Harvey Pearce (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1907, rpt. 1977), p.xi.

barriers people place between each other, the social and psychological inhibitions which restrict the relations between the sexes, and the urgent need for a whole new set of attitudes for any improvement of the human condition to have a lasting effect.

CHAPTER TWO

WOMAN'S FATAL FLAW : THE TALES

The women of Hawthorne's short stories at first sight appear to illustrate all the stereotyped attitudes and notions about women common to nineteenth century American fiction. There are frail, delicate maidens such as Sylph Etherege and Lilias Fay ('The Lily's Quest'), who fade and die with fashionable grace; there are several fair domestic angels, who, like Rosina in 'Egotism; or the Bosom Serpent', light the path towards salvation, and there are the proud, dark ladies such as Lady Eleanore and the unnamed woman in 'The White Old Maid', who pay for their sins with lives of sorrow. Hawthorne's allegorical method demanded the use of simple, easily recognized figures and he exploited the traditional associations of the fair and dark character types to the full. As examples of deep or complex characterization most of these woman fall well short of the mark. As a part of Hawthorne's wider purpose in the tales, however, they allow him to make significant comment upon the nature of woman and upon the stereotypes themselves.

Most of the female characters in the short stories are presented from the male's point of view, in the context of their potential to destroy or uplift the hero. Hawthorne manages to go beyond the conventional restrictions of this approach, however, by consistently questioning the very point of view he employs. Throughout the tales we are presented with men whose inability to accept women as human beings brings about their downfall. Hawthorne explores the conventional myths about women and shows how destructive they can be. Several of his men, on discovering that the ideal of womanly perfection is an impossibility, retreat into the equally deluded notion that all women are monsters. They reject the possibilities for happiness offered by this life and become alienated from mankind and, by implication, from God. Hawthorne

thus perpetuates the ideal of the life-giving American angel whilst at the same time stressing that she can only exist if man will accept her imperfections.

One man who cannot settle for anything less than perfection is Aylmer in 'The Birthmark'. We are made aware from the very beginning of the tale that there is something deeply wrong in his approach to love and marriage. Not only is romantic passion a foreign world to him:

> he...washed the stain of acids from his fingers and persuaded a beautiful woman to become his wife [1]

but his love for his wife also has to compete with his devotion to science:

> it was not unusual for the love of science to rival the love of woman in its depth and absorbing energy. (p. 36)

In Aylmer's case the rivalry is resolved by a fusion between the two loves, but the implication remains that his passion for Georgiana survives only because she allows herself to become the subject of his scientific research:

> His love for his young wife might prove the stronger of the two but it could only be by intertwining itself with his love of science, and uniting the strength of the latter to its own. Such a union accordingly took place. (p. 37)

Aylmer's ambition is to remove a tiny birthmark in the shape of a hand from Georgiana's left cheek. He finally succeeds, but at the expense of his wife's life. Into this simple plot Hawthorne weaves a complex pattern of meaning centred around the ingenious symbol of the birthmark. The birthmark anticipates in many ways both the significance and ambivalence of the scarlet letter. It is crimson, it is

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1. Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'The Birthmark', in *Mosses from an Old Manse,* The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. 10 (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1974), p. 36. All further references to this work appear in the text.

connected with the heart, and it is the visible mark of earthly imperfection. The birthmark is an essential part of Georgiana's being, 'deeply woven, as it were, with the texture and substance of her face', and it responds to 'every pulse of emotion that throbbed within her heart' (pp. 37-38).

When Georgiana blushes, the birthmark almost disappears; when 'any shifting motion caused her to turn pale', the mark reappears, 'a crimson stain upon the snow' (p. 38). Aylmer's gaze, expressing his revulsion at the flaw, only makes it more apparent:

> It needed but a glance with the peculiar expression that his face often wore, to change the roses of her cheek into a deathlike paleness, amid which the Crimson Hand was brought strongly out, like a bas-relief of ruby on the whitest marble.
>
> (p. 39)

The birthmark acts as a constant barometer of Georgiana's feelings. It responds, as Georgiana responds, to the reactions of others and as such it reflects the inner feelings of all with whom she comes into contact. For some of her lovers the mark is a magical symbol of her 'sway over all hearts' (p. 38); for the voice of envy it is a 'bloody hand' which totally mars her beauty; whilst for others, Aylmer included, it is the only flaw on a 'specimen of ideal loveliness'. Even for Georgiana herself, the birthmark radically changes its meaning. Until faced with Aylmer's disapproval she had always thought of it as a charm, but his horror and disgust teach her to loathe the mark to the point of madness.

Although the meaning of the birthmark changes according to the eye of the beholder, the story shows that these interpretations are all different aspects of the same truth:

> It was the fatal flaw of humanity, which Nature, in one shape or another, stamps ineffaceably on all her productions, either to imply that they are temporary and finite, or that their perfection must be wrought by toil and pain. The Crimson Hand expressed the

> ineludible gripe, in which mortality clutches the highest and purest of earthly mould, degrading them into kindred with the lowest, and even with the very brutes, like whom their visible frames return to dust.
> (pp. 38-9)

Georgiana's 'Kindred' with the 'very brutes' is expressed in Aminadab's recognition of her sexual attraction - '"If she were my wife, I'd never part with that birthmark"' (p. 43). Many a desperate swain 'would have risked life for the privilege of pressing his lips to the mysterious hand' (p. 38), and even Aylmer feels an 'unaccountable impulse' (p. 54) to press the mark with his lips. Georgiana's main link with the rest of humanity is her sexuality, and as a symbol of this the birthmark is appreciated by some, loathed by others. Aylmer's reaction is a complete distortion of the Birthmark's many implications; it becomes a 'frightful object' to him which causes him 'more trouble and horror than Georgiana's beauty, whether of soul or sense, had given him delight' (p. 39). Aylmer only sees the potential for sin and suffering in the symbol of his wife's humanity and is blinded to the possibilities for joy and earthly fulfilment that are also a part of its meaning. Like many of Hawthorne's men, his perception of human imperfection and sinfulness masks the real human goodness which surrounds him.

Aylmer's aim can be seen as 'pure and lofty' (p. 52) but, like all his other scientific experiments, it is doomed to failure because his aim is too high. He will be content with 'nothing less than perfection' (p. 52) in his wife, rather than be 'guilty of treason to holy love by degrading its perfect idea to the level of the actual' (p. 52). Georgiana's beauty of mind and body shows that 'the actual' contains a very real potential for happiness, and her death demonstrates the impossibility of perfection for any human being. Moreover, Georgiana knows that Aylmer will not be satisfied even with perfection for longer than a moment:

> for his spirit was ever on the march, ever ascending, and each instant required something that was beyond the scope of the instant before.
> (p. 52)

Because of the birthmark Aylmer saw 'mortality where he would fain have worshipped' (p. 39). He wants his wife to be nothing less than an angel so that, in effect, his ambition is to destroy her humanity. Both Aylmer and Georgiana fall victim to the ideal of womanly perfection; they both lose their chance for earthly happiness for the sake of an illusion. The moment the birthmark disappears is the moment of Georgiana's death:

> The fatal hand had grappled with the mystery of life, and was the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with a mortal frame.
> (p. 55)

'The Birthmark' skilfully illustrates the falsity, hypocrisy, and potential destructiveness of the stereotypes imposed upon nineteenth century woman. It shows that the angel stereotype denies everything that makes a woman human and it shows the injustice of condemning a woman for failing to live up to an impossible ideal. Hawthorne stresses that imperfection is an essential part of being human; it is our link with the rest of mankind. The flaw of woman, like the sinfulness of all mankind, is an ambiguous thing, holding potential for both joy and sorrow. Thus the idea that woman's 'fatal flaw' renders her hideous or evil is misguided and tragically destructive. Those who cannot accept the flaw lose the joys that earthly life has to offer and reject their foretaste of celestial bliss.

Aylmer places his devotion to an ideal above the person he loves most. His preoccupation with Georgiana's essential defect exaggerates its significance and blinds him to her true worth. He rejects 'the best the earth could offer' because he

> failed to look beyond the shadowy scope of time, and,

> living once for all in eternity, to find the perfect future in the present.
>
> (p. 56)

The same could easily have been said of Young Goodman Brown. Like Aylmer he wants his world, and in particular his wife, to be perfect, and like Aylmer his discovery of imperfection blinds him to all else. Goodman Brown, however, is not a scientist with an exotic wife, but rather a simple young man of Puritan background who suffers a crisis of faith. His story is a New England allegory of simple clear-cut lines and complex meaning.

The story begins with Goodman Brown exchanging a farewell kiss with his wife at sunset. The scene is charged with significance and introduces several clues to the meaning of the tale. The first elements to which Hawthorne draws our attention are the names of the two protagonists. Goodman Brown is an American Everyman, and, as Hawthorne says with ironic understatement, his wife, Faith, is aptly named. Faith is both woman and symbol of faith and through the constant interweaving of these two functions becomes central to the meaning of the story. Goodman Brown says goodbye to 'My love and my Faith'[1] to embark on his errand, and continues constantly to use her name with double entendre:

> 'Poor little Faith!'...'What a wretch am I, to leave her on such an errand.'
>
> (p. 75)
>
> 'Faith kept me back a while,' replied the young man.
>
> (p. 76)
>
> 'With Heaven above, and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil.'
>
> (p. 82)

Faith as woman, however, is more complicated than her name would seem to suggest:

> And Faith...thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap.
>
> (p. 74)

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1. 'Young Goodman Brown' in *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 10, p. 74. All further references to this work appear in the text.

> 'Then, God bless you!' said Faith, with the pink ribbons.
> (p. 74)

> he looked back, and saw the head of Faith still peeping after him, with a melancholy air, in spite of her pink ribbons.
> (p. 75)

It appears that Faith, like Georgiana, has her flaw; but it is noticeable that in her case the ribbons could hardly detract from her beauty - except, perhaps, in the eyes of the staunchest Puritan - and they are rendered all the more innocuous by the fact that they are pink rather than crimson. They are symbolic of Faith's human nature and concomitant sexuality, but are nevertheless presented as little more than a harmless concession to feminine vanity. It is the disparity between this impression and the construction later placed upon them by Goodman Brown which marks him out as a man obsessed.

The third key element of the opening scene is the emphasis placed upon the vagaries of darkness and dreams. This foreshadows the dream experience that is about to change Goodman Brown forever; he is hovering precariously on the threshold between home and wilderness, between daylight and darkness. Strangely enough, however, the first dreams we are told of belong to Faith. She tries to retain her husband's companionship for the night by stressing her own susceptibility to troubled dreams:

> 'A lone woman is troubled with such dreams, and such thoughts, that she's afeard of herself, sometimes. Pray, tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights of the year!'
> (p. 74)

but Goodman Brown can only interpret her fears as doubts about himself:

> 'What my sweet, pretty wife, dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married!'
> (p. 74)

Or as the fear of some outside threat:

> 'Say thy prayers, dear Faith, and go to bed at dusk, and no harm will come to thee.'
> (p. 75)

Goodman Brown allows his preoccupation with his 'present evil purpose' to overshadow the import of his wife's appeal. He clearly does not think her capable of understanding the temptation before him and prefers to face the wilderness alone. Instead of thinking of her as a fellow human being who might share his troubles and who in turn might need his support, he prefers to view her as an angel on earth, whose perfection will effortlessly guarantee his eventual salvation:

> 'What a wretch am I, to leave her on such an errand! She talks of dreams, too. Methought, as she spoke, there was trouble in her face, as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done tonight. But, no, no! 'twould kill her to think it. Well; she's a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night, I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven.'
>
> (p. 75)

The familiar image of the domestic angel proves only too easy for Goodman Brown to ignore:

> With this excellent resolve for the future, Goodman Brown felt himself justified in making more haste on his present evil purpose.
>
> (p. 75)

And in the ensuing battle for Goodman Brown's soul the fatuous image of woman, upon which he bases his faith, is easily shattered.

Goodman Brown's wilderness odyssey is presented with deliberate ambiguity so that we feel all the reality of the process of youthful disillusionment whilst being conscious that this is in essence an interior experience.[1] He follows a dreary and solitary path so crowded with obstacles that he might be 'passing through an unseen multitude' (p. 75). Goodman Brown is in a fit state of mind to see devils behind

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1. Q.D. Leavis in 'Hawthorne as Poet' says 'The journey...[is] to the wilderness where the hidden self satisfies, or is forced to realize, its subconscious fears and promptings in sleep.' *SR*, 59 (Spring 1951), 179-205; rpt. A.N. Kaul, ed., *Hawthorne: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 36.
   Frederick C. Crews also examines 'the various ways that Brown is facing embodiments of his own thoughts in the characters he meets in the forest', *The Sins of the Fathers* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 100-106.

every tree, and the devil's companionship allows him to do just that. First he is told of the sins of his ancestors and of those in positions of power in the state; then he is led through a discovery of sin on a familiar, individual level in the forms of Goody Cloyse, Deacon Gookin and the minister. Brown sees his childhood mentors as journeying towards a satanic tryst and his faith falters:

> Young Goodman Brown caught hold of a tree, for support, being ready to sink to the ground, faint and overburthened with the heavy sickness of his heart. He looked up to the sky, doubting whether there really was a Heaven above him. Yet there was the blue arch and the stars brightening in it.
>
> (p. 82)

So far, Goodman Brown's experience of youthful disillusionment, whilst vivid, is not enough to destroy his faith altogether. The devil must destroy his faith in Faith to gain control of his heart.

This is easily done. Heaven is obscured by a dark cloud, a swell of voices rushes by; Goodman Brown hears the lamentations of a young woman; he cries aloud for his Faith, and is left with a pink ribbon in his grasp. This is his turning point. His faith is gone and the fiend rages in his breast.

The sexual connotations of Brown's forest journey have already been examined by many commentators.[1] According to Roy Male, 'almost everything in the forest scene suggests that the communion of sinners is essentially sexual and that Brown qualifies for it by his marriage'.[2] Goodman Brown's recognition of his wife's sexuality in the shape of a pink ribbon, does not accord with his image of the perfect, sexless, angel-wife. Her image has fallen from its shrine and the innocuous pink has acquired invidious overtones, so that for Brown she has joined

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1. For example, Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers*, and Roy R. Male, *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision* (Austin, Texas: Univ. of Texas Press, 1957).

2. Male, p. 78.

the vast community of sinners, and by implication is indissolubly linked with 'men of dissolute lives and women of spotted fame, wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice' (p. 85).

Brown's puritanical awareness of evil negates all possibility of faith. After awakening from his vision he can no longer perceive any good in his world 'because an anthem of sin rushed loudly upon his ear, and drowned all the blessed strain' (p. 89). His wife represents both the faith he has lost and the reason he has lost it. Her role as representative of the faith Brown needs to attain salvation, is inseparable from her role as woman. She is linked to both Eve and the Virgin Mary, combining the power to tempt with the potential to save. Faith as woman offers Brown the chance to discover faith within himself, but whereas once he could have slept 'purely and sweetly...in the arms of Faith' (p. 81), his knowledge of sin makes him shrink from her bosom (p. 89).

Faith remains unchanged:

> he spied the head of Faith with the pink ribbons,
> gazing anxiously forth, and bursting into such joy
> at the sight of him that she skipt along the street...
> (p. 89)

but Brown has learned to recognize her as human and hence imperfect and he cannot cope with this truth. He fails to discover the higher knowledge of Faith's potential for human goodness because he no longer has any faith left. His warped obsession with evil is imposed upon his wife and family:

> when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled,
> and muttered to himself, and gazed sternly at his
> wife, and turned away.
> (p. 89)

And he allows a cloud of doom to cut himself off from this life and the next.

In effect, Goodman Brown has become one of Hawthorne's men of

stone. These men are characterized by gloom, isolation and alienation; they are egotists who see nothing but evil all around them. Hawthorne's archetypal man of stone is Richard Digby in 'The Man of Adamant'. His story is less complex and of slighter material than 'Young Goodman Brown' but it clearly illustrates Hawthorne's concern with the theme of brotherhood and the essential role of woman within this scheme.

Richard Digby is 'the gloomiest and most intolerant of a stern brotherhood', in 'the old times of religious gloom and intolerance'.[1] He believes that he, 'alone of mortals', is entrusted with 'the treasure of a true faith' (p. 161), and that the rest of mankind is doomed to eternal death. Accordingly he decides to cut himself off from sinful humanity so that his journey to heaven will not be tainted by outside interference. He finds a lonely cave in the wilderness and there incarcerates himself. His self-satisfaction knows no bounds:

> 'Here my soul will be at peace, for the wicked will not find me. Here I can read the Scriptures, and be no more provoked with lying interpretations. Here I can offer up acceptable prayers, because my voice will not be mingled with the sinful supplications of the multitude. Of a truth the only way to Heaven leadeth through the narrow entrance of this cave - and I alone have found it!'
>
> (p. 163)

That Digby has surrendered himself to a false God is clearly stated from the beginning to the end of the tale. He talks to himself, reads the Bible to himself, and probably even prays to himself. Richard Digby is his own God; his laughter is demonic; and he regards his cave as superior to Heaven 'for, above the sky, there would be angels to disturb him' (p. 164).

Nevertheless an angel does come to disturb him, even in the isolation of his cave. Mary Goffe is one of Hawthorne's few unambiguous

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1. 'The Man of Adamant' in *The Snow Image and Uncollected Tales*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 11, p. 161. All further references to this work appear in the text.

women. As her name suggests, she is above reproach, without the taint of Eve, and, because she is dead, unhampered by the sexual complications of a human body. She represents faith and love, and is presented as a Christ-like figure:

> What else but faith and love united could have sustained so delicate a creature, wandering thus far into the forest with her golden hair dishevelled by the boughs, and her feet wounded by the thorns.
>
> (p. 165)

But even the most angelic of women appears sinful to the man of adamant:

> 'Off' cried he. 'I am sanctified, and thou art sinful. Away!' ....
>
> 'Away!' replied Richard Digby, still with a dark frown. 'My heart is in better condition than thine own. Leave me, earthly one; for the sun is almost set; and when no light reaches the door of the cave, then is my prayer time!'
>
> (p. 165)

Mary tries to persuade Digby to rejoin his race 'for they need thee Richard; and thou hast tenfold need of them' (p. 166), and at last resort offers him water from the nearby fountain and the illumination of her companionship to read the Bible and to pray. Digby's conception of woman, however, cannot accommodate such a role:

> 'Tempt me no more, accursed woman,' exclaimed he, still with his marble frown, 'lest I smite thee down also! What hast thou to do with my Bible? - what with my prayers? - what with my heaven?'
>
> (p. 167)

This final rejection precipitates Digby's transformation into stone. He has rejected the best that both Earth and Heaven could offer, and has lost 'celestial bliss' altogether. Digby's fatal mistake is to deny his brotherhood with the rest of humanity because of an exaggerated awareness of sin. The role of the woman in this tale is to offer potential rescue and salvation as the all-important link between man and mankind. She fails because man misreads her role.

Mary Goffe conforms completely to the stereotyped image of ideal

womanhood in terms of her role, characteristics, and sentimental presentation; but even so, her function is consistent with Hawthorne's emphasis upon the importance of viewing women without the blindness of bigotry. There is a very real sense of what Digby has lost and of the hurt he has caused in this tale. The community he rejected is one in which 'the sunshine continued to fall peacefully on the cottages and fields, and the husbandmen labored and children played' (p. 162). This is the life he could have shared if his plan of salvation had not 'enfolded him with such an iron grasp that no other sentiment could reach his bosom' (p. 165). Instead, Mary Goffe is buried in an English grave, and Richard Digby sits forever:

> ... in the attitude of repelling the whole race of mortals - not from Heaven - but from the horrible loneliness of his dark, cold sepulchre.
> (p. 169)

'The Man of Adamant' uses several of Hawthorne's favourite motifs, including the forest, with its implications of spiritual isolation and moral wilderness, the bubbling fountain which signifies the spirit, and the central symbol of the heart, with its susceptibility to all sorts of physical manifestations of spiritual maladies. The heart is always closely associated with the figure of woman. At the core of the diseased heart there inevitably stands a male/female relationship which has failed because the male has lost faith in his partner. The resulting estrangement from 'Friendship, and Love and Piety, all human and celestial sympathies' (p. 169) can be cured only by the re-establishment of that faith. Richard Digby and Goodman Brown fail to look beyond their egotistical concern with the sinfulness of their fellowmen to the goodness and love offered by Mary and Faith. Roderick Elliston in 'Egotism; or the Bosom Serpent', however, is able to grasp that opportunity.

Roderick Elliston's disease of the heart takes the form of a

serpent which has taken up residence in his bosom. The narrator plays with the concept and teases us with various conjectures about the real nature of this malady. He cites numerous 'medical' accounts, and reports the surprising symptoms of Elliston's disease with even more relish than he uses to describe the 'deposition of calculous particles' within Richard Digby's heart. Nevertheless the essential features of this malady are closely related to the experiences of both Digby and Brown, and of several other characters, including Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*.

The disease began 'shortly after Elliston's separation from his wife',[1] a separation which Elliston, like Goodman Brown, 'wilfully' instigated himself. It is characterized by 'a singular gloom spreading over his daily life' (p. 271) and a desire to be 'estranged...from all companionship' (p. 271). His misanthropy recalls the man of stone:

> Not merely the eye of man was a horror to him; not merely the light of a friend's countenance; but even the blessed sunshine, likewise, which in its universal beneficence, typifies the radiance of the creator's face, expressing his love for all the creatures of his hand.
>
> (pp. 271-72)

Like Goodman Brown, Elliston possesses a fiend in his breast which he pampers 'with a continual and exclusive sacrifice of devil workship' (p. 274) and which grants him the 'evil faculty of recognizing whatever was ugliest in man's heart' (p. 274). He takes to writhing about the city, probing each man's 'fatal error, or hoarded sin, or unquiet conscience' (p. 277). At times he clutches his breast, muttering 'It gnaws me! It gnaws me!', on other occasions he utters a demonic chuckle; his snake and his human nature are constantly at war.

Elliston differs from his fellow sufferers, however, in that he

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1. 'Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent', in *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 10, p. 270. All further references to this work appear in the text.

understands his disease and is able to grasp his chance of rescue when it is offered. He knows that it is his own egotism which keeps the snake alive:

> 'Could I, for one instant, forget myself, the serpent might not abide within me. It is my diseased self-contemplation that has engendered and nourished him!'
> (p. 283)

Hence, when his wife, Rosina, says '"forget yourself in the idea of another"' (p. 283) he is able through the recognition of the 'hope and unselfish love' (p. 283) she represents, to escape the fiend once and for all.

Rosina is little more than a cipher, 'the ideal of gentle womanhood' (p. 270), but this is all that her function in this tale requires. The story seeks to place Elliston's 'tremendous egotism' in its true perspective. It shows the disastrous consequences of his jealousy, but it also shows how simply so 'fearful a fiend' (p. 283) can be replaced with trust. Instead of casting a shadow of doom over this life and the next, Elliston's disease becomes a mere 'anecdote' in the story of a shared 'Eternity' (p. 283).

'Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent' ends on a highly optimistic note. According to Rosina, '"The serpent was but a dark fantasy, and what it typified was as shadowy as itself"' (p. 283). The serpent had typified Elliston's jealousy and Hawthorne had stressed its shadowy nature by avoiding any mention of it until the last four lines of the tale. This kind of evasiveness is even more apparent in 'The Minister's Black Veil'. We are never told exactly why Parson Hooper suddenly decided to wear two folds of black crepe over his face for the rest of his life; he just appears, and we are invited to speculate. In many ways the minister's motivation seems to be as shadowy as his veil.

Elliston's jealousy of his wife obviously adds up to a fear of her sexual attraction, and, according to F.C. Crews, the stress

placed upon Hooper's effeminate nature and his obsession with secret sin, and the horrors that 'must be drawn darkly between the fondest of lovers'[1] also points to a fear of 'the sexual aspects of womanhood' and a desire to forestall 'their realization in marriage'.[2] This interpretation is further supported by the crucial interview between Hooper and his fiancée. Hooper passionately cries:

> Do not desert me, though this veil must be between us here on earth. Be mine and hereafter there shall be no veil over my face, no darkness between our souls! It is but a mortal veil - it is not for eternity!
>
> (p. 47)

Hooper wants to enjoy the benefits of a spiritual union, without having to cope with the complexities of an earthly relationship, and it is here that he falls into the same sort of delusion as Aylmer, Brown, and the rest of the company. He cannot cope with the basic fact of human imperfection, or with the sexual aspect of woman's promise. His answer to the discovery of evil is to draw a gloomy veil between himself and the rest of the world. The veil enables him 'to sympathize with all dark affections' (p. 49), but it cuts him off completely from the world of sunlight, love, and laughter. His state is described in familiar terms:

> Thus, from beneath the black veil, there rolled a cloud into the sunshine, an ambiguity of sin and sorrow, which enveloped the poor minister, so that love or sympathy could never reach him. It was said, that ghost and fiend consorted with him there.
>
> (p. 48)

The piece of crepe separates Hooper from 'cheerful brotherhood and woman's love' (p. 50) and it keeps him 'in that saddest of all prisons, his own heart' (p. 50). For him it expresses something he

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1. 'The Minister's Black Veil', in *Twice-Told Tales*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 9, p. 47. All further references to this work appear in the text.

2. Crews, pp. 108-10.

sees on every face; something he perceives in every heart:

> When the friend shows his inmost heart to his friend; the lover to his best beloved; when man does not shrink from his creator, loathsomely treasuring up the secret of his sin; then deem me a monster, for the symbol beneath which I have lived and die! I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a Black Veil!
>
> (p. 52)

Hooper has gained a profound awareness of the sinfulness of mankind and the inescapable brotherhood that this implies. He views his veil as the type of all the veils that enshroud the men and women around him. Like Goodman Brown, however, he has failed to meet the challenge that this knowledge brings. This is the challenge offered by Elizabeth soon after he adopted the veil: 'Lift the veil but once, and look me in the face' (p. 47). Elizabeth presents the occasion for Hooper to rise above his 'secret sins' by facing another human being without the veil of mystery and self-consciousness, but he refuses to lift the shadow of mistrust that he has placed between them. Whereas Elliston was able to forget himself in the idea of another, Hooper's sexual fears prove too strong for him. Having missed the opportunity to dispel his shadowy doubts, Hooper is buried with his veil intact. He goes to his creator 'treasuring up the secret of his sin' (p. 52) and leaves behind the life which was an exemplar of the moral he expounds.

The women of the stories examined so far have little importance as characters and are presented purely in terms of the part they have to play in the hero's quest for knowledge and salvation. Nevertheless their role within this scheme is crucial. Georgiana, Faith, Mary, Rosina, and Elizabeth all offer their respective partners the chance to rise above their obsession with human imperfection through participation in a world of human affection.

Hawthorne continually stresses the heart as the source of all

wickedness and as the only arena in which evil can be overcome. In 'Earth's Holocaust' he portrays an attempt by man to rid himself of all the trappings of civilization; to purge the earth of such encumbrances as hereditary status, weapons, money, and even of the distinctions of sex. The bonfire, however, does not disturb the devil for one moment, because man still fails 'to hit upon some method of purifying that foul cavern', the heart.[1] The moral Hawthorne draws from this tale helps to illuminate many of the attitudes and seeming contradictions we find in his works:

> The Heart - the Heart - there was the little, yet boundless sphere, wherein existed the original wrong, of which the crime and misery of this outward world were merely types. Purify that inner sphere; and the many shapes that haunt the outward, and which now seem almost our only realities, will turn to shadowy phantoms, and vanish of their own accord. But if we go no deeper than the Intellect, and strive, with merely that feeble instrument, to discern and rectify what is wrong, our whole accomplishment will be a dream.
>
> (p. 404)

It is within the context of this concern with the heart that the women of the short stories attain their full significance. Only by sharing the burden of a common susceptibility to sin and sorrow can Hawthorne's men and women work towards a purification of the heart.

This message is aptly demonstrated in 'The Maypole of Merrymount'. The young 'lightsome' couple who are about to become the Lord and Lady of the May, belong to a community of revellers, single-minded in their pursuit of mirth. The revellers are contrasted with the stern band of Puritans who determine to break up the community and bend them to their harsh law. The young couple stand between these two extremes. The moment they discover real passion they are forced to cast off the superficial joys of ignorance:

> From the moment that they truly loved, they had

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1. 'Earth's Holocaust', in *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 10, p. 403. All further references to this work appear in the text.

> subjected themselves to earth's doom of care, and sorrow, and troubled joy, and had no more a home at Merry Mount. That was Edith's mystery.[1]

Love brings responsibility and an awareness of mortality, but it also provides a path which leads beyond sorrow:

> ... as their flowery garland was wreathed of the brightest roses that had grown there, so, in the tie that united them, were intertwined all the purest and best of their early joys. They went heavenward, supporting each other along the difficult path which it was their lot to tread....
>
> (p. 67)

The 'mystery' which Edith felt in her heart helps to explain the ambiguity which so many of Hawthorne's female figures display. It is inescapable from the double promise of 'troubled joy' which the young couple discover through love. 'Troubled joy' is what women like Faith and Georgiana offer their men; if the men cannot accept the necessary 'trouble' and pain that love demands, then they lose their only chance for joy.

At the opposite extreme from the young couple whose mutual support guides them through the burdens of this world, are the men and women who deny their brotherhood with the rest of humanity by trying to escape the responsibilities that brotherhood entails. Ethan Brand claims to have found the unpardonable sin, and his definition is as good as any:

> 'It is a sin that grew within my own breast,' replied Ethan Brand, standing erect, with the pride that distinguishes all enthusiasts of his stamp. 'A sin that grew nowhere else! The sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man, and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its own mighty claims!' [2]

Once again woman is the key figure in the process of rejection. Brand's

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1. 'The Maypole of Merrymount' in *Twice Told Tales*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 9, p. 58. All further references to this work appear in the text.

2. 'Ethan Brand' in *The Snow Image and Uncollected Tales*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 11, p. 90. All further references to this work appear in the text.

faith in the existence of an unpardonable sin is confirmed when he remembers 'the Esther of our tale':

> the very girl whom, with such cold and remorseless purpose, Ethan Brand had made the subject of a psychological experiment, and wasted, absorbed and perhaps annihilated her soul, in the process.
> (p. 94)

The denial of brotherhood, in whatever form it takes, inevitably involves the violation of another human being. The figure of woman is at the core of the problem because woman represents the crucial link between man and mankind. As often as Hawthorne's men reject this link the woman is led to suffer.

In 'The Shaker Bridal', for instance, we are shown yet another man who manages to overcome his 'natural sympathy with human frailties and affections',[1] Adam Colburn, moved by despair, wholeheartedly adopts the doctrines of the Society of Shakers and casts off the chains of 'earthly affection' by opting for a 'spiritual' relationship with his childhood sweetheart, Martha. The couple are finally offered the joint rule of their Shaker community, but at the very moment when Adam Colburn folds his arms 'with a sense of satisfied ambition' (p. 425), Martha collapses at his feet:

> But paler and paler grew Martha by his side, till, like a corpse in its burial clothes, she sank down at the feet of her early lover; for, after many trials firmly borne, her heart could endure the weight of its desolate agony no longer.
> (p. 425)

In one sense Martha's fate could be seen as an illustration of woman's relative emotional weakness. In Hawthorne's fictional world, however, and in the terms of the whole story, Martha's weakness has the strength of a superior knowledge. Martha and Adam fail dismally to make their way in the world before entering the Shaker community, and the story

1. 'The Shaker Bridal' in *Twice Told Tales*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 9, p. 424. All further references to this work appear in the text.

implies that their failure is due to the fact that they face their troubles alone. 'The Shaker Bridal' is in many ways an alternative 'Maypole of Merrymount' and it demonstrates again Hawthorne's concern with the values of mutual responsibility, and mutual support.

The denial of the responsibilities of brotherhood is not entirely a male prerogative in Hawthorne's tales. There are also a few women who cut themselves off from their fellow creatures and who reap the penalties of gloom and isolation. These women are in many ways stereotyped 'dark ladies', but Hawthorne is capable of using the associations of the conventionally bad woman to evoke the same depth of meaning that we find in the tales of their male counterparts. In his presentation of these women, Hawthorne's primary concern is with the effects of guilt, rather than its causes. The women suffer for the simple reason that they are alienated from the ordinary bonds of affection, not because of an authorial judgement upon their sin itself.

Even a woman like Prudence Inglefield in 'John Inglefield's Thanksgiving' is presented with a certain amount of sympathy. She is a proverbial wanton woman who returns to her father's fireside on the evening of thanksgiving day. For a few short hours she re-enters the hearts of her family and shares in their simple pleasures. Yet at the hour for domestic worship she moves to the threshold of her home with an altered demeanour. 'Sin and evil passions' deform her face as she prepares to leave the fireside,[1] and her response to her father's appeal is that of a woman torn in two:

> her countenance wore almost the expression as if she were struggling with a fiend, who had power to seize his victim even within the hallowed precincts of her father's hearth.
>
> (p. 184)

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1. 'John Inglefield's Thanksgiving', in *Twice Told Tales*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 9, p. 184. All further references to this work appear in the text.

The devil wins, and Prudence spends a night of 'dissolute mirth' at 'the theatre of a neighboring city' (p. 184). Her story is an illustration of the power that 'would snatch a guilty soul from the gate of heaven, and make its sin and its punishment alike eternal' (p. 185) but the logic of the tale also shows that Prudence's greatest sin is turning her back on her family. The fireside offers a very real chance of escape from the devil through the re-establishment of 'pure affections'. Prudence's rejection of this opportunity involves a denial of all the human sympathy she possesses and it is this which transforms her into a painted monster of the night.

The same rejection of the ties of human affection haunts the woman of 'The Hollow of the Three Hills', and is expressed in the look of wretchedness which distinguishes the dark lady from Edith in 'The White Old Maid'. Yet it is not only sin which prompts Hawthorne's women to forsake their responsibilities; religious fanaticism can work the same effect. Catherine in 'The Gentle Boy', although a victim of both man and circumstance, exemplifies this point. She is 'naturally a woman of mighty passions'[1] whose adherence to the Quaker faith makes her an outcast from society. Her plight is presented with great sympathy, but at the same time it is clearly shown that the demands of her religion are unnatural and potentially destructive.

Catherine is obliged to leave her son, Ilbrahim, to the care of his adoptive parents, Tobias and Dorothy Pearson. She consciously quells her maternal instincts for the sake of her beliefs - a course which involves a denial of all the 'pure affections' that are an essential part of Hawthorne's concept of 'brotherhood'. Her choice is not an easy one:

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1. 'The Gentle Boy' in *Twice Told Tales*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 9, p. 81. All further references to this work appear in the text.

> 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
>
> (p. 84)

but when compared to Dorothy, Catherine is fatally misguided:

> The Quaker rose from the ground, but drew the boy closer to her, while she gazed earnestly in Dorothy's face. Her mild, but saddened features, and neat, matronly attire, harmonized together, and were like a verse of fireside poetry. Her very aspect proved that she was blameless, so far as mortal could be so, in respect to God and man; while the enthusiast, in her robe of sackcloth and girdle of knotted cord, had as evidently violated the duties of the present life and the future, by fixing her attention wholly on the latter. The two females, as they held each a hand of Ilbrahim, formed a practical allegory; it was rational piety and unbridled fanaticism, contending for the empire of a young heart.
>
> (p. 85)

The contrast between the two women is patently familiar. Dorothy is the quietly effective fireside angel, whilst Catherine is the passionate, raven-haired lady. Hawthorne does not hesitate to draw upon all the associations of these stereotypes nor to insist upon the overriding importance of a woman's maternal duties. The gentle boy's death is as much the fault of his mother's neglect as of the harshness of the Puritans, and the mother, in turn, is made all the more fanatical 'by the sundering of all human ties' (p. 104). It is important to note, however, that whilst Hawthorne supports the conservative idea of a woman's 'proper place' in this story, he does so within the wider context of 'the duties of the present life' (p. 85). His main concern in 'The Gentle Boy' is with the errors of any system of belief which leads men to persecute their fellow beings, or which requires the sacrifice of maternal or paternal feelings. The same sort of judgement placed upon Catherine, is extended to the old Quaker who left his daughter's death-bed for the sake of his God. Their religion is one of sacrifice, but all too often the tortuous struggle for personal

salvation involves the sacrifice of others. The real contrast in this story is not between dark and fair heroines, but between the dark wanderings and deep pitfalls of man's individual search for belief, and the simple faith that comes from the exercise of tolerance, charity and earthly affection.

Yet another lady who fails in the field of human affection is Lady Eleanore in 'Lady Eleanore's Mantle'. Her story is an allegory of pride, embodied simply, yet with great effect, by the gorgeously embroidered mantle which enshrouds her body. Lady Eleanore comes to New England to live with her guardian Colonel Shute, and brings with her the legendary mantle, along with her equally infamous 'harsh unyielding pride, a haughty consciousness of her hereditary and personal advantages, which made her almost incapable of control'.[1] She treats all her fellow beings, and especially her semi-insane admirer, Jervase Helwyse, with scornful disdain, and it is clear from the moment of her arrival that this arrogance is yet another attempt to deny the connections with the whole of humanity to which all men and women are subject. When she places her foot upon Helwyse's prostrate form, a familiar moral is drawn:

> never, surely, was there an apter emblem of aristocracy and hereditary pride, trampling on human sympathies and the kindred of nature, than these two figures presented at that moment.
>
> (p. 276)

And the doctor of the town is able to interpret the nature of her sin and predict her punishment:

> 'she seeks to place herself above the sympathies of our common nature, which envelopes all human souls. See, if that nature does not assert its claim over her in some mode that shall bring her level with the lowest.'
>
> (p. 276)

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1. 'Lady Eleanore's Mantle' in *Twice Told Tales*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 9, p. 274. All further references to this work appear in the text.

Terms like 'human sympathies', 'common nature', and 'the kindred of nature' occur over and over again throughout Hawthorne's works, and in this tale we see Lady Eleanore falling into the same trap as her male counterparts. This time, however, it is the woman who must learn to accept her own flawed state and the crucial link it represents.

The agent which brings Lady Eleanore 'to the level of the lowest' is the Small-Pox - a pestilence which 'compelled rich and poor to feel themselves brethren' (p. 283).[1] The source of the disease is Lady Eleanore's mantle - the symbol of her pride and ironically a kind of veil which she draws closely about her form in an act of withdrawal from human contact. Like Richard Digby, she is offered a sip of holy wine as 'a symbol that you have not sought to withdraw yourself from the chain of human sympathies' (p. 280). With remarkable economy the symbol of Lady Eleanore's 'stand above human sympathies' (p. 284), the mantle, is inevitably the sin which unites her with the rest of mankind. Because of the mantle her face is scarred forever and she is doomed to a life of shrinking isolation, trying to hide the indelible marks of her humanity:

> The curse of Heaven hath stricken me, because I would not call man my brother; nor woman sister. I wrapt myself in PRIDE as in a mantle, and scorned the sympathies of nature; and therefore has nature made this wretched body the medium of a dreadful sympathy. You are avenged - they are all avenged - Nature is avenged - for I am Eleanore Rochcliffe!
> (p. 287)

Thanks to her mantle of pride, Lady Eleanore's pock marks and poisonous breath are as devastating as Georgiana's birthmark is innocuous. In 'Rappaccini's Daughter', however, the woman in question appears to possess both poison and innocence - a paradoxical combination which makes this the most complex and the most intriguing

1. Edgar Allan Poe in 'The Masque of the Red Death' uses the image of pestilence to similar effect. The 'Red Death' victim carried stains which 'shut him out from the sympathy of his fellow-men', and yet the disease is also the agent through which Prince and courtiers are brought 'level with the lowest'. *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allen Poe* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1975), pp. 269-73.

of Hawthorne's tales. Signor Giacomo Rappaccini is a famous doctor who cultivates a garden full of poisonous plants in order to distil his medicines and to pursue his quest for scientific knowledge. His most chilling scientific experiment is his daughter, Beatrice.

Beatrice Rappaccini has been nourished since her birth with the breath of her father's most poisonous shrub. Her touch will wither a bunch of flowers, her grasp will leave behind an indelible print of purple finger marks, and insects fall dead at her feet. She possesses a rich, luxuriant beauty, expressive in every way of her sister-plant, and she leads a life of almost complete isolation within the confines of her father's deadly garden. The hero, Giovanni Guasconti, enters upon the scene and wins Beatrice's love, but the insinuations of Rappaccini's rival, Professor Baglioni, and the evidence of his own eyes, raise doubts about Beatrice in Giovanni's mind, until finally the realization that he too has become poisonous leads him to wound her with words of hatred, and kill her with Baglioni's antidote.

On a superficial level the story illustrates the folly of human attempts to outdo nature. Just as Aylmer's attempt to create perfection ended in death, so Rappaccini's attempt to create evil is defeated. Beatrice is the victim of 'the fatality that attends all such efforts of perverted wisdom'.[1] The story is packed so full with rich and intriguing symbols, however, that it draws us into a never-ending search for deeper meanings. Several critics have asked 'who is Beatrice?'[2] She is undoubtedly the central figure of the story and her nature holds the elusive key to the tale's significance. Her ambiguity has often been stressed, for she combines real innocence

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1. In *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 10, p. 128. All further references to this work appear in the text.

2. The title of J. Tharpe's chapter on the tale in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Identity and Knowledge* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1967).

with an equally real potential for harm. Her flaw is not innocuous like Georgiana's or Faith's, it is horribly active, with or without her consent. Yet the difficulty of reconciling poison with innocence should be Giovanni's, not ours. Several critics have recognized that Beatrice's poison is 'merely a metaphor for the power of sexual attraction',[1] and the glut of sensual imagery used to describe her form leaves little room for doubt. It is quite feasible that Beatrice should be devastatingly attractive, sexually, and innocent at the same time. Her unconscious sexual power may have an 'evil' or 'poisonour' effect but Hawthorne leaves it to the reader to decide how seriously to regard these terms. What he does make clear, without equivocation, is that Beatrice's poison is something imposed on her by her ancestors; it has nothing to do with her real self, and everything to do with appearances.

At the beginning of the story, Hawthorne presents a detailed description of Rappaccini's garden, which serves to place Beatrice firmly within her physical setting, but which also defines her allegorical position through the analogy of the purple shrub. All the plants of the garden are poisonous to some degree, and yet they are all nourished upon water from the fountain, 'an immortal spirit, that sung its song unceasingly, and without heeding the vicissitudes around it' (p. 94). The closer we examine the description of the plants, the more they resemble the human race:

> Every portion of the soil was peopled with plants and herbs which if less beautiful, still bore tokens of assiduous care; as if all had their individual virtues, known to the scientific mind that fostered

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1. Brian Way, 'Art and the Spirit of Anarchy', in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: New Critical Essays*, ed. Robert A. Lee (London: Vision Press Ltd., 1982), pp. 15-17. F.C. Crews comes to a similar conclusion in *The Sins of the Fathers*. Other critics, notably Hyatt Waggoner and Roy Male, admit sexual connotations but place most emphasis on the 'dual nature of humanity' since the fall, which tends to obscure Beatrice's significance as a woman.

> them. Some were placed in urns, rich with old carving, and others in common garden plots; some crept serpent-like along the ground, or climbed on high, using whatever means of ascent was offered them.
> (p. 95)

The plants have their poison in common, but at the same time retain individual virtues:

> Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world? - and this man, with such a perception of harm in what his own hands had caused to grow, was he the Adam?
> (p. 96)

Within this Eden grows a special plant, more beautiful than the rest, set in the midst of the pool, and yet only to be approached with armour. Beatrice shares all the plant's characteristics. Her spirit is clear and deep, but her body, perfume, voice, and clothes possess all the mysterious lustre and richness of the plant's purple blossoms. Like the shrub, she is one particular blossom in an empoisoned race, but the men in her life have been taught to fear anything outside 'the limits of ordinary experience', so she is 'still to be touched only with a glove', and never 'approached without a mask' (p. 97).

As the story continues, the disparity between Beatrice's goodness and her unconscious power to destroy becomes more and more apparent. Her face is all simplicity and sweetness, but the atmosphere of her breath makes creatures faint at her feet. Giovanni wonders 'what is this being? - beautiful shall I call her? - or inexpressibly terrible?' and all the time a fierce but subtle poison is entering his system. This poison is not love or horror, but a 'lurid intermixture of the two' (p. 105). It is inspired by Beatrice's appearance, yet it is something purely his own, and it colours his whole view of its object. Giovanni's feverish lust is the real poison in this tale.

Because Beatrice has ensnared him like a helpless insect in a web, Giovanni feels compelled to regard her as 'something ugly and monstrous' (p. 104). He does not know how to cope with the evidence

of his senses. The fact that the destructive power he has witnessed could be quite unintentional, and a completely separate thing from Beatrice's character and spirit, does not occur to him. She has to be either 'angel or demon' (p. 109) according to whether his senses are wrong or right. He does not realize that if something is 'true to the outward senses, still it may be false in its essence' (p. 112).

When Giovanni gets close to Beatrice he discovers a quite different person from the woman of his fantasies. He is amazed to find 'that he should be conversing with Beatrice like a brother, and should find her so human and so maiden-like' (p. 114). Henceforth he quells all thoughts of poison, and regards her only as 'worthiest to be worshipped' (p. 114). As an angel she makes a perfect playmate, but still their relationship is placed upon dangerous ground. Giovanni has tried to pretend that the poison does not exist, rather than attempt to come to terms with it. Whilst their asexual relationship brings them many hours of innocent happiness, sooner or later they will have to face 'the physical barrier between them' (p. 116).

The seeds of doubt are sown once again when Baglioni visits Giovanni. Baglioni is the harsh realist of the tale, who wants to bring everything 'within the limits of ordinary nature' (p. 119). Baglioni's character, and especially his demonic chuckle, is reminiscent of Aminadab, but he functions as an Aylmer. Baglioni is completely blind to Beatrice's true nature and views her simply as the stereotyped 'Belle Empoisonneuse':

> 'Doubtless, likewise, the fair and learned Signora Beatrice would minister to her patients with draughts as sweet as a maiden's breath. But wo to him that sips them.'
> (p. 118)

Baglioni is wrong about Beatrice's character and has spread lies about the extent of her learning. He is as guilty as Rappaccini in that both have attempted to mould Beatrice into something evil. She has inherited

both the 'poison' of her sexual attraction and the unjust myths that are its inevitable accompaniment.

Unfortunately for Beatrice, her immature and rather shallow lover cannot admit the poison without believing the myths. Baglioni's advice leaves him 'grovelling among earthly doubts' (p. 120), because in Giovanni's opinion:

> those dreadful peculiarities in her physical nature ... could not be supposed to exist without some corresponding monstrosity of soul.
>
> (p. 120)

In fact all the monstrosity of soul belongs to Giovanni, as is demonstrated by his 'venomous' outburst:

> 'Yes poisonous thing!; ...'Thou hast done it! Thou has blasted me! Thou has filled my veins with poison! Thou has made me as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and deadly a creature as thyself - a world's wonder of hideous monstrosity!'
>
> (p. 124)

Giovanni's words act as a far more deadly poison than anything Beatrice had ever possessed and her final words place the evil in its true perspective:

> 'Farewell Giovanni! Thy words of hatred are like lead within my heart - but they, too, will fall away as I ascend. Oh was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?'
>
> (p. 127)

When Beatrice dies, she is surrounded by the men who made her their victim. The two representatives of the older generation gloat over the evil they have created - an evil which gains life through Giovanni's belief. Although Beatrice, like Georgiana, has imbibed an acute consciousness of her flawed state - as illustrated by the constant 'reserve' in her demeanour - she knows just as surely that it is not of her making:

> 'though my body be nourished with poison, my spirit is God's creature, and craves love as its daily food.'
>
> (p. 125)

There are several hints in this tale that the evil and poisonous associations placed upon woman's physical nature are, like Rappaccini's plants, 'but the monstrous offspring of man's depraved fancy' (p. 110). Beatrice is one sacrifice to this 'fancy' - a victim to the angel/ monster stereotypes of Hawthorne's day. She is a dark lady with an angelic soul - an innocent temptress who refuses to be moulded into a demon:

> But, with her actual presence, there came influences which had too real an existence to be at once shaken off; recollections of many a holy and passionate outgush of her heart, when the pure fountain had been unsealed from its depths, and made visible in its transparency to his mental eye; recollections which, had Giovanni known how to estimate them, would have assured him that all this ugly mystery was but an earthly illusion, and that, whatever mist of evil might seem to have gathered over her, the real Beatrice was a heavenly angel.
>
> (p. 122)

Beatrice's story illustrates just how small the gap is between Hawthorne's dark temptresses and his fair angels. Georgiana and Faith are essentially fair maidens, yet they are marked by the fatal flaw which betrays their common humanity. Beatrice's flaw turns her into a temptress, yet she too is in essence an angel. Throughout Hawthorne's short stories his concern with the absolute necessity of accepting our common susceptibility to sin and sorrow is particularly applied to the figure of woman. Woman is the symbol of man's humanity. She is his dark and fair, dual nature, and she is the link which enables him to unite and transcend the opposing forces within his heart.

CHAPTER THREE

HESTER PRYNNE

The Scarlet Letter is universally acknowledged as Hawthorne's greatest work. It marks the transition from short story to romance and it is central to Hawthorne's corpus. In the same way, Hester Prynne is central to *The Scarlet Letter*. Whilst Dimmesdale might be given an equal share of her platform, Hester steals the limelight. It is Hester's enigmatic character which captures the reader's imagination, and it is her figure which remains in our minds long after we put down the book. How Hawthorne came to create a figure of such stature and significance we shall never really know, but it is clear that she draws much of her strength from the women of the tales. Hawthorne's experiments with different types of female character, and his exploration of woman's mythical significance in the tales, laid the foundations for his portrayal of one of the great heroines of fiction.

In 'Rappaccini's Daughter' Hawthorne reveals a greater interest in the plight of his heroine than in any of the earlier tales. Although Beatrice is still very much a collection of symbolic attributes, she achieves a life of her own and exercises a fascination which has enthralled generations of commentators. As the title of the story suggests, Beatrice is the centre of interest in the tale. She completely outshines her male co-stars and extends her disturbing influence far beyond her fictional confines. In terms of impact alone she foreshadows Hester Prynne, and much of Hester's attraction depends upon characteristics inherited from Beatrice. Both heroines are dark, complex, and ambiguous. Both are invested with a symbolic significance which mirrors the paradox of their natures. The difference lies in the

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1. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, E. Hudson Long (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1961). All further references are to this edition.

greater reality and complexity of Hester Prynne and her situation. Hawthorne has lifted the innocent temptress out of the realms of myth and fairytale and has put her down in a specifically American setting. He lumbers her with the sorts of real human problems and moral paradoxes that accompany ordinary human existence and measures her peculiar combination of good and evil against this more familiar environment. Instead of fairytale poison, Hester has to come to terms with her child and the scarlet letter. Instead of the mythical garden of poisonous plants, Hester has her New England Puritan community. In *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne combines the symbolic suggestiveness of his tales with a new and powerful attempt at psychological portrayal. His heroine is as multi-dimensional and complicated as any real human being, and just as difficult to get to know.

Of all Hawthorne's heroines, Hester has been the one to excite the most praise. In fact at times her admirers rival Hawthorne in their search for a fitting phrase. W.D. Howells concluded that ' in all fiction one could hardly find a character more boldly, more simply, more quietly imagined'.[1] According to Mark Van Doren, her 'passion and beauty dominate every other person, and colour each event', yet, nevertheless, 'we are close to her all of the time, and completely convinced of her flesh and blood, of her heart and mind',[2] and Theodore T. Munger sees her as a saint whose 'life came to blessed uses, with rewards of love and gratitude from others that reached even unto death'.[3] Some commentators even reveal a hint of bitterness towards the creator who dared to criticize the heroine they admire so much. F.I. Carpenter,

1. W.D. Howells, *Heroines of Fiction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1901), p. 174.
2. Mark Van Doren, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1948), p. 151.
3. Theodore T. Munger, 'Saintly Hester', in *A Scarlet Letter Handbook*, ed. Seymour L. Gross (San Francisco: Wadsworth Publishing Co. Inc., 1960), p. 42.

for example says:

> In the last analysis, the greatness of *The Scarlet Letter* lies in the character of Hester Prynne. Because she dared to trust herself and to believe in the possibility of a new morality in a new world, she achieved spiritual greatness in spite of her own human weakness, in spite of the prejudices of her Puritan society and, finally, in spite of the prejudices of her creator himself [1]

and according to Morton Cronin 'Hester Prynne is a greater romantic heroine than Hawthorne deserved'.[2]

As well as praise, Hester, and *The Scarlet Letter* as a whole, have stimulated a never ending stream of diverse interpretations, ranging from romantic to orthodox Christian, and encompassing completely antithetical understanding of theme, character, and symbolism.[3] Critics have even tended to fall into opposing camps of support for whichever character seems to embody their interpretation. Hester's champions point to the resiliant survival of free thought, whilst Dimmesdale's supporters argue the triumph of a Puritan conscience over the complex attractions of sin. It is impossible, when writing specifically about Hester, not to ignore much of what Hawthorne says through Dimmesdale. The distinction between the two characters and what they represent, however, is a very superficial one. Both are important creations, and both are the products of the same amalgam of ideas and attitudes. Hawthorne does not present Hester as the embodiment of one strand of his thought, any more than he makes her a heroine in spite of himself. Instead she combines several themes and concepts already apparent in the tales, and testifies to Hawthorne's abiding concern with the nature and significance of woman in society.

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1. F.I. Carpenter, 'Hester Versus Hawthorne' in *A Scarlet Letter Handbook*, ed. Seymour L. Gross (San Francisco: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc., 1960), p. 47.
2. Morton Cronin, 'Hawthorne on Romantic Love and the Status of Women', *PMLA*, 69 (1954), 91.
3. See Charles Child Walcut, '*The Scarlet Letter* and its Modern Critics', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 7 , 251-64.

The diversity of critical opinion concerning Hester's function and Hawthorne's attitude towards her is an obvious symptom of her success, and proof that Hawthorne has managed to shake off the restrictions of stereotype. Whereas Hawthorne exploits traditional stereotypes in his short stories so as to undercut them symbolically, in *The Scarlet Letter* Hester's whole character and personality deny her cast. Hester captures the imagination because she challenges our assumptions; she cannot be reduced to a formula, or made to fit comfortably into any preconceived role. The complexity of her character is expressed symbolically through the ambiguity of the scarlet letter; reality and symbol intertwine to exploit the myths of the female figure whilst insisting upon her individuality.

Hester's challenge to the stereotypes of literature and society is conveyed paradoxically through a constant association with convention. With her sultry looks and temperament, her pride and her shame, Hester is the epitome of Ralph P. Boas's 'romantic lady':[1]

> The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam, and a face, which, besides being beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow and deep black eyes. [2]
>
> (p. 42)

She has 'an impulsive and passionate nature' (p. 45) with ' a rich, voluptuous, Oriental characteristic' (p. 63), and from the very first we see her as suffering; her blatant sexuality has already been punished. Hester is inevitably doomed to suffer, because 'here, there was the taint of deepest sin in the most sacred quality of human life' (p. 44).

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1. See above, Chapter 1, p. 14.

2. Boas actually quotes this passage, but continues: 'Though her appearance follows the standard tradition, Hester goes far beyond the regular romantic conception as the book is worked out.' *Romanticism in America*, p. 81.

Despite her temptress qualities, however, there is another side to Hester's nature. She actively practices charity. bestowing all her superfluous means 'on wretches less miserable than herself' (p. 63). She is 'helpful to the sick' and 'comfortable to the afflicted' (p. 118) and above all else is a devoted and loving mother. This latter role takes on added significance when we recall how in 'The Gentle Boy' Hawthorne drew a sharp distinction between Catherine, the dark lady who neglected her child, and Dorothy, the matronly angel who embraced her maternal responsibilities. Hester, with her strong sense of duty towards those she loves, adopts Dorothy's role against all odds, and would present an 'image of Divine Maternity' (p. 44) were it not for the sin which lies behind the birth of her child.

Hester thus possesses characteristics which link her with both the dark romantic lady and the fair fire-side angel. Like Beatrice she combines deadly poison with genuine goodness and this combination serves to set her apart from the ordinary course of human relations. When Hester is first introduced she is a solitary spectacle, enduring her shame under the gaze of the crowd. Throughout the novel she maintains this position in relation to the crowd, and particularly in relation to the reader. Unlike the dark ladies of the later novels, Hester has no fair maiden to serve as her foil; instead she stands alone, compelling our gaze and forcing us to consider the impact of her figure, and the purport of the insignia on her breast. All the other women in the novel are absorbed into Hester's 'eternal feminine'. Pearl and Mistress Hibbins, the only other females with names, inevitably become expressions of different aspects of this one central character. Hester is able to encompass their significance as she encompasses the significance of the stereotypes. Through Hester, Hawthorne rejected the distinction between American angel and romantic adulteress, and

by attempting a combination of the two exposed their limitations in the very act of transcending them.

Hawthorne forces us to think about how we perceive Hester Prynne by showing how easily the Puritan community is able to consistently misinterpret her character. A subtle parallel is created between Hester's Puritan audience and the reader so that we have to assess their interpretations by our own, and avoid, where possible, their mistakes. According to J. Tharpe, the very difficulty of ever really knowing our fellow human beings is an important theme in the novel. The gulf between communal assumptions and individual truth is enormous and the Puritan community, for all its laws, knows next to nothing about any of the main protagonists:

> The people never come to know any of the characters. No one ever knows Hester. Dimmesdale is consistently misinterpreted. The crowds refuse to take any of his statements, not even his confession, at face value. Chillingworth never uses his own name and is known to Hester alone. Pearl has but a first name. [1]

To cope with Hester's deviance the community gives her a label, a badge of shame which effectively isolates and defines her existence. They make her 'a living sermon against sin' (p. 49) so that:

> ...giving up her individuality, she would become the general symbol at which the preacher and moralist might point, and in which they might vivify and embody their images of woman's frailty and sinful passion.
> (p. 59)

The scarlet letter is society's attempt to force an easily recognizable stereotype upon Hester. The attempt fails because Hester is a living, thinking and hence ambiguous individual. Whilst the scarlet letter is an essential part of her being, it can never represent her whole self.

The people who force Hester to wear the scarlet letter are incapable of understanding her personality or motivation:

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1. Tharpe, pp. 104-5.

> out of the whole human family, it would not have been easy to select the same number of wise and virtuous persons, who should be less capable of sitting in judgement on an erring woman's heart, and disentangling its mesh of good and evil.
> (p. 50)

They have no right 'to meddle with a question of human guilt, passion and anguish' (p. 50) and their sentence is clearly immoral and ineffective. During the early years of Hester's punishment they think of her as 'a worthy type of her of Babylon' (p. 81). Later, when public opinion urges a change of heart, they think they can remove the badge and what it stands for simply by decree (p. 122). Magistrates and community want to see Hester as either good or evil, sinner or saint:

> The public is despotic in its temper; it is capable of denying common justice, when too strenuously demanded as a right; but quite frequently it awards more than justice.
> (p. 117)

The scarlet woman becomes a sister of mercy after years of self-sacrifice and the scarlet letter takes on a new meaning. However 'Able' is no less arbitrary than 'Adulteress':

> Society was inclined to show its former victim a more benign countenance than she cared to be favored with, or perchance than she deserved.
> (p. 117)

Hester's story shows how the compulsion to give woman a label leads inevitably to illusion. Hester is neither whore nor angel, but a complicated 'mesh'. Any attempt at judgement either from her peers or on the part of the reader cannot help but be reductive and 'despotic'.

Hester's ambiguity is reflected symbolically in the scarlet letter. What was for the Puritans a simple, straightforward emblem, is made for us the most complex of images. A lurid token of red and gold, the letter is imposed upon the grey area of Hester's dress. The grey is significant[1] - Hester's sin cannot be viewed in terms of black

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1. Hawthorne's use of colour in *The Scarlet Letter* has been exhaustively examined, for example in Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death*
(contd)

or white and the scarlet letter cannot retain a rigid meaning. Instead the brilliant red and gold comes to illustrate the paradox of Hester's sin: the paradox of woman and of her role within history.

The scarlet letter is the great-grandchild of Georgiana's birthmark, Faith's pink ribbons and Beatrice Rappaccini's purple poison. It is Hester's fatal flaw, the 'ineludible gripe, in which mortality clutches the highest and purest of earthly mold, degrading them into kindred with the lowest'.[1] Like the birthmark, the ribbons and the poison, the letter is evidence of Hester's sexual nature: the imperfection which links Hester, as woman, with the rest of her race. And like the birthmark it is capable of changing its meaning according to time, circumstance, and the eye of the beholder; it is closely interwoven with Hester's physical and emotional being. Whenever Hester feels a human eye upon her token, she experiences a throb of anguish (p. 64), and whenever she is close to the possessor of a hidden sin 'the red infamy on her breast would give a sympathetic throb' (p. 65).

The scarlet letter is imposed upon Hester by the 'iron men' of the community. Like Aylmer, Goodman Brown and Giovanni, they distort Hester's flaw until it is represented in 'exaggerated and gigantic proportions' in the 'convex mirror' of their 'gleaming armour' (p. 78). The letter is in many ways a false symbol. It is not a natural expression of Hester's being, but, like Beatrice's passion, is an interpretation invented by society which isolates and represses the very sexuality it represents.

Hawthorne deepens the significance of Hester's flaw by providing an alternative token of sin. Pearl is described as God's retribution, in ironic contrast to the punishment of the community:

(contd). *in the American Novel* (New York: World, 1960; Revised ed. New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 434.

1. 'The Birthmark', p. 39.

> How strange, indeed! Man had marked this woman's sin by a scarlet letter, which had such potent and disastrous efficacy that no human sympathy could reach her, save it were sinful like herself. God as a direct consequence of the sin which man thus punished, had given her a lovely child, whose place was on that same dishonoured bosom, to connect her parent forever with the race and descent of mortals and to be finally a blessed soul in heaven.
> (p. 66)

In 'The Birthmark' Georgiana's flaw was the 'bond' which united her to the rest of humanity; yet because he could not cope with this imperfection, Aylmer placed his wife into an artificial isolation as if she had some kind of malignant disease. The Puritan community in *The Scarlet Letter* makes the same mistake. Their symbol of shame is designed to isolate Hester from her fellow human beings, even though her sin, as Pearl demonstrates, is essentially something which connects Hester to 'the race and descent of mortals'.

Pearl is identified with the scarlet letter throughout the novel - even her clothes mirror the letter's scarlet and gold colour scheme - but it is the fundamental differences between the two which are most important. Pearl is the reverse side of the scarlet letter. She is the other half of Hester's fatal flaw: the side which the Puritans ignore. The scarlet letter is essentially the 'Blackman's mark' (p. 134), whereas Pearl is ultimately the product of a heavenly father. They represent two radically different ways of viewing and coping with sin, and it is this disparity which points to the meaning of Hester's story.

The scarlet letter is the Puritan interpretation of Hester's crime; it is an attempt to identify and isolate evil within the community and functions like 'the black flower of civilized society' (p. 38), the prison. Society effectively disowns the woman of the scarlet letter; she lives physically and spiritually on the outskirts of the community. The story emphasizes, however, through the motif of

the connective chain, that sin is paradoxically the one link which all human beings have in common. The attempt to break this link inevitably amounts to Ethan Brand's 'unpardonable sin' - the denial of brotherhood.

Hester remains within the Puritan settlement after her sentence because 'her sin, her ignominy, were the roots which she had struck into the soil':

> The chain that bound her here was of iron links, and galling to her inmost soul, but never could be broken.
> (p. 60)

She also feels bound to the man she loves, but the bond is inevitably 'the iron link of mutual crime, which neither he nor she could break' (p. 116). Both Dimmesdale and the community attempt to deny all association with Hester:

> Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came into contact implied, and often expressed that she was banished and as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere, or communicated with the common nature by other organs and senses than the rest of mankind.
> (p. 63)

Yet even in the context of this harsh treatment some links can never be broken. Hester is connected with the highest and lowest through the medium of her art:

> Her needlework was seen on the ruff of the Governor; military men wore it on their scarfes, and the minister on his band; it decked the baby's little cap...
> (p. 62)

and she also possesses a 'sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts' (p. 65), granted through the scarlet letter. These bonds, however, only serve to further Hester's isolation, the one leaving her to independent solitude, the other amounting to 'a loss of faith' which only increases her suffering. The whole paradox of the scarlet letter is that whilst it stands for what Hester has in common with her race, it functions as a barrier between the woman and her kind.

Through her actions, Hester 'was quick to acknowledge her sisterhood with the race of man' (p. 116), but all other ties have been taken away:

> The links that united her to the rest of human kind - links of flowers, or silk, or gold, or whatever the material - had all been broken.
>
> (p. 116)

She consequently assumes a 'freedom of speculation' which would have scandalized her peers:

> Standing alone in the world - alone as to any dependence on society, and with little Pearl to be guided and protected - alone and hopeless of retrieving her position, even had she not scorned to consider it desirable, - she cast away the fragments of a broken chain. The world's law was no law for her mind.
>
> (p. 119)

Hester's intellectual emancipation is a direct consequence of the scarlet letter. Hawthorne speaks in terms of 'the effect of the symbol or rather, of the position in respect to society that was indicated by it' (p. 118) and shows those effects as a turn from 'passion and feeling, to thought' (p. 119). 'Man's hard law' inevitably breeds rebellion, and Hester, whose heart has lost its 'regular and healthy throb' is condemned to wander in a 'dark labyrinth' of thought (p. 120). It is with heavy irony that the narrator claims 'The scarlet letter had not done its office' (p. 120). The Puritans could hardly hope to mould Hester's mind by ostracizing her from their world.

Whilst it is the scarlet letter which leads Hester into her moral wilderness, it is Pearl who stops her from going too far:

> Yet had little Pearl never come to her from the spiritual world it might have been far otherwise. Then she might have come down to us in history, hand in hand with Ann Hutchinson, as the foundress of a religious sect.
>
> (p. 119)

Pearl's effect is completely opposite to that of the scarlet letter. She curbs her mother's rebellion, she prevents her from signing her name in the blackman's book, and she brings meaning and purpose to

Hester's existence.

According to Nina Baym, Pearl represents the sin of passion as it is felt and understood by Hester, and Chillingworth likewise embodies Dimmesdale's conception of their sin.[1] Pearl is wild and lawless, and closely connected with the passionate side of Hester's nature. She also represents truth, and performs the task of a conscience by constantly drawing her mother's attention to the scarlet letter and its purport. Pearl connects her mother to the rest of mankind, and forms a chain between mother and father:

> ...and little Pearl, herself a symbol, and the connecting link between those two.
>
> (p. 112)

Pearl must be acknowledged before she can shake off her symbolic function and take her proper place in the world. As the representative of so many of the implications of Hester's and Dimmesdale's sin, Pearl literally embodies the responsibilities incurred by that sin.

Hawthorne shows through Pearl that, despite all of society's faults, Hester is still subject to social bonds which she must not deny. The links that are present in her duty to her child, and to the men she has inadvertently wounded are at the root of her need to be true to the scarlet letter. Pearl's constant questioning concerning the badge is a quest for this truth. She represents the road to recovery:

> If little Pearl were entertained with faith and trust... might it not be her errand to soothe away the sorrow that lay cold in her mother's heart...and to help her overcome the passion, once so wild and even yet neither dead nor asleep.
>
> (p. 130)

Just as Pearl stands between Hester and the despair which comes from dwelling upon the injustices of life, so the child stands between Hester and the prospect of happiness through the fulfilment of passion. There can be little doubt that Hawthorne sympathized with Hester's intellectual and emotional rebellion, yet the insistent figure of Pearl

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1. Nina Baym, 'Passion and Authority in *The Scarlet Letter*', *NEQ*, 43 (1970), 217.

refuses to go away - her childish demand for attention carries a symbolic weight which no amount of sympathy can overturn.

The demands Pearl places upon her mother are equally applied to Dimmesdale. Hester has had to learn through necessity to accept the letter and her child. Dimmesdale, likewise will not find peace until he acknowledges Hester's 'fatal flaw' and, by implication, the figure of the dark lady and what she represents. Through Hester, Dimmesdale, the innocent Adam, has discovered sin within his heart. Because of his extreme innocence this discovery induces a state of shocked paralysis. He can do nothing but dwell in morbid horror upon the disease which is eating away his life. Hester's fatal flaw is literally branded upon his breast and Dimmesdale can do nothing except try to hide it with his hand. It is essential for Dimmesdale that he find the courage to fully acknowledge the dark lady and to accept his bond with her.

In the forest scene Dimmesdale comes close to acknowledging his links with Hester. This scene represents the emotive climax of Hester's story. It shows Hester boldly leading Dimmesdale into new realms of thought; it presents a glimpse of freedom and the possibility of a new beginning; and above all it marks the rejection of 'these iron men and their opinions'. Hester's strength, independence, and force of character are summoned to Dimmesdale's aid. It is here that she reveals the depth of her love, and the reader is made to share the hopes and frustrations of the scarlet woman through the emotive impact of her words:

> Hast thou exhausted possibility in the failure of this one trial? Not so! The future is yet full of trial and success. There is happiness to be enjoyed! There is good to be done! Exchange this false life of thine for a true one... Preach! Write! Act! Do anything save to lie down and die!
>
> (p. 142)

Hester recovers her femininity in this scene and it is this which makes her so strong:

> By another impulse, she took off the formal cap that confined her hair; and down it fell upon her shoulders, dark and rich with at once a shadow and a light in its abundance, and imparting the charm of softness to her features....
>
> (p. 145)

The woman who led man into sin now offers her support, and nature smiles upon their union:

> Her sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty came back... All at once, as with a sudden smile of heaven; forth burst the sunshine.
>
> (p. 145)

Hawthorne makes it clear, however, that the kind of solution that Hester and Dimmesdale accept in the forest is not enough. Although their love is accorded 'the sympathy of nature' (p. 146), they have not accepted the social responsibilities it incurs. The nature which smiles upon the lovers is 'the wild free atmosphere of an unredeemed, unchristianized, lawless region' (p. 144), 'never subjugated by human law nor illumined by higher truth' (p. 146). For Dimmesdale a true acceptance of the dark lady and her flaw means public confession. For Hester it means continuing to bear the mark of her shame with fortitude. The 'natural' child and offspring of their union, the embodiment of truth, returns to the scene to darken their world with her frown.

The image of Pearl, standing at the brook-side, pointing imperiously at her mother's breast, is an eloquent expression of the whole tragedy and paradox of Hester's situation. Through sin, Hester has gained strength, courage and understanding. The sin itself was an expression of essentially good natural impulses. She plainly deserves the happiness she has tried to grasp. For Hawthorne, however, the consequences of sin are inescapable - Hester and Dimmesdale are united by the links of mutual crime and any future between them must be based upon a penitent acceptance of this fact. Between the lovers and their happiness stand Pearl and Chillingworth - both representative of

responsibilities which go beyond what Hester and Dimmesdale owe to each other. Pearl forces Hester to 'take up' her scarlet letter as if it were a cross (p. 151) and so foreshadows Hester's final voluntary acceptance of her burden and the insight of maturity that this implies.

It is tempting to look for a complete vindication of Hester and Dimmesdale within the forest scenes. For the first time in the novel our hero and heroine are actually happy, and we can entertain the possibility of the triumph of true love, or, alternatively, of transcendental freedom. Like the young couple in 'The Maypole of Merrymount', however, Hester and Dimmesdale are taught that love brings a susceptibility to sin and sorrow and a necessity for mutual responsibility and support. A happy outcome would have contradicted one of Hawthorne's simplest but most fundamental messages - that all men and women are sinners and that the brotherhood this implies is inescapable. Hawthorne's presentation of this theme, and his exploration of its consequences, works on several different levels of meaning in the novel. It informs his presentation of the community, of Hester and Dimmesdale as individuals, and as representatives of the American experience.

Hawthorne's main criticism of the Puritans is of their 'holier than thou attitudes'.[1] He exposes with blatant irony the hypocrisy and the injustice of their condemnation of Hester, from the very start of the tale. The notably unchristian sentiments voiced outside the prison door show that the community has little right to start throwing stones. The Puritan children, considered too 'pure' to play with Pearl, reveal an intolerance which provides a succinct parody of their elders:

> 'Behold, verily, there is the woman of the scarlet letter; and, of a truth, moreover, there is the

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1. See Joseph Schwartz, 'Three Aspects of Hawthorne's Puritanism', *NEQ*, 36 (1963), 192-208

> likeness of the scarlet letter running along by her side! Come, therefore, and let us fling mud at them!' (p. 75).

The Puritans must learn to look to their own hearts before condemning others, and likewise Hester and Dimmesdale must look inwards and be true to their own natures. For Dimmesdale, the inescapable responsibility is public confession. Within his frame of reference any other solution would be a lie - he cannot escape the nagging torment of his sin, personified in Chillingworth. His death neatly illustrates Hawthorne's theme, though its meaning is ironically disguised by the layers of possible meaning around it.[1] Whilst the spectators struggle to come up with a literal explanation of Dimmesdale's actions, the narrator slips in a wider interpretation which goes almost unnoticed:

> According to these highly respectable witnesses, the minister, conscious that he was dying...had made the manner of his death a parable, in order to impress on his admirers the mighty and mournful lesson, that, in the view of Infinite Purity, we are sinners all alike. (p. 183)

Ironically this is exactly what Dimmesdale's life and death have illustrated. For Dimmesdale, death was the only way to extract meaning from his sin.

Hester too must discover the meaning of her scarlet letter. If Dimmesdale's death illustrates the message 'we are sinners all alike', Hester's story goes a step forward and shows how to cope with this fact. To this end Hawthorne has her return to the settlement, years later, to resume her symbol and begin her 'penitence'. Unlike Georgiana, Beatrice, and even Dimmesdale, Hester does not have to die for her flaw. Instead, she makes the remainder of her life a 'parable', illustrating the good that may come from a resolute acceptance of sin. She makes the scarlet letter 'something to be sorrowed over and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence too' (p. 185). The mark of Eve becomes a tool

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1. Daniel G. Hoffman, *Form and Fable in American Fiction* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 175-76.

for redemption. It expresses Hester's sisterhood with all sinners and at the same time turns this 'sisterhood' into something meaningful:

> ...people brought all their sorrows and perplexities and besought her counsel, as one who had herself gone through a mighty trouble.
>
> (p. 185)

By the end of the novel Hester has achieved the status of a prophetess. She has gained wisdom enough to admit and understand both her own shortcomings and the shortcomings of society. She sees the injustices of woman's position in society and predicts the eventual solution of the problem:

> She assured them, too, of her firm belief, that, at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness.
>
> (p. 186)

At this point, though humbled by sin, Hester presents a figure of mythical proportions and as such the meaning of her 'parable' stretches far beyond its New England context. The problem of 'the whole relation between man and woman', was not a simple collation of feminist issues for Hawthorne, but rather a paradox his country inherited from Adam, and which he embodied in this New England Eve.

Among the several interpretations of Hester's scarlet 'A' are the associations of A with America and with the mark of Adam. Within the context of the novel's New England setting these associations become particularly significant. The exploration of man's attempts to set up a regenerative society is a theme which recurs throughout Hawthorne's tales and romances. It is present in tales like 'The Maypole of Merrymount'. 'The Gentle boy', and 'The Shaker Bridal'; it is central to *The Blithedale Romance*, and it is likewise an important theme in *The Scarlet Letter*. According to A.N. Kaul it is 'the

American theme of exodus: a determined band of people separating from a corrupt society to form a regenerate community, and expecting thereby to light the beacon flame of new hope for the rest of the world'.[1]

Hawthorne portrays his Utopian communities as inevitably subject to the same problems they left behind. At the core is the 'unsure ground' on which is based 'the whole relation between man and woman'. The ground is unsure because of the ambiguous promise that woman represents. Hester, for all her capacity to promote love, faith, and joy, in fact destroys the two men in her life. She is another Eve, whose sexuality brings havoc to the Puritans' New Eden. At the same time, however, she is a productive, creative force in her society; she is something the Puritans should not repress - something which must be admitted for society to grow and mature.

The 'fluidity of meaning'[2] which is characteristic of Hawthorne's symbolic method allows him to fuse social and spiritual concerns in the figure of Hester. She is on one level indicative of the problem of the individual in the community. As a rebel and as a woman she poses quite a threat to her society. There is no place for her within the Puritan scheme of things or within American society as Hawthorne knew it. Trapped in a loveless marriage with her sinister scientist since youth, she is persecuted relentlessly by those around her for breaking the rules and following the dictates of her heart. Law and circumstance conflict directly with the individual's natural impulses, creating an unjust impasse, from which Hawthorne can see no way out other than a divine revelation in 'Heaven's own time'.

On the spiritual level, Hester shows that America must admit the dark lady, her scarlet letter, and what they represent. The one moral

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1. Kaul, p. 146.
2. Hoffman, p. 172.

Hawthorne feels safe to draw is 'Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!' (p. 183). Hester as an individual learns to come to terms with her scarlet letter and eventually forces the community to do the same. This is her triumph and her message. Hawthorne seems to be saying that America, too, must learn to accept its dark side. It must admit the wildness embodied in the landscape and its Indians and the passion embodied in Hester. The 'fatal flaw' is a universal fact of life, but as soon as we accept this universality its effect is forestalled.

CHAPTER FOUR

ZENOBIA AND PRISCILLA

In *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne once again uses 'the American theme of exodus'[1] as a significant setting for his tale. Although based upon the contemporary 'Brook Farm', Blithedale is in essence a perennial utopia, doomed for the same reasons that all such attempts to remould society are doomed, and yet expressive of all man's higher qualities and of a dream particularly close to American hearts. Blithedale presents in miniature another version of the American Experiment. Hawthorne emphasizes its parallels with its Puritan past:

> Our Sundays, at Blithedale, were not ordinarily kept with such rich observance as might have befitted the descendants of the Pilgrims, whose high enterprise, as we sometimes flattered ourselves, we had taken up...[2]

and draws upon the same elemental combination of character types which forged the world of *The Scarlet Letter* and which informs all of Hawthorne's representatives of human society.

Central to Blithedale is the figure of woman. Initially she is 'Queen Zenobia', 'the first comer' (p. 15) and the emotional heart of the enterprise. Later, a paler version of womanhood joins her by the hearth and the two form a focal paradox at the core of the community. Grouped in various positions around these two, Hawthorne places his Iron man, his wizard, and his alienated, ineffectual artist-hero. These are the men and women who are eventually supposed to achieve 'the blessed state of brotherhood and sisterhood' (p. 13) which is the aim of Blithedale. They form the 'society' which Hawthorne presents and they embody its inevitable disunity. 'Brotherhood and sisterhood' are an impossibility whilst the relations between the sexes are unsure,

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1. Kaul, p. 146.

2. *The Blithedale Romance*, ed. Seymour Gross and Rosalie Murphy (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1978), p. 108. All further references to this work appear in the text.

whilst one sex is able to exploit the other, and whilst mistrust and misunderstanding are the inevitable accompaniments of passion.

Although ostensibly a story about a regenerative community, *The Blithedale Romance* does not yield any characters who are really committed to the community's ideals. Zenobia is said to have joined the experiment 'partly in earnest - and, ...half in proud jest, or a kind of recklessness that had grown upon her' (p. 175); Priscilla joins to seek protection and to be near her sister; Hollingsworth is determined to use the project to achieve his own ends; and Coverdale, perhaps the most committed of all, maintains throughout the kind of detachment which will enable him to resume his former life with ease. The only other characters of enough importance to be named are the outsiders, Westervelt and Moodie, and the wisely skeptical rustics, Silas Foster and his wife. Whilst every member of this cast is of vital importance to the success or failure of Blithedale, they are all in some way or other out of place and at odds with the novel's environment. It gradually becomes apparent that there is something deeply wrong with human relationships which no amount of idealism can overcome; something which ironically is brought into stronger relief by the noble aspirations of the Blithedale community.

The character who seems capable of holding the community together or of shattering it to pieces is Zenobia. It is she who welcomes the reformers with 'something appropriate...to say to every individual' (p. 14); it is she who dispels doubts and fears by her entrance (p. 20), and it is she who seems to inspire and organize both work and play. In the end it is Zenobia's death which kills our narrator's interest and which signals the complete disintegration of the project. Originally the source of inspiration, extending a soft warm hand of welcome (p. 14) she comes to symbolize its death, with a hand as 'cold as a veritable

piece of snow' (p. 209).

Zenobia - womanliness incarnate - is thus at the centre of the Blithedale problem. It is the shift in the way the others relate to her that marks the breakdown of human relationships. She represents something the others cannot come to terms with, something they reject in favour of a shadow, a pale reflection of her glory. Utopia breaks down primarily because man has not yet learned how to incorporate the real figure of woman into his world. Just as Coverdale struggles to compress Zenobia into his pages so even Blithedale cannot provide her with space and breadth enough to live.

Everything we know about Zenobia is learnt through Coverdale - a dubious narrator at best, one who always misses the crucial scene, who fails in sympathy, and by implication in understanding. Nevertheless through his descriptions and his all too human reactions a very clear, strong image of Zenobia emerges - an image which is proof against the narrator's hostility and which can rise above his judgement.

Zenobia's power has been well documented. Henry James called her 'the nearest approach that Hawthorne has made to the complete creation of a *person*'.[1] D.H. Lawrence's habitual word for her is 'superb',[2] and W.D. Howells claimed that 'a certain kind of New England woman... has never been so clearly seen or boldly shown as in Zenobia'.[3] According to Irving Howe 'Zenobia rules the book...For she alone is open in her sexuality'.[4] Yet despite such praise, a tendency in criticism to view Coverdale as a mere spokesman for Hawthorne's opinions has led

1. Henry James, *Hawthorne*, ed. John Morley (London: Macmillan and Co., 1879), p. 134.

2. D.H. Lawrence, *The Symbolic Meaning*, ed. Armin Arnold (Arundel: Centaur Press, Ltd., 1962), pp. 154-70.

3. Howells, p. 179.

4. Irving Howe, 'Hawthorne: Pastoral and Politics' in *The Blithedale Romance*, ed. Seymour Gross and Rosalie Murphy (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1978), p. 293.

many to view Zenobia as the product of some sort of conflict within Hawthorne himself. He is supposed to feel an unwilling attraction towards her so that 'he wants to destroy the dark lady at the same time that he wants to glorify her'.[1] Like Beatrice and Hester, Zenobia is meant to be a success in spite of her creator; Coverdale's ambivalent reaction is Hawthorne's,[2] and the triumph of Priscilla is some sort of personal retreat:

> Hawthorne/Coverdale has created a new woman whose vitality makes her a real person, not a doll, yet he rejects her for Sophia/Priscilla. [3]

Such interpretations, however, underestimate Hawthorne's skill at characterization and neglect many of the implications of the novel's symbolic pattern. Coverdale is a complex creation, quite distinct from the author, and reminiscent of many other young heroes, particularly Giovanni in 'Rappaccini's daughter'. He is a man who fails to find happiness, and this failure is firmly linked to his attitude towards the women of the tale. Coverdale's ambivalence is one of Hawthorne's masterstrokes. It confirms Zenobia's power to disturb and at the same time forces us to question Coverdale's judgements at every step. We are obliged to pay close attention to symbolic suggestion, whilst also acknowledging Zenobia's reality.

Zenobia follows in the tradition of Beatrice and Hester by conforming to the dark, exotic, and passionate formula of the romantic lady. She also inherits their ability to transcend the stereotype and to expose its inadequacy. Zenobia differs from her predecessors in that she is a decidedly modern woman - a literary lady and an

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1. Philip Rahv, 'The Dark Lady of Salem', *Partisan Review* 8(1941), 362-81, rpt. *The Blithedale Romance*, ed. Seymour Gross and Rosalie Murphy (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1978), p. 338.

2. Morton Cronin, 'Hawthorne on Romantic Love and the Status of Women', *PMLA*, 69(1954), 89-98, 91

3. Judith Fryer, *The Faces of Eve: Woman in the Nineteenth Century American Novel* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), p. 218.

advocate of women's rights. As an exotic blue-stocking Zenobia is a complex figure who consciously adopts many roles. The inevitable explosive conflicts which develop between the different aspects of Zenobia's character and the various roles she has to play dictate her destiny. She is a remarkable woman, doomed to 'bruise herself against the narrow limitations of her sex'.

Zenobia is first introduced through the mysterious conversation between Coverdale and Moodie. We learn that her name is a mask 'like the white drapery of the Veiled Lady, only a little more transparent' (p. 8). Already Zenobia has achieved the status of a legend - she is the type of person that the Miles Coverdales of this world continually gossip about, and obviously needs the protection of her pseudonym. Whilst her name might resemble the veil, her nature is free and open - perhaps too open for her own good and certainly too much so for Coverdale's equilibrium. She bids the dreamers welcome with a 'fine, frank, mellow voice' (p. 4). She extends her hand and smiles a smile which 'beamed warmth upon us all' (p. 15). Every inch the gracious hostess, Zenobia looms larger than life and presents a figure which overwhelms the minor poet, makes him blush, and conjures images which are hardly 'decorous'.

The impact of Zenobia's figure gains its tremendous force and reality from Coverdale's markedly sensual description. Her 'mellow, almost broad laugh' is 'most delectable to hear' (p. 16), her touch is 'very soft and warm' (p. 14), the smell of her flower lingers in the poet's memory, and at the sight of her white shoulder Coverdale reflects:

> It struck me as a great piece of good-fortune
> that there should be just that glimpse.
> (p. 15)

Zenobia's appeal to the senses is inescapable. There is even something

in the way she moves which sends Coverdale into ecstasies. She has a 'noble and beautiful motion which characterized her as much as any other personal charm':

> Not one woman in a thousand could move so admirably as Zenobia. Many women can sit gracefully; and a few, perhaps, can assume a series of graceful positions. But natural movement is the result and expression of the whole being and cannot be well and nobly performed, unless responsive to something in the character.
> (p. 144)

Although somewhat stunned by her sexuality, Coverdale initially reacts positively to Zenobia, speaking in terms of her warmth, generosity and richness. The main thing that strikes him about this literary lady is that she is unmistakably a woman. She possesses an overflowing 'bloom, health, and vigor' which is preferable to the 'softness and delicacy' found in women everywhere (p. 15), and she exudes an influence 'such as we might suppose to come from Eve' - something which has been 'refined away out of the feminine system' (p. 17). When later Coverdale opts for the refined, sickly product of society, his attitude shows up as some kind of retreat. Zenobia's richness proves too much for him, so that where once he sees Zenobia as having a 'noble courage...scorning the petty restraints which take the life and colour out of other women's conversation' (p. 17), he later takes a voyeuristic pleasure in trying to establish her as a 'woman with a past'.

Even in his first stage of frank admiration, Coverdale, the minor poet, cannot help but try to categorize Zenobia; he imagines her as Eve, in the garb of Eden (pp. 16-17), and as Pandora 'fresh from Vulcan's workshop' (p. 23). When stricken with a fever, however, Coverdale's imagination runs riot. He fancies that Zenobia is an enchantress with a preternatural flower in her hair, and becomes obsessed with the question of her marriage. Whilst she nurses and entertains the invalid, he is busy thinking:

> 'Zenobia is a wife! Zenobia has lived, and loved! There is no folded petal, no latent dew drop, in this perfectly developed rose!'
>
> (p. 44)

Coverdale begins to reveal a hint of antagonism towards her, partly because her sensuality overpowers him:

> I know not well how to express, that the native glow of colouring in her cheeks, and even the flesh-warmth over her round arms, and what was visible of her full bust - in a word, her womanliness incarnated - compelled me sometimes to close my eyes...
>
> (p. 41)

and partly because he feels cheated by the possibility that she has 'lived and loved':

> A bachelor always feels himself defrauded, when he knows, or suspects, that any woman of his acquaintance has given herself away.
>
> (p. 44)

Zenobia in turns senses Coverdale's attitude and questions his motives (p. 44). Coverdale has only himself to blame if Zenobia learns to hide her secrets from him, yet her mystery makes him peevish and ungrateful and this tone comes to dominate his presentation of her:

> I most ungratefully began to wish that she would let me alone. Then, too her gruel was very wretched stuff....Why could not she have allowed one of the other women to take the gruel in charge?
>
> (p. 45)

It is little wonder that Coverdale pays scant attention to Zenobia's intellect. Her conversation adds 'several gratuitous throbs to his pulse' (p. 40) and her stories are enthralling, but Coverdale is quick to denigrate. His attitude to Zenobia's mind differs little from his attitude to her body. He admires her intelligence, but also finds it threatening. His praise is invariably accompanied by criticism:

> She was made...for a stump-oratress. I recognized no severe culture in Zenobia; her mind was full of

> weeds. It startled me, sometimes, in my state of moral, as well as bodily faint-heartedness, to observe the hardihood of her philosophy; she made no scruple of oversetting all human institutions, and scattering them as a breeze from her fan. A female reformer... has an instinctive sense of where the life lies, and is inclined to aim directly at that spot. Especially the relation between the sexes is naturally among the earliest to attract her notice.
>
> (p. 41)

Despite his professed feminism Coverdale is quite intimidated by the idea of an attack upon 'the relation between the sexes'. It has often been argued that Hawthorne shared this fear,[1] yet it is an inescapable fact that, like the female reformers, he too aims directly at the 'spot' - where the life lies. Zenobia's story shows that there is undeniably something wrong between the sexes, and Coverdale is an integral part of that wrong.

Zenobia's 'talisman' is the exotic flower she wears in her hair. It follows the tradition of the pink ribbons and the birthmark, but, like the scarlet letter, is much more complex than these early symbols. Like its predecessors its most obvious task is to stand for Zenobia's sexuality. It is

> a hot-house flower - an outlandish flower - a flower of the tropics, such as appeared to have sprung passionately out of a soil, the very weeds of which would be fervid and spicy.
>
> (p. 41)

It is easy to see why the flower so haunts Coverdale's imagination, yet even he sees that it is also representative of Zenobia's entire being. The flower is rare, fresh and luxuriant (p. 15), it always 'assimilated its richness to the rich beauty of the woman', and it is so much an integral part of her appearance that each new flower seems to have been created by Nature for 'the one purpose of adorning Zenobia's head' (p. 42). According to Coverdale:

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1. For example, Cronin, p. 96.

> this favorite ornament was actually a subtile expression of Zenobia's chracter.
>
> (p. 42)

Moreover it sums up her whole life, functioning as an epitaph even at the moment she is introduced:

> So brilliant, so rare, so costly as it must have been, and yet enduring for only a day.
>
> (p. 15)

Zenobia is described in terms of flower imagery, throughout *The Blithedale Romance*. She is a 'perfectly developed rose' (p. 44), she is 'the freshest and rosiest woman of a thousand' (pp. 42-3), she is a 'bright, fair, rosy, beautiful woman' (p. 26) and it would have 'befitted the bounteous nature of this beautiful woman to scatter fresh flowers from her hand, and to revive faded ones by her touch' (p. 20). Always the perfect flower, in full bloom, Zenobia is by implication doomed to be shortlived. Her magnificent flower grows languid after 'being exposed to the fervency of the kitchen fire' (p. 20), and is carelessly cast aside. The action sums up Zenobia's fate and becomes an important motif throughout the tale. Zenobia is inextricably linked with the rejected flower. It is her 'fatal flaw'; a portent and an explanation of her fate.

There is yet another set of flower images in *The Blithedale Romance*; images which both link and contrast with those associated with Zenobia. These, of course, describe Priscilla and are so numerous that without them this pale maiden could hardly have substance at all. Priscilla is associated with budding, unopened flowers, with wildflowers, violets, wild vines and leaves. At Blithedale she 'kept budding and blossoming' (p. 67) and is decked out with 'rural buds and leaflets' (p. 54). Yet once she was like the violets and columbines of Eliot's Pulpit, 'sad and shadowy recluses...children of the sun who had never seen their father, but dwelt among damp mosses'

(p. 110). Priscilla shivers like 'birch-leaves' (p. 202) and is 'blown about like a leaf' (p. 158). She fades and droops (p. 116) when her sun (Hollingsworth) turns away from her, and she reminds Coverdale of 'plants that one sometimes observes doing their best to vegetate among the bricks of an enclosed court' (p. 47).

Priscilla's pale delicate beauty is constantly compared to Zenobia's bloom, but ironically it is the pale wild flower which is more likely to survive. The difference between the two is stressed at Zenobia's funeral:

> Thus, while we see that such a being responds to every breeze, with tremulous vibration, and imagine that she must be shattered by the first rude blast, we find her retaining her equilibrium amid shocks that might have overthrown many a sturdier frame.
> (p. 222)

Zenobia, raised in a hothouse, is inevitably snapped at the stem, whereas Priscilla, the wild flower, has learned to bend with the breeze.

For all the differences between Priscilla and Zenobia, however, they are very closely linked, literally and symbolically. They are sisters, after all, daughters of the same father, the one a pale shadow of the other. Symbolically their relationship is vitally important to the meaning of the tale.

When Coverdale is ill he fancies that the flower in Zenobia's hair is proof that she is 'a sister of the Veiled Lady'. There is a link being created here between Zenobia's flower and the figure of Priscilla, even though, as we have seen, Priscilla is not an exotic. Zenobia's treatment of Priscilla is couched in terms which echo the way she treated that first magnificent flower:

> She flung it on the floor, as unconcernedly as a village-girl would throw away a faded violet.
> (p. 20)

Priscilla is a 'faded violet' and Zenobia in her rustic dress adopts the persona of a 'village girl'.[1] Later when Hollingsworth and

1. Note Coverdale's comments on her death.

Zenobia ignore Priscilla, Coverdale repeats the motif:

> But as she appeared to be tossed aside by her other friends, or carelessly let fall, like a flower which they had done with, I could not resist the impulse to take just one peep beneath her folded petals.
> (p. 116)

Still later at the end of Moodie's story Coverdale exclaims:

> that very evening... - Priscilla - poor, pallid flower! - was either snatched from Zenobia's hand, or flung wilfully away!
> (p. 178)

Zenobia thus 'flings away' her sister as she would the flower in her hair. She takes her to the city and makes her 'as lovely as a flower' (p. 156) - once more a shimmering reflection of the jewelled flower in Zenobia's hair - and then casts her into the web of the wizard.

The logic of Hawthorne's symbols seems to indicate that Priscilla and the exotic flower are part of the same thing. Like Pearl, Priscilla is herself a symbol, and as Pearl is an alternative scarlet letter, so Priscilla is the reverse side of Zenobia's flower. The pale maiden is the dark lady's 'fatal flaw'. She is the myth which strangles the reality; a blight and a weed which destroys the perfect rose.

Zenobia's attempt to cast Priscilla away fails miserably. To start with, the pale flower is also a 'gentle parasite' (p. 114) which like a vine gains its strength at the expense of the sturdy tree. Priscilla's love is Zenobia's doom:

> [it] twined itself perseveringly around this unseen sister; as a grape-vine might strive to clamber out of a gloomy hollow among the rocks, and embrace a young tree, standing in the sunny warmth above.
> (p. 171)

Her very weakness is her strength. Her 'impalpable grace' lies 'singularly between disease and beauty' (p. 94). Both Hollingsworth and Coverdale are drawn towards her 'pleasant weakness' (p. 69), they reject Zenobia's 'native strength' (p. 74), fostering the disease which kills the stem.

Priscilla is 'the type of womanhood, such as man has spent centuries in making it' (p. 133). She is an image Zenobia cannot shake off - the diseased, veiled, bodiless figure of woman which passively draws the life and substance out of existence. She is a snow image which will melt away at Zenobia's feet 'in a pool of ice cold water' sentencing her to 'death with a pair of wet slippers' (p. 31).

Zenobia is instinctively aware of the threat posed by Priscilla from the moment they meet. She expresses this through the 'weed of evil odor' which she slips amongst Priscilla's May Queen flowers (p. 54), and through her ambivalent attitude towards the girl. She does not realize how closely she is related to this figure until she tries to cast her off. When she does, she becomes a witch and a sorceress (p. 197) on 'trial' for her life in front of Judge Coverdale and Judge Hollingsworth. The men 'judge and condemn her, unheard, and then tell her to go free without a sentence' (p. 198). Zenobia is condemned for rejecting an ideal which would have suffocated her, and the men sentence themselves to safe, hollow, empty lives.

Although drawn to represent an 'ideal' of womanhood, Priscilla is far from being Hawthorne's ideal. Rather, as Nina Baym points out, she exposes in her two roles of exploited seamstress and etherealized veiled lady all the hypocrisies of the ideal:

> While real women are abused, an ideal of woman is exalted; the ideal conceals the abuse, and its unnaturalness further abuses women.[1]

Priscilla is totally a product of her society. She has no will of her own, but is moulded and manipulated by those around her. She is bodiless and characterless - even Coverdale admits at one stage that he cares for her simply because of the 'fancywork' with which he has decked her out, and 'not for her realities' (p. 94). Priscilla is

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1. Nina Baym, 'Hawthorne's Women: The Tyranny of Social Myths', *Centennial Review*, 15 (1971), 264.

loved precisely because she is a pale submissive victim. The men enjoy her weakness:

> Yet everybody was kind to Priscilla; everybody loved her...everybody would have given her half of his last crust, or the bigger share of his plum-cake. These were pretty certain indications that we were all conscious of a pleasant weakness in the girl...
> (p. 69)

and bask in her worship:

> ...he had a still more exquisite enjoyment of Priscilla's silent sympathy with his purposes, so unalloyed with criticism, and therefore more grateful than any intellectual approbation....
> (p. 73)

Her character is perfectly consistent with her function as an emblem.

Both women give their hearts to Hollingsworth, an action 'like casting a flower into a sepulchre' (pp. 93-4), but for Priscilla, the unthinking image of womanhood, there is no danger of destruction. She may be used and abused, 'blown about like a leaf' (p. 158), yet she is never really touched by events. Rather it is Zenobia, the thinking female, who is crushed and bruised at every turn. Priscilla finds a 'veiled happiness' (p. 223) within the tomb of Hollingsworth's heart whereas Zenobia has thrown her heart into an earthly grave. It is Zenobia who has always been the victim, a fact she tries to dramatize by the manner of her death.

Ironically Zenobia is destroyed because no one recognizes her vulnerability. The men have categorized the two women and treat them accordingly. Coverdale worries that Hollingsworth might crush 'the tender rosebud' of Priscilla's heart within his grasp, and sees 'no occasion' to give himself trouble over Zenobia (p. 74). He envisions the women in classic roles - Zenobia as the 'belle empoisonneuse' with 'the exceedingly sharp bodkin' or 'the ratsbane' (p. 73), and Priscilla as the 'perfectly modest, delicate and virginlike' heroine (p. 72). Hollingsworth, though swayed primarily by pecuniary motives, does

prefer Priscilla's gentle adoration to Zenobia's companionship, and when Zenobia is no longer wealthy he casts her aside without a qualm. Moodie prefers the daughter of his 'calamity' to the 'brilliant child of his prosperity' (p. 178), and Westervelt, though less enamoured of Priscilla, is incapable of appreciating the human being beneath Zenobia's glittering surface.

Like Beatrice Rappaccini, Zenobia is betrayed by her appearance. The men are dazzled by the exotic flower and the associations it conjures to the extent that they fail to recognize the angelic side of her nature. Beatrice and Zenobia both commit suicide because man will not allow them to exist. Beatrice's cry of anguish predicts Zenobia's case:

> 'though my body be nourished with poison, my spirit is God's creature, and craves love as its daily food.'[1]

Like Beatrice, Zenobia inherits her poison from the evil 'scientist' of the tale, Westervelt:

> Whatever stain Zenobia had, was caught from him; nor does it seldom happen that a character of admirable qualities loses its better life, because the atmosphere, that should sustain it, is rendered poisonous by such breath as this man mingled with Zenobia's.
>
> (p. 222)

Westervelt's attitude to Zenobia's death again echoes Rappaccini. He cannot see that Zenobia has anything to complain of; if she had hearkened to his counsels she might have enjoyed a brilliant lifetime (pp. 221-22), acting out the temptress role and wielding her poisonous power.

Like so many of Hawthorne's men, Coverdale and Hollingsworth prefer to view women in terms of light and dark; hence Priscilla and Zenobia become angel and monster. Hawthorne, however, continually

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1. 'Rappaccini's Daughter', in *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 10, p. 125.

points to the fact that this distinction is wholly misleading. Priscilla has her sinister side[1] and Zenobia is generous, loving, and capable of great good. The fact that Priscilla is chosen instead of Zenobia leaves Hollingsworth a broken shell of a man, and Coverdale an ineffectual, ageing dilletante. Hollingsworth's ideal woman is clearly an unnatural choice. She is nothing but a parasite, a mere reflection of man's 'more powerful existence' (p. 44). She sits at his feet drawing man down rather than uplifting him. Even Coverdale understands that Hollingsworth's vision of the ideal woman is an affirmation of the 'intensity of masculine egotism':

> It centred everything in itself and deprived woman of her very soul, her inexpressible and unfathomable all, to make it a mere incident in the great sum of man.
> (p. 114)

The Priscilla myth thus destroys both man and woman. It leaves woman without a soul, and man without a mate:

> 'man...is never content, unless he can degrade himself by stooping towards what he loves. In denying us our rights, he betrays even more blindness to his own interests, than profligate disregard of ours!'
> (p. 133)

Zenobia is the only character who understands the full implications of Hollingsworth's choice - Coverdale, our narrator, would have made the same choice himself. She alone knows that he has 'flung away what would have served him better than the poor pale flower he kept' (pp. 206-7), and she is able to prophesy his melancholy destiny. Zenobia knowingly uses the symbols of the story through her actions and her words; she understands and sees through Coverdale, Hollingsworth, Westervelt, and Priscilla, and despite Coverdale's denigration she emerges as the most clear-sighted character in the book. Primarily

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1. See Allan Lefcowitz and Barbara Lefcowitz, 'Some Rents in the Veil: New Light on Priscilla and Zenobia', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 21 (1966), 263-75, for analysis of Priscilla as prostitute.

she is clear-sighted because she understands herself, she recognizes her faults and mistakes, and she listens to the dictates of her heart. Zenobia is thus central to the story in a two-fold sense. She articulates its meaning, where Coverdale can only grope for answers, and she embodies its meaning through her life and death. Zenobia in fact commissions the 'ballad' (p. 206) though fully aware of Coverdale's limitations, and it is primarily through his attitude to her that his limitations are revealed.[1]

Zenobia is given the opportunity to elucidate the meaning of the tale, presumably without Coverdale's interference, through her legend of 'the Silvery Veil'. The story applies particularly to Coverdale and Hollingsworth; it is about attitudes to the figure of woman, and it expresses a familiar Hawthorne comment upon the problem of relationships. The subject of the story is the mystery of the Veiled Lady. Everyone wants to know who she is. Does the veil cover 'the most beautiful countenance in the world', or is it a 'hideous and horrible' face, a skeleton or a Medusa? (p. 102). Woman is presented as a vague mythical creature and man is faced with the question: angel or demon? In Hawthorne this is always a trick question. If Theodore accepts the Veiled Lady as woman, without fear or reservation, she will be his angel. If he denies her and lifts the veil in 'scornful scepticism', she will haunt him as a demon. Theodore fails to meet the challenge and the Veiled Lady becomes his evil fate. In the same way Hollingsworth is haunted by the figure of Zenobia and Coverdale pines for a shadow.

The veil, as we have seen in 'The Minister's Black Veil',

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1. Nina Baym discusses Coverdale as incapable of 'mature artistry' because he cannot 'acknowledge passion as an element of human character', in '*The Blithedale Romance*: A Radical Reading', *JEGP* 67 (1968), rpt. *The Blithedale Romance*, Norton Critical Edition, p. 355.

represents the barriers of mystery people place between one another - in this case specifically between man and woman. It is representative of all the myths and presuppositions which keep women in bondage and which prevent men and women from facing one another honestly and without fear. As the Veiled Lady and 'the type of womanhood, such as man has spent centuries in making it' (p. 113), Priscilla is Zenobia's evil fate:

> 'In love, in wordly fortune, in all your pursuit of happiness, she is doomed to fling a blight over your prospects.'
>
> (p. 107)

There is no escape for Zenobia; she is doomed if she tries to cast off the ideal, yet she will suffocate if she does not. Her position as nineteenth century woman is a 'genuine tragedy'. It is a 'woman's doom' and she has 'deserved it like a woman' (p. 206).

On the eve of her death Zenobia shows a full awareness of the paradox of her position. She knows that as the 'hereditary bond-slave' that she is, she has been 'false to the whole circle of good, in my reckless truth to the little good I saw before me' (p. 201). She has betrayed womanhood (Priscilla) in the very act of defending her own, and she is about to die for a man who is 'a cold, heartless, self-beginning, and self-ending piece of mechanism!' (p. 201). In a sense Zenobia does die 'merely because love had gone against her', and this is:

> ...a miserable wrong - the result, like so many others, of masculine egotism - that the success or failure of woman's existence should be made to depend wholly on the affections, and on one species of affection.
>
> (p. 222)

But there is more to her suicide than Coverdale can grasp. Zenobia has learned through bitter experience that it is impossible for her to be true to herself. The world has no place for her:

> 'the whole universe, her own sex and yours, and Providence, or Destiny, to boot, make common cause against the woman who swerves one hair's breadth out of the beaten track.'
>
> (p. 206)

and she in turn can find no foothold or place except in death:

> 'Yes: and add, (for I may as well own it, now) that, with that one hair's breadth, she goes all astray, and never sees the world in its true aspect, afterwards!'
>
> (p. 206)

Without Zenobia and what she represents, Blithedale can never achieve its aims. Hawthorne again illustrates the conviction found in 'Earth's Holocaust' that no attempt to reform the world can ever succeed unless we first reform the heart:

> The Heart - the Heart - there was the little yet boundless sphere, wherein existed the original wrong, of which the crime and misery of this outward world were merely types. Purify that inner sphere; and the many shapes that haunt the outward...will turn to shadowy phantoms...[1]

The reformation of the heart involves more than simply throwing open the avenues of the world 'to the passport of a woman's bleeding heart' (p. 222), it means accepting woman as she is; lifting the veil and looking her in the face. Hollingsworth scorns Zenobia for holding a woman's view:

> 'a woman's, whose whole sphere of action is in the heart, and who can conceive of no higher nor wider one!'
>
> (p. 202)

For Hawthorne, however, there is no higher or wider sphere. Zenobia's realm is the heart. She stands at the heart of the community, holding the 'silken' bands (p. 179) of 'intertwined heart-strings' (p. 199) which tie the reformers together. By rejecting her they deny the heart, and 'the blessed state of brotherhood and sisterhood' (p. 13) at which they aimed becomes no more than a dream.

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1. 'Earth's Holocaust', *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 10, p. 404.

CHAPTER FIVE

MIRIAM AND HILDA

Hawthorne's last published romance, *The Marble Faun*, returns to the home of Beatrice Rappaccini, and introduces two young expatriate Americans to the scene. The whole of Italy now serves as Rappaccini's garden, and it is in Rome, the ancient centre of civilization, that the innocent young Italian, Donatello, absorbs the poison of the dark, exotic temptress, Miriam. Kenyon and Hilda, the modern children of the Puritans, are forced to witness and to play a part in this ancient tale; America is again confronted with man's heritage of sin, and again the figure of woman is at the heart of the problem.

Like *The Blithedale Romance*, *The Marble Faun* is concerned with just four main characters, with various representatives of the past, of authority, and of heaven and hell lurking in the background. In the later work, however, we are presented with two contrasting couples. Instead of forming a circle around the central feminine presence, the characters pursue complementary and contrasting paths. Each relationship informs the other, and Hawthorne attempts to strike some sort of balance between both maidens, dark, and fair. Both have a significant representative function, and both are granted a measure of individual humanity.

Of all Hawthorne's heroines, Miriam and Hilda appear to conform most fully to the familiar dark/fair stereotypes. Hawthorne uses the Italian setting and the mechanics of his story to exploit all the myths of feminine good and evil to the utmost. In appearance and temperament the women are perfectly complementary. Miriam is exceedingly beautiful. She has 'dark eyes, into which you might look as deeply as your glance could go, and still be conscious of a depth that you had not sounded'.[1] She has 'black, abundant hair...a dark glory such as

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1. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, Afterword Murray Krieger (contd)

crowns no Christian maiden's head' (p. 43), and she is characterized by the changeableness of her expression - from sadness to sunshine and back again in the space of a moment. Hilda is pretty 'in our native New England style', with 'light brown ringlets' and a 'feminine and kindly face' (p. 52). She can become 'beautiful and striking' according to her 'inward thought' so that 'it really seemed as if Hilda were only visible by the sunshine of her soul' (p. 52). Whereas Miriam is 'impressible and impulsive' (p. 66) and prone to 'broadening melancholy ...petulance and moody passion' (p. 34), Hilda is 'endowed with a mild cheerfulness of temper, not overflowing with animal spirits, but never long despondent' (p. 53).

Miriam's dynamic nature is expressed in her art. She is a creative force, determined to place her own impressions of life on canvas. Hilda, however, prefers to worship the work of her male counterparts. She is a copyist - a selfless devotee of the Old Masters, committed only to the propagation of their works. Miriam is proud of her originality; Hilda chooses only to reflect the glory of others.

The differences between the two are closely associated with their birth. Hilda's background is simple and familiar; she is the American 'girl next door'. Miriam is of exotic stock. She has a 'certain rich Oriental character in her face' (p. 24) and we learn towards the end of the romance, that she is 'from English parentage, on the mother's side, but with a vein, likewise, of Jewish blood' and that she is connected through her father 'with one of those few princely families of southern Italy which still retain great wealth and influence' (p. 308).

Miriam's blood connects her with the figure of woman as she has appeared from the dawn of time. She is an Old Testament beauty, a Rachel, a Judith, and ultimately Eve. Hilda, on the other hand, is

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(contd) (New York: Signet Classics, The New American Library, Inc., 1961), p. 42. All further references to this work appear in the text.

a modern girl, untouched by the past. She looks at humanity with 'angel's eyes', and wanders through a corrupt world 'without a suspicion or a shadow upon the snowy whiteness of her fame' (p. 47). She is constantly associated with the Virgin Mary, whose shrine she tends, but is nevertheless 'a daughter of the Puritans' (p. 46). With her white dress, her doves, and her tower, Hilda is the ideal of angelic womanhood. Miriam is the temptress, haunted by the shadow of an ancient crime.

The men of *The Marble Faun* are composite creations, possessing attributes of several of Hawthorne's earlier heroes. Kenyon is successor to both Coverdale and Hollingsworth. He is the young artist who comes closest to the narrative voice. Like Coverdale he is in love with the pure, white maiden and, like Coverdale, his powers of sympathy and artistic creation are limited by this preference. Kenyon is also, however, a 'man of marble' (p. 80), as capable of stern judgement and opinions as any of his Puritan ancestors. Donatello on the other hand has an 'elastic temperament' (p. 66). He is characterized by his 'ever-varying activity' of movement and throughout the novel he is the character who changes and grows, transmuted from innocence to wisdom, from child to man.

The third masculine influence in the tale is Miriam's model - another Rappaccini, Chillingworth or Westervelt - who materializes out of the past to haunt his victim. The model is a man-demon, 'the old pagan phantom...who sought to betray the blessed saints' (p. 30). His humanity is skilfully obscured by the mystery and myth which surround him. In all the stories that circulate about him he is an evil spirit, the spectre of the catacomb, a man without physical substance, but with a horrific potency. He is a 'dusky, death-scented apparition' whose shadow is 'always flung into the light which Miriam diffused

around her' (p. 34).

Miriam, Hilda, Kenyon and Donatello lead a free, untrammelled life in Rome until Miriam's mysterious encounter with the 'model' in the catacombs. This man subsequently haunts her paintings and her life. He has some strange hold over her, and although he assumes the guise of an ordinary vagrant artist's model, his identity is a mystery which provokes endless rumour and speculation. Donatello, the Count of Monti Beni, is in love with Miriam, and his childlike passion breeds an intense hatred for the stranger. In a moment of frenzy Donatello responds to the agony in Miriam's eyes by murdering the model, and henceforth the story explores the impact of this action on the lives and relationships of the four young friends.

The plot re-enacts a familiar story. Donatello, an Italian Adam, the unsophisticated pagan embodiment of man before the fall, comes into the sphere of a beautiful Eve, stained by the shadow of an ancestral demon. The faun, by attempting to destroy the spectre of evil, is drawn into sin and sorrow. He is then faced with the choice of rejecting the dark lady and what she represents, or of recognizing their common guilt and embracing the promise of growth and regeneration she offers.

Unlike Giovanni, Aylmer, or Goodman Brown, Donatello learns to accept his poisoned mate and hence gains in wisdom, intelligence, and sensitivity. Miriam presents the same ambiguous promise of sorrow and joy we have seen in Georgiana, Faith, Beatrice, Hester, and Zenobia, but at last she has found a mate capable of appreciating her message. The dark lady's promise is fulfilled, and thus Hawthorne is able to devote more of the story to an examination of the nineteenth century angel and the ramifications of her role. Although Miriam is a much more appealing character than Hilda, in *The Marble Faun* the dark lady

does not totally engulf her pale shadow. Hilda is a distinctly separate character - a modern girl who has to come to terms with Miriam's age-old story.

Most commentators are of the opinion that Hilda is Hawthorne's ultimate ideal, based upon his wife, Sophia, and embodying all the finest attributes of womanhood. Any defects in her character are supposed to be Hawthorne's reluctant, or even subconsious concessions to artistic truth, so that if Hilda appears to be less than perfect, she does so in spite of her creator. In his introduction to the Centenary edition of *The Marble Faun* C.M. Simpson says:

> Hilda's moral rigour, the priggishness of which Hawthorne surely underestimated, is a refraction of Sophia, despite her disclaimers [1]

and, according to F.O. Matthiessen, Hawthorne's intention was to make Kenyon and Hilda a very real, attractive couple:

> In his treatment of their relationship Hawthorne has obviously interwoven many strands of his own relations with his wife; but the unintended impression of self-righteousness and priggishness that exudes from these characters brings to the fore some extreme limitations of the standards that Hawthorne took for granted. [2]

Hyatt Waggoner describes Hilda as 'at once a nineteenth century stereotype and Hawthorne's tribute to Sophia'[3] and Peter D. Zivkovic champions Miriam at the expense of Hawthorne's artistic control:

> Later Miriam is completely aware that Hilda's purity is unreal, and evil and pities her for all that. And here she sees better than does Hawthorne.[4]

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1. C.M. Simpson, 'Introduction to *The Marble Faun*', *The Marble Faun*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 4, p. xxxvii.

2. F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), p. 356.

3. Hyatt H. Waggoner, *Hawthorne: A Critical Study*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), rpt. *Hawthorne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. A.N. Kaul, p. 173.

4. Peter D. Zivkovic, 'The Evil of the Isolated Intellect: Hilda in *The Marble Faun*', *The Merrill Studies in The Marble Faun*, ed. David B. Kesterton (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1971), p. 100.

When we examine Hawthorne's subtle manipulation of his symbols in this story, it is facile to suggest that he lacked control of his material, and given his consistent questioning of society's stereotyped images of womanhood, it is hardly credible that he should use the epitome of blonde purity as a tribute to his wife. Once again Hawthorne uses the stereotype to test its validity. He reveals some uncomfortable truths about this cherished ideal - truths which have been noted by nearly every critic of the work. Whilst Hawthorne may have regarded his wife as the nearest thing to divine womanhood this world could produce, he nevertheless presented the ideal as an impossible, inhuman myth, capable of great harm as well as good. Through Hilda he exposes its flaws and creates a figure whose very purity is her downfall. Unlike Priscilla, the soiled seamstress, Hilda is presented spotless and untouched by the sordid world around her. She is elevated beyond the realms of ordinary humanity and from this heightened perspective her relevance is assessed.

Hilda's character presents many difficulties simply because she is a perfect example of nineteenth century America's ideal woman. Whereas Priscilla's purity is undercut by images of disease and hidden destructiveness, Hilda is surrounded by doves. Everything about her is in perfect accord with the angel-maiden concept. She is a 'Christian girl' who pays honour to the 'idea of divine womanhood' (p. 46). The air about her tower so exhilarates her that she feels tempted to try her angel's wings:

> ...sometimes I feel half inclined to attempt a flight from the top of my tower, in the faith that I should float upward. (p. 46)

The 'confraternity of artists' calls Hilda 'the Dove' because her snowy white robe so closely resembles the plumage of her regular companions (p. 48). According to Kenyon 'her womanhood is of the ethereal type,

and incompatible with any shadow of darkness or of evil' (p. 98).

It is precisely because of the ethereal nature of Hilda's womanhood, however, that she fails as a human being. Hilda is 'utterly sufficient to herself', she 'does not dwell in our mortal atmosphere' (p. 93) and she deliberately rejects her sisterhood with the rest of erring humanity in an attempt to preserve her own purity. The ideal, when carried to its logical extreme becomes cold, isolated, and inhuman. Hilda's innocence ironically echoes the effect of Beatrice Cenci's awareness of sin and sorrow:

> It...removed this beautiful girl out of the sphere of humanity, and set her in a far-off region, the remoteness of which - while yet her face is so close before us - makes us shiver as at a specter.
>
> (p. 53)

Hilda is as unreal as Guido's Archangel Michael, whose expression of 'heavenly severity' displays a measure of 'pain, trouble, and disgust at being brought into contact with sin' (p. 137). Her innocence 'is like a sharp steel sword' (p. 55); she is an 'unruffled' victor over sin simply because she has never actually come to blows with it. Hilda steps daintly over the 'pit of blackness' (p. 122) which Miriam can perceive below; she shares the Archangel's 'dainty air of the first celestial society' (p. 138), and, like Michael, she tries to keep her robe spotless amidst a world of dirt and squalour, by ignoring reality.

But Hilda is unable to keep her skirts totally clean. She is forced to witness a reenactment of the original sin when her closest friend and confidante, Miriam, momentarily consents to the murder of the demon who haunts her. This is a crime Hilda cannot ignore. Miriam's 'death-struggle with evil' (p. 138) leaves her stained with blood, so that Hilda shrinks from her touch. Miriam questions Hilda's reactions in significant terms:

> '...is it some bloodstain on me, or death scent in my garments? They say that monstrous deformities sprout out of fiends, who once were lovely angels.

Do you perceive such in me already?'

(p. 155)

and Hilda replies in the same vein. She is determined to keep her 'garments' untouched:

> If I were one of God's angels, with a nature incapable of stain, and garments that never could be spotted, I would keep ever at your side, and try to lead you upward. But I am a poor lonely girl, whom God has set here in an evil world, and given her only a white robe, and bid her wear it back to Him, as white as when she put it on.
>
> (p. 154)

Hilda thinks that Miriam's magnetism will 'discolor' the 'pure, white atmosphere' through which she tries to perceive the world, and hence tries to disconnect herself from her friend. The damage has already been done, however. The stain works through its infection in numerous and subtle ways.

The Marble Faun contains a great number of references to spots and stains in connection with the two women of the tale. These are just one more version of the crimson stain we first met on Georgiana's cheek. This time the fatal flaw is the mark of real bloodshed, but it can nevertheless be as innocuous as Faith's pink ribbons, or as devastating as the scarlet letter.

Miriam is already under the shadow of a stain when first we meet her. According to the model it has been said that her 'white hand had once a crimson stain' (p. 76). Miriam replies that it had no stain until he had grasped it. The imaginary bloodstain is thus an ambiguous symbol, part of Miraim's mystery, and symbolic of some innocent involvement with crime:

> In their words, or in the breath that uttered them, there seemed to be an odor of guilt, and a scent of blood. Yet, how could we imagine that a stain of ensanguined crime should attach to Miriam! Or how, on the other hand, should spotless innocence be subjected to a thralldom like that which she endured from the specter....
>
> (p. 76)

Miriam's secret is a 'dark-red carbuncle - red as blood' (p. 100). It creates a 'voiceless gulf' (p. 88) between her and her friends and she knows that by sharing its purport she will spread the stain:

> 'What a sin to stain his joyous nature with the blackness of a woe like mine!'
>
> (p. 120)

The evil spectre of the catacomb is both perpetrator and victim of the crime which sets its indelible stamp upon Miriam's soul:

> this form of clay had held the evil spirit which blasted her sweet youth, and compelled her, as it were, to stain her womanhood with crime.
>
> (p. 142)

Even after the murder, Hawthorne is careful to maintain a certain ambiguity around the subject of Miriam's and Donatello's guilt. They are stained, but the act was performed in an almost unconscious state against a disembodied 'spirit'. Miriam argues:

> ...in dreams, the conscience sleeps, and we often stain ourselves with guilt of which we should be incapable in our waking moments. The deed you seemed to do, last night, was no more than such a dream.
>
> (p. 148)

The murder is for Donatello an erotic initiation into Miriam's mystery. It initially breeds a kind of ecstasy as they embrace in a union 'closer than a marriage bond' (p. 131).[1] Later, it breeds remorse; man and woman have to come to terms with a shared guilt and any future between them must be based upon a penitent awareness of their sin. Hawthorne deliberately softens and widens the context of Miriam's and Donatello's sin to represent the story of humanity. Their stain is inescapable - like the young couple of 'The Maypole of Merrymount' they have been initiated through sexual love into a world

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1. According to Nina Baym, 'the crux of Donatello's deed is not murder, but sex'. *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1976), p. 236.
   F.C. Crews also discusses 'the sexual connotations of the murder scene' in *The Sins of the Fathers*, pp. 219-25.

of mutual struggle and support.

Hilda, in the innocent simplicity of which we are told so much, believes that she can hold herself aloof and remain untouched by the stain Miriam has learned to accept. After witnessing the crime we find her sitting listlessly in her tower, asking herself:

> 'Am I, too, stained with guilt?'
>
> (p. 151)

The narrator quickly adds 'not so, thank Heaven', but then goes on to explain Hilda's similarity to the portrait of Beatrice Cenci as 'the intimate consciousness of her father's sin that threw its shadow over her' (p. 152). Hilda now takes Miriam's place as the sinless maiden walking under the shadow of an ancestral crime. Like Miriam she tries to shake the shadow off and like Miriam she finds that the stain has stuck.

Hilda's fatal flaw is the imaginary bloodstain caught from Miriam's crime. A young Italian artist draws a portrait of the maiden which illustrates the point:

> It represents Hilda as gazing with sad and earnest horror at a blood spot which she seemed just then to have discovered on her robe.
>
> (p. 239)

The portrait is entitled 'Innocence, Dying of a Bloodstain'. In it, Hilda's face is supposed to resemble Beatrice Cenci's forlorn gaze. The painter has recognized her innocent anguish, though the world at large misinterprets his subtlety.

The symbolic suggestiveness of Hilda's stain has been noted by many,[1] but criticism takes it for granted that Hilda is stained with nothing but the awareness of Miriam's crime. Hence 'sin enters Hilda's

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1. For example Nina Baym in 'Hawthorne's Women: The Tyranny of Social Myths', p. 268; and F. Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers*, p. 217.

life vicariously through Miriam',[1] and 'the murder which Hilda witnesses becomes a kind of vicarious sexual initiation'.[2] Obviously Hilda's individual purity must be maintained, yet the effect of the image of the bloodstained robe is to emphasize Hilda's sisterhood with Miriam (and also with Beatrice Cenci). No matter how far she might recoil in horror, Hilda cannot escape the mark of her humanity, 'the fatal flaw of humanity which...expressed the ineludible gripe in which mortality clutches the highest and purest of earthly mold, degrading them into kindred with the lowest'.[3]

The clue to Hilda's bloodstain, and the reason why it 'eats into her life' lies in the forced severance of her relationship with Miriam. When the pure maiden discovers the existence of sin it is essential that she arm herself against it. She must cut herself off from the source of evil and barricade her soul. This is perfectly all right in theory but in practice the situation is more complicated. Hilda's rejection of Miriam, although vindicated by both the narrator and Kenyon, is, dramatically, harsh and cruel. All the sympathy of the scene is reserved for Miriam and her passionate appeal:

> 'Were you to touch my hand, you would find it as warm to your grasp as ever. If you were sick or suffering, I would watch night and day for you. It is in such simple offices that true affection shows itself; and so I speak of them. Yet now, Hilda, your very look seems to put me beyond the limits of human kind!'
> (p. 153)

Hilda's actions inevitably put her into the same category as young Goodman Brown, Parson Hooper or The Man of Adamant, or the Puritans in *The Scarlet Letter*. Perceiving sin in her friend, she has broken

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1. Louise K. Barnett, 'American Artists and the Portrait of Beatrice Cenci', *NEQ* 53 (1980), 179.
2. Crews, p. 217.
3. 'The Birthmark', *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 10, pp. 38-

the chain which linked them together, denied their sisterhood, though once they were 'closer than sisters of the same blood' (p. 153), and, in effect, denied their common humanity. Hilda's action is perfectly consistent for a stereotyped ideal, but for a human being it shows a distinct lack of humanity. Miriam articulates the paradox of Hilda's perfection:

> I have always said, Hilda, that you were merciless for I had a perception of it, even while you loved me best. You have no sin, nor any conception of what it is; and therefore you are terribly severe! As an angel, you are not amiss; but, as a human creature, and a woman among earthly men and women, you need a sin to soften you.
> (p. 154)

By denying Miriam, Hilda has rejected that part of herself which is her link with the rest of mankind. She has, in fact, tried to deny her own susceptibility to sin and sorrow, her sexuality, and her very womanhood. The paradox of her situation is that the very denial of sin constitutes a sin in itself - the bloodstain is inescapable if Hilda is to maintain an earthly existence. Hilda's white robe performs a very similar function to Lady Eleanore's white mantle. Both women draw their robes around them in an attempt to cut themselves off from the rest of their race; but these same robes contain, hidden in their folds, the one stain of sin which unites the wearer with the rest. Hilda's very purity is her downfall. Her story shows that a human angel is a contradiction in terms. The ideal of Divine Womanhood is as monstrous an extreme as the stereotyped dark lady - Hawthorne's ideal is somewhere in between.

Hilda must inevitably come down from her tower and become earth-stained and humanized enough to marry her man of stone. This she does when she remembers her debt to Miriam. She 'fancies' some sense of guilt (Hawthorne equivocates *because* she is guilty of innocence) and hence takes Miriam's mysterious package through the filth of Rome to

the 'paternal abode of Beatrice' (p. 280). At this point she vanishes:

> She had trodden lightly over the crumble of old crimes; she had taken her way amid the grime and corruption... walking saintlike through it all, with white, innocent feet; until, in some dark pitfall that lay right across her path, she had vanished out of sight.
> (p. 297)

Even Hilda's dainty step cannot avoid the 'chasm' for long. Hilda has descended to discover her womanliness and eventually to take her place in the tide of human affairs. As an ideal Hilda had cut herself off from the eternal feminine,[1] now she goes to re-establish her link with Beatrice/Miriam. When Miriam first entrusted the packet to Hilda she urged her to greet the ghost of Beatrice:

> 'do not fail to speak to her, and try to win her confidence ...Poor sister Beatrice! For she was still a woman, Hilda, be her sin or sorrow what they might.'
> (p. 56)

Hilda now fulfils this quest, discovers her humanity, and is initiated into the world:

> For the present, be it enough to say that Hilda had been summoned forth from a secret place, and led we know not through what mysterious passages, to a point where the tumult of life burst suddenly upon her ears.
> (p. 324)

She maintains her narrow, childlike perception of good and evil in the world, but is, nevertheless, sufficiently humanized to adorn Kenyon's fireside:

> ...for Hilda was coming down from her tower, to be herself enshrined and worshipped as a household saint, in the light of her husband's fireside.
> (p. 330)

The Marble Faun is Hawthorne's deepest and most complex consideration of the significance of the female figure. It tends to provoke the sort of reaction voiced by J. Tharpe in his chapter 'Who are Zenobia and Miriam?':

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1. A complete reversal of *The Blithedale Romance* where Zenobia, 'womanliness incarnate', tried to shake off the ideal.

> In a sense, he asks ...'What is Man?' and 'What is Woman?' to conclude very little about either, except that it is all very strange.

The Marble Faun turns the question 'What is Woman?' over and over and round and round. It explores the major feminine myths through discussions of art and it explores art through the figure of woman. Miriam and Hilda do not just represent the different aspects of womanhood; they take part in the novel's debate and inform it through their art.

Miriam Schaefer, artist in oils, paints both sides of the feminine myth: the fearful figure of woman 'acting the part of a revengeful mischief towards man' (p. 39) and the 'subtlely idéalized' figure of domestic womanhood. She is acutely conscious of the fact that she is playing with stereotypes; as an artist she mirrors Hawthorne's position. Miriam has a model of a woman in the throes of tragic despair; she is '"a lady of exceedingly pliable disposition, now a heroine of romance, and now a rustic maid"' (p. 38); the figure of woman can be manipulated endlessly. Miriam's picture of Jael is similarly subject to change:

> Her first conception of the stern Jewess had evidently been that of perfect womanhood, a lovely form, and a high, heroic face of lofty beauty; but, dissatisfied either with her own work or the terrible story itself, Miriam had added a certain wayward quirk of her pencil, which at once converted the heroine into a vulgar murderess.
>
> (p. 39)

Like Hawthorne, Miriam either presents 'a truer and lovelier picture of the life that belongs to woman' than reality could inspire, or she paints stories of bloodshed 'in which woman's hand was crimsoned by the stain' (p. 40). She tries to present 'the joys and sorrows, the intertwining light and shadow of human life' (p. 42) nevertheless, and she always tempers her visions of domestic life with the shadow of a figure who stands apart. As a fictional character herself, Miriam is a creation of intertwining light and shadow - at one point converted to a vulgar

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1. Tharpe, p. 136.

murderess', but thereby awakened to a life of 'love and endless remorse' (p. 40).

The discussion of the figure of woman in art continues when Miriam and Hilda examine Hilda's copy of Guido's Beatrice. A strange effect is created here of art within art, as the representatives of the two visions of womanhood hold a debate about the nature of woman as revealed in Beatrice. Hilda at first thinks her fallen but sinless (p. 54), but when she is reminded of Beatrice's crime (she was implicated in the murder of her father after an incestuous rape), she calls it a 'terrible guilt, an inexpiable crime' (p. 55). Miriam, on the other hand, is more sympathetic:

> 'Beatrice's sin may not have been so great: perhaps it was no sin at all, but the best virtue possible in the circumstances.'
>
> (p. 55)

Hilda can see only in terms of black and white. Woman is either innocent or guilty, right or wrong, angel or temptress. Miriam views the world in shades of grey - she can envisage a sin that could be virtue; a fall that could be fortunate.

Another image of woman put forward for contemplation is Kenyon's Cleopatra. She is the archetypal temptress - 'fierce, voluptuous, passionate, tender, wicked, terrible, and full of poisonous and rapturous enchantment' (p. 97). She is an expression of Kenyon's deepest artistic soul, but also of the fears which make him recoil from Miriam and long for Hilda's bland security. Cleopatra does possess a 'truth' but it is only half the story. She and Hilda are opposite extremes which need to meet before art can transmute into life. Miriam recognizes the Egyptian's limitations when she concludes 'I am not of her sisterhood, I do assure you' (p. 99).

Perhaps the most pervasive figure of womanhood throughout the

novel is the Virgin Mother. She is represented in shrines and paintings in every street and every gallery, and Hawthorne uses these represenations as a central paradox in his work. Hilda's search for 'just the Virgin Mother whom she needed' (p. 251) mirrors the paradox Hawthorne created in her own character. The concept of the Virgin Mother is only conceivable in the context of a miracle. It is simply impossible for a human artist to create such a figure. Hilda wants:

> a face of celestial beauty, but human as well as heavenly, and with a shadow of past grief upon it; bright with immortal youth, yet matronly and motherly; and endowed with a queenly dignity, but infintely tender, as the highest and deepest attribute of her divinity.
>
> (p. 251)

What she finds is a host of flattered portraits of 'earthly beauty'; no model can be both human and without sin; the taint of earthliness will always persist.

Hilda's search for the Virgin Mother is in a sense a search for the self she thinks she ought to be. She fails in her search because she cannot accept the earthly compromise that art has had to make. She does not realize that whilst human divinity is an impossibility, we can approach the divine by recognizing our humanity and its burdens. Whilst Hilda is continuing her search Miriam is fulfilling woman's redemptive possibilities. The dark lady functions as both Eve and Mary towards her Adam, so that 'she, most wretched, who beguiled him into evil might guide him to a higher innocence than that from which he fell' (p. 206).

Although Hilda does not perceptively change as a character she does finally relinquish her claim to virginal purity enough to become Kenyon's wife; only by adopting an earthly role can she put her 'white wisdom' (p. 329) into practice. This change is foreshadowed in the final artistic depiction of womanhood described in the novel - the Venus of the Tribune which Kenyon extracts from the soil. This Venus is 'earth-stained' but

'wonderfully delicate and beautiful'; she at first appears in fragments, but when pieced together she becomes:

> one of the few works of antique sculpture in which we recognize womanhood, and that, moreover, without prejudice to its divinity.
>
> (p. 304)

Kenyon says to himself:

> 'I seek for Hilda, and find a marble woman! Is the omen good or ill?'
>
> (p. 304)

His question is fraught with ironies. Hilda is a marble woman; cold, hard, and inflexible. But she has gathered her share of crumbling soil, she has been transformed into a Venus, and she is ready to relinquish her shrine for a pedestal.

Kenyon, like Coverdale and Hollingsworth, does deny a part of his creative self by opting for the fair maiden. He will not discover the depths of suffering, nor the heights of wisdom that are Donatello's lot through Miriam. Whilst Hawthorne has placed both maidens, dark and fair, on a continuum which establishes their sisterhood, Hilda is still a long way from the womanliness of a Hester, Zenobia, or Miriam. Miriam is strong, intelligent and creative, but she offers a challenge that Kenyon simply could not meet. Instead of a full-blooded dark lady, he gains a slightly soiled angel of the fireside.

Hilda set the same sort of problem for Hawthorne's creative self. Whereas Miriam is a vivid and sympathetic character, Hilda represents an ideal which cannot exist. Her very attempt to preserve her purity draws her into sin and is the agent whereby she is eventually transformed into a human sister to Miriam. Her failure as a character ironically re-inforces her symbolic significance: the ideal of divine womanhood is impossible and unreal; it is even destructive when put into practice. Through Hilda, Hawthorne reveals the flaws in the fair maiden myth.

Through Miriam, he dramatizes the further paradox that woman's very propensity to sin, her sexuality, and her humanity, is the force which enables her to do good - the force which transforms man into a nobler and higher being.

CONCLUSION

The female characters of Hawthorne's tales and novels conform to a coherent, though complicated, vision of woman's role in the world. It is a role of crucial importance. Women stand at the heart of the affairs of men; they represent the key to redemption - the key to understanding and happiness.

For Hawthorne, woman is the agent by which the individual is linked with the rest of humanity, and through the motif of the fatal flaw he shows how that link operates, whilst at the same time demonstrating how often and how tragically it is misunderstood. Woman's fatal flaw, whether it be symbolized by a birthmark, some ribbons, a deadly mantle, a blood-stained robe, a poisonous shrub, a flower, or a scarlet letter, holds an ambiguous promise of troubled joy. It is linked to the sin of Eve, it has potential for sorrow and destruction, but it is also the agent through which men and women can accept their common humanity and through acceptance, transcend its limitations.

The myths about women which enable them to be labelled as either angels or demons are exposed throughout Hawthorne's works as harmful and restrictive misconceptions. Again and again Hawthorne's symbols work to show that woman, like man, is a mixture of good and evil, of divine understanding and human frailty. In this context the stereotyped dark lady and the fair ideal are manipulated so as to show just how much real humanity differs from the stereotypes. The dark women like Beatrice, Hester, Zenobia, and Miriam all have souls which belong to God. They have the potential to uplift their men and to function as angels despite their temptress roles. The fair maidens pale in comparison. They demonstrate the impossibility of perfect womanhood, either by the taint of hidden corruption, or by showing that perfection in reality equals a lack of humanity - Georgiana dies the moment her

flaw is removed, and Hilda sins in the very attempt to preserve the virginal pride of her purity.

Each of Hawthorne's men has a similar lesson to learn. Figures like Goodman Brown, Parson Hooper, Richard Digby, Giovanni, Dimmesdale, and Coverdale, need to look beyond the veil of mystery which stands between man and woman to accept the real promise that woman represents. Men like Aylmer, Rappaccini, Ethan Brand, Chillingworth, Westervelt, and the Model, are beyond help. They have tampered with the human heart; in their pride they have tried to make themselves Gods and have ignored or usurped woman's restorative role.

It is the Rappaccinis, Chillingworths and Westervelts who create and perpetuate the veil of mystery which enshrouds and entraps the figure of woman. The wizard haunts many of Hawthorne's tales and is present in all his novels. He is the man of stone's *alter ego*, an ancient, ageless personification of the dark forces which all Hawthorne's characters must learn to accept. In *The Scarlet Letter* Chillingworth represents an evil which the Puritans deny in themselves but readily assign to Hester Prynne. In *The Blithedale Romance* Westervelt draws both Zenobia and Priscilla into his snare, and in *The Marble Faun* Miriam's Model dogs her footsteps until all the characters are initiated into an awareness of sin.

Even *The House of the Seven Gables* yields a similar formula. Colonel Pyncheon, the original owner of the House of the Seven Gables built his edifice on land gained through the execution for witchcraft of its owner, Old Matthew Maule. Throughout the history of the house the Puritan's progeny are haunted by this deed; each Pyncheon has a wizard/Maule who casts a shadow over his existence. One Pyncheon even sacrifices his daughter's freedom to the enticements of a Maule. Alice Pyncheon's mind is transformed into 'a kind of telescopic

medium'[1] for the sake of an illusory profit, and, like Priscilla, she pays the price of becoming the wizard's slave. Alice's enthralment eventually brings about her death and the young Matthew Maule is 'the darkest and wofullest man that ever walked behind a corpse' because, like so many of Hawthorne's men, he 'had taken a woman's delicate soul into his rude gripe, to play with - and she was dead!' (p. 203).

The Pyncheons are haunted by the spectre of an inherited crime until the modern generation of the novel, Phoebe and Holgrave, resolve the conflict between Pyncheon and Maule. This resolution is made possible by 'love's web of sorcery' (p. 309). Holgrave has the opportunity to master Phoebe's spirit when he notices the influences of his mesmerizing gestures:

> A veil was beginning to be muffled about her, in which she could behold only him, and live only in his thoughts and emotions.
>
> (p. 203)

He resists the temptation, however, and instead gains her freely given love. The two are married and this union between wizard and Puritan exorcises the ancient curse. A balance is achieved at the end of *The House of the Seven Gables* between the male and female principles, between the powers of darkness and of sunshine, and between past and present. Phoebe and Holgrave through the power of the heart 'transfigured the earth, and made it Eden again' (p. 298). They represent a fusion of the dark and light aspects of American civilization which is, in Hawthorne's terms, the only way to establish a regenerative society.

Hawthorne's 'family' of characters is placed in a world which constantly connects the lesson of Eden to the hopes and aspirations

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1. *The House of the Seven Gables* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1907, rpt. 1977), p. 199. All further references to this work appear in the text.

of America. Whether his tale is set in Italy, Puritan New England, or a contemporary commune, his message remains the same. If America wishes to fulfil its promise as a regenerative society, it must first look inwards. The heart is the realm in which man will find both his disease and its remedy. Woman, as Eve and Mary, is analogous to the heart. Accepting her in both these roles is one step towards establishing 'the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness'.[1]

This message informs in one aspect or another all of Hawthorne's work. It is often obscured by the many veils of mystery which Hawthorne himself was so fond of casting over his work, but, like everything else in Hawthorne, his mystery and vacillation are significant. Hawthorne's narrative voice is invariably unreliable. His only first person narrator, Coverdale, is obviously limited in both perception and understanding, and in his other works the narrator is habitually diffident, happy to leave the business of interpretation to the reader. In this sense Hawthorne as an artist is perhaps closest to Holgrave, the mesmerist, Daguerrotypist, and writer. Hawthorne is a weaver of mysteries who uses symbols to make 'pictures out of sunshine' (p. 86). Like Holgrave's images, Hawthorne's meanings are constantly 'dodging away from the eye, and trying to escape altogether' (p. 86). Yet this is a conscious process - Hawthorne forces the reader to probe beneath the surface of his works, to respond to the symbolic aspects of plot and characterization, and to pass judgement accordingly. Holgrave's art is deceptively complex:

> While we give it credit only for depicting the
> merest surface, it actually brings out the secret
> character with a truth that no painter would ever
> venture upon, even could he detect it.
>
> (p. 87)

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1. *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 186.

and this reflects Hawthorne's constant ambition. Hawthorne was concerned to present truths of human nature which other artists would hardly dare to admit, and to reveal the 'secret character' which all readers would recognize as their own.

The figure of the female in Hawthorne's fiction offers the same challenge to the reader as it does to characters like Brown, Giovanni, Coverdale and Donatello. Woman is surrounded by the contradictions of myth and stereotype, she is angelic and demonic, mysterious and invariably ambiguous. Yet Hawthorne's symbolic language constantly urges that we should lift the veil of mystery and accept the paradox that woman represents. The acknowledgement of woman's double promise of 'troubled joy' is, in Hawthorne's terms, a fruitful acceptance of our common humanity. Hawthorne's challenge to dig beneath 'the merest surface' is in essence a challenge to look to the heart, to change the world by first altering that 'little but boundless sphere' wherein he perceives our sickness and our cure.

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