Hawthorne And Faulkner: The Continuity Of A Dark American Tradition.

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HAWTHORNE AND FAULKNER:
THE CONTINUITY OF A DARK AMERICAN TRADITION

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

HAWTHORNE AND FAULKNER:

THE CONTINUITY OF A DARK AMERICAN TRADITION

by Eleanor Marianne Lang

This study of the literary relationship between Hawthorne and Faulkner makes a detailed comparison of the three major works of each writer, The Scarlet Letter and Light in August, The House of the Seven Gables and The Sound and the Fury, and The Marble Faun and Absalom, Absalom! in an attempt to show the continuity of certain character types and situations in the fiction and consciousness of America. The dynamism of Hester Prynne and Lena Grove is set against the static abstraction and masochism of the false clergymen, Arthur Dimmesdale and Gail Hightower, against the refusal of the blackness inherent in human existence by the insidious persecutors, Roger Chillingworth and Doc Hines, and against the moral annihilation of the children of evil, Pearl and Joe Christmas, who are trapped at the point of impact between the life and death forces. The organic wholeness of Dilsey and Phoebe challenges the disengagement from reality and fragmentation of the family caused by the false pride of Hepzibah Pyncheon and Mrs. Compson, the greed of Judge Pyncheon and Jason Compson, and the estheticism of Clifford Pyncheon and Quentin Compson. Both The Marble Faun and Absalom, Absalom! turn on the

acceptance of the element of darkness in man, which darkness precipitates the eternal fall: that fall can be fortunate if acknowledged but unfortunate if denied, and the refusals of Hilda and Quentin, as harbingers of the future, to affirm their own participation in the Adamic descent permeate both works with a nihilism that is relieved solely by any reconciliation the reader may make to the timeless parables of historical responsibility that Hawthorne and Faulkner present. And to express these cosmic conflicts, both authors employ stylized characters in a pattern of opposition and balance, playing out the primal scheme; that is to say, Hawthorne and Faulkner write prose romances.

Both writers fit Leslie Fiedler's definition of a Gothic novelist as "one who makes terror rather than love the center of his work, knowing all the while, of course, that there can be no terror without the hope for love and love's defeat." This is what joins Hawthorne and Faulkner in the dark mainstream of American literature, this and a cosmic pessimism lightened only after the fictional fact by their own accomplished act of the imagination which is a leap in the darkness of the human heart.

Graduate Student: "Sir, do you--according to Nathaniel Hawthorne the greatest sin was the violation of the human heart. Would you say that you think along those lines as far as what the greatest crime or characteristic of sin?"

Mr. Faulkner: "Yes, yes, I agree with that."

--Faulkner in the University

CHAPTER ONE

HAWTHORNE-FAULKNER CRITICISM, 1939 - 1970

In a letter to Delia Bacon, Hawthorne wrote: "We find thoughts in all great writers (and even in small ones) that strike their roots far beneath the surface, and intertwine themselves with the roots of other writers' thoughts; so that when we pull up one, we stir the whole, and yet those writers have had no conscious society with one another."[1] It is this root relationship between Hawthorne and Faulkner that bears exploration, for despite their obvious formalistic differences, both have tapped the same vein of human experience and used American social and moral types as metaphors for the creation of myths that sustain an exegesis in terms of all men, not New Englanders or Southerners or Americans merely. For both authors employ the social struggles of their particular societies to render the inner conflicts of the modern consciousness, whose presently attenuated identity contrasts so disastrously with the burgeoning ego of the past. And the availability of that juxtaposition between the past and the present in the intensely provincial traditions into which both writers were born enables them to write parables of the

[1] Letter to Miss Delia Bacon, dated June 21, 1856. Cited from a copy in The Yale Collection of Hawthorne Letters by Jane Lundblad in Nathaniel Hawthorne and European Literary Tradition (Upsala: Almqvict and Wiksells Boktryckeri, 1947), p. 70.

universal forces, textures, and patterns that have shaped the moral situation of a mankind pitched on a point of uncertainty over whether it should murder or create or even act at all.

Certainly, Hawthorne and Faulkner had no conscious society with one another through Faulkner's reading of Hawthorne; even if that were of any relevance, it remains impossible to establish any direct influence. Joseph Blotner's catalogue[2] of Faulkner's library lists only the 1948 Portable Hawthorne and an undated copy of The Blithedale Romance, a gift from his grandmother. There is also the inconsequential[3] matter of the title of Faulkner's first book of

[2] William Faulkner's Library: A Catalogue (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1964), p. 36.

[3] R. P. Adams, in a triumph of tenuity, finds that Faulkner was heavily influenced by Hawthorne's handling of the faun image and in "The Apprenticeship of William Faulkner," Tulane Studies in English, 12 (1962), 144, he writes, "Faulkner's marble faun, like Hawthorne's, embodies a contrasting juxtaposition of the primitive Arcadian life to the life of modern civilization; and other fauns in Faulkner serve the same time-jumping function. The echo from Hawthorne seems especially clear when Mrs. Maurier in Mosquitoes thinks that the countenance of Gordon, the sculptor, seen by moonlight, is 'like a silver faun's face'; Hawthorne's Donatello is closely associated with the sculptor Kenyon, and his own name is that of an Italian sculptor of the fifteenth century. The primitive innocence of the faun, his ignorance of both good and evil, parallel to that of Adam in Eden, is used by Faulkner much as it is by Hawthorne. Faulkner's idiots exemplify this innocence, and one of them, Ike Snopes in The Hamlet, has pointed faun's ears . . . .' Some other characters are almost as invincibly ignorant or naive as the idiots; and these too are sometimes explicitly faunlike. Another example from The Hamlet is Labove, the school master, described as having 'legs haired-over like those of a faun.' Donald Mahon, the wounded and traumatized flyer of Soldiers' Pay, is presented several times in terms of the faun image."

poetry, The Marble Faun (1924); but William Van O'Connor wrote to Faulkner's Oxford friend, Phil Stone, about that since Stone had financed the publication of the book and he replied, "Bill read some Hawthorne, but I don't think he read a great deal. The truth is I don't think he is extremely well read in anything. I think I still have two copies of 'The Marble Faun' but the title had nothing to do with Hawthorne at all. I know because I am the man that put this title on it."[4]

One must also, unfortunately, take account of Faulkner's own statements on Hawthorne in his university lectures. At the University of Virginia, he mentioned him simply as one of the "masters from whom we learned our craft" along with Dickens, Fielding, Thackeray, Conrad, Twain, Smollett, Melville, James.[5] And in Japan he said repeatedly that "Hawthorne or Henry James are not truly American writers. Their tradition was from Europe. They wrote in the tradition of European writers. They were not true Americans in the sense I mean--indigenous American writers who were produced and nurtured by a culture which was completely American, such as Whitman and Mark Twain, the poet Sandburg. They were products of a nation which did not develop,

[4] "Hawthorne and Faulkner: Some Common Ground," The Virginia Quarterly Review, 33 (1957), 121-122.

[5] Faulkner in the University, ed. Frederick G. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 243.

did not begin to develop, until after the eastern seaboard was a cultured region, where the tradition (which after all, to me) was a European tradition."[6] It is, obviously, not very helpful to have Faulkner extricate himself from the very tradition in which this essay is trying to place him. One can only suggest that there are two sides to the Hawthorne-James tradition and Faulkner is talking about one while this interpretation is concerned with the other.

There has been something less than a critical stampede to recognize the Hawthorne-Faulkner relationship. It is only the desire of Faulkner critics to fit their man into a tradition that has precipitated the exploration at all. Hawthorne critics, except for Randall Stewart, couldn't care less. The first critical observation of the relationship between Hawthorne and Faulkner was made by George Marion O'Donnell in 1939 in that great-granddaddy of all seminal articles on Faulkner, "Faulkner's Mythology." In speaking of the credibility Faulkner maintains at the same time that he is achieving archetypal significance, O'Donnell finds that "the only close parallel in American literature is the better work of Nathaniel Hawthorne, whom Mr. Faulkner resembles in a great many ways."[7] O'Donnell's definition of allegory as "formalized--and therefore dead--myth" kept him from

6 A Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962, ed. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 168.

seeing the fundamental similarity between the two writers, but Malcolm Cowley, in his 1946 introduction to The Portable Faulkner, defined that bond as the creation of moral fables and the elaboration of the legends of New England and Mississippi, respectively, areas which became for each "epic or bardic poet in prose" "a permanent state of consciousness."[8] Cowley sees these two bards standing "to each other as July to December, as heat to cold, as swamp to mountain, as the luxuriant to the meagre but perfect, as planter to Puritan; and yet Hawthorne had much the same attitude toward New England that Faulkner has toward the South, together with a strong sense of regional particularity."[9] As succeeding critics have shown, this emphasis on their regional differences tends to blur the Puritan heritage common to both, but it is Cowley's stress on the moral fabling of both writers that set the course, sometimes for better and often for worse, for all succeeding Hawthorne-Faulkner criticism.

The first specific parallels were drawn in 1948 by Richard Chase when he saw such Faulkner characters as Byron Bunch and Gail

7 "Faulkner's Mythology," in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1960), p. 88.

8 "Introduction to The Portable Faulkner," in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1960), p. 109.

9 Cowley, p. 108.

Hightower confronting the same dilemma of moral intervention in human affairs that faced many of Hawthorne's characters, for example, the painter in "Prophetic Pictures." And Chase also pointed to the joint concern of both writers for "the inescapable stain on every human life," comparing, in this regard, Joe Christmas and Aylmer--"There is never any real proof that Joe is part Negro, but Joe's gratuitous assumption that he is tainted is at the root of all his actions. He becomes as obsessed with his stain as does Aylmer with the blemish on his wife's face in Hawthorne's 'The Birthmark' and, with a purpose as relentless and immoral as Aylmer's, he goes about removing the stain--an impulse which arises in the central figures of both 'The Birthmark' and Light in August from what is, in the final moral terms, simply their inability to bear the burden of being human."[10] Chase notes, finally that the word "burden" is used by Southern writers in the same way that Hawthorne and Melville used the pack of the peddler, as the "'burden' of one's history or of one's continually self-annihilating humanity."[11] And in The American Novel and Its Tradition in 1957, Chase makes the definitive placement of Faulkner in the Hawthornian stream of American literature, stating

10 "The Stone and the Crucifixion: Faulkner's Light in August," in Visions and Revisions in Modern American Literary Criticism, ed. Bernard S. Oldsey and Arthur O. Lewis, Jr. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1962), pp. 277-278.

11 "The Stone and the Crucifixion: Faulkner's Light in August," p. 278.

that the "non-Emersonian tradition of Hawthorne and Melville prepared the way for Faulkner by introducing the strain of dark and somber drama which characterizes so much of the best American fiction. . . . But there had to intervene between the older American traditions and Faulkner the naturalistic novel with its license as to subject matter and the promise it offers--so infrequently fulfilled--of reviving a genuine tragic art by evoking fate in terms of heredity and environment."[12] It is this alignment of both authors with the dark and tragic side of the American artistic experience which has determined the focus of my own comparison.

More extensive parallels between Hawthorne and Faulkner have been drawn by Randall Stewart,[13] Harold J. Douglas and Robert Daniel,[14] and William Van O'Connor. But that examination has been expended on what is essentially a misdirection of Hawthorne-Faulkner scholarship for all three articles base their comparisons on orthodox Christianity and even authorial Puritanism of writers I see as two of the most radical artists America has produced. But the value of these explications has been immense, despite their doctrinaire

12 The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), p. 220.

13 "Hawthorne and Faulkner," College English, 17 (1956), 258-262.

14 "Faulkner and the Puritanism of the South," Tennessee Studies in Literature, 2 (1957), 1-13.

approach, for they have developed the rather incidental allusions of the early critics to an interesting literary relationship into a seminal statement of a basic American literary tradition. Stewart begins usefully by rehearsing the obvious differences between the two authors: "reticence is contrasted with a shocking frankness, obscenity even; readability with abstruseness, normal narrative procedure with complicated time arrangements; authorial omniscience with the stream of consciousness; a style calm and restrained with passionate, dithyrambic utterance."[15] But compared with the similarities, these contrasts become merely historical and geographical accidents and Stewart moves past them and past also the irrelevant matter of the overt influence of Hawthorne on Faulkner and on to their "common view of the human condition."[16] In order to get at that common view, Stewart goes by way of historical, sociological, and biographical parallels, comparing the upheaval of traditional social structures as progressivism moved into their respective regions and epochs, the rat-race displacing the aristocratic culture, the loyalty and affection of both men for their own lumps or postage stamps of native soil, their compulsive reliving of the social guilt incurred by each region on account of the Salem witch trials in New England and slavery in the South. This regionalism Stewart sees as a vantage

[15] Stewart, 258.

[16] Stewart, 258.

point and not a focal point, a fact which has long been recognized in Hawthorne's case but which has struggled for recognition against the morass of sociological reading of Faulkner's work as a report on the South. As Stewart rightly affirms, Faulkner, like Hawthorne, is writing "a report on the human race."[17] The value of their regionalism lies in the tangibility of a past which they expanded to counteract the "curiously American fallacy . . . that the New World would produce sinless beings . . . . In these writers, the past is not dead, it is not even past, it is a continuous living force."[18]

Stewart points also to the ambiguity of human experience for both writers and notes that "Hawthorne, like Faulkner, is very careful to check the debits against the credits. When you think he has given one of his characters a clean bill of health, look again, and you will see the tell-tale blemish, the sign of imperfection."[19] This point I have developed with Dimmesdale's so-called salvation and Hightower's ineffectual one, Pearl's seemingly successful womanhood, the apparently happy endings of The House of the Seven Gables and The Marble Faun, and the "redemption" through Dilsey in The Sound and the Fury. As Stewart says, "the problem of evil dominates the

[17] Stewart, 262.

[18] Stewart, 259-260.

[19] Stewart, 260.

works of both writers. Both writers are concerned with the fall of man, with man's struggle toward redemption, with the regeneration occasioned by sin itself, with the felix culpa."[20] But Stewart finds a great deal more "prevailing" in these writers than is, I think, warranted by the cosmic pessimism of Hawthorne and Faulkner's total visions. Though he finds that Hawthorne's characters lack the heroic stature of Faulkner's towering ones, he does draw one specific parallel in this regard between Arthur Dimmesdale and Joe Christmas, seeing both as fighting a civil war within the soul. But division is not really the essence of the damnation of either. If they are linked at all, it is in the monomania and masochism common to both. A closer parallel exists between Dimmesdale and Gail Hightower in their free responsibility for their actions and between Joe and Pearl in their victimization by the destructive forces these clergymen set in motion. Finally and most dubiously, Stewart fits Hawthorne and Faulkner into the orthodox Christian tradition and sees both as keeping the faith against the heresies of romanticism and naturalistic amoralism. It's a tight squeeze and those Protean gentlemen escape with ease, but not before Stewart has stigmatized them with the label of "reactionary." D. H. Lawrence annihilated that sort of reading of Hawthorne in his Studies in Classic American Literature, and his dismantling of the American innocence machine can be applied with equal

[20] Stewart, 261.

validity to Faulkner. Down with Arthur Dimmesdale; up with Hester. Down with Joe Christmas; up with Lena Grove. For morality in both authors exists in terms of harmony with the life-force, not adherence to an orthodox definition of sin and the Christianity in Hawthorne and Faulkner is descriptive rather than prescriptive. Both wrote parables of good and evil, but both identified good with dynamic organicism, not doctrinaire virtue, and evil with static mechanism, not violations of a formal code, while original sin becomes the inevitable weakness inflicted on a mankind caught between these opposing forces.[21] Both writers are Christian insofar as their visions reflect cosmic rhythms embodied in the Christian myth of death and rebirth, but both stop far short of a faith in resurrection, which is the cornerstone of the orthodox tradition.[22]

The trouble with Stewart's placement of Hawthorne and Faulkner in the orthodox Christian tradition is that it opens the door to a literal application of dogmatic creed to artistic vision and, predictably, several critics have gone storming through. Douglas and

21 The terms "dynamic organicism" and "static mechanism" are used throughout this paper as they have been defined by Morse Peckham in "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," PMLA, 66 (1951), 5-23.

22 This point has been made in regard to Faulkner by Hyatt H. Waggoner in his William Faulkner: From Jefferson To The World (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), p. 247, and is equally true of Hawthorne who deals in Ecclesiastian cycles but not resurrection.

Daniel stamp both writers as Calvinistic in their acceptance of the depravity of man and sexuality as the chief sign of man's fallen nature, and they compare The Scarlet Letter and As I Lay Dying as the chief case in point, paralleling the adulteries and the wild natures of the children born of infidelity.[23] By focusing so narrowly on the guilt imposed by society on these women, Douglas and Daniel by-pass completely the heroine status accorded both for their achievement of dynamic consciousness. These two critics note that Hawthorne and Faulkner hated the excesses of Calvinism but fail to see that these authors use such excesses to dramatize the life-denial that lies at the heart of normal everyday Calvinism. J. Robert Barth likewise views Hawthorne and Faulkner as accepting divine determinism and

[23] Two other critics have also found parallels between The Scarlet Letter and As I Lay Dying (the adulterous heroine; the child of sin named Pearl and Jewel; the sinful minister): Richard Bridgman, "As Hester Prynne Lay Dying," English Language Notes, 2 (1965), 294-296, and Melvin Backman, Faulkner, The Major Years: A Critical Study (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1966). Bridgman goes so far as to proclaim that "only deliberate planning could bring about the pointed resemblance between the two books." At the University of Virginia, Faulkner was asked if he consciously or unconsciously paralleled his book with Hawthorne and he replied, impishly: "No, a writer don't have to consciously parallel because he robs and steals from everything he ever wrote or read or saw. I was simply writing a tour de force and as every writer does I took whatever I needed wherever I could find it, without any compunction and with no sense of violating any ethics or hurting anyone's feelings because any writer feels that anyone after him is perfectly welcome to take any trick he has learned or any plot that he has used. Of course we don't know just who Hawthorne took his from. Which he probably did because there are so few plots to write about." (Faulkner in the University, p. 115)

human depravity; while he allows that Hawthorne sometimes questioned the Calvinist tradition, he avows that Faulkner accepted every tenet of the Calvinist vision from predestination to misogyny, confusing, at every step along the way, the statements of Faulkner's morally prone characters--Quentin Compson, Mr. Compson, Joe Christmas, Gail Hightower, Caddy's daughter Quentin, Bayard Sartoris, Joanna Burden--with Faulkner's own belief and concluding that, as far as Faulkner is concerned, "freedom is not natural to man."[24] Barth insists Faulkner is saying that "because the South has sinned . . . because our fathers have sinned, man is no longer free to work out his destiny."[25] But the sins of the fathers only make the terms of freedom more difficult, and if Faulkner and Hawthorne are so convinced of predestination to an irrevocable doom, how does one account for the moral triumph of a Byron Bunch or a Dilsey or a Hester Prynne or a Donatello? If a community sows a Sutpen and reaps a Snopes, it is only because its people go to the harvest.

The full scope of thematic and character parallels has been indicated by William Van O'Connor. He covers some of the same biographical and regional material as Stewart but when he comes to the religious heritage of both artists, he is not so swift to gather them

[24] "Faulkner and the Calvinist Tradition," Thought, 39 (1964), 112.

[25] Barth, 114.

into the Calvinistic fold. Rather, he compares the New England Puritans in The Scarlet Letter with the North Mississippi Presbyterians in Light in August and finds that for both groups "their minds and imaginations are thoroughly moralized. In each novel, human weakness and the need to sympathize and to forgive are played off against an iron-like rigidity and lack of sympathy."[26] He goes on to describe Hawthorne's Puritans as "iron men" whose treatment of Hester is grotesque and whose "excessive commitment to virtue, which was characteristic of the Puritans, gives rise to the spirit of persecution. There is a direct relationship between the rigid righteousness of the Puritans and the profound unhappiness and suffering in the lives of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale. There was little or no place in the Puritan system for the idea of man as sinful and in need of forgiveness. On the contrary, they were obsessed with evil and with the need to suppress it."[27] All these points are well taken but implicit in O'Connor's statements is a rather more conventional definition of the sin involved than I have employed. The portion of O'Connor's comparison I have chosen to develop is the religious zealotry which is common to both Roger Chillingworth and Euphues Hines as representatives of "men and women committed to a vision

[26] O'Connor, 110.

[27] O'Connor, 112.

of human conduct that is dark with a guilt that is not to be forgiven."[28]

O'Connor was also the first to note that Hawthorne and Faulkner share in common the awareness that the past lives on into the present and in this regard he sees a connection among The House of the Seven Gables, The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! paralleling Thomas Sutpen and the dominant male Pyncheons, the ingrownness and spiritual incest in these families, the genteel decay of the narcissistic Compsons and Pyncheons, and Mrs. Compson and Hepzibah. I have drawn upon all of these valuable similarities in my pairing of characters and themes in The House of the Seven Gables and The Sound and the Fury and endeavored to add still other connections in an attempt to point out the common judgment passed by both authors on the same violations of the organic vision. Likewise, I have expanded upon O'Connor's pairing of The Marble Faun and Absalom, Absalom! in regard to the incest and the contrast between "Catholicism's acceptance of fallibility and human weakness . . . its capacity for compromise" and "the Puritan's stern inflexibility"[29] while developing my own comparison of Hilda and Quentin as fake innocents who refuse to acknowledge their complicity in the Adamic fall re-enacted in both romances

[28] O'Connor, 113.

[29] O'Connor, 120-121.

and so destroy themselves and the future in the process.

But perhaps the most valuable of all of O'Connor's richly suggestive ideas is that both Hawthorne and Faulkner are "highly stylized writers" whose characters "push away from commonplace reality toward the symbolic."[30] It is this stylization to the point almost of allegory that qualifies Hawthorne and Faulkner more as prose romancers than as novelists.

The only full-length consideration of the Hawthorne-Faulkner relationship is an unpublished dissertation by Theodore Lewis Colson, "The Characters of Hawthorne and Faulkner: A Topology of Sinners."[31] Colson studies the two writers in terms of their comparable religious sensibilities and the spiritual kinship of many of their characters in their consciousness of sin. He juxtaposes or isolates various characters from the novels and short stories of both authors as he pursues the themes of innocence and the fall, rapacity, moral rigidity, life as art, and, finally, remorse. Colson has not attempted to draw parallels so much as to place characters side by side, juxtaposed but examined separately, to make apparent their relevance to

[30] O'Connor, 122.

[31] "The Characters of Hawthorne and Faulkner: A Topology of Sinners," Diss. University of Michigan, 1967, 1-213.

each other, while I have stressed the specific connections between the motivations, plights, attitudes, and visions of my paired characters to make explicit the thematic concerns common to both authors. We bisect each other's interpretation at several points, particularly in our discussion of The House of the Seven Gables and The Sound and the Fury, in which we both emphasize avarice and artistic attenuation; but Colson's approach throughout his dissertation is overtly theological, while mine compares Hawthorne and Faulkner more in the terms of secular humanism.

I have chosen to restrict my study of the literary relationship between Hawthorne and Faulkner to a detailed comparison of the three major works of each writer, The Scarlet Letter and Light in August, The House of the Seven Gables and The Sound and the Fury, and The Marble Faun and Absalom, Absalom! in an attempt to show the continuity of certain character types and situations in the fiction and consciousness of America. The dynamism of Hester Prynne and Lena Grove is set against the static abstraction and masochism of the false clergymen, Arthur Dimmesdale and Gail Hightower, against the refusal of the blackness inherent in human existence by the insidious persecutors, Roger Chillingworth and Doc Hines, and against the moral annihilation of the children of evil, Pearl and Joe Christmas, who

are trapped at the point of impact between the life and death forces. The organic wholeness of Dilsey and Phoebe challenges the disengagement from reality and fragmentation of the family caused by the false pride of Hepzibah Pyncheon and Mrs. Compson, the greed of Judge Pyncheon and Jason Compson, and the estheticism of Clifford Pyncheon and Quentin Compson. Both The Marble Faun and Absalom, Absalom! turn on the acceptance of the element of darkness in man, which darkness precipitates the eternal fall; that fall can be fortunate if acknowledged but unfortunate if denied, and the refusals of Hilda and Quentin, as harbingers of the future, to affirm their own participation in the Adamic descent permeate both works with a cosmic pessimism that is relieved only by any reconciliation the reader may make to the timeless parables of historical responsibility that Hawthorne and Faulkner present. And to express these cosmic conflicts, both authors employ stylized characters in a pattern of opposition and balance, playing out the primal scheme; that is to say, Hawthorne and Faulkner write prose romances.

In Anatomy of Criticism, Northrop Frye considers the problem of fictional genres and finds that the essential distinction between the romance and the novel

> lies in the conception of characterization. The romancer does not attempt to create 'real people' so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. . . . That is why the romance so often radiates a glow of subjective

> intensity that the novel lacks and why a suggestion of allegory is constantly creeping in around its fringes. Certain elements of character are released in the romance which make it naturally a more revolutionary form than the novel. The novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their personae or social masks. He needs the framework of a stable society, and many of our best novelists have been conventional to the verge of fussiness. The romancer deals with individuality, with characters in vacuo idealized by revery, and however conservative he may be, something nihilistic and untamable is likely to keep breaking out of his pages.[32]

Hawthorne is, of course, a self-proclaimed romancer; in his preface to The House of the Seven Gables, he asserts that the romance has a right to present "the truth of the human heart . . . under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture. He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and, especially, to mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the Public. He can hardly be said, however, to commit a literary crime, even if he disregard this caution."[33] As Peter Swiggart states,

[32] Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 304-305.

[33] The House of the Seven Gables (Columbus: Centenary Edition of Ohio State University Press, 1965), p. 1.

Faulkner works in the same genre:

> Mr. Frye's description of prose-romance characterization is a useful means of isolating William Faulkner's work from that of contemporary realists and of relating his novels to the nineteenth-century romance tradition associated with Hawthorne and Melville. Faulkner is a twentieth-century novelist, deeply influenced by modern experiments in narrative point of view and the creation of characterization as a direct means of expressing moral and social concerns associates him with earlier American writers. . . . Faulkner seems to echo Hawthorne's words by insisting, in his Nobel Prize speech, that the writer concern himself with 'the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed.' Both authors explore the moral and psychological truths of the heart, and both employ stylized characters placed in situations designed primarily to illustrate their symbolic or allegorical function.[34]

Swiggart pursues this stylization in Faulkner's characters by classifying them as either Puritans or primitives, that is, as archetypal social figures, but it is also possible to expand Faulkner's polarities beyond these restricted limits and, in doing so, to develop more fully that probing of the moral and psychological truths of the heart common to Hawthorne and Faulkner. For there are cosmic forces at play in the works of both authors: dynamism and stasis, wholeness and fragmentation, reality and illusion, involvement and withdrawal, acceptance and denial, creativity and sterility, life and death. And to represent the shifting relationships and collisions of these forces, Hawthorne

[34] The Art of Faulkner's Novels (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), pp. 3-4.

and Faulkner create not rounded characters but essentially allegorical figures moving in a moralized landscape.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SCARLET LETTER AND LIGHT IN AUGUST

When David G. Noble says that Light in August is a retelling of The Scarlet Letter, he points unerringly to the inhuman theology of perfection as the villain in both stories.[1] But the point must be qualified and conditioned to avoid the predestination-grace-anti-Romanticism syndrome of the Christian-revival critics and rescue the comparison between the two writers from its present state of winged affirmation. In both novels, the characters have free will, are vouchsafed no divine aid, and indulge in a positive orgy of dynamic organicism while their respective authors make a most un-orthodox examination of the problem of evil. And in doing so, Hawthorne and Faulkner employ similar character types and arrange them in patterns strongly parallel to one another. So, in Light in August, there are bardic reverberations. We have heard these stories before, in The Scarlet Letter, four stories really: 1) dynamic womanhood triumphant, 2) the false clergyman, 3) the insidious persecutor, and 4) the child of evil.

[1] The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden: The Central Myth in the American Novel since 1830, (New York: George Braziller, 1968), p. 167.

i) The Circle, the Madonna, and the Unacceptable Heroine

Lena Grove is Hester Prynne's less gifted and more bovine sister, but the family resemblance is unmistakable. Though acutely sensitive to the hostility of the societies into which they make entrances, both have the courage of their creativity. The opening scenes of these two major American novels are remarkably similar. Mothers with illegitimate children endure the disapproval of the community for breaking the same structure of the social code. The woman is set apart, encircled, sufficient to herself, on-going. The circle of the community is rigid, dependent, outside the magic circle of the woman yet with eyes fastened upon her. An extended reprise of the first two chapters of The Scarlet Letter and the first chapter of Light in August will illustrate the continuity of the pattern, and make a case for both women as the bearers of the central affirmations of their novels.

Hawthorne's parable begins with an imagistic confrontation of self and society, of dream and reality. The founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony projected a Utopia but "recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison."[2] So

2 Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, ed. Sculley Bradley, Richard Croom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long, (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1961), p. 38. All references are to this edition and will be indicated in the text.

death and crime were recognized in a practical sense though shuddered at as a flaw in their vision of the ideal as capable of concrete manifestation in the new Eden of America, as Noble has pointed out,[3] but Hawthorne's meaning can not be restricted solely to the American experience.[4] The Adamic myth is a perennial one which Americans have dramatized more unabashedly and with greater literalness than anyone since the Jewish people crossed over Jordan into the Promised Land. And in it, Hawthorne found an emblem for a universal human delusion. As Harry Levin has said, ". . . when we refer to the American way of life, we simply mean the human condition, accelerated, amplified, and

3 Noble, p. 26. "European men had here in Massachusetts established a human society as mortal and fallible as themselves. Nevertheless, they had proclaimed themselves as earthly saints who had withdrawn from their sinful brothers in Europe to establish a Kingdom of God in the New World. The great expectation of these Puritans was that none of their elect membership would sin; they refused to accept weakness as the necessary human condition in this new land where rebirth promised the possibility of Adamic innocence."

4 Edwin Fussell, for instance, in Frontier: American Literature and the American West, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 91-114, says "A is for America" and "for Hawthorne, the West is the meaning of America." Viola Sachs in "The Myth of America in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter," Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny, 14 (1967), 245-267, does avoid the extreme dubiousness of this view and finds that Dimmesdale and Chillingworth stand for the old world, Hester for the new world, and Pearl for the American Dream as child of the old and new orders. But restricting The Scarlet Letter to a study of national character has, eventually, a claustrophobic effect; the novel's conflicts and paradoxes are American only by an accident of geography.

projected on a wide screen."[5] The Scarlet Letter is as much about America as Hamlet is about Denmark. Crime and death are central to both works in spite of everyman's desire to shunt them to one side where they won't intrude upon either the oblivion of merrymaking or the pretense of perfection. And so Hawthorne chose to frame his story with a prison at the beginning and a cemetery at the end, mortal book ends of society from which escape only one woman's costly freedom and, more dubiously, Pearl. But Hawthorne's area of concentration is the ugly prison, which "like all that pertains to crime . . . seemed never to have known a youthful era" (p. 38). Old as Cain and Abel, crime erects the prison, the "black flower of civilized society . . ." (p. 38). Immediately juxtaposed to this, however, is the wild rosebush "rooted almost at the threshold" of the prison door. The two flowers then are defined spatially in terms of one another, and their significations can not be separated either. That the two are intertwined is emphasized by Hawthorne's alternatives for the source of the rosebush: "whether it had merely survived out of the stern old wilderness . . . or whether, as there is fair authority for believing, it had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson, as she entered the prison door . . ." (p. 39). Is it wild nature or wild morality, or is each an emblem of

[5] The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, (New York: Random House, 1958), pp. 8-9.

the other? Ann Hutchinson was an antinominian, believing that Christians are freed from the moral law by the dispensation of grace set forth in the gospel, a doctrine that remains the omega point of selfhood in defiance of society's enforced code of external values. The social forces that trample on such individuality, as inevitably and per se they must do, are the black flowers looming over the wild rose, both cursed with each other, responsible for each other's being, a confrontation without resolution. It is, however, from the wild rose that Hawthorne would have us pluck "some sweet moral blossom" (p. 39) and thereby sets the stage for the entrance of his moral heroine, Hester Prynne.

In the crowd waiting around the prison door, Hawthorne focuses on the comments of four old dames, one young wife, and one man. The older gossips are unmerciful, suggesting a branding iron or death instead of a scarlet letter, while the young wife softly foresees the inner scar and pain the letter will cause Hester, and the man, appalled by the pitiless judgment of the matrons, exclaims, ". . . is there no virtue in woman, save what springs from a wholesome fear of the gallows? That is the hardest word yet!" (p. 41). There is, however, a virtue which springs not from fear of external coercion but from an inner wholeness and identity and presence and a willingness to suffer for that, and Hester Prynne exhibits it grandly as she repels the hand of the town-beadle and steps from the darkness into the summer sun of her own free will. Lady-like and dignified,

". . . her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped" (pp. 43-43). And the halo image at the beginning becomes that reiterated magic circle of the last chapters. In the Election Day crowd, ". . . wherever Hester stood, a small, vacant area--a sort of magic circle--had formed itself about her, into which, though the people were elbowing one another at a little distance, none ventured, or felt disposed to intrude. It was a forcible type of the moral solitude in which the scarlet letter enveloped its fated wearer; partly by her own reserve, and partly by the instinctive, though no longer so unkindly, withdrawal of her fellow-creatures" (p. 166). In fact, the whole structure of Hester's history is one of endless circling back to the point from which she began to live "her realities of the infant and the shame" (p. 46)--the reascendance of the scaffold, the resumption of the scarlet letter, the return to the cottage after Pearl's marriage. During Dimmesdale's Election sermon, Hester stood at the foot of the scaffold because there was "an inevitable magnetism in that spot, whence she dated the first hour of her life of ignominy . . ." and "a sense within her, --too ill-defined to be made a thought, but weighing heavily on her mind, --that her whole orb of life, both before and after, was connected with this spot, as with the one point that gave it unity" (p. 173). Whether that orb, that unity, all the circles signify futility or fulfillment is, of course, insoluble and the whole fascination of the scarlet letter. Like the crowd, we stand

outside "that magic circle of ignominy" (p. 175), "fixed there by the centrifugal force of the repugnance which the mystic symbol inspired" (p. 174). It is the ambiguity that is hardest to bear, and Hawthorne's most succinct expression of the judgmental difficulty occurs in his image of Hester as Madonna-figure:

> Had there been a Papist among the crowd of Puritans, he might have seen in this beautiful woman, so picturesque in her attire and mien, and with the infant at her bosom, an object to remind him of the image of Divine Maternity, which so many illustrious painters have vied with one another to represent, something which should remind him, indeed, but only by contrast, of that sacred image of sinless motherhood, whose infant was to redeem the world. Here, there was the taint of deepest sin in the most sacred quality of human life, working such effect, that the world was only the darker for the woman's beauty, and the more lost for the infant that she had borne. (p. 44)

One of the more significant points here is that only a Papist would have seen Hester as another Mary, for his world view, unlike that of the Puritans, is based on a theology of the imperfection of man, on the forgiveness of sins, on a hagiography in which saints identified themselves with sinners. The contrast, of course, remains, of that sin tainting that most sacred quality of human life. The question here is what sin and which sacred quality. In what way is Hester a moral heroine? And how does one come to terms with the paradoxical Pearl in this passage?

> 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 dishonored bosom, to connect her parent for ever with the race and descent of mortals, and to be finally a blessed soul in heaven. (p. 66)

Evidently sin and virtue, damnation and salvation, are bound up with one another, as closely connected as the wild rose bush and the prison.

One way of explaining this Hawthornian paradox which avoids the distortions of the doctrinaire anti-romantic critics[6] and leaves the visual effect of the novel intact--that is, Hester as the heroine who lives, Dimmesdale as the anti-hero who, in effect, kills himself, and Chillingworth as the villain who dies--is to see the romance as a conflict between dynamism and stasis, between harmonizing with the life-force and focusing on personal relations and staking one's whole identity on the abstractions of theology or science and focusing totally on oneself. Dimmesdale and Chillingworth will be examined below. For the moment, consider Hester.

6 Austin Warren in Nathaniel Hawthorne: Representative Selections, (New York: American Book Co., 1934), p. xxv, insists that Hawthorne denies Hester's romantic assertion that "what we did had a consecration of its own" by saying that she was taught much amiss in wandering through her moral wilderness. And according to Randall Stewart, "Puritan Humanism vs. Romantic Naturalism," in The Scarlet Letter, (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1961), p. 347, ". . . when the romantic apologist goes on to insist that the book is a vindication of individual impulse, the right of the individual to happiness, the sacredness of passion, it is necessary to demur. Does not Hester's view carry individualism a bit too far? Does it not translate 'the sacredness of the individual' into 'the individual a law unto himself'?" Such views do not take into account Hester's final prophecy as the culmination of her wisdom and her heroine-hood.

Hester remains in the Puritan community despite her ostracism because Dimmesdale is there and she sees herself connected to him "in a union, that, unrecognized on earth, would bring them together before the bar of final judgment, and make that their marriage-altar, for a joint futurity of endless retribution" (p. 60). And her last words to Dimmesdale ask, "Shall we not spend our immortal life together?" (p. 181). Moreover, she makes of Pearl a living symbol of their union, "the scarlet letter endowed with life" (p. 75), while "her own dress was of the coarsest materials and the most sombre hue" (p. 62). And after Pearl has married, Hester returns and resumes the scarlet letter of her own free will. Clearly, her relationship with Arthur Dimmesdale is the controlling force in her life, her reason for being; and she, who has staked everything on this union, is the one character in the novel who brings forth life and who survives the two men who have deserted her.

In the throes of her suffering, however, she indulges in speculation, and "the world's law was no law for her mind" (p. 119). Had it not been for Pearl, she might have been another Ann Hutchinson (whom Hawthorne before called "sainted") or a prophetess or a martyr to social change. The questions are: does this make her bad old Hester or good new Hester, and was her relationship with Dimmesdale good or evil? The problem as far as Hester is concerned is summed up in the seeming contradiction between "She knew that her deed had been evil" (p. 66) and "What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it

so! We said so to each other!" (p. 140). Rather than see the forest scene as evidence of weakness and inconsistency, I view it as being of a piece with the female dynamism of Hester. It is not a question of knowing or feeling, of one being right and the other wrong, but rather that one must go through what D. H. Lawrence calls "blood-consciousness" in order to arrive at self-knowledge. This same dynamism vindicates Hester's casting off the scarlet letter. The mistake here is not that Hester wants to leave and begin again somewhere else with Arthur, to escape the mechanism of history and transcend time, but that Pearl, that rigid little witch-baby who embodies the immediate and probably corrupt future, won't let her.

Throughout the romance, Hawthorne emphasizes the rich creativity of Hester's needle-work, in which he found the perfect objective correlative for her creation of her own self, a self she discovers through a knowing of the other, dynamically empathizing with him, desiring to lose herself in the union that together they could create. But during the Election procession, she sees a Dimmesdale who has given himself over totally to his own spiritualization, and he was "remote from her own sphere, and utterly beyond her reach . . . unattainable in his worldly position and . . . in that far vista of his unsympathizing thoughts . . ." and she knew "there could be no real bond betwixt the clergyman and herself" (p. 170). There was Hester's sin and it was double: aligning herself first with that withered emblem of scientific rationalization, Roger Chillingworth, and then

with that pathetic figure of spiritual abstraction, Arthur Dimmesdale. The one tries to manipulate the world, the other to transcend it, and neither knows, as Hester does, how to live in it. So Hester lacked wisdom and when she called, they came, but neither had on a wedding garment and so there was the abomination of desolation and weeping and gnashing of teeth in the exterior darkness. She endures retribution for hoping that abstractions could be humanized, for supposing that humanity was universally desired. No wonder that when Hester is buried by Dimmesdale, there is "a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle" (p. 186) and that their final union is in a single tombstone.

When Hester at the end comforts and counsels people, she tells them "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). This reiterates a passage by the narrator earlier in the book:

> . . . the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. Finally, all other difficulties being obviated, woman can not take advantage of these preliminary reforms, until she herself shall have undergone a still mightier change, in which, perhaps, the ethereal essence, wherein she has her truest life, will be found to have evaporated. (p. 120)

Less ethereal, more of the earth perhaps? To return again to the end of the romance, Hester recalls that once she thought she might be the "destined prophetess" of the new truth about the relationship between men and women but

> had long since recognized the impossibility that any mission of divine and mysterious truth should be confided to a woman stained with sin, bowed down with shame, or even burdened with a life-long sorrow. The angel and apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman, indeed, but lofty, pure, and beautiful; and wise, moreover, not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy; and showing how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest test of a life successful to such an end! (p. 186)

So the destined prophetess would have to know less and understand more, and that would be her purity. In her role as earth-mother, this is Lena Grove, destined prophetess of the divine and mysterious truth of harmony with the creative forces of the universe, who is wise through the ethereal medium of joy and of that new order that is the oldest order of all; and, like the earth, she abideth forever with her glance "all-embracing, swift, innocent and profound."[7]

There are, of course, certain problems in attempting to compare two women so seemingly dissimilar: Hester--tragic, intense, conscious; Lena--comic, somnambulistic, instinctive; the one all struggle,

[7] William Faulkner, Light in August, (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 7. All references are to this edition and will be indicated in the text.

the other all serenity. Their point of convergence, however, is not in the lowest common denominators but rather in the highest, in their cosmic roles, with Lena as the apotheosis of Hester. In both novels, the woman is an iconoclast who endures, survives the smashing of convention, for whom the social code is not an absolute, who may even bring good out of apparent evil, and who is, therefore, the hope of an evolutionary universe. What is involved, of course, is not so much illegitimate children as illegitimate values. And structurally, in terms of female dynamism and male stasis, Lena occupies the same place at the organic center of Light in August that Hester does in The Scarlet Letter and has the same relationship to Joe Christmas and Gail Hightower that Hester has to Roger Chillingworth and Arthur Dimmesdale. The problem with Hester is whether she is "good" enough to be a moral heroine. The problem with Lena is whether she is serious and central enough to qualify as one.

At the University of Virginia, Faulkner said of Light in August: ". . . that story began with Lena Grove, the idea of the young girl with nothing, pregnant, determined to find her sweetheart. It was--that was out of my admiration for women, for the courage and endurance of women. As I told that story I had to get more and more into it, but that was mainly the story of Lena Grove."[8] Now, while D. H.

[8] Faulkner in the University, ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 74.

Lawrence is right that we should "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale,"[9] sometimes the artist is right, and it seems only fitting he should receive credit for that. Besides, his statement is borne out by the title, the crucial opening and closing chapters, and the pattern of opposition between life and death forces which do not simply balance one another. Rather, the continuity of life embodied in Lena and her baby vindicates, redeems the death forces in the novel, which are recognized, wept over, but remain unworshipped. In this, Light in August is a retelling of not only The Scarlet Letter but also of Ecclesiastes: "One generation passeth away and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever. The sunne also ariseth, and the sunne goeth downe, and hasteth to the place where he arose." The same circular motion informs all three works, signifying in the end neither futility nor fulfillment but only endless futurity.

In Light in August Lena's circle must be distinguished from the circles of Christmas and Hightower as hers differs in terms of pace. It is not the galloping illusion of some past glory, a wheel of thinking now sandclutched, now rushing and spinning, nor is it that frantic circle of paved street which Christmas ran for thirty years. In contrast, Lena's circle is slow and steady, timeless and continuous:

[9] Studies in Classic American Literature, (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1923), p. 13.

> . . . backrolling now behind her a long monotonous succession of peaceful and undeviating changes from day to dark and dark to day again, through which she advanced in identical and anonymous and deliberate wagons as though through a succession of creakwheeled and limpeared avatars, like something moving forever and without progress across an urn. (p. 6)

As Alfred Kazin has pointed out, Lena's symbol is the wheel on the road[10] moving implacably onward, unconscious of the land and destinies through which it passes. But too much, perhaps, can be made of her tranquillity, her passivity, her oblivion. She is conscious of distance achieved, she actively pursues her goal, and she is fully aware of the disapproval of the community. How tranquil is the Lena who screams out at childbirth? How serene is the Lena who cries when Hightower pressures her not to hold onto Byron Burch?

Critics have tended to blur the reaction of the community to Lena into one of benevolent acceptance. Edmond Volpe says, "All the people whom she meets on the road are kind to her. Even a Martha Armstid, who would usually be vigorous in her denunciation of an unwed mother, treats her with kindness and generosity."[11] Yet Armstid

10 "The Stillness of Light in August," in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery, (New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1960), p. 252.

11 A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), p. 152.

thinks, "I reckon I do know what Martha's going to say. I reckon womenfolks are likely to be good without being very kind" (p. 11). And Cleanth Brooks finds that ". . . Lena moves serenely into the community and it gathers itself about her with protective gestures."[12] But, in fact, the Armstids are a composite of the speaking roles accorded four members of the crowd before Hester's prison; Mrs. Armstid, stern and disapproving and outraged by Lena's unwed motherhood, clashing out her bitterness on the pans in the kitchen, demanding "Is your name Burch yet?" (p. 15), watching her "with an expression of cold and impersonal contempt" (p. 18) and yet giving Lena the egg money; and Mr. Armstid bluntly questioning, "How folks can look at a strange gal walking the road in your shape and know that her husband has left her?" (p. 11), yet inviting her to stay the night with them and replying to his wife's savage brusqueness by asking, "What do you want to do about it? Turn her out? Let her sleep in the barn maybe?" (p. 15). In Lena, under the Armstids' harsh interrogation and the stare of strange eyes all the way from Alabama to Mississippi, there is that same awareness and sureness of self that Hester exhibited on the scaffold and all the years after.

But Lena is able to go beyond Hester, for she knows instinctively that the social code is at best only an approximation of the natural

[12] William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 68.

law which she obeys in its pure form--"That will be her life, her destiny. The good stock peopling in tranquil obedience to it the good earth . . ." (p. 356). Hester recognizes the communal judgment and absorbs it into herself; Lena knows that it doesn't matter, not even who assumes fatherhood. As Richard Chase has noted, "When she asks along the road for Burch, people direct her to 'Bunch,' but to her they always seem to say 'Burch.' She is purposefully separated from irrelevance and relaxed in her vision of reality."[13] That is the source for her tranquillity, her freedom from rigidity, her submission to creativity. It is not won, as Hester's is, but given and accepted and pursued. And the community judges her as an individual but depends upon her, has forbearance for her as a symbol of the life-force.

That Lena is a serious symbol is emphasized by the way in which Faulkner has invested her with Madonna and earth-goddess attributes through his romance. When Hawthorne referred to Hester as a Madonna, he said the world was darker for her beauty and the more lost for the infant she bore. This darkness was perhaps due to Hester's having opened moral vistas, wilderness areas of commitment to organic union as opposed to the inflexible abstractions which governed her society;

[13] "The Stone and the Crucifixion: Faulkner's Light in August," in Visions and Revisions in Modern American Literary Criticism, ed. Bernard S. Oldsey and Arthur O. Lewis, Jr., (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1952), p. 279.

and, as Byron Burch knows, people are more afraid of the trouble they haven't got than the trouble they do have. So Hester's was the necessary darkness and lostness before the dawn on which Lena's baby is born, and Lena herself is haloed in the lambent August light.

Beekman Cottrell[14] has outlined a number of the parallels which make Lena a Mary-figure. Both, for instance, travel a great distance to a strange place in order that their sons might be born there and both give birth in humble surroundings on the outskirts of town. And as Beach Langston has observed,[15] Faulkner tells us six times in the first chapter that Lena is dressed in blue, the traditional color for Mary. There is also the matter of Mrs. Hines' and, subsequently, Lena's confusion of the birth of her child with the birth of Joe Christmas, thus giving Lena's new-born son aspects of a Christ-figure additional to those which accrue to him by virtue of his mother's identification with Mary. This view of Lena as Mary and her child as a type of Christ-figure finds further support in the characterization of Byron Bunch as Saint Joseph. Byron and Joseph are both workers in wood and both are willing to care for and marry an expectant mother

14 "Christian Symbols in Light in August," Modern Fiction Studies, 2 (1957), 207-213.

15 "The Meaning of Lena Grove and Gail Hightower in Light in August," Boston University Studies in English, 5 (1961), 50.

no matter what the paternity of the child, accepting the role of guardian and protector to the new-born child. And in the closing scene of the novel, Lena with all her Mary attributes and Byron with his aspects of Saint Joseph, and the child born in the Christmas cabin, all project definite aspects of a type of Holy Family.

Coupled with Lena's Mary-figure qualities are those of a pagan earth-goddess. There is, first of all, her name, Grove, alluding to the sacred groves where the goddess Diana was worshipped and the fact that the ancient festival of Diana was celebrated in August, as Michael Millgate has pointed out.[16] And Diana was an earth-mother, a fertility figure as Lena is--on her way into Jefferson she has a spasm of labor pain and "she sits quite still, hearing and feeling the implacable and immemorial earth, but without fear or alarm" (p. 25). Hightower, the morning after she delivers, knows she "will have to have others, more remembering the strong young body from out whose travail even there shone something tranquil and unafraid. More of them. Many more . . . from these hearty loins without hurry or haste descending mother and daughter" (p. 356). This pagan earth-mother image works not as a violation of her Mary-image, nor does the comic mode in which she is cast make a burlesque of these allusions, for all three elements collaborate in the creation of a symbolic type conveying a complex of dynamic functions. In Mary, the spirit

16 The Achievement of William Faulkner, (New York: Random House, 1963), pp. 134, 136.

becomes flesh; in Diana, the creative forces continue; and in the comic approach, the value of both is reaffirmed.

Within the design of the novel, then, Lena opposes the static behavior of Christmas and Hightower with her dynamic presence, being diametrically opposed to the death-force of Joe and the time-trap of the defrocked minister. Victims of their own rationalization and abstraction, they seek knowing, not being, and define themselves in terms of society's obsessions with categories or dreams of glory past. But Lena defines herself, as Hester does, not through external projections but through inner harmony with the creative force within the self. In her empathy with the immemorial earth in which the self is lost, merged, Lena knows the All of the romantic vision and holds to her quest, finding that, indeed, a body does get around and in this knowledge finds her innocence and her profundity, her "ethereal medium of Joy."

ii) The Dubious Redemption of the Voluptuous Ego

In contradistinction to Hester's and Lena's moral vitality is the death-wish common to both Dimmesdale and Hightower. Both fail to meet, to achieve dynamic union, and substitute in its place the "voluptuous ego of the martyr" (Light in August, p. 429). As a result, the two ministers are false to their calling and their congregations, yet remain imprisoned in the groove of monorail morality which

their respective religions propagate. And they are, in the end, victims of their own abstractions and experience highly dubious redemptions.

The moral anemia of the two men is conveyed emblematically in their physical appearance. When called upon to address Hester on the scaffold, Dimmesdale is described as having a white brow, melancholy eyes, tremulous mouth, and a half-frightened look "as of a being who felt himself quite astray and at a loss in the pathway of human existence, and could only be at ease in some seclusion of his own" (p. 51). Throughout the novel he is described as pale and holding his hand over his heart, and his careworn, emaciated condition becomes an incremental repetition from his appearance at Governor Bellingham's house to his last performance on the scaffold, when he must use Hester's strength in order to enact his death scene. Only once in the progress of the romance does physical vitality return to him and that is after the forest scene and his agreement with Hester to leave for Bristol. Then he "leaped the plashy places" and recalled "how feebly, and with what frequent pauses for breath, he had toiled over the same ground only two days before" (p. 154). And the causal connection between union with the other and physical strength dramatizes visually the basis of Dimmesdale's failure as a human being.

According to D. H. Lawrence, "There is a basic hostility in all of us between the physical and the mental, the blood and the spirit.

The mind is 'ashamed' of the blood. And the blood is destroyed by the mind . . . ."[17] This is Dimmesdale's dilemma, that he can not believe in his physical nature, nor acknowledge that once he satisfied it, nor accept responsibility for, give his name to the child of that momentary fulfillment. His anemia comes from trying to bleach his blood, and the disease is pernicious. He, too, felt at the time that what they did had a consecration of its own, but in the forest, seven years later, he hushes Hester's mention of what he has not forgotten. And Hester states with all her dynamic authority:

> "Wilt thou die for very weakness? There is no other cause!"
>
> "The judgment of God is on me," answered the conscience-stricken priest. "It is too mighty for me to struggle with!"
>
> "Heaven would show mercy," rejoined Hester, "hadst thou but the strength to take advantage of it." (p. 141)

Dimmesdale's weakness is his self-consciousness, so acute that it excludes any possibility of yielding to the life-force and meeting with an other since he refuses categorically to subordinate his ego.

This alienation from anything organic is revealed most tellingly when he recounts to Hester: "'I have long shrunk from children, because they often show a distrust, --a backwardness to be familiar with me. They will not climb my knee, nor prattle in my ear, nor answer to my smile; but stand apart, and eye me strangely. Even

[17] Lawrence, p. 96.

little babes, when I take them in my arms, weep bitterly!" (p. 148). Out of the mouths of babes, etc. And when he fasts and keeps vigils, his self-imposed physical weakness brings on visions of his father "with a saint-like frown" (p. 105) and his mother "turning her face away as she passed by" (p. 106). These visions, the narrator tells us, were, in one sense,

> the truest and most substantial things which the poor minister now dealt with. It is the unspeakable misery of a life so false as his, that it steals the pith and substance out of whatever realities there are around us, and which were meant by Heaven to be the spirit's joy and nutriment. To the untrue man, the whole universe is false, --it is impalpable, --it shrinks to nothing within his grasp. And he himself, in so far as he shows himself in a false light, becomes a shadow, or, indeed, ceases to exist. (p. 106)

False to his own physical reality, Dimmesdale finds that same reality turning on him, and he compounds the error by punishing his own flesh with a bloody scourge, "laughing bitterly at himself the while, and smiting so much the more pitilessly, because of that bitter laugh" (p. 105). It is, as Lawrence has said,

> . . . the old self-mutilation process gone rotten. The mind wanting to get its teeth in the blood and flesh. The ego exulting in the tortures of the mutinous flesh. I, the ego, <u>will</u> triumph over my own flesh. Lash! Lash! I am a grand free spirit. <u>Lash</u>! I am the master of my soul! <u>Lash</u>! <u>Lash</u>! I am the captain of my soul. <u>Lash</u>! Hurray! "In the fell clutch of circumstance," etc., etc. Good-bye Arthur.[18]

[18] Lawrence, p. 100.

The fountainhead of these perceptual errors is the insurmountable ego of the martyr and the sybaritic sinner. For coupled with his rejection of the flesh is his embrace of what he likes to regard as the unpardonable sin, but, lacking the courage of his convulsions, he can't, like Ethan Brand, jump into a limekiln on a dark night with no one watching. Take away the audience and you have no more Arthur Dimmesdale. According to William H. Nolte, who has done the definitive hatchet job on Dimmesdale, annihilating the perversely sentimental beatification of the minister by Mark Van Doren and Randall Stewart,[19] Arthur is guilty of "weakness, self-pity, cowardice, hypocrisy, masochism, egotistic humility, and overbearing Puritanism . . . . Nothing matters to him except himself. His 'love' for Hester was no more than a flirtation with the devil (in his eyes), and his love for God, or the strictures of his peculiar God, was a

19 Mark Van Doren, "Between Two Worlds," in The Scarlet Letter (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1961), p. 296: ". . . his suffering makes him beautiful . . ."; Stewart, p. 349: "If heroism is measured in terms of the magnitude and severity of the struggle which is undergone, then Arthur must be adjudged the more heroic of the two, for Hester never did anything which cost a tithe of the bloody sweat, the agony, which Arthur's public confession cost . . . . He is the persecuted one, the tempted one. He it was whom the sorrows of death encompassed, the pains of hell gat hold upon. His public confession is one of the noblest climaxes of tragic literature. Poor, bedevilled Arthur Dimmesdale, the slave of passion and the servant of the Lord, brilliant of intellect, eloquent of voice, the darling of his congregation, the worst of hypocrites, and the prey of endless rationalizations and sophistries. No veteran of the calvary of woe was ever more battle-scarred or desperate than Dimmesdale as he stood on the scaffold and began, 'People of New England!' 'with a voice that rose over them, high, solemn, majestic.'"

debasing form of self-aggrandizement, darkly tinged with self-abuse."[20]

Nolte seems, perhaps, a little harsh in what he makes of Dimmesdale's long respiration after Hester refuses to name her fellow-sinner, but when the reader totals up all the instances of Dimmesdale's concern for his public image, a concern which leaves Hester to bear her public shame alone, credence is lent to Nolte's judgment. For throughout the novel, Dimmesdale is acutely conscious of his congregation's adulation of him and it is this which he has made into his reason for being, which determines all he does and all he neglects to do. In the pulpit, he confesses himself "a viler companion of the vilest, the worst of sinners, an abomination, a thing of unimaginable iniquity" (p. 104), knowing well his worshippers "did but reverence him the more . . . . He had spoken the very truth, and transformed it into the veriest of falsehood" (p. 105). When he stands on the scaffold at night, "There was no peril of discovery" (p. 107). And Hawthorne tells us this was a mocking of penitence "in which his soul trifled with itself" (p. 107), surely the ultimate in self-abuse. When Dimmesdale is asked by Pearl to stand with them on the scaffold at noon the next day, "all the dread of public exposure, that had so long been the anguish of his life, had returned upon him" (p. 111), --this just moments after the three had formed an electric chain and he had felt "a tumultuous rush of new life, other life than his own, pouring like a torrent into his heart, and hurrying through

[20] "Hawthorne's Dimmesdale: A Small Man Gone Wrong," The New England Quarterly, 38 (1965), 168-186.

all his veins, as if the mother and the child were communicating their vital warmth to his half-torpid system" (p. 111). He rejects the dynamism of union with them for the static safety of self-concern and the pleasure of his own remorse.

So Dimmesdale defrauds himself, Hester, Pearl, and his congregation, and this fraudulence becomes, in turn, a witness against the religious mentality that produced it. Fittingly, for instance, Dimmesdale dresses for his mock vigil on the scaffold "with as much care as if it had been for public worship, and precisely in the same manner" (p. 106). And the morning after that infamous vigil, the minister preaches a sermon "which was held to be the richest and most powerful, and the most replete with heavenly influences, that had ever proceeded from his lips" (p. 115). Cowardice plus hypocrisy equals heavenly influences? Hawthorne takes the old Sexton's advice to Dimmesdale and handles Satan without gloves in designing such devastating juxtapositions. But the allegory of Dimmesdale focuses on the minister as "a true priest, a true religionist, with the reverential sentiment largely developed, and an order of mind that impelled itself powerfully along the track of a creed, and wore its passage continually deeper with the lapse of time. . . . it would always be essential to his peace to feel the pressure of a faith around him, supporting, while it confined him within its iron framework" (p. 90). And the rigidity of that image is reiterated in the forest scene when Hester, urging Arthur to begin his romantic

journey, says, "'And what hast thou to do with all these iron men, and their opinions? They have kept thy better part in bondage too long already!'" (p. 142).

Such iron always produces irony in Hawthorne, Randall Stewart's declaration that he was "a Puritan, perhaps the Puritan of Puritans among the great American writers"[21] notwithstanding; the sheer weight of all of Hawthorne's denigrations of Puritanism is sufficient to establish the authorial attitude here: the very imposition of the scarlet letter on Hester; the "grim rigidity that petrified the bearded physiognomies" (p. 39) of those who waited to ogle Hester; the "grim and grisly presence of the town-beadle . . . who prefigured and represented in his aspect the whole dismal severity of the Puritannic code of law" (p. 42); the clergy and the governor placing themselves on a balcony above Hester, presuming to stand in judgment on her; the cruel presumption of self-righteousness that attempts to appropriate Pearl for the good of everyone concerned; Hawthorne's description of Puritan children as "the most intolerant brood that ever lived" (p. 70), who played at going to church, scourging Quakers, and scalping Indians; and then the rich and the powerful accepting the adornment of Hester's needlework but not her social presence. The list is a very long one from which only one vehement conclusion can be drawn, that Hawthorne was appalled at the cost in humanity exacted

[21] Stewart, p. 345.

by the cruel, self-righteous mentality to which he gave the habitation and name of New England Puritanism. It is, I think, beside the point to take Hawthorne to task for misrepresenting the historical facts and ambience and effects of Puritanism as, for instance and however compassionately, Edward H. Davidson does.[22] Hawthorne is not, after all, writing an historical novel, or rather he is, but it is a history of the heart of man, not of a fixed point in time, and within the framework of the prose romance, Puritanism is as much a type of sin as the scarlet A itself. And Arthur Dimmesdale is simultaneously its chief implementer and victim.

The basic flaw in such a behavioral code is its infliction of a dualistic vision in which the universe and all conscious life are divided against themselves and salvation is predicated on abstracting the will and the mind from the desire and the body, giving the name soul to only the former. The man who absorbs such a view into himself and, in turn, imposes it on others is a human being subtracted from his humanity and detached from the flow of being. Partial and warped, he makes a god of his abstraction and sacrifices himself and those on whom his life impinges to that perverse deity.

What manner of redemption can there be, then, for such a person? The whole man can not be redeemed since Arthur has denied existence

22 "The Question of History in The Scarlet Letter," The Emerson Society Quarterly, 25 (1961), 2-3.

and value to integration as a prerequisite for his concept of salvation. All he can do is make a final attempt at satiating the greedy ego of his abstracted self. So Dimmesdale, with his superb sense of theatre, exits with a performance perfected in numerous dress rehearsals, only now fulfilling simultaneously the needs of his public self for an audience and of his private self for suffering. Furthermore, his confession isn't any good to anyone except himself. In a pinch, Arthur ducks the irrevocable damnation he declared for himself in the forest and conceives a sudden taste for Mercy. Hester herself would prefer all their deaths to his confession, and Pearl's kiss is really the kiss of death, as will be demonstrated later. Moreover, Arthur manages at the end to commit two deadly sins, pride--"'behold me here, the one sinner of the world'" (p. 180)--and presumption--"'By giving me this burning torture to bear upon my breast! By sending yonder dark and terrible old man, to keep the torture always at red-heat! By bringing me hither, to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people! Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost forever!'" (p. 182, italics mine). He has not even the capacity for compromise and compassion that moved Marlow to lie to Kurtz's beloved, so when Hester asks if they will not spend their immortal lives together, Dimmesdale ends by, as Lawrence said, "throwing the 'sin' in her teeth, and escaping into death."[23] In

[23] Lawrence, p. 101.

fact, the only redeeming factor among all of Dimmesdale's failures is that Hester loves him. But Nolte dispensed with that possibility of salvation very neatly when he wrote, "If there were reason in love, one might doubt the realism of her continuing respect for the minister. Since there is not, one can only regret her bad taste."[24]

It seems a great injustice to Gail Hightower to run him in harness with the likes of Arthur Dimmesdale. His initial compassion for Joe Christmas ("Poor man. Poor mankind" [p. 87]), his delivery of two babies, his lie to save Christmas, too late though it is, his admission of guilt in his wife's suicide--all these indicate a moral consciousness that extends beyond the self and beyond mere knowledge. There is, however, a great similarity in the dilemmas faced by the two men, for both desert their women, that is, refuse immersion in the life-force, and substitute in their places abstract principles --Dimmesdale his pallid concept of soul and Hightower his delusions of past grandeur--the two abstractions passing under the guise of religion and making a particle of reality stand for the whole of existence.

Gail Hightower shares with Arthur Dimmesdale the emblematic wanness of the false clergyman, rather like a school color. Dimmesdale's was the paleness of emaciation, Hightower's the paleness of obesity. Interspersed in his early conversations with Byron Bunch are these

[24] Nolte, 172.

indicative descriptions: "Hightower is a tall man and he was thin once. But he is not thin now. His skin is the color of flour sacking and his upper body in shape is like a loosely filled sack falling from his gaunt shoulders of its own weight, upon his lap" (p. 68), and "His face is at once gaunt and flabby; it is as though there were two faces, one imposed upon the other, looking out from beneath the pale, bold skull surrounded by a frieze of gray hair, from behind the twin motionless glares of his spectacles. That part of his torso visible above the desk is shapeless, almost monstrous, with a soft and sedentary obesity" (p. 77). These sketchings of Hightower accumulate significance as they go on until, in the interview with Byron Bunch when he advises the man in love to just go away, Faulkner writes, "And when Hightower approaches, the smell of plump unwashed flesh and unfresh clothing--that odor of unfastidious sedentation, of static overflesh not often enough bathed--is well nigh overpowering" (p. 261). It is then Hightower thinks to himself, "'I am not in life any more'" (p. 263), and when Byron stumbles over his account of Lena's attitude toward Lucas Burch, Hightower is "the unbending man beyond the desk watching him, not offering to help" (p. 264). And this attempt to prevent Byron from dynamic union is a reprise one spiral higher of all he has committed before and it's all written in that pale, gaunt obesity, that <u>static</u> overflesh. If Dimmesdale is overly-attenuated in his self-concern, Hightower is slovenly in his self-satisfaction.

Only once, as in Dimmesdale's case, does physical vitality return to the man and that is after his involvement in life with his delivery of Lena's baby. After a two-mile walk back home, he thinks, "'I ought to feel worse than I do' . . . . But he has to admit that he does not" (p. 354). Instead, "there goes through him a glow, a wave, a surge of something almost hot, almost triumphant. 'I showed them!' he thinks. 'Life comes to the old man yet, while they get there too late. They get there for his leavings, as Byron would say' . . . . He moves like a man with a purpose now, who for twenty-five years has been doing nothing at all between the time to wake and the time to sleep again" (p. 355). So he chooses Henry IV, "food for a man" (p. 355), and not Tennyson to read, and thinks he will not sleep but does, almost immediately, and that man's food is never read. It is all a prelude to the oblivion he will require until he dies. The pattern occurs again when he wakes up; the glow is still there which he had feared to sleep off and he walks to visit Lena, but once there he moves to keep Byron from Lena and leaves her crying, having got his wish, he thinks, which is really a death-wish for the world.

Dimmesdale avoided life, courted death through homage to a false concept; Hightower did it by embracing a false dream. Both cut themselves off from organic life, from the continuum of being. Hightower's dream is that he has merged his self with that of his dead grandfather at the moment of glorious defeat, and of this alone is he conscious. It was "as though the seed which his grandfather transmitted to him

had been on the horse too that night and had been killed too and time had stopped there and then for the seed and nothing had happened in time since, not even him" (p. 55). As Peter Swiggart says, he "tries to convince himself that since his grandfather is dead, he no longer has any responsibility toward the living . . . . This moment of fusion, when the past becomes real, is called the soon rather than the now because once the galloping horses do appear the timeless moment of Hightower's vision will have pushed present reality entire from his mind."[25]

The effect on Hightower's wife of his refusal to accept the physical reality of now is very like the isolation forced on Hester by Dimmesdale's failure to acknowledge her until it is too late and then for the wrong reason. Taking Hightower's "romanticism" as a viable alternative to the cold machinations of the seminary world of her parents, she marries him, only to discover that beneath the rhetoric and the intensity lurks the same failure of humanity from which she was trying so desperately to escape. To Hightower, marriage "was not men and women in sanctified and living physical intimacy, but a dead state carried over into and existing still among the living like two shadows chained together with the shadow of a chain" (p. 420). Driven by her husband's absorption in his dream self, she commits suicide by

[25] The Art of Faulkner's Novels (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), pp. 142, 144.

jumping from a drunken stranger's hotel room in Memphis. This is the final scandal to the people of Jefferson who have listened to their minister mixing up galloping horses with absolution and choirs of martial seraphim and noted his wife's absence from church, her trips to Memphis, her failure to receive the church ladies, and, one Sunday, her shrieking at her husband in the pulpit. So they walk out on him and he emerges from the empty church with an open hymn book held before his face, but a photographer off to one side gets his profile and "behind the book his lips were drawn back as though he were smiling. But his teeth were tight together and his face looked like the face of Satan in the old prints" (p. 59).

This reference to Satan is not merely an analogy; it is an identification, an equation. For Hightower forced the town to interpret the D. D. after his name as meaning Done Damned. When the community, outraged at his refusal to leave town, threatens him in the name of the Ku Klux Klan and then beats him unconscious in the woods, he accepts, in fact, welcomes the assault "with that patient and voluptuous ego of the martyr, the air, the behavior, the How long, O Lord until, inside his house again and the door locked, he lifted the mask with voluptuous and triumphant glee: Ah. That's done now. That's past now. That's bought and paid for now" (p. 429). So his beating is just as self-imposed as is Arthur Dimmesdale's bloody scourge. Dimmesdale wanted freedom from the flesh, Hightower, freedom from life; and the two men, the two death-desires, are really inter-

changeable at this point. And once Hightower was ostracized utterly, he could indulge his dream completely, having, Satan-fashion, turned his back on every human need it was in his power to fulfill. In doing so, Hightower was untrue not only to his wife but to his calling and his congregation as well. As he comes to realize in the final reverie of the novel,

> I came here where faces full of bafflement and hunger and eagerness waited for me, waiting to believe; I did not see them. Where hands were raised for what they believed that I would bring them; I did not see them. I brought with me one trust, perhaps the first trust of man, which I had accepted of my own will before God; I considered that promise and trust of so little worth that I did not know that I had even accepted it. And if that was all I did for her, what could I have expected? what could I have expected save disgrace and despair and the face of God turned away in very shame? (p. 427)

Explicitly, then, desertion of the woman disqualifies the man for any activity of love among others or within himself. Severed from her, he is severed from all men, all life, and a fall from life is a fall from grace.

But the failure is not his alone. It stands, also, as an allegorical accusation against the religion and social conscience engendered by and upon the people themselves. As Hightower comes to see, the church is being destroyed by

> the professionals who control it and who have removed the bells from its steeples. He seems to see them endless, without order, empty, symbolical, bleak, skypointed not with ecstasy or passion but in adjuration, threat and doom. He seems to

> see the churches of the world like a rampart, like one of those barricades of the middleages planted with dead and sharpened stakes, against truth and against that peace in which to sin and be forgiven which is the life of man. (pp. 426-427)

Hightower's complicity is that he acquiesced to these professionals, accepted them, and when "the demagoguery, the abasement, the small lying had its reverberation in other small lies and ultimate threats in the form of requests and suggestions among the hierarchate of the Church and he received the call to Jefferson, he forgot how he had got it for the time" (p. 422). But the implications of the empty steeples stretch far beyond the petty seminary politics. The adjuration, the threat, the doom, the refusal to forgive--these are the death themes heard in the stories of Joe Christmas, Simon McEachern, Joanna Burden, Doc Hines, Percy Grimm, and the town. In the Hightower reverie that occurs between the time Christmas is jailed and the appearance of his grandparents in Hightower's study, Faulkner associates the minister's evocation of the past with the music of the Sunday evening prayer service, music

> pleading, asking, for not love, not life, forbidding it to others, demanding in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon, like all Protestant music. It was as though they who accepted it and raised voices to praise it within praise having been made what they were by that which the music praised and symbolised, they took revenge upon that which made them so by means of the praise itself. Listening, he seems to hear within it the apotheosis of his own history, his own land, his own environed blood . . . . Pleasure, ecstasy, they cannot seem to bear: their escape from it is in violence, in drinking and fighting and praying;

> catastrophe too, the violence identical and apparently inescapable And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another? (p. 322)

The community is outraged at the minister's preaching galloping horses in their church, but it fails to see the objective correlative between a past-obsessed minister preaching from the pulpit a glorious defeat, which defeat was, in fact, his grandfather shot stealing chickens, and their own communal worship of an idealized ante-bellum past, a past which they, too, foist upon the present in terms of the categorical imperatives which finally murder Joe Christmas. It is the same guilt borne by the Puritan community for their punishment of Hester in which is reflected the death-orientation of their hopes and aspirations. Their god, like Jefferson's, is a retreat from life, and Dimmesdale and Hightower are his prophets. Both have thought to buy immunity from immersion in the dynamic principle by suffering public ignominy, have thought to sanctify their sin through pain instead of seeking the good through confirmation of the other in joy. The romantic journey moves from the everlasting no through the center of indifference to the eternal yea. Dimmesdale stops at the no, Hightower at the center of indifference. Only Byron Bunch moves through to the omega point and so does not say good-bye even to that personification of the plateau he has left behind him.

Whether Hightower does remain at the center of indifference, whether he has failed to redeem himself, has been the subject of

considerable critical controversy. Cleanth Brooks, for instance, feels instead that Hightower has been "powerfully changed" by his delivery of Lena's baby, his gratitude toward Byron--"After all he has done for me. Fetched to me. Ay; given, restored to me" (p. 363), his lie to save Christmas, his admission of guilt for his wife's suicide and for his charlatan preaching, his vision of faces which he sees now for what they are, so that, at the end, according to Brooks, "he hears once again the phantom cavalry, the mystic experience with which he has sustained himself in the past, but this time he hears with a difference 'the clashing sabres and the dying thunder of hooves,' for he himself has finally dared something and has broken out of his self-centered dream."[26] What this difference is Brooks never goes on to explain, but John S. Williams[27] has attempted to develop the idea by seeing in Hightower's final vision of the wheel and the faces "a moment of self-knowledge and illumination" which enables him "to accept his share of responsibility for creating the present state of affairs in Jefferson, Mississippi, in particular, and the South in general . . . . The isolation that he has so long maintained . . . is in his case destroyed forever . . . he is drawn back into the community, not so much into Jefferson which remains

[26] Brooks, p. 70.

[27] "'The Final Copper Light of Afternoon': Hightower's Redemption," Twentieth-Century Literature, 13 (1968), 205-215.

bound to the burden of its dead past, but into the human community--the realm 'in which to sin and be forgiven which is the life of man.'"[28] Mr. Williams defines "redemption" subjectively as involving the responsible acceptance of the past's guilt and sin into one's present so as to leave one's future radically open to new possibilities, and objectively as the self's giving up its self-imposed isolation and re-entering the world, the self's moving from rejection of itself, the other, and the world to affirmation of itself, the other, and the world.[29] While it is true that Hightower fulfills the criteria of subjective redemption, it is not so clear that he takes advantage of that radical openness and satisfies the requirements for objective redemption. It would no doubt be unfair to Mr. Williams to suggest that Hightower is not about to become a professional midwife, but the notion at least points in the properly skeptical direction.

For the final paragraph of Hightower's last vision contradicts or, at the very least, heavily qualifies all the self-realization that has gone before. Hightower sees again the phantom riders rush past and disappear, and yet "it seems to him that he still hears them: the wild bugles and the clashing sabres and the dying thunder

[28] Williams, 214.

[29] Williams, 213.

of hooves" (p. 432). As Walter J. Slatoff has said, ". . . this vision, and the obsession that brings it, has been clearly associated with Hightower's failure to come to terms with himself and his world, and in his presumable recognition of his guilt before the final release of the wheel, he himself has recognized this . . . this very vision is a kind of madness which has emasculated and destroyed him and . . . his welcoming of it means he has again retreated from himself and the world."[30] But it is not a simple regression for Hightower. There is, as Brooks says, a difference this time, for that final paragraph begins: "It is as though they had merely waited until he could find something to part with, to be reaffirmed in triumph and desire with, with this last left of honor and pride and life" (p. 431). What he found to part with was the renewal of his taste for life granted him by Byron and Lena and Joe Christmas. But he is an old man who made his choice a long time ago. When he tells Byron: "'Not of my choice that I am no longer a man of God'" (p. 319), Byron replies, 'I know that. Because a man aint given that many choices. You made your choice before that'" (p. 320). And in one of Byron's last encounters with him, he sees Hightower's canvas chair "mended and faded and sagged so long to the shape of Hightower's body that even when empty it seems to hold still in ghostly embrace

30 Quest For Failure: A Study of William Faulkner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), p. 193.

the owner's obese shapelessness; approaching, Byron thinks how the mute chair evocative of disuse and supineness and shabby remoteness from the world, is somehow the symbol and the being too of the man himself" (p. 317). This definition of the man never materially changes throughout the novel. Always, participation in the physical reality of now and human relationships is forced upon him, never sought by him, and he can not sustain such action alone. His admission of guilt is a good in and by itself, but it never goes beyond forgiveness into the realm of effective being. It is as consonant with his own character as Dimmesdale's confession is with his, being a conversion not into life but into a kind of death in continuation of the old behavioral patterns, the choice made before. Hightower has this renewed taste for life, but the most vital thing he knows is his dream. And it is this vigor for which his visionary riders had waited, "to be reaffirmed in triumph and desire with, with this last left of honor and pride and life" (p. 431); he has, in the end, not even the distance engendered by regret to ask: ubi sunt? For both Dimmesdale and Hightower, then, the shadow does fall between the idea and the reality.

iii) The Secret Sharers

William Van O'Connor has noted the parallels between Roger Chillingworth and Doc Hines, seeing that each "hovers at the edge of a human life relishing further and further signs of anguish and despair."[31] This is true, but the most striking similarity between them is the way both Hawthorne and Faulkner have created in them a personification of the specific evil that warps one of the major characters and disfigures the human heart of the community. Moreover, the evil is the same for Chillingworth as it is for Hines, the refusal to accept and forgive and transform the blackness inherent in human existence, which refusal is itself the irredeemable blackness. A brief consideration of both characters will indicate their functions in the allegorical structures of the two romances.

Chillingworth is Dimmesdale's self-consciousness and self-division externalized. That he is aware at all times of what he is doing and why contributes not to his salvation but only increases his culpability. He admits to Hester during their first interview in prison that he married her in order to kindle a household fire in his chill and lonely heart, so that simple bliss would be his. But he knows that he betrayed her "budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay" (p. 57). His behavioral pattern is set, too,

31 "Hawthorne and Faulkner: Some Common Ground," The Virginia Quarterly Review, 33 (1957), 112.

like Dimmesdale's, and there is no shift in focus when he moves from "my bliss" to "my revenge." It is this self-concern that isolates him from the human community and makes of that withdrawal of his name from the roll of mankind a culmination and not a commencement. And of a piece with this self-concern is his declaration of possession to Hester: "No matter whether of love or hate, no matter whether of right or wrong! Thou and thine, Hester Prynne, belong to me! (p. 58). Incapable of dynamic union with organic life, he substitutes the possessiveness of a tyrant and the cold machinations of the unmitigated analytical mind, having "lost that spiritual view of existence amid the intricacies of that wondrous mechanism . . . the human frame" (p. 87). So he begins his search for the man who had wronged him "with the severe and equal integrity of a judge, desirous only of truth, even as if the question involved no more than the air-drawn lines and figures of a geometrical problem, instead of human passions, and wrongs inflicted on himself" (p. 94).

However, as Nina Baym has pointed out, Chillingworth, along with Aylmer and Ethan Brand, are "usually characterized as intellectual sinners, but all are motivated by passion. Each of the three is increasingly dominated by a single selfish passion which gradually absorbs all his energies, transforming him into a monomaniac. They are described in images of hell-fire. Their present red-hot states are carefully contrasted to their cold, pure pasts . . . ."[32] When Chillingworth begins working on his priestly patient, he is described

as having been, throughout life, "calm in temperament, kindly, though not of warm affections, but ever, and in all his relations with the world, a pure and upright man" (p. 94). He is, according to Miss Baym, "an upright, pure but totally selfish man, whose temperament can respond hotly only to injury."[33] This passion is signified by Hawthorne's burning description of him: "Sometimes, a light glimmered out of the physician's eyes, burning blue and ominous, like the reflection of a furnace, or let us say, like one of those gleams of ghastly fire that darted from Bunyan's awful door-way in the hillside, and quivered on the pilgrim's face" (p. 94). By the time of Hester's interview in the forest with the old physician, the blue flame has turned red: "Ever and anon, too, there came a glare of red light out of his eyes; as if the old man's soul were on fire, and kept on smoldering duskily within his breast, until, by some casual puff of passion, it was blown into a momentary flame" (p. 123).

Chillingworth has, in short, the same animal nature and hot passion he detects so acutely in his victim, but it is passion misdirected, as Dimmesdale's passion is, toward destruction instead of toward creativity. Misshapen, with one shoulder higher than the other, he concentrates in the very shape of his body that deformity

32 "The Head, the Heart, and the Unpardonable Sin," The New England Quarterly, 40 (1967), 36.

33 Baym, 37.

which Dimmesdale wreaks upon his blood-consciousness thus destroying it, that is, his desire to transcend life. Chillingworth is, in fact, the logical conclusion of Dimmesdale's ethereal aspirations, for he has been spared, unmercifully, both passionate love and progeny.

That Chillingworth symbolizes the extracted essence of Dimmesdale's failure of his full humanity is most evident in the parallels between the revenge Dimmesdale takes on himself for his sin, not the sin against the man he has wronged but against his own spiritual self, and the revenge Chillingworth takes on Dimmesdale for the wounding of his own ego. The bloody scourge is really only an outward manifestation of abusive inner activity, of a man gnawing at his own heart, and when, during his vigils, Dimmesdale looks at his face in a mirror by a powerful light, he "thus typified the constant introspection wherewith he tortured, but could not purify himself" (p. 105). There is, in both men, not just in Chillingworth, "a quiet depth of malice, hitherto latent, but active now . . ." (p. 101). And it is this shared malice which Hawthorne turns into the most devastating irony in the novel when Dimmesdale has the audacity to say: "That old man's revenge has been blacker than my sin. He has violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart" (p. 140). But that is precisely what Dimmesdale has done, violated the sanctity of his own heart. In Chillingworth's prison interview with Hester, he declares that "there are few things,--whether in the outward world, or, to a

certain depth, in the invisible sphere of thought,--few things hidden from the man, who devotes himself earnestly and unreservedly to the solution of a mystery" (p. 57). But there are some mysteries that shouldn't be tampered with, that men shouldn't want explained, like those of the heart, that ask only acceptance and a stance of wonder. In trespassing on such a preserve, Chillingworth is Dimmesdale's secret sharer and both pay the death wage for it. In the end, neither has escaped the other, and in his curious final comment on them both, Hawthorne wonders

> whether hatred and love be not the same thing at bottom. Each, in its utmost development, supposes a high degree of intimacy and heart-knowledge; each renders one individual dependent for the food of his affections and spiritual life upon another; each leaves the passionate lover, or the no less passionate hater forlorn and desolate by the withdrawal of his object. Philosophically considered, therefore, the two passions seem essentially the same except that one happens to be seen in a celestial radiance, and the other in a dusky and lurid glow. In the spiritual world, the old physician and the minister--mutual victims as they have been--may, unawares, have found their earthly stock of hatred and antipathy transmuted into golden love. (pp. 183-184)

And united they were in their love of self and hatred of dynamic union. The narrator says of Dimmesdale that his sick heart had made him suspicious of all mankind, that "Trusting no man as his friend, he could not recognize his enemy when the latter actually appeared" (p. 95). For his enemy was Chillingworth, alias himself, who wears, like the public Dimmesdale, a false face; under the mask of a healer

is a poisoner of the very springs of life. In refusing to submerge themselves in the dynamic organicism of life, to die to themselves, they fail to live, and in Chillingworth as the Black Man, the devil himself, we see "the dark problem of life" and Mr. Dimmesdale "made plain" (p. 96).

In his denial of physical reality as symbolized by the woman and his willingness to murder his own flesh and blood, Doc Hines is the personification of the self-destructiveness of Joe Christmas and parallels in character and structural function the insidious-persecutor role of Chillingworth in The Scarlet Letter.

No one in Mottstown knew exactly what sort of work Hines did, for, like Chillingworth, in whom Hester saw "a strange secrecy in his nature . . . grown upon him by the hidden practices of his revenge" (p. 141), Hines "was a secret man . . . with something in his glare coldly and violently fanatical and a little crazed, precluding questioning, curiosity" (p. 298) and "with a face which had once been either courageous or violent--either a visionary or a supreme egoist" (pp. 299-300). Egoist it is, for he has the "confidence of a man who has had the controlling of lesser men" (p. 300), and he exerts that confidence to the point of mad wickedness when he invades Negro churches and seizes the pulpit to preach to them the superiority of the white race. This is a broad playing out of Joe's refusal to accept the possibility of negritude in himself and anticipates, in fact, Joe's own violent disruption of Negro service when he curses

God from the pulpit. And this white racism, in turn, embodies a universal stance of man unwilling to accept the darkness within and without as an integral and essential element of life. Hines is, in fact, responsible for initiating Joe's obsession with his categorical identity. Having left his grandson on the doorstep of the Memphis orphanage where he is caretaker, Hines is there to insinuate to the other children that Joe is Negro and then to torment Joe with the question: "'Why dont you play with them other children like you used to?' and he didn't say nothing and old Doc Hines said, 'Is it because they call you nigger?' and he didn't say nothing . . . ." (p. 335).

In his revenge against blackness, Hines, secretive, fanatical, egotistical, gives yet another form to the essence of Chillingworth's rationalization for his own revenge against Dimmesdale and makes the same specious use of religion to justify his own monomania. In their forest interview, Chillingworth tells Hester:

> "My old faith, long forgotten comes back to me, and explains all that we do and all we suffer. By thy first step awry, thou didst plant the germ of evil; but, since that moment, it has all been a dark necessity. Ye that have wronged me are not sinful save in a kind of typical illusion; neither am I fiend-like, who have snatched a fiend's office from his hands. It is our fate. Let the black flower blossom as it may!" (p. 126)

There is a deadly similarity between that and Doc Hines' belief in his private line to God:

> "It was the Lord. He was there. Old Doc Hines give God His chance too. The Lord told old Doc Hines what to do and old Doc Hines done it. Then

> the Lord said to old Doc Hines, 'You watch, now. Watch my will a-working.' And old Doc Hines watched and heard the mouths of little children, of God's own fatherless and motherless, putting His words and knowledge into their mouths even when they couldn't know it since they were without sin yet . . . . 'What did I tell you?' God said to old Doc Hines. 'And now I've set My will to working and now I'm gone . . . and I can leave you here to watch it' . . . it was not anything that old Doc Hines didn't know because the Lord did not keep His purpose hid from His chosen instrument . . . and God come and He said to old Doc Hines, 'You can go too now. You have done My work' . . . . And old Doc Hines went when God told him to go. But he kept in touch with God . . . ." (pp. 334-335, 337-338)

Mrs. Hines understands that what Hines is doing is taking "God's name in vain and in pride to justify and excuse the devil that was in him" (p. 326) just as Chillingworth absolves himself of all fiendish propensities. Cleanth Brooks has traced the moral and cultural implications of such blasphemy in observing that "The tendency to call one's own hates the vengeance of a just God is a sin to which Protestantism has always been prone. But not merely Southern Protestantism and not merely Protestantism as such . . . most of the millennial movements, including the revolutionary movements, of the West share in this tendency to attribute the desires and hates of an individual or a group to God or to the dialectic of history or to the nature of reality. Doc Hines' distortions of this aspect of some of the Protestant sects, though they are those of a madman, are meaningful, for they constitute a serious caricature of views held by people who are quite 'normal.'"[34]

One corollary of this righteousness and wrath and one in which the allegorical method of both writers is most obvious is the unerring intuition which leads both men to their prey, Chillingworth to Dimmesdale, and Hines to his daughter Milly and her lover as they are running away:

> . . . he took the only short cut he could possibly have taken, choosing it in the dark, out of a half a dozen of them, that would ever have caught up with them. And yet it wasn't any possible way that he could have known which road they had taken. But he did. He found them like he had known all the time just where they would be, like him and the man that his gal told him was a Mexican had made a date to meet there. It was like he knew. (p. 329)

The reader is reminded that when Lucifer in his pride fell from grace, he lost none of his faculties and that the forces of evil and hatred are as sharp and knowing, perhaps more so, than the forces of goodness and love. And aligned with this devilish complacency and intuition is the manner in which both men feed on the object of their contempt. Chillingworth is "dependent for the food of his affections and spiritual life" (p. 184) on Dimmesdale, and Hines receives quite literally his bread of life from Negroes—". . . now and then Negro women carrying what were obviously dishes of food would be seen entering from the rear of the house where the couple lived, and emerging empty-handed . . . this white man who very nearly depended on the bounty and charity of Negroes for sustenance was going singlehanded

[34] Brooks, p. 63.

into remote Negro churches and interrupting the service to enter the pulpit and in his harsh dead voice and at times with violent obscenity, preach to them humility before all skins lighter than theirs, preaching the superiority of the white race, himself his own exhibit A in fanatic and unconscious paradox" (pp. 299, 301).

The static mechanism of puritan fanaticism and white racism is conjoined inevitably with that of misogyny, and in all of these Doc Hines reflects the rigidity of Joe Christmas in concentrated form. As Joe is both victim and stern embodiment of the categorical imperatives of both religion and race, so also is he the most violent woman-hater in the novel and this misogyny is externalized in Hines' reiterated abomination of womanflesh. With his Adam's-rib mentality, he sees all women as created evil, and so he can, in good conscience, let his daughter Milly die in childbirth by refusing to go for a doctor. And Milly has compounded her mistake tenfold in her father's eyes by running off with a man who Doc believes, in fact, has to believe, is a Negro; it is the miscegenation which he finds the ultimate in woman's capacity for evil, one devil taking in a second devil more evil than herself. It is into this pattern of outrage at miscegenation that Joe Christmas chooses to grow. As Olga Vickery says, "He beats the prostitute who refuses to be horrified by his Negro blood, thus forcing her to initiate that ritual violence which he expects. His reaction is understandable, for her indifference challenges the validity of the premise on which he has built his

whole life."[35]

But the ultimate expression of Hines' static, life-denying, divisive mentality as emblematic of Joe's self-destructiveness comes in old Doc's desire for the town to lynch his own grandson: "He was pure crazy by now, standing on the corner and yelling at whoever would pass, calling them cowards because they wouldn't take the nigger out of jail and hang him right then and there . . . . He said that he had a right to kill the nigger" (p. 307). And Joe walks into Mottstown after Joanna Burden's murder just asking to be recognized and caught and killed. But the roots of his death-wish are in the value he gives his own identity. He finally chooses blackness, but any choice means the sickness unto death, for he is both. So, like Hines, he is willing to sacrifice his own flesh and blood to which he had chosen never to reconcile himself, being progeny and progenitor of the polarity of that static mechanism of which his grandfather Hines is so vindictively representative.

iv) The Defiant Imitators

When the irresistible force of dynamic organicism meets the immovable object of static mechanism in these two novels, Pearl and Joe are trapped at the point of impact, have their moment of

[35] The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 71.

triumphant grief, and are annihilated. Although both are, in a sense, fatherless outcasts, they suffer really from too much fatherhood or at least the wrong kind and from not being cast out far enough to avoid the paternal plague. For the fathers of Pearl and Joe have eaten the sour grapes of pseudo-Christianity and their children's teeth are set on edge, Arthur Dimmesdale and Joe's foster-father, Simon McEachern, both having bequeathed to their children a mind-set that relishes corruption and abstraction, outward signs and not inward essence. Opposing this static male principle is the dynamic woman who imparts to the child not a life-object but a style, a mode of feeling, from which each child extracts the pain but foregoes the affirmation that lies just the other side of it. The hope in each novel is so marginal as to be almost non-existent, consisting only of "this woman was," not "that child will be."

That Pearl is the uneasy combination of the life and death forces in the novel is evident in the juxtaposition of opposites which Hawthorne uses to describe her. She is, for instance, passionate yet inhuman--". . . there was a trait of passion, a certain depth of hue, which she never lost; and if, in any of her changes, she had grown fainter or paler, she would have ceased to be herself; --it would have been no longer Pearl!" (p. 67); But Hester came to know

> a certain peculiar look that warned her when it would be labor thrown away to insist, persuade, or plead. It was a look so intelligent, yet

> inexplicable, so perverse, sometimes so malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild flow of spirits, that Hester could not help questioning, at such moments, whether Pearl was a human child . . . . Whenever that look appeared in her wild, bright, deeply black eyes, it invested her with a strange remoteness and intangibility; it was as if she were hovering in the air and might vanish, like a glimmering light that comes we know not whence, and goes we know not whither. (p. 68)

And Hester would rush to embrace her, just "to assure herself that Pearl was flesh and blood, and not utterly delusive" (p. 68).

But the contraries of her nature are most disturbingly dramatized in the way Pearl spends her time during her mother's two crucial interviews, first with Chillingworth and then with Dimmesdale. While Hester is confronting her husband with his persecution of the minister, Pearl is torturing animals, and while she is proposing the romantic journey to Dimmesdale, Pearl is playing Saint Francis to a wolf. As the Black Man counters Hester's plea for his forgiveness of Dimmesdale with talk of revenge for their transforming him into a fiend, Pearl has a narcissistic encounter with a pool. She flirts with her reflection, asking it to come out and join her, and "as it declined to venture--seeking a passage for herself into its sphere of impalpable earth and unattainable sky. Soon finding, however, that either she or the image was unreal, she turned elsewhere for better pastime" (p. 128). The temptation to self-absorption to which Chillingworth has succumbed is present for Pearl, but she can not decide which self is real, the earthly one or the

abstracted image. So she moves on to vivisection, laying out a jelly fish to melt in the warm sun, pelting small sea-fowl with pebbles, and breaking the wing of a gray bird with a white breast. "But then the elf-child sighed, and gave up her sport; because it grieved her to have done harm to a little being that was as wild as the sea-breeze, or as wild as Pearl herself" (p. 128). The powers of destruction are within her, the impulse for inflicting pain, as they are in Chillingworth, but there is that much of Hester's sympathy in the child that she grieves, if only after the fact. Finally, she gathers sea-weed and adorns herself like a mermaid, symbol of immersion in the life-force, but then with some eel-grass she forms the letter A on her own bosom, "but freshly green instead of scarlet! The child bent her chin upon her breast, and contemplated this device with strange interest; even as if the one only thing for which she had been sent into the world was to make out its hidden import" (p. 128). The power of greenness is akin to the power of blackness at this moment, signifying the vitality of sin and suffering, the continuum of its being, the impossibility of ever converting the static into the dynamic, and the sin committed when organicism is adulterated with mechanism. Pearl wonders if her mother will ask her what the green A means; it is part of Hester's failure of wisdom that she claims it has no purport for Pearl and threatens to shut her in a dark closet if she persists in asking the why of the A. Yet unconsciously, Hester recognizes, soon after, the eternal meaning of

the A as the type of all sin. In the forest as they go to intercept the minister, the dialogue between Pearl and her mother reveals the way of the world:

> "Mother," said little Pearl, "the sunshine does not love you. It runs away and hides itself, because it is afraid of something on your bosom. Now, see! There it is playing, a good way off. Stand you here, and let me run and catch it. I am but a child. It will not flee from me; for I wear nothing on my bosom yet!"
>
> "Nor ever will, my child, I hope," said Hester.
>
> "And why not mother?" asked Pearl, stopping short, just at the beginning of her race. "Will it not come of its own accord, when I am a woman grown?"
>
> "Run away, child," answered her mother, "and catch the sunshine! It will soon be gone." (p. 132)

The sun, equated with innocence, will soon be gone, for Pearl, for Everychild.

Contrasted with Pearl's perverse cruelty to animals during the Chillingworth interview is the amusement she finds in the Doctor Doolittle passage paralleling her mother's life-offering to Reverend Dimmesdale.

> The small denizens of the wilderness hardly took pains to move out of her path. A partridge, indeed, with a brood of ten behind her, ran forward threateningly but soon repented of her fierceness, and clucked to her young ones not to be afraid. A pigeon, alone on a low branch, allowed Pearl to come beneath, and uttered a sound as much of greeting as alarm. A squirrel from the lofty depths of his domestic tree, chattered either in anger or merriment . . . and flung down a nut upon her head . . . . A fox, startled from his sleep by her light footstep on the leaves, looked inquisitively at Pearl, as doubting whether it were better to steal off, or renew his nap on the same spot. A wolf, it is said--but here the tale has

> surely lapsed into the improbable,--came up, and smelt of Pearl's robe, and offered his savage head to be patted by her hand. The truth seems to be, however, that the mother-forest, and these wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child.
>
> And she was gentler here than in the grassy-margined streets of the settlement, or in her mother's cottage. (pp. 146-147)

So an animistic nature embraces her because she is wild, and Pearl in turn responds to nature with more gentleness and sympathy than she gives to the community or to her own mother. Yet she returns from this sojourn of dynamic empathy to demand that Hester resume the scarlet letter, exhibiting that resistance to change which is the mark of the mechanistic mentality.

When Pearl approaches, her father, terrified that the world would see his features in her face, says she is mostly Hester's, but Hester replies, "'No, no! Not mostly! . . . A little longer, and thou needest not to be afraid to trace whose child she is'" (pp. 147-148). The somber fact is that Pearl, caught between the life and death forces represented by her parents, is her mother's child but her father's adult. Her principle of being is, as Dimmesdale says, "the freedom of a broken law" (p. 98), which lets her dance on a gravestone, unburdened, as no other Hawthorne character is, by the shadow of generations past, by the old order. "It was as if she had been made afresh, out of new elements, and must perforce be permitted to live her own life, and be a law unto herself, without her eccentricities being reckoned to her for a crime" (p. 98). And

what does she do with this freedom, this pearl of great price, but cast it before swine, first in demanding Dimmesdale's fatherhood and then in regressing not just to the Old World but actually marrying into continental aristocracy and using the Black Man's money to do it.

This is not exactly the standard critical position on Pearl, however. It has been suggested, for instance, that it is "one of Pearl's most important functions to save her mother from becoming a reformer,"[36] that Chillingworth was generous in making Pearl the richest New World heiress of her day,[37] that Pearl "represents man's hopeful future."[38] The value of the first is highly dubious and ignores Hester's status as heroine and last word; the second is a comfortable varnish over a painful truth; and the third encompasses both in its whitewashing of Hawthorne's diabolical implications. A typically bourgeois reading of Pearl which concentrates the essence of these complacent approaches is Chester E. Eisinger's. He sees the Pearl before Dimmesdale's confession as

> a symbol of natural liberty, perverse and willful,

36 John C. Gerber, "Introduction," Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Scarlet Letter (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 11.

37 Frederick C. Crews, The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 151.

38 Hugh N. Maclean, "Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter: 'The Dark Problem of This Life,'" American Literature, 27 (1955), 14.

> consulting her own impulses and following them wherever conflicts arose. She is antisocial. She will not be governed by any human will or law. She is as unruly as nature and is therefore unfit for civil society. Only when these natural qualities are washed away in Dimmesdale's salvation does Pearl become a responsible human being, ready for admission into the community of men and, when Chillingworth's money came to her, even into the Puritan community . . . . We may safely surmise that, equipped with money and a receptive feminine disposition, Pearl makes a good marriage and bears children. She treats her mother with love and consideration. Pearl stands at the end as an apotheosis of Puritan morality.[39]

And perversely enough, she is an apotheosis--of the corrupt American dream--with her name from a masochist, her money from a fiend, and her wedding band from European nobility. Lawrence thinks she married an Italian count,[40] but he was just being fanciful. It was, more likely, a prince from Monaco. Pearl is indeed humanized by that kiss she gives her dying father (and thereby culpable), and her tears are a "pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor for ever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it" (p. 181). But some worlds, the false ones of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth and her husband, it is better to battle. Heroine Hester, the dynamic norm of

[39] "Pearl and the Puritan Heritage," College English, 12 (1951), 329. He even congratulates the Puritans' self-righteous attempt at child-snatching, saying, "Illegitimate though she may be, the authorities of the colony are concerned for her spiritual well-being in the interest, again, of her immortal soul. It is this concern that impels the Governor to propose that Pearl be taken from Hester." p. 328.

[40] Lawrence, p. 107.

the novel, knows where the real world is, returns to it, yet even there chooses to stand apart and lecture the receptive on her vision of a third world, not caring to use the luxurious trifles Pearl sends her. And as Lawrence says, ". . . oh, Pearl, there's a Nemesis even for you. There's a Doom, Pearl. Doom! What a beautiful northern word. Doom. The Doom of the Pearl. Who will write that Allegory?"[41] William Faulkner, of course.

Pearl is really a point in time in which the opposing forces of dynamism and stasis co-exist and hang in decadent suspension before disintegrating into the pathology of Joe Christmas. For, like Pearl, Joe sums up, within the battlefield of his self, the antagonism between the life and death forces of the novel, choosing repeatedly life-denial until he himself becomes the epitome of the polarity so opposed to the fecundity of Lena Grove. Richard Chase has unfolded the pattern of linear discreteness versus the curve, flight versus pursuit in Light in August: "The curve image stands for holistic consciousness, a containing culture and tradition, the cyclical life and death of all the creatures of the earth. Throughout the novel, Lena retains her holistic consciousness and she is strong, enduring, hopeful . . . . The linear discrete image stands for 'modernism': abstraction, rationalism, applied science, capitalism, progressivism, emasculation, the atomized consciousness . . . . For Joe Christmas,

[41] Lawrence, p. 113.

in whom the linear consciousness becomes pathological, the curve image is a 'cage' or a 'prison' to be broken out of. Or it is something to be gashed from the outside so that whatever it contains will be spilled meaninglessly out."[42]

Just as Pearl is fascinated with the scarlet letter as a communal symbol of evil, so Joe focuses on that which his cultural environment designates as evil, namely, the female and the Negro, alternately embracing both as the death of the soul and fleeing in revulsion from that which would submerge him in physical reality and bring him into life if approached with openness and the courage to be; but like anything else, the darkness of both can be corrupted, as it is here by the twisted ironwork of Southern puritanism.

Zealots of this mentality, afraid of the dark and yet fascinated by it, mold Joe's life from the beginning. Doc Hines sits outside God's own boiler room, seeing Joe as a pollution and abomination of the earth by what he regards as the vice of his supposedly Negro blood. Joe knows that he is different from the others "because he is watching me all the time" and "he accepted it" (p. 121), letting Hines carry him off silently to a Negro orphanage in Little Rock. And this acquiescence of Joe's to the power of hatred continues into his relationship with his foster father, Simon McEachern, who calls the pollution by another name, the innate depravity of man as taught

[42] Chase, p. 272.

by the articles of Calvinism; but it is only another manifestation of the same fixation with blackness.

For McEachern, the two virtues are work and the fear of God, the cardinal sin is sex, and Christmas, symbol of divine joy in rebirth, is a heathenish name which he will change. And he has that same obsession with revenge which Chillingworth embodies and Pearl delights in. When Joe is repulsed by and beats the Negro girl the neighborhood boys have hired for their sexual initiation and then fights all the other boys, McEachern, knowing only that he has been in a fight and come home late, whips him and then says, "'You left marks on them, I trust?'" (p. 140). But this sin is not in the catechism Joe refuses to learn, for which refusal McEachern, "the ruthless man who had never known either pity or doubt" (p. 133), whose "voice was not unkind. It was not human, personal at all" (p. 130), whips him into unconsciousness. Obeying only the forms and not the essence of Christianity, the rules of discipline and not the heart of love, McEachern sets an example and Joe willingly follows; they were "in their rigid abnegation of all compromise more alike than actual blood could have made them" (p. 130). As his foster father beats him, "the boy's body might have been wood or stone; a post or a tower upon which the sentient part of him mused like a hermit, contemplative and remote with ecstasy and self-crucifixion" (pp. 139-140). Masochist and enemy of the love that nourishes growth and change, Joe hardens into a Satan-figure, the Christ of a hellish mode of existence, who

chooses cruelty and rigidity because it is simpler, more predictable, requiring only stoicism, never the risk of human response or otherness. So he rejects Mrs. McEachern's fumbling attempts at kindness and love, attempts which, in the harsh world of her husband, had to be kept secret, for love was treason, a betrayal of the locked heart. And Joe resents that she was trying to make him cry--"Then she thinks that they would have had me" (p. 147).

But it's the other side that gets him, the static, death-oriented people to whom Joe, like Pearl, responds, and in his final lap around the iron circle, he encounters Joanna Burden, in whose dementia the two shades of darkness, racial and religious, are combined and then blackened utterly by her grotesque corruption of sex. It is when Joanna begins to speculate about having a child but really wanting just marriage that Joe thinks for a moment, "Why not? It would mean ease, security, for the rest of your life. You would never have to move again. And you might as well be married to her as this" (p. 232) but declaring to himself, "'No. If I give in now, I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be'" (p. 232). And so, when Joanna asks him first to go to a Negro college and then to kneel down and pray, she, as Peter Swiggart observes, "crystallizes both Joe's racial obsession and his hatred of orthodox Calvinist piety. . . . Joe's puritan hatred of women and the physical desire they represent is consistently involved with his hatred of the Negro blood which he seems to hold responsible

for the terrifying world in which he must live. He imagines relations with women as a pit or pool of glimmering darkness out of which he can not extricate his own lost and damned mulatto body. The religious and sexual agony of Joanna Burden reflects . . . Joe Christmas's own tormented self."[43] So he kills her and then lets himself be killed by Percy Grimm, another of his secret sharers, who carries out the five-shot crucifixion and mutilation that expiates nothing, and continues in hell his sterility in life.

Joe, unlike Pearl, resists as an adult as well as a child the false world into which he was born, but in that resistance he becomes the image of his corruptors, just as Pearl does in her acceptance. Doc Hines, Simon McEachern, and Joanna Burden each reflects an aspect of Joe's failure of humanity. The allegory of Pearl then is the acquiescence to a man-made doom and dance of death, and Joe is the black pearl trapped in the shell of Puritan morality. Pearl becomes one of the living dead and Joe one of the dead living on in memory, and both lay their coldly palpable hands upon the consciousness of the reader. And the point of utter bleakness in the novel is the merging of Lena's new-born son with Joe as a baby, not only in the mind of Mrs. Hines but in Lena's as well. It would seem there is no guarantee that the dynamic forces of the universe will not spawn men who choose to mechanize themselves into the static syndrome of abstractions.

[43] Swiggart, p. 137.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES AND THE SOUND AND THE FURY

The greed, pride, estheticism, cynicism, and salvation in the romance of The Sound and the Fury are the dissolution and evolution of those same allegorical themes in The House of the Seven Gables. The morality play in both works presents the conflict between the fragmentation of those who misconstrue and then deify a particle of reality, making a sin of synecdoche and languishing in their misery, and the integrity of those whose total being encompasses and proclaims the organic wholeness of life and its quintessence of joy. The characters with splintered visions see materialistic acquisition, family pride, or the Ideal exclusively, and this obsession, in turn, affects their attitude toward time, causing them to dwell in the exclusive past or future rather than in the whole man's inclusive now. Also, both works have resident cynics standing outside time and contemplating these shards of not-so-Grecian urns, and beyond them are the dynamic women who transcend time by living within it, opposing the idea as villain with being as heroine.

Both families have the strain of doom in them, which, for the Pyncheons, takes the form of stealing and success and, for the Compsons, the form of gambling and failure. But the success and

failure do not so much differentiate as join the two families in the self-consciousness that savors both phenomena as peculiarly theirs and a source of almost Calvinistic justification. Both attain a point of pseudo-aristocracy, the Pyncheons in the Puritan Colonel with his rank, wealth, and eminent character, and the Compsons in the Old Governor, Quentin MacLachan, who was "the last Compson who would not fail at everything he touched save longevity or suicide."[1] But the aristocratic gives way to the commercial as Hepzibah, "a lady--who had fed herself from childhood with the shadowy food of aristocratic reminiscences and whose religion it was, that a lady's hand soils itself irremediably by doing ought for bread--this born lady, after sixty years of narrowing means, /who/ is fain to step down from her pedestal of imaginary rank,"[2] is forced to open a cent-shop. And Compson's mile, now the center of the town of Jefferson, is in time "populated mainly by the descendants not of Compsons but of Snopeses, /who/ had begun to encroach and then nibble at and into it as the failed brigadier spent the next forty years selling fragments of it off to keep up the mortgage on the remainder" (p. 7), and that

[1] The Sound and the Fury (New York: The Modern Library, 1946), p. 7. All references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.

[2] The House of the Seven Gables (Columbus: Centenary Edition of Ohio State University Press, 1965), pp. 37-38. All references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.

remnant is sold by Jason Compson III to pay for Caddy's wedding and Quentin's one year at Harvard.

The seven-gabled house and Compson's place register their owners' decline, being objective correlatives of the decay within. The ancestral home of the Pyncheons is "a rusty wooden house" (p. 5), which "grew black in the prevalent east-wind" (p. 6), surrounded by "a ruinous wooden fence" (p. 27) and with "green moss . . . gathered over the projections of the windows" (p. 28) and the "sordid and ugly luxuriance of gigantic weeds, that grew in the angle of the house" (p. 28), in short, a "desolate, gusty, rusty old house" (p. 28). The Yoknapatawpha version of this is the Compson place, with the "weed-choked traces of the old ruined lawns and promenades, the house which had needed painting too long already, the scaling columns of the portico" (p. 8). Jason IV eventually sells the place to a countryman, who makes it a boarding house for juries and horse and mule traders, and in time it vanishes altogether, being replaced by bungalows. But the Pyncheon house still stands, a narrative fact laden with implications as black as the house itself and to be considered later.

So the social and economic situations of the two families are similar, but these are simply the meaningful contexts which release the interplay between good and evil, between the fractured vision and the whole one. The real importance of the comparison lies not in the similarities but in the variations wrought upon the same sins and moral triumphs by their passage into the twentieth century. If there

is an increase in shabbiness and blatancy, there is a decrease in hypocrisy and gullibility, and a collation of the two works becomes a revelation of the fate of the family.in the modern world, the family being the collective anti-hero refusing to seize the day and saved only by the outsider who absorbs the lost ones into her vision as life absorbs death.

The false sense of family pride, based on family not as a set of personal relationships but as social currency is a flaw in both Hepzibah and Mrs. Compson, but only in the latter is the flaw fatal. Both retreat from the world, fearing interaction with the human community and under committment to a fantastic notion of their innate gentility. Hepzibah earns the narrator's snickering and merciless enumeration of every palpitation of her heart and each heavy sigh as she demeans herself by opening a cent-shop in one of the gables. "'Ah, Mr. Holgrave,' cried she, . . . 'I never can go through with it! Never, never, never! I wish I were dead, and in the old family-tomb, with all my forefathers! With my father, and my mother, and my sister! Yes,--and with my brother, who had far better find me there than here! . . . I was born a lady, and have always lived one--no matter in what narrowness of means, always a lady!'" (pp. 44-45). And the objective correlative of this family pride is Hepzibah's emotional relationship to her brother, Clifford, all nicely fraught, as Frederick C. Crews notes,[3] with suggestions of latent incest as she studies his miniature, kept under lock and key: "It is the like-

ness of a young man, in a silken dressing-gown of an old fashion, the soft richness of which is well adapted to the countenance of reverie, with its full, tender lips, and beautiful eyes, that seem to indicate not so much capacity of thought, as gentle and voluptuous emotion . . . . Can it have been an early lover of Miss Hepzibah? No; she never had a lover--poor thing, how could she?--nor ever knew, by her own experience, what love technically means. And yet, her undying faith and trust, her fresh remembrance, and continual devotedness towards the original of that miniature, have been the only substance for her heart to feed upon" (pp. 31-32). This lavish emotion is the final angle in a lifetime of inward turning, all that is left for a fortress mentality such as Hepzibah's, whose "very brain was impregnated with the dry-rot" (p. 59) of the Pyncheon-house timbers. What is so terrible about Hepzibah is that in this gaunt and sallow old maid is the potential for dynamic union with others, for kindness and goodness, but all wasted, first in solitary confinement assumed out of fear, self-consciousness, and pride, and then expended uselessly on her cruel sybarite of a brother. It is Hepzibah who imparts to the romance that lingering touch of nostalgia, of regret, which, along with the irony, tempers the notorious happy ending into pure steel, for the nostalgia is not a remembrance of times past, but a

[3] The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 183.

requiem for opportunities missed, relationships unconstructed, connections never made.

As William Van O'Connor says, "Mrs. Compson is a little like Hepzibah but much more egregiously committed to her gentility."[4] She is also without Hepzibah's saving grace of love and pity and final humility. If Hepzibah wastes her love on her unworthy brother, still the capacity is there, while Caroline Bascomb Compson is totally incapable of love. And the sin of false family pride has descended from its nineteenth-century level of being merely ludicrous to its twentieth-century nadir of neurosis; the house divided against the outside world has become the house divided against itself.

It is Mrs. Compson who creates that cleavage, separating her children into those who are Compsons--Quentin, Benjy, and Caddy--and the one who is, like herself, a Bascomb, and that is the cruel and rapacious Jason. She refuses maternal affection to Quentin and Caddy, preferring to languish in her self-pity, and thus contributes to the emotional instability of both. Quentin, just before his suicide, thinks, "if I'd just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother" (p. 190), and Caddy, spied on by Jason under orders from his mother, tells Quentin before her wedding, "There was something terrible in me sometimes at night I could see it grinning at me I could see it

[4] "Hawthorne and Faulkner: Some Common Ground," The Virginia Quarterly Review, 33 (1957), 117.

through them grinning at me through their faces it's gone now and I'm sick" (p. 131). As Edmond Volpe says, Caddy is the one Compson who can give herself "to love and to life," but Mrs. Compson turns Caddy's love for Dalton Ames, for instance, "into something evil."[5] But it is her attitude toward her idiot son, Benjy, that reveals most flagrantly her failure of humanity, her obsession with appearances, her disengagement from reality. Unable to acknowledge that she has given birth to an idiot son, Caroline Compson changes his name from Maury, her free-loading brother's name, to Benjamin, in an attempt to disassociate the Bascombs from such a social disgrace. In fact, Mrs. Compson thinks of Benjy as "my punishment for putting aside my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me" (p. 122), betraying herself, according to R. P. Adams, as "something of a parvenu, feeling that the Bascombs are socially inferior to the Compsons and asserting therefore that they are intrinsically better . . . ."[6] Pretending to love Benjy above all, she makes one hypocritical gesture after another, telling Caddy: "Are you going to take that baby out without his overshoes . . . Do you want to make him sick, with the house full of company?" (p. 28). She is condemned out of her own

5 A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), pp. 99-100.

6 Faulkner: Myth and Motion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 241.

mouth there, and again when she whines: "'Nobody knows how I dread Christmas. Nobody knows. I am not one of those women who can stand things'" (p. 28).

Hepzibah's nearsighted scowl at the world has degenerated into Mrs. Compson's psychosomatic headaches, and the declaration of gentility has become a pact with the devil when, half-wishing that her granddaughter, Quentin, has committed suicide and not just run off with a man, Caroline Compson cries: "'It cant be simply to flout and hurt me. Whoever God is, He would not permit that. I'm a lady'" (p. 315). This is a long way from that rain-soaked railroad platform where Hepzibah, feeling if not knowing who God is, kneels and prays for herself and Clifford: "'Oh, God--our Father--are we not thy children? Have mercy on us!'" (p. 267).

In a disintegrating family where love is either perverted or denied, the sensitive member is vulnerable to estheticism as recompense. This is the fate of both Clifford Pyncheon and Quentin Compson, neither of whom is able to connect with the real world, and, as a result, both live in the shadows of their own conceptions, making of each living thing within the range of their experience a frozen object to be contemplated in the vacuum of an effete consciousness. Each makes one last foray into the objective world but only for the purpose of imposing his subjective values on its realistically recalcitrant inhabitants, not in surrender to the dynamic flow of life. This failure of the esthete could still be sheltered and humored by

Hepzibah and Phoebe and Uncle Venner, but the Compsons have no such capability or willingness, and the destiny of the acute sensibility in the modern world is not a comfortable regression into childhood but suicide.

Both Clifford and Quentin share a fixation for the sensual, but in Clifford this takes the form of appetite and in Quentin the form of revulsion. When Hepzibah tells Clifford that he is finally at home, where there is nothing but love, he responds with a smile that "had a charm of wonderful beauty" (p. 107). But it was followed

> by a coarser expression; or one that had the effect of coarseness on the fine mould and outline of his countenance, because there was nothing intellectual to temper it. It was a look of appetite. He ate food with what might almost be termed voracity, and seemed to forget himself, Hepzibah, the young girl, and everything else around him, in the sensual enjoyment which the bountifully spread table afforded . . . the effect was painful, and made Phoebe droop her eyes. (p. 107)

Born to enjoy only the Beautiful, Clifford is shattered by the ugliness of his thirty-years imprisonment for a murder he did not commit. But he retains his sybaritic nature, which turns him away from Hepzibah's yellow, wrinkled, scowl, despite all her affection for him. And the narrator observes that "He owed her nothing. A nature like Clifford's can contract no debts of that kind. It is . . . always selfish in its essence" (p. 109). Clifford does respond to Phoebe, however, demonstrating how close the exquisite and the erotic are to one another in such a trembling sensibility.

> He took unfailing note of every charm that appertained to her sex, and saw the ripeness of her lips, and the virginal development of her bosom. All her little, womanly ways, budding out of her like blossoms on a young fruit-tree, had their effect on him, and sometimes caused his very heart to tingle with the keenest thrills of pleasure. At such moments--for the effect was seldom more than momentary--the half-torpid man would be full of harmonious life, just as a long-silent harp is full of sound, when the musician's fingers sweep across it. (pp. 141-142)

Yet in this he does not connect with the real world or Phoebe as a human being, but simply reduces her to an objet d'art, safely distanced by her youth and his age. As Crews comments, "Phoebe's company enables Clifford to retreat more easily into a state of childhood--one in which his 'gentle and voluptuous emotion' need meet no challenges from mature sexual reality."[7]

Clifford does make three attempts to enter the real world, but all, as Clark Griffith points out, "in the wrongest possible way"[8] --nearly jumping from a window to join a parade, preparing to attend church with Hepzibah but retreating in timidity, and, finally, boarding a train in flight from his cousin Jaffrey's corpse. But the narrator questions the motive behind Clifford's abortive leap-- "whether impelled by the species of terror, that sometimes urges its

[7] Crews, p. 185.

[8] "Substance and Shadow: Language and Meaning in The House of the Seven Gables," ed. Seymour L. Gross (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1967), p. 392.

victim over the very precipice which he shrinks from, or by a natural magnetism, tending towards the great centre of humanity--it were not easy to decide" (p. 166). His previous and subsequent behavior suggests that terror is more likely. Clifford cancels the church attendance, telling Hepzibah they are only ghosts who will frighten little children with their appearance. "'And besides,' he continued, with a fastidious sensibility, inalienably characteristic of the man, 'it would not be fit nor beautiful, to go!'" (p. 169). The most nearly successful foray is the wild train ride he and his sister take in a vain attempt to banish the past and all evil from even the borders of consciousness. But the narrator undercuts the success of the venture even before it starts with a comparison of Clifford's excitement to "a joyous piece of music, played with wild vivacity, but upon a discordant instrument . . . the cracked, jarring note might always be heard, and . . . jarred loudest amid the loftiest exultation of the melody" (p. 254). Once aboard, Clifford indulges in a facile theory of human progress, seeing it as moving in an ascending spiral curve--"'While we fancy ourselves going straight forward, and attaining, at every step, an entirely new position of affairs, we do actually return to something long ago tried and abandoned, but which we now find etherealized, refined, and perfected to its ideal. The past is but a coarse and sensual prophecy of the present and the future'" (pp. 259-260). And as proof he cites mesmerism for the fastidious reason that it will do much "'towards purging away the grossness out

of human life'" (p. 263) and the telegraph, but not for the ugly business of capturing robbers and murderers: he wants it to be used only for "'holy missions,'" like sending heart-throbs between lovers. His captive audience on the train quite rightly thinks him mad, and, this temporary and insubstantial display of pseudo-vitality over, Clifford has to be led home by his sister.

Clifford's ultimate fate acts as a quiet commentary on his life and delusions, for in removing the Pyncheons to a more stately mansion and showering a fortune upon them, Hawthorne, as F. O. Matthiessen perceives, "was sowing all over again the same seeds of evil"[9] that first called down Maule's curse upon the Pyncheons; and, in effect, the ending of The House of the Seven Gables is "and they all died happily ever after," buried alive in the cushioned mausoleum of wealth and status and the Beautiful.

Quentin's more literal rendezvous with death goes back to his revulsion from the sensual and even farther to his being deprived of maternal love; and in his mother's place he substitutes his sister, Caddy, demanding of her a matriarchal purity consonant with his unattainable ideal of Southern womanhood. Appalled by his sister's sexual ripeness, he slaps her and smears her with mud, then pushes her into the branch water in an attempt at purification. Like

9 American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 332.

Clifford, he wants to revert to childhood, but his motive is to retrieve the simplicity of sexlessness. Contemplating self-castration, he thinks: "But that's not it. It's not not having them. It's never to have had them then I could say O That That's Chinese I dont know Chinese" (p. 135). Sex becomes for Quentin, not an objet d'art but an idea of honor suspended by his moral estheticism in a state of inviolability, beyond the reach of time and change and life itself. As a result, according to John W. Hunt, Quentin "can see Caddy only as a sex abstraction and not as a person, only as the weak custodian of a virginity embodying the family honor. He is incapable of love . . . but capable of intellectual incest. He is, finally, capable only of self-love."[10]

However, by the time Quentin is at Harvard, his problem no longer passes solely under the guise of sex but has become the sum total of static mechanism, the refusal to accept the dynamism of life, and this mechanism is signified by his obsession with time. If Clifford is haunted by a past not of his own making, Quentin is haunted by a never-never land of his own creation. Time for Clifford is merely a dungeon; for Quentin, it is a mausoleum. And Quentin's futile endeavor to kill time is his own death-warrant: having denied sex and time, the containers of all creativity and life and evolution,

[10] William Faulkner: Art in Theological Tension (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965), p. 50.

he is left with the final alternative of suicide. As Faulkner says in his 1946 appendix to The Sound and the Fury, Quentin "loved death above all, who loved only death, loved and lived in a deliberate and almost perverted anticipation of death as a lover loves and deliberately refrains from the waiting willing friendly tender incredible body of his beloved, until he can no longer bear not the refraining but the restraint and so flings, hurls himself, relinquishing, drowning" (pp. 9-10).

"If things just finished themselves" (p. 78), he thinks, for it is the continuity that he can not bear, the continuity of a world that does not conform to his rigid abstractions, that, instead, is in the throes of relativity. In his conversations with his father and his final plea to Caddy, Quentin tries to stave off the suicide that is, by force of his own demands, inevitable. But neither move is really a reaching out toward life but rather an attempt to impose his own frozen design on life. Yet the stream continues to flow though his shadow be upon it. He tries, for instance, to prevent Caddy's marriage to "that blackguard," Herbert Head, by telling Caddy that Herbert was dropped from his club for cheating at cards. The realistic Caddy, pregnant by an unknown man, counters with "Well what about it I'm not going to play cards with" (p. 142). Not only will Quentin not accept Caddy's necessary refusal to play his Ideal, but he also declines to make the one promise Caddy asks of him, to take care of Father and Benjy. In confirmation of his egocentricity, he

chooses instead to annihilate all his potential as a human being for weighting himself on the side of compassion; he would rather weight himself with flatirons.

After Caddy has rejected his demand that she not marry and that he and she and Benjy go away together, Quentin makes one last prison-break, but one that moves back toward the cell rather than over the wall. He tells his father that he has committed incest with Caddy and that therefore she can't marry Herbert Head, but his father knows that he is simply willing it to be so: "You wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into a horror and then exorcise it with the truth" (p. 195). But it is more than Caddy's loss of virginity and imminent marriage that moves Quentin to his false confession of incest. It is a final stab at some sort of meaning for his existence in a disintegrating society and family. Typically, he attacks the problem negatively, seeking an external code in terms of its violation: "If we could just have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us . . . . If it could just be a hell beyond that: the clean flame the two of us more than dead. Then you will have only me then only me then the two of us amid the pointing and the horror beyond the clean flame . . . . Only you and me then amid the pointing and the horror walled by the clean flame" (pp. 98, 135, 136).

Clifford neglects evil in his ascending spiral; Quentin neglects good in his linear descent. Both are partial views, the apotheoses

of which lead to an unreal existence; and the two manifestations of estheticism, Clifford's and Quentin's, betray a museum mentality in which the ideal objects of their quivering sensibilities are sealed in glass, out of reach and out of context, and just at a time when their sensitivities are required to withstand the onslaught of the commercial man.

Greed has a double characterization in Hawthorne's romance, bodied forth in both Colonel Pyncheon and Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon. And Jason Compson is their lineal descendant, grown coarser, less hypocritical, stupider, and a lot funnier. But the comedy is very black and serves only to heighten the corrosive effect of money on man's humanity.

In The House of the Seven Gables, the chain of crime and grief begins over Colonel Pyncheon's coveting a spring of pristine water belonging to Matthew Maule; since Maule refuses to surrender his homesteading rights, the Colonel has him convicted of witchcraft and hanged. But Maule's dying curse is that God will give Pyncheon blood to drink, which is what comes from coveting water, as the water, symbol of life, well knows and turns brackish the moment the murderous Pyncheon begins construction of his house over Maule's hut. It was to be "a family-mansion--spacious, ponderously framed of oaken timber, and calculated to endure for many generations of his posterity . . ." (p. 9). But as Clifford, in his moment of enlightenment, proclaims:

> 'What we call real estate--the solid ground to build a house on--is the broad foundation on which nearly all the guilt of this world rests. A man will commit almost any wrong--he will heap up an immense pile of wickedness, as hard as granite, and which will weigh as heavily upon his soul, to eternal ages--only to build a great, gloomy, dark-chambered mansion, for himself to die in, and for his posterity to be miserable in. He lays his own dead corpse beneath the underpinning, as one may say, and hangs his frowning picture on the wall, and, after thus converting himself into an Evil Destiny, expects his remotest great grandchildren to be happy there!' (p. 263)

In fulfillment of Maule's curse, Colonel Pyncheon is found dead on the day of his housewarming, blood dripping from his chin, but he achieves in death more possession of the future than even he, perhaps, dreamt of in his animosity. Not only will house and posterity memorialize him, but his portrait, Bible in one hand and iron sword hilt in the other, is to hang always in the parlor or else, so the superstition goes, the house will crumble into ruin, having no longer the image of ruthlessness and avarice to uphold it. And as long as it does, the Colonel, "a little diluted," enjoys "a sort of intermittent immortality" (p. 19) in the one descendant of every generation whose hardness and practicality qualify him to compound the original sin. And at the time the romance opens, that inheritor is Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, with his hypocritical smile and gold-headed cane in place of the Bible and the sword, who has his great ancestor's iron fist, which closes, as the Colonel's did, around the illusion of imaginary wealth. The Puritan had been within a few days of acquiring

all of Waldo County in Maine, a veritable earldom, but after his death, the Indian deed essential to confirm the acquisition could not be found. And so the Pyncheons lost what they never quite had, yet for generations after would stand around the map and chart the increased value brought to the land by its working settlers, feeling the "absurd delusion of family importance, which all along characterized the Pyncheons. . . . In the better specimens of the breed, this peculiarity threw an ideal grace over the hard material of human life, without stealing away any truly valuable quality. In the baser sort, its effect was to increase the liability to sluggishness and dependence, and induce the victim of a shadowy hope to remit all self-effort, while awaiting the realization of his dreams" (p. 19). Likewise, Jaffrey Pyncheon, remembering Clifford's childhood story of secret wealth and thinking the tale referred to the supposedly missing portion of their uncle's fortune, dies, also of apoplexy, his chin dripping with blood and the wealth but a dream. He too has violated, in full legality, the life of a man in order to acquire money and position; the man is his own cousin, Clifford, imprisoned thirty years for his uncle's "murder," and the money is that of the uncle who coughed blood and died when he saw Jaffrey stealing from him. In the final denouement, the hidden spring which moves the Pyncheon portrait reveals no cache of gold but only the Indian deed, now worthless, like the spring which moved the first Pyncheon to aggression and murder.

But behind all this maneuvering for financial gain is the grim eye of a universal type which, staring straight ahead at the object of its appetite, fails to see the context and contingency of its setting. Forgetting that all things are one, this Pyncheon rips the object from its human contiguity, mindless of the primal scream of pain that rises from an outraged natural order, and never knows how or why it is that the object of his avarice should, in time, crush the blood from him. Living exclusively for the accoutrements of the future, the evil Pyncheon in his sundry reincarnations, obliterates the past and finds the present of merely utilitarian value. And, in the process, he perforce ignores, or, rather, is not even aware of, the suffering his actions engender. As the narrator states, "the act of the passing generation is the germ which may and must produce good or evil fruit, in a far distant time; that, together with the seed of the merely temporary crop, which mortals term expediency, they inevitably sow the acorns of a more enduring growth, which may darkly overshadow their posterity" (p. 6).

Jason is old Colonel Pyncheon full-strength, and, in the modern world, his immortality is more than intermittent. Theirs is a character type that begins in envy, moves through rapacity and cruelty, and ends in a fatal liberation. Just as Colonel Pyncheon coveted Maule's spring, so Jason covets the chances at status and wealth which his brother, Quentin, and his sister, Caddy, threw away, finding them of no value. Colonel Pyncheon is after the "just" spoils of

what he has won; Jason is after the "just" recompense for what he has lost. When Herbert Head annuls his marriage to Caddy after discovering her child is not his, Jason is deprived of the job he was promised in Herbert's bank, and it is this "injustice" which haunts him the rest of his life and provides him with what little (I'm glad I haven't got the sort of conscience I've got to nurse like a sick puppy all the time" [p. 246]) rationalization he needs to inflict his incessant acts of sheer cussedness (like burning that free pass to the circus just so Luster can't have it, not to mention his regular theft of his niece's money) on the Compson household. The ghost of what he never had shadows him in much the same way as the phantom of the Waldo County earldom hovers over generation after generation of the Pyncheons until, in Jaffrey Pyncheon, the delusion of wealth achieves its final slimy metamorphosis before disintegrating. Jaffrey and Jason are, as Randall Stewart says, "representatives of the money mania in their respective regions and epochs. Both are rats in a rat-race, and both are treated about as contemptuously as any characters one is likely to meet with anywhere in fiction."[11] What adds to the criminality of their lust for financial accumulation is that the specific hoard of riches they aim at during the action of the novels is, or was at one time, the object of their own theft--Jaffrey wants more of the money he stole from his uncle and Clifford,

[11] "Hawthorne and Faulkner," College English, 17 (1956), 259

and Jason frantically tries to retrieve the money he had embezzled from his niece, which she has stolen back before running off with the circus man. But it is not really the money that moves them so much as that which is not theirs. And it is the insatiability and voraciousness of their lust which make them monsters and poison every aspect of their lives and their relationships with others.

Both Jaffrey and Jason take a whited-sepulchre approach to public opinion: Jaffrey oils his way around town with his oozy smile and unctiously benevolent manner and "ornamental pile of ostentatious deeds" (p. 229), which fool the church and the state and everyone except Hepzibah, Holgrave, and some political opponents; and Jason doesn't want Benjy in the front yard where people can see him and tries to put an end to the promiscuous activities of his niece, Quentin, "'because I've got a position in this town, and I'm not going to have any member of my family going on like a nigger wench!" (p. 207). It takes natural goodness personified, a victim, or an artist to see through Judge Pyncheon--Phoebe instinctively withdraws from his cousinly kiss, Hepzibah rises up in wrathful indignation at his protests of affection for the cousin he imprisoned, and the daguerreotypist lets the sun reveal the man as "sly, subtle, hard, imperious, and, withal, cold as ice" (p. 92). But Jason is Judge Pyncheon unmasked for the whole town of Jefferson to see, meanness made manifest by his own crassness. When Jason's niece runs off with the money he stole from her plus his own savings, the sheriff, acting

as the town surrogate, refuses to give chase, saying, "'You drove that girl into running off, Jason . . . . And I have some suspicions about who that money belongs to that I dont reckon I'll ever know for certain'" (p. 320).

The ratty quality in both villains is demonstrated in their fulfillment of the letter, but not the spirit, of the law, their stooping to spy on their own relatives, and their attempted abandonment of members of their own families. When Jaffrey testifies at Clifford's murder trial, "so craftily had he arranged the circumstances, that . . . [he] hardly found it necessary to swear to anything false, but only to withhold the one decisive explanation, by refraining to state what he had himself done and witnessed" (p. 312). And when Jason promises to let Caddy see her daughter for just one minute, he fulfills the promise by driving the child in a hack like a fire engine past her mother. It is not, therefore, surprising that both men, at some time or other, play private-eye in an attempt to destroy the happiness of a sister or cousin. Jason, a veteran of childhood tattle-taling, is perfectly suited to carry out his mother's orders and report on Caddy's affair with Dalton Ames; and Jaffrey has had Clifford watched for symptoms of insanity (that near-jump from the arched window, for example) as a way of blackmailing his cousin into telling him the hiding place of their late uncle's non-existent wealth--should Clifford refuse, Jaffrey will consider the refusal "the one needed jot of evidence, to satisfy my mind of

his insanity" (p. 236). Jason, on the other hand, succeeds in having his own brother castrated and committed to the state asylum at Jackson, dealing the final divisive blow to a shattered family. And once his mother dies, he is free of Dilsey and free to sell the Compson place, moving then into a converted office where he entertains his Memphis friend, Lorraine, on weekends. Since Jason remains a bachelor, the Compson line ends with him; and Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon dies childless also, his son having succumbed to cholera and Phoebe engaging herself to marry into the Maules.

So both embodiments of avarice are liberated in the end, but only from all that makes a man human, his life and his sympathy for others. Both congratulated themselves on their practicality and intelligence, but directed their energies toward a merely speculative object, an uncle's supposed wealth or a killing in the cotton market. But Jaffrey is fooled by death and Jason by the combination of market-decline, a run-away niece, and a weird sort of poetic justice. The Judge, who "prided himself on eschewing all airy matter, and never mistaking a shadow for a substance" (p. 118) and who, as Hepzibah says, "'took hold of everything as if it were real'" (p. 316), meets his death chasing ephemeral riches. And Jason, in the end, is as much a self-willed victim of abstraction as his brother, Quentin, for "of his niece he did not think at all, nor the arbitrary valuation of the money. Neither of them had had entity or individuality for him for ten years, together they merely symbolized the job in the

bank of which he had been deprived before he ever got it" (p. 321).

Opposing the worship of idea is the implementation of being, and Phoebe and Dilsey, in their reality and their relation to others, convey potential redemption to the reader. And that redemption is not a state to come but exists in the now in their very presences. Both become part of a household burdened with what are called Maule's curse and Compson's devilment, respectively, but look very much like original sin, and the two women counter, though they do not counteract, the negativity of that stain with discipline and grace, providing not an exorcism but a balance. They embody a possibility of humanity, which, in its shaping vision, moves beyond the destructive illusions of family pride, estheticism, and greed, and into the realm of simplicity and humility and love. Their performance of the same general functions in the two novels demonstrates, however, an evolution in the allegorical role of the dynamic synthesizing character; Phoebe is naive, tenuous, superficial, while Dilsey is knowing, implacable, profound. Moreover, Dilsey is genuinely noble, while Phoebe, unfortunately, has all the nobility of Shirley Temple on the Good Ship Lollipop.

It is difficult to understand why Hawthorne made Phoebe so indigestibly sweet unless it is his old diabolism asserting its bleak self by an ironic slash of an ending--plastic figure of goodness marries phony convert to conservatism, and they live ostentatiously ever after on the blood money of the wicked cousin. Nevertheless, certain aspects

of Phoebe's role must be taken seriously. She possesses, assuredly, a great talent for order in the middle of disintegration and decay, which enables her "to bring out the hidden capabilities of things around them" (p. 71); and so she rearranges her chamber, gets Hepzibah through the breakfast cooking, manages the cent-shop at a profit, and the "grime and sordidness of the House of the Seven Gables seemed to have vanished, since her appearance there; the gnawing tooth of the dry-rot was stayed, among the old timbers of its skeleton-frame; the dust had ceased to settle down so densely from the antique ceilings, upon the floors and furniture of the rooms below . . . . The shadows of gloomy events . . . the heavy breathless scent which Death had left . . . these were less powerful than the purifying influence, scattered throughout the atmosphere of the household by the presence of one, youthful, fresh, and thoroughly wholesome heart" (pp. 136-137). Holgrave recognizes the uniqueness of her gifts and the necessity of her physical presence for them to be effective, a fact which limits greatly any permanent redemptive effect on the world:

> 'Whatever health, comfort, and natural life, exists in the house, is embodied in your person. These blessings came along with you, and will vanish when you leave the threshold. Miss Hepzibah, by secluding herself from society, has lost all true relation with it, and is in fact dead; although she galvanizes herself into a semblance of life, and stands behind her counter, afflicting the world with a greatly-to-be-deprecated scowl. Your poor Cousin Clifford is another dead and long-buried person, on whom the Governor and Council have wrought a necromantic miracle. I should not wonder if he were to

> crumble away, some morning, after you are gone, and nothing be seen of him more, except a heap of dust. Miss Hepzibah, at any rate, will lose what little flexibility she has. They both exist by you!' (p. 216)

Phoebe's capacity for order and nourishment comes from her organicism and her actuality. "The life of the long and busy day--spent in occupations that might so easily have taken a squalid and ugly aspect--had been made pleasant, and even lovely, by the spontaneous grace with which these homely duties seemed to bloom out of her character; so that labor, while she dealt with it, had the easy and flexible charm of play. Angels do not toil, but let their good works grow out of them; and so did Phoebe" (p. 82). And the concomitant of this outgrowth is the fact that, as the narrator says, "She was real! Holding her hand, you felt something; a tender something; a substance, and a warm one; and so long as you should feel its grasp, soft as it was, you might be certain that your place was good in the whole sympathetic chain of human nature. The world was no longer a delusion" (p. 141). But exposure to the free-thinking of Holgrave, the ravages of woe on Hepzibah and Clifford, and the sudden death of her cousin, Jaffrey, plus the primordial gloom of the Pyncheon mansion have made her somewhat less effulgent in her incessant cheerfulness, at least one indisputable proof of the value of sin and suffering.

Dilsey, on the other hand, wasn't born cheerful, but has, instead, a deeper joy, which springs not from mere tidiness but from a

belief in her own identity and her place in a supernal order:

> My name been Dilsey since fore I could remember and it be Dilsey when they's long forgot me.
> How will they know it's Dilsey, when it's long forgot, Dilsey, Caddy said.
> It'll be in the Book, honey, Dilsey said.
> Can you read it, Caddy said.
> Wont have to, Dilsey said. They'll read it for me. All I got to do is say Ise here. (p. 77)

It is this belief and understanding that make her, throughout the successive generations, the one cohesive life-force with the fragmentation and fatality of the Compson family, whom she refuses to abandon even when Jason tries to force her out by not paying her wages. As Edmond Volpe rightly affirms, "During all those years she has remained the fixed center of the household, taking over the maternal responsibilities abdicated by Mrs. Compson, caring for the physical and spiritual needs of the entire family. She has served as a buffer between Benjy and his family, between Mrs. Compson and the facts of life, between Jason and Caddy's daughter, Quentin. She is a servant, but she works with such devotion and responsibility that she has far more dignity than those she serves."[12]

But the limits of her effectiveness, of her powers of transformation, are defined with sad accuracy by Jason. When Dilsey tells him, "'Aint I raised eve'y one of y'all?'" he replies, "'And a damn fine job you made of it'" (p. 216). But the fault is not Dilsey's,

[12] Volpe, p. 124.

for grace and belief have to be received with openness, and the Compson refusal to do this is summed up in Miss Quentin's gesture of knocking Dilsey's hand off her shoulder after the woman had saved her from a beating by Jason, saying, "'You damn old nigger'" (p. 203).

Just as Phoebe stands in contrast to the decay around her, so Dilsey opposes the corruption of the Compson obsessions with time and abstraction. Both the Pyncheons and the Compsons forsake the present in abject surrender to the past and hatred for the unbearable now, but though Hawthorne and Faulkner dramatically disparage this retrogression, they neither annihilate it nor even neutralize its virulence. Dilsey, for instance, is able to deal with time, knowing that when the kitchen clock strikes ten times, it is one o'clock. Not victimized by time but living within it, Dilsey accepts historical time and flux and this acceptance enables her to see the beginning and the ending of the Compsons, of every family, and "two tears slid down her fallen cheeks, in and out of the myriad coruscations of immolation and abnegation and time" (p. 311). But the novel ends not with her belief in the religion and the blood of the Lamb but with the howl of a thirty-three-year-old idiot, the reverberations of which sound on through the precarious return to order as Luster, one of the "they" who endured but full of Compson devilment, swings finally to the right of the monument. The restoration of order is as dubious as the exorcism of Maule's curse through the marriage of Phoebe and Holgrave. The house of the seven gables still stands, and

the sound and the fury signify nothing, but both must be accepted and engaged endlessly and without progress. A Dilsey is required now, a Phoebe being inadequate to withstand the nihilism and despair of the modern world, shorn of belief and love, and to triumph over it with a vision that is not a vision merely but a living reality.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MARBLE FAUN AND ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

Between Hilda's cry of "'Oh, hush! . . . This is terrible; and I could weep for you, if you indeed believe it . . . . You have shocked me beyond words!'"[1] at the end of The Marble Faun and Quentin's anguished reiteration of "I dont hate it . . . I dont, I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!"[2] at the end of Absalom, Absalom!, there exists a kinship more intimate than a common artistic parent could have made them, for both Hilda and Quentin refuse initiation into the brotherhood of evil of which they are already charter members. And in their abnegation they shadow forth the Hamlet-haunted visions of their creators in all their reluctant nihilism and hypothetical affirmation. For the chaste American is the prototype of that irredeemable innocence which sees the fall of man and confesses it, but will not accept either the logical conclusions to be drawn from it or his own responsibility in it. In both

1 The Marble Faun: or, The Romance of Monte Beni (Columbus: Centenary Edition of Ohio State University Press, 1968) p. 460. All references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.

2 Absalom, Absalom! (New York: The Modern Library, 1936), p. 378. All references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.

Hilda and Quentin, the prelapsarian longing has become not longing merely but willed fact, implacable against the miasmic reality to which they deny assent. Hilda watches the fortunate fall of the innocent Donatello but refuses to see it as fortunate; Quentin re-enacts the unfortunate fall of the innocent Sutpen but doesn't see what is really unfortunate about it. And in this voluntary blindness, Hilda and Quentin embody a universal type of behavior convenient for the weak of heart in a disintegrating modern world but fatal in its consequences for an already embattled humanity.

The timelessness necessary for these representative dramas is achieved by an epic layering of epochs in Hawthorne and of generations in Faulkner. In The Marble Faun, all of Western civilization is summoned as a backdrop to the tragedy, the players moving successively through Arcadian, Etruscan, medieval, Renaissance, and modern Rome, for Rome is all time, the Eternal City, full of history and yet beyond it too. As Johannes Kjørven perceives:

> The recognition of the moral significance of Rome's 'historic' 'dust' is timeless in two ways: it may take place at any time and penetrate into the human consciousness as it does in Miriam's case when she sees her likeness to Beatrice in Guido's picture. Miriam's recognition suggests the unavoidable involvement in a criminal past and equally the basic moral destiny which history imparts metaphorically. Secondly, recognized and accepted for what it is, Rome's history as a metaphor for the recognition of evil belongs to the same dimension of timelessness. Guido's picture of Beatrice tells Miriam that there is a timeless, enduring element in history, and it is her very sense of her own likeness to

> Beatrice which constitutes that enduring element of evil and guilt, which as a historical creature in 'the massiveness' of Rome's history she cannot escape.[3]

Likewise, the story of Sutpen unfolds in a chronological progression (although this must be reconstructed as such by the reader) of mountain, ante-bellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction societies, condensing into the myth of the South, the transition from simplicity to complexity to disintegration which resulted in the modern world. Faulkner invokes, moreover, Biblical and classical allusions to the fratricide and incest among Absalom, Amnon, and Tamar, to the hubris of Agamemnon and the doom wrought by Clytemnestra in order to render yet more timeless the archetypal fall he records.

In the first chapter of The Marble Faun, the narrator establishes the texture of the romance by defining the Roman ambience: "It is a vague sense of ponderous remembrances; a perception of such weight and destiny in a by-gone life, of which this spot was the centre, that the present moment is pressed down or crowded out, and our individual affairs and interests are but half as real, here, as elsewhere . . . . Side by side with the massiveness of the Roman past, all matters that we handle or dream of, nowadays, look evanescent and visionary alike" (p. 6). And Quentin holds within himself all the stories of the past so carefully husbanded by a society seeking such antiquity as Rome

[3] "Hawthorne, and the Significance of History," Americana Norvegica, 1 (1966), 152.

already possessed. He had grown up with the Sutpen-Coldfield names

> interchangeable and almost myriad. His childhood was full of them, his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts still recovering, even forty-three years afterward, from the fever which had cured the disease, waking from the fever without even knowing that it had been the fever itself which they had fought against and not the sickness, looking with stubborn recalcitrance backward beyond the fever and into the disease with actual regret, weak from the fever yet free of the disease and not even aware that the freedom was that of impotence. (p. 12)

As Kjørven points out, "History per se does not solve the enigma of history; still there are glimpses of meaning in it, which transcend the march of the ages, bear the whole project of history, and suggest how life can be renewed collectively as well as individually. By seeing oneself in a historical pattern containing the prelapsarian state of innocence as well as the Fall and the tragedy of struggle, death, and subsequent hope of reconciliation, one can also accept the same limitations upon the human condition in the present."[4] It is precisely this encompassing historical sense that Hilda and Quentin decline to cultivate although they have all about them the materials for that discovery and responsibility. Their problem is that they possess the past only as knowledge, not as experience and they become fake innocents doomed by their own fraudulence.

[4] Kjørven, 156.

The standard critical position on Hilda finds her not only a failure as Hawthorne's representative of the Ideal and Purity, but also the major reason why the magnificence of The Marble Faun is flawed. Hyatt Waggoner finds Hilda "a lifeless convention lifted bodily from nineteenth-century romances and the steel engravings of the Christmas gift books: the 'pure' maiden, Cooper's 'genteel female,' Mark Twain's conception of Olivia and Hawthorne's of Sophia. She appears, in short, to be a stereotyped 'culture-symbol,' the embodiment of nineteenth-century . . . sentimentalism and the 'religion of the heart.' She is 'pure,' 'spiritual,' the guardian of moral values and the inspiration of sinful men, exercising her power by appealing to man's 'higher self.' Now that the culture has changed and this stereotype has lost its irrational appeal, she is completely unbelievable."[5] He points out, moreover, that her "priggishness and lack of charity" make the theme of which she is chief defender ridiculous, and that "she must be considered guilty of a pharisaical form of spiritual pride, a far more deadly vice than any specific sinful act such as that Miriam is supposed to have been implicated in."[6] The problem, Waggoner thinks, is that Hawthorne intended her to be human and not pure spirit, but just forgot about the Incarnation

[5] Hawthorne: A Critical Study (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 202.

[6] Waggoner, p. 204.

and Pauline theology.

Terence Martin, after detailing Hilda's merciless rejection of Miriam, engages in an equally unsatisfactory resolution of the contradictory Hilda, inserting biography in place of absent-mindedness. He writes that "Hawthorne appears to respect Hilda's white robe of innocence immensely, even as he sees the necessity of her coming down from her tower to participate more fully in the human condition. In large part, Hilda embodies the image of what Hawthorne admired in womanhood; she possesses many of the traits that Hawthorne loved in his wife Sophia. The severity of Hilda's innocence is unmistakable; but her character takes its special form from Hawthorne's desire to protect her, to hold her aloof and unspotted amid the grimy streets of Rome and the evil pervading the city . . . . For Hilda represents home, the homing instinct, and all that home connotes to Hawthorne . . . . There is no doubt that Hilda has the final answers in The Marble Faun."[7] Frederick C. Crews insists, of course, that Hawthorne is indulging all of his old repressions again and that when "Hilda turns her back on Miriam, [he] does his best to condone her--and so do all the other characters. Even Hilda's relenting, long after it might have been useful, is taken not as evidence that she was formerly wrong but as a proof of virtually divine magnanimity."[8] Richard

[7] Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965), pp. 174-175.

Harter Fogle stays closest to the complexity of the novel but invokes a theory of intellectual tenuosity which resulted in artistic cloudiness, stating that Hilda is unquestionably a symbol for heaven, but a symbol in which the human and the divine are confused--"She is the emblem of heaven, yet her limitation hints faintly at a higher simplicity which embraces all humanity, instead of, like her, rejecting much of life. Hawthorne intends to go no further; engrossed in the idea of divine perfection, he yet draws a line beyond which his speculation does not trespass."[9]

Only two critics suggest alternatives to such blind alleys of interpretation: F. O. Matthiessen does believe Hawthorne is seriously proposing Hilda as the mouthpiece for genuine goodness but suggests that he is unconsciously giving us in Hilda "an ugly glimpse of American spiritual life."[10] Roy R. Male confronts the problem straight on, although he, too, assumes authorial endorsement of the lady in white. He suggests that "we might accept Hilda in a medieval dream vision, but in fiction she is impossible . . . . Hilda ought to be

8 The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 216.

9 Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), p. 201.

10 American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 356.

an ideal who is merely glimpsed at the end. When Hawthorne brings her out of her tower and involves her in the streets of Rome, we expect her to be more human than she can possibly be if she is to retain her allegorical function as spiritual purity . . . . She is associated throughout with the purity of marble. Even the marble image of her hand--the birthmark, the earthy part of Hilda that is all Kenyon can grasp--assumes its share of her remote divinity. Hawthorne apparently expected the reader to sense her icy rigidity and yet to sympathize with her."[11] What Male proposes, however, is that, first, Kenyon's "final union with Hilda, which should presumably result from a full comprehension of the whole experience, actually amounts to a retreat from it," secondly, that both Hilda and Kenyon "convince us of the loss that occurs in refinement," and finally, that both characters "ultimately remain spectators of the central experience of the book . . . ."[12] And from such skeptical acorns, giant ironical interpretations often grow.

All of these puzzlements, excuses, and disparagements regarding Hilda and her function in The Marble Faun depend upon the assumption that Hawthorne solemnly endorsed her as a valuable and viable approach to human existence and that his pen simply slipped and he was

[11] Hawthorne's Tragic Vision (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957), p. 172.

[12] Male, pp. 173-174.

merely unconvincing in his portrayal. But suppose that Hawthorne was being his old ironic self, the one who is in the habit of sabotaging ostentatiously apparent salvations, first in Dimmesdale and Pearl and then in Phoebe and Holgrave. Assume further that Hilda's failure of compassion was not accidental and awkward but rather a deliberate and deft stroke on Hawthorne's part; he could, after all, have made her sympathetic and generous to Miriam without besmirching her goodness and in the process have enhanced her moral position. Suppose, in short, that Hawthorne, as usual, knew exactly what he was doing and that his theme is not the horror of sin but the pervasiveness of it and that The Marble Faun is not a paean to purity but yet another of his attacks on the Puritan theology of perfection.

The theme of The Marble Faun is the timeless parable of the fall of Adam and Eve from a state of innocence into the knowledge of good and evil. The point of the first fall as recorded in Genesis is that all men are implicated in Adam's sin, and Hawthorne takes great care to implicate both Hilda and Kenyon in the murder of the Model through their implicit unwillingness to let Miriam unburden her past life to them. The precise nature of that past is as impossible to ascertain as what made Henry Sutpen kill Charles Bon, but the parallels drawn between Miriam and Beatrice Cenci suggest that Miriam was forced by her father into an incestuous betrothal to a cousin; to avoid the marriage, she tacitly urges the cousin to murder her father. And that cousin, whose family carries, possibly, the strain of

insanity (and it is, perhaps, the insanity and not the incest that prompts the resort to murder), emerges from the shadows of the catacombs to haunt Miriam and become her Model. But neither Hilda nor Kenyon, as Miriam rightly intuits, has the capacious sympathy to absorb such a revelation and share it with her. And if they are not culpable for this and for their horror of her after the murder, then the Puritan gossips have Hawthorne's benediction for their isolation, persecution, and castigation of Hester Prynne.

The rigidity and hypocrisy inherent in such moral snobbery are blatantly present in Hilda, and Hawthorne prepares his portrait of her with elaborate detail and foreshadowing. There is, foremost, that image of Hilda in her tower high above the decay of Rome, all dressed in white and feeding the doves with one hand while she trims the Virgin's lamp with the other. And from such a lofty perch, she feels that if she jumped, she would float upward. It is no wonder, then, that her early school paintings lacked "the reality which comes only from a close acquaintance with life. . . . With years and experience she might be expected to attain a darker and more forcible touch, which would impart to her designs the relief they needed" (p. 55). But when that experience is offered to her in Rome, she loses her originality and becomes a copyist who reproduces only portions of the old masterpieces. That she becomes a superb copyist, the best in Rome, one who goes straight to the central point of the artist's conception because she appreciates the masters so deeply,

indicates her tremendous potential for full humanity. For these artistic gifts posit her power of comprehension, her knowledge, and, hence, her culpability. The question is a matter of transfer of learning. If she is capable of such sympathy and unselfishness in becoming a handmaiden to the great masters "instead of a minor enchantress within a circle of her own" (p. 61), is she also able to sacrifice herself in the same unstinting fashion to life? That any answer to this question must be highly debatable is indicated by Hilda's finest achievement as an artist, her perfect reproduction from memory of Guido's Beatrice Cenci. Miriam finds it very strange "'how an innocent, delicate, white soul, like yours, has been able to sieze the subtle mystery of this portrait; as you surely must, in order to reproduce it so perfectly'" (p. 67). For Beatrice's history parallels what Miriam's is, perhaps, already and certainly will shortly be: complicity by desire in murder. And Hilda's reaction to Beatrice's guilt which, until Miriam reminded her, she had conveniently forgotten, predicts her imminent cruelty toward Miriam, for she finds that Beatrice's doom of a scaffold death was just. As Miriam exclaims, "'Oh, Hilda, your innocence is like a sharp steel sword. . . . Your judgments are often terribly severe, though you seem all made up of gentleness and mercy'" (p. 66).

It is not so strange, then, that Hilda should see right to the heart of Beatrice Cenci, for she, too, is guilty of a murder; in refusing compassion, she breaks the magnetic chain of humanity, which

bond is always the central value in Hawthorne, and, in doing so, Hilda kills that which binds us, one to another, in all our moral triumphs and all our imperfections. In their stroll on the Pincian, Kenyon suggests to Hilda that a man loses his capacity for honest affection as he cultivates and refines himself. Hilda refuses to believe this, and Kenyon then, of course, retracts the idea as foolish in fawning submission to his beloved, for he has not the courage of his own perceptions. But, in fact, the idea is a sadly accurate description of both Kenyon and Hilda, for their refinement and their attitude of hermetically sealing themselves off from the dark and grimy aspects of life are the reasons why they are so right for each other, why they make such a "nice" couple. And it is singularly appropriate that Kenyon should express his love for Hilda by sculpting her hand in the chilly rigidity of marble. Yet Kenyon, like Hilda, has the potential for the fire of hot life, for he has created a statue of a Cleopatra who is "fierce, voluptuous, passionate, tender, wicked, terrible, and full of poisonous and rapturous enchantment" (p. 127). But the moment after unveiling it for Miriam to see, he turns aside with reserve and alarm her anguished plea that he listen to her burning secret. What is more, he supposes that there will be no change in the relationship between himself and Miriam after this failure of empathy, thus revealing the essentially static nature of his mentality. Miriam rightly observes to him that "'You are less sincere than I thought you . . . if you try to make me think that

there will be no change'" (p. 130).

As the action moves rapidly toward its tragic climax, Hilda successively prides herself on never having looked into "'that pit of blackness that lies beneath us, everywhere'" over which "'human happiness is but a thin crust'" and hallows the idea of Virginia's being stabbed by her father to preserve her purity. And then Hilda sees Donatello and Miriam murder the Model and, later, when Miriam has shouted to her to pray for them, she shuts the window. The next morning, Hilda sees her face and the Beatrice portrait simultaneously in a mirror and is appalled by the similarity. True to her struthious self, she moves out of the range of that revealing reflection. Having now thrown away all her opportunities for awareness of her own moral weakness, Hilda is prepared to betray Miriam at the moment of her friend's greatest need "with an involuntary repellent gesture, so expressive, that Miriam at once felt a great chasm opening itself between them two" (p. 207). Taking refuge in bewilderment, Hilda justifies her callousness by pleading her vulnerability to such moral contamination; what she does not recognize is her own potential, fully realized in this crisis, for being a Typhoid Annie herself. Miriam, pale as death, tells her, "'I always said, Hilda, that you were merciless . . . . 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. 209). Hilda, being no angel, has committed that sin but will not realize it and so it has not softened her. As

Merle E. Brown states, "refusing to recognize one's already existent sinfulness is a presumption more sinful than that sin one denies, and makes impossible the attainment of that virtue and happiness which is accessible to grown mortals. The potentiality for goodness is born in a person only with his awareness that he is one of an all-inclusive brotherhood of human beings, a relationship not of blood, of parentage, or by contract, but of sin and inadequacy, and requiring the mutual dependence of everyone."[13] It is true that Hilda does ask Miriam to forgive her if she has said "'a needlessly cruel word'" (p. 209), but, as Terence Martin points out, "that adverb needlessly measures the limited extent to which Hilda can sympathize with Miriam, or anyone else."[14] Yet Miriam does forgive her, and when Hilda asks her for advice on what to do with her terrible secret, "Miriam at once responded to the girl's cry for help" (p. 211) and gives her liberty to tell it if it would ease her heart. Such is the magnanimity of one who recognizes her own sinfulness and is softened by it.

The denouement to Hilda's reluctant confrontation with evil is her unabsolved confession in St. Peter's and her half-hearted speculation that she may have injured Miriam with her severity. But these

[13] "The Structure of The Marble Faun," American Literature, 28 (1956), 312.

[14] Martin, p. 174.

actions are merely a playing-out of her established and frozen attitudes and reflect not a concern for others but only the fastidious fear that she may, after all, have a smudge on that white dress of hers, but a spot that was put there by somebody else. When Hilda sees the snake in the garden, she doesn't get that zero-at-the-bone feeling, only a minus one-half twinge. So the romance is now ready to ask its central questions about the felix culpa and to evaluate the characters in terms of their answers to them.

Peter G. Beidler has illuminated with dazzling lucidity the complex structuring of all those questions about the fortunate fall, demonstrating that four distinct questions are asked: 1) does Donatello rise as a result of his sin and the suffering that sin caused? 2) if sin educated Donatello, is sin, then, the only means of education? 3) was Donatello's growth worth the sacrifice of the old, innocent and carefree Donatello? 4) was Adam's fall part of a divine plan that allows us to rise to a higher plane than we otherwise might attain?[15] Beidler finds that Hawthorne answers yes to the first, no to the second, yes and no to the third, and an emphatic no to the fourth. What is troublesome here is that Beidler's touchstone for each of these answers is the opinion of Kenyon and Hilda, the static and vapid characters, as opposed to the opinion of the dynamic

[15] "Theme of the Fortunate Fall in The Marble Faun," The Emerson Society Quarterly, 47 (1967), 56-62.

and courageous Miriam. He is, in other words, proceeding on the standard critical assumption that if Miriam is wrong, as she certainly is in her perpetration of the murder, Hilda must, therefore, be right. The difficulty lies in what, exactly, Hawthorne meant by the fall. Since Donatello is Adam in the romance and Hawthorne went to all the trouble of making his story indubitably allegorical, why should the murder be interpreted literally? What makes murder the perfect choice for a re-enactment of Adam's sin is that it involves playing God, which is what Adam tried to do.

The point, I think, is not that, if we accept the idea of the fortunate fall, we should, as Beidler says, "go right out and commit a few serious crimes so that we could experience the rise that comes as a result of sin."[16] Rather, Hawthorne is dramatizing the pervasiveness of the fall, the fact that Adam's, alias Donatello's, infirmity is a sign of the evil inherent in everyone, the most genuinely innocent as well as those for whom self-conceived innocence is a blind. What worries Beidler and the other critical foes of the fortunate-fall theory is that sin can be as harmful as it is beneficial. But the determining factor is the individual's attitude toward his sin. As Robert Stanton states, "although sin is the occasion of spiritual growth--even its necessary occasion--it is not the cause of it; that spiritual growth comes not from sin but from our overcoming

16 Beidler, 57.

the effects of sin."[17] And it is impossible to overcome the effects of sin and grow until one recognizes that one has, in fact, sinned.

Hilda's position in this regard is made abundantly clear in her conversation with Kenyon at the end of The Marble Faun. As far as she is concerned, the problem of Donatello involves three questions. Kenyon suggests that "'life has grown so sadly serious, that such men must change their nature, or else perish, like the antediluvian creatures that required, as the condition of their existence, a more summer-like atmosphere than ours'" (pp. 459-460). But Hilda replies, "'I will not accept your moral!'" (p. 460). Now immediately preceding Kenyon's statement, Donatello has been characterized as being compounded especially for happiness (yet he fell), and Hilda, at the moment of her negative response, is described as "happy-natured" (p. 460). There is, as Faulkner would say, the ding-dong of doom in that. The second problem raised by Kenyon is that Donatello's remorse over his crime, "'gnawing into his soul, has awakened it; developing a thousand high capabilities, moral and intellectual, which we never should have dreamed of asking for, within the scanty compass of the Donatello whom we knew'" (p. 460). Earlier, when Hilda had seen Kenyon's marble bust of Donatello, done at Monte Beni after the crime, she sees in it, "'a growing intellectual power and moral

17 "Dramatic Irony in Hawthorne's Romances," Modern Language Notes, 71 (1956), 425.

sense. Donatello's face used to evince little more than a genial, pleasurable sort of vivacity, and capability of enjoyment. But, here, a soul is being breathed into him; it is the Faun, but advancing towards a state of higher development'" (p. 380). But now, faced with the verbalized statement of growth through sin and remorse, Hilda retreats into the safety zone of "'I don't know whether this is so'" (p. 460). Finally, Kenyon asks her if "'sin then--which we deem such a dreadful blackness in the Universe--is it, like Sorrow, merely an element of human education, through which we struggle to a higher and purer state than we could otherwise have attained. Did Adam fall, that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier Paradise than his?'" (p. 460). And Hilda is shocked, but unfortunately not beyond words, though she says she is. She cries out to Kenyon, "'Do not you perceive what a mockery your creed makes, not only of all religious sentiment, but of moral law, and how it annuls and obliterates whatever precepts of Heaven are written deepest within us?'" (p. 460).

But Kenyon's theory doesn't do that at all; it is, in fact, the basis of religion and moral law, that is, the acceptance of a sinful nature which must be engaged in order to win redemption. Donatello's murder of the Model is the refusal of innocence to accept the presence of evil, and it is Hilda's crime as well, which is why she must, within the logic of the allegory, see the murder committed, why she must confess, and why she can not receive the absolution she doesn't even want. And the imagistic clincher is Hilda's bridal gift from

Miriam, a bracelet of seven ancient Etruscan gems dug out of seven sepulchres. This brings tears to Hilda's eyes but not to her soul, and is a gloomy prophecy of what fate awaits this other Adam and Eve in the garden of the New World. For Hawthorne has not set Hilda and Kenyon up for an ideal but for a fall. Hilda "saw sunlight on the mountain-tops, " (p. 426) but one suspects that the sunlight is just cheap gilt paint and that the mountain-tops will have to be returned to Paramount Pictures in the morning.

One way of approaching Absalom, Absalom! is to read it as the preface to a one-volume suicide note called The Sound and the Fury, for Quentin is the tragic anti-hero of Absalom, Absalom!, who absorbs and projects the mythic implications of the legend he embodies and creates but can not accept. He has the knowledge of the fall as re-enacted by Thomas Sutpen but refuses, despite the fear and trembling that should warn him, to accept the experience of it as his own and not hate it. As Richard B. Sewall writes, "It is as if a son of a lesser Hamlet or of an untutored Faustus were telling his father's story and finding himself unable to live with it. . . . Unlike Hamlet, he never speaks of his shattered illusions nor passes judgment. All we know is that the story in some way found him out, laid a question on his plate that he could not live with in peace."[18] Like Hilda's confession, Quentin's compulsive narration is without absolution, and both move toward a New England death.

The terror of Sutpen's fall possesses Quentin in the same way that Hilda's horror of Miriam's descent with Donatello into the pit of darkness possesses her. For both initiates, the spectacle of the fall is just that, something to be watched, not a mirror image of themselves; both tremble on the brink of awareness, but then step back, supposedly to safety but actually into jeopardy. Sutpen, Rosa, and Henry pass across the stage of Quentin's mind, not actors merely, but a succession of Quentin's second selves, reflecting his mechanistic mentality, his outraged virginity, his impulse to incest and repulsion of darkness. The bond between Quentin and these ghosts is apparent to the reader and felt certainly by Quentin as he lay "still and rigid on his back with the cold New England night on his face and the blood running warm in his rigid body and limbs, breathing hard but slow" (p. 373), but the vital connection between past and present, between actor and audience, between storyteller and story he will not make, will not acknowledge. For Quentin, as for Miss Rosa,

> there are some things which happen to us which the intelligence and the senses refuse just as the stomach sometimes refuses what the palate has accepted but which the digestion cannot compass--occurrences which stop us dead as though by some impalpable intervention, like a sheet of glass through which we watch all subsequent events transpire as though in a soundless vacuum, and fade, vanish; are gone, leaving us immobile, impotent, helpless; fixed, until we can die. (pp. 151-152)

[18] The Vision of Tragedy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 136-137, 146.

As Ilse Dusoir Lind points out, "Sutpen's fall and the obliteration of his house bring to mind the great myth of man's original fall from innocence . . . . Young Sutpen's own loss of 'innocence' takes place before that white door of the great house of the plantation owner, where--under the stare of the 'nigger monkey'--he first felt, like Adam in Paradise, the shameful inadequacy of his natural garb ("his patched overalls and no shoes"). That single, contemptuous glance of the slave at the door altered his whole spiritual condition."[19] The Southern planter had played God with him, and "he knew that something would have to be done about it; he would have to do something about it in order to live with himself for the rest of his life and he could not decide what it was because of that innocence which he had just discovered he had, which . . . he would have to compete with" (p. 234). Sutpen wins over his innocence but it is a Pyrrhic victory, for he decides to assert himself by playing God himself and imposing his "design" on others. It is his initial exercise in the mechanism of pure logic, the repetition of which will kill him, for there is no place in his materialistic construct for dynamic human values. So he cultivates innocence the same way he cultivates cotton, as a necessary part of his design, an "innocence

19 "The Design and Meaning of Absalom, Absalom!" in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1960), pp. 281, 297.

which believed that the ingredients of morality were like the ingredients of pie or cake and once you had measured them and balanced them and mixed them and put them into the oven it was all finished and nothing but pie or cake could come out" (p. 263).

Ensconced in this ethical cocoon, he is able to desert his first wife and refuse to acknowledge his first son, because their Negro blood does not fit into his plan, having, in all justice, made them a generous financial settlement. And the design is achieved as he and twenty Haitian slaves and a captive French architect "drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table beneath the up-palm immobile and pontific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the Be Sutpen's Hundred like the olden time Be Light" (pp. 8-9). Possessing now the acceptable "swamp-hatched butterfly" for a wife, he founds his dynasty, but in his repudiation of his first marriage are the seeds of his own destruction as he watches his white son, Henry, become friends at school with his passing-for-white Negro son, Charles Bon, and his daughter, Judith, fall in love with this Charles, whom he thought had been put aside for good. And in forbidding the marriage of Judith and Charles, he loses what had been his most cherished goal, immortality through progeny, for Henry renounces his patrimony and later shoots Bon, leaving Judith a widow without ever having been a bride. But because of his rigidity of purpose, Sutpen is forced to repeat his mistakes and be foiled again and again, first in his proposal to Miss

Rosa, thinking "he had turned all time back twenty years and stopped it, froze it" (p. 165) when he suggests they "breed together for test and sample and if it was a boy they could marry" (p. 177) and, finally, in his rejection of Milly Jones after she bears him a girl, for which rejection he is cut down by her grandfather, Wash.

Defeated, then, by time, inflexibility, and preconception, Sutpen figures forth the errors of the mind and heart that will draw Quentin into the Charles River in less than a year. For Quentin, too, attempts immolation upon the altar of his design, his ideal, but Caddy is too strong for him and in that relative weakness lies the reason behind Quentin's fascination for Sutpen. Mr. Compson tells his son that Sutpen was of a time when there were giants in the earth, "people too as we are, and victims too as we are, but victims of a different circumstance, simpler and therefore, integer for integer, larger, more heroic and the figures therefore more heroic too, not dwarfed and involved but distinct, uncomplex who had the gift of loving once or dying once instead of being diffused and scattered creatures drawn blindly limb from limb from a grab bag and assembled" (p. 89). As Melvin Backman sees, "out of his sense of impotence and alienation, Quentin . . . seemed to turn to the godlike Sutpen for the power and virility he lacked, for the father who would solve the son's dilemma. But the giant, rising out of the past like a swiftly growing djinn from Aladdin's lamp, threatened to consume rather than renew the puny summoner."[20]

Leslie Fiedler refers to Sutpen's "invulnerable moral virginity,"[21] and within the novel this aspect of Sutpen and of Quentin is physically embodied in Miss Rosa Coldfield. In the structure of the novel, according to Peter Swiggart, "she stands for traditional Southern romanticism and is a foil to Sutpen's equally obsessive moral rationalism,"[22] and Quentin has the misfortune to partake of the worst of both stances. If, like Sutpen, he is guilty of demanding that life correspond to his mental construct, that construct itself consists of impossibly romantic notions of honor and purity. For both Rosa and Quentin, as for Hilda, reality had not lived up to their ideal, and each transcends that disillusionment by escaping into hell, the void, and heaven respectively, instead of coming to terms with it and creating out of the ruins a viable relation to the world. Rosa has grown up in a loveless house, not a home at all, with only her father's stern and abstract morality as a childhood companion. Needing desperately the love she had never known, not from parent or lover, she had, there being nothing else, fallen in love with love

20 Faulkner, The Major Years: A Critical Study (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1966), pp. 111-112.

21 Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 472.

22 The Art of Faulkner's Novels (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), p. 151.

and named it Charles Bon, whom she had never seen. And then she agreed to wed the demon Sutpen, who had pushed her sister into a dream existence, the real world being unbearable, and she became engaged to him simply because he was the first person who had looked at her, so she thought, as a human being. And when she discovers he is only contemplating her as he would a new mare, she dies and wears black for the remaining forty-three years of her life. As R. P. Adams says, "Quentin is immobilized between the glorious vision he would like to believe in and the sordid realities to which his evidence often points. The moral of the whole book emerges from the pervasive counterpoint of static ideal aristocracy against the concrete dynamism of rapid, chaotic, and often violent change. . . . Quentin is never able to escape the rigidly static 'morality' which is equated, in the experience of both Sutpen and Miss Rosa, with 'virginity,' that imperviousness to the concrete experience of motion through time which is the fine bloom of Sutpen's 'innocence.'"[23]

The psychic bond between Quentin and Henry Sutpen is the most inextricable in the book, woven as it is out of those static principles of incest and puritanism, which, as William Van O'Connor perceives, yoke Absalom, Absalom! to The Marble Faun. "It is clear," O'Connor says, "that in all three novels, The Marble Faun, The Sound

[23] Faulkner: Myth and Motion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 213.

and the Fury, and Absalom, Absalom!, incest is used as a symbol of inward-turning. And Hawthorne and Faulkner have related it to evils that have their origins in a diseased sort of self-centeredness."[24] Both Quentin and Henry share that possessiveness toward their sisters which becomes a metaphor for their rejection of the complex world outside the state of childhood. When Henry brings Charles Bon home, it is really Henry who seduces Judith, using Bon as his surrogate,

> seduced her along with himself from that distance between Oxford and Sutpen's Hundred, between herself and the man whom she had not even seen yet, as though by means of that telepathy with which as they seemed at times to anticipate one anothers' actions as two birds leave a limb at the same instant; that rapport not like the conventional delusion of that between twins but rather such as might exist between two people who, regardless of sex or age or heritage of race or tongue, had been marooned at birth on a desert island: the island here Sutpen's Hundred; the solitude, the shadow of that father with whom not only the town but their mother's family as well had merely assumed armistice rather than accepting and assimilating. (p. 99)

For Quentin, this is the dream of incest come true; and it is his confrontation of the dying Henry that night he took Miss Rosa to the decaying Sutpen mansion that exercises the centrifugal force in his re-creation of the Sutpen legend as somehow the essence of the South and of himself:

24 "Hawthorne and Faulkner: Some Common Ground," The Virginia Quarterly Review, 33 (1957), 120.

> He (Quentin) couldn't pass that . . . that door, the running feet on the stairs beyond it almost a continuation of the faint shot . . . pausing, looking at the door, the yellowed creamy mass of old intricate satin and lace spread carefully on the bed and then caught swiftly up by the white girl and held before her as the door crashed in and the brother stood there, hatless, with his shaggy bayonet-trimmed hair, his gaunt worn unshaven face, his patched and faded gray tunic, the pistol still hanging against his flank: the two of them, brother and sister, curiously alike as if the difference in sex had merely sharpened the common blood to a terrific, an almost unbearable, similarity, speaking to one another in short brief staccato sentences like slaps, as if they stood breast to breast striking one another in turn neither making any attempt to guard against the blows.
>
> Now you cant marry him.
> Why cant I marry him?
> Because he's dead.
> Dead?
> Yes. I killed him. (p. 173)

Henry had accomplished with Charles Bon what Quentin failed to do with Dalton Ames and Herbert Hill and in the wasted yellow face of Henry, Quentin encounters himself and reads his own self-inflicted doom.

It is the spiritual incest of Puritanism that links Henry and Quentin and Hilda, that attitude of noli me tangere in the face of darkness, whether that darkness is sex or Negro or evil, that pose of perfection that severs the human bonds with which the world is held precariously together. Just as Hilda is implicated in the murder of the Model, so Quentin is an accomplice after the fact in his participation by desire in Henry's murder of Charles to preserve his sister's purity. It was, as Shreve reconstructs it, the miscegenation and not

the incest that precipitates the fratricide. And it is the inflexibility of a Puritan society, whose mores Sutpen adopted easily since they meshed so well with his own rigid demands, which leads to the fatal rejection of Bon by his father and his brother. O'Connor notes that, in both novels, the authors stress "Catholicism's acceptance of fallibility and human weakness, and contrasts its capacity for compromise with the Puritan's stern inflexibility. . . . Henry Sutpen is a stern literalist, almost as inflexible as his father, Thomas Sutpen. Most of the novel's tension is in terms of Sutpen inflexibility and of Charles Bon's needing and asking for human sympathy, acceptance and understanding."[25] Hilda and Henry remain aliens, despite their fascination, in the Catholic cultures of Rome and New Orleans before returning home to a death-in-life, sentenced by their own refusal to recognize and absorb and understand the value of darkness.

Both Hilda and Quentin, then, faced with the discrepancy between the ideal and the real, reject the historical vision that will encompass both, that will accept both the innocence and the fall, which acceptance brings with it the hope of final reconciliation. Their fake innocence is purblind, hysterical, static, and life-denying. Refusing to connect the present with the past or themselves with others, they can have no future or even the materials of hope.

[25] O'Connor, 120-121.

There is, throughout both The Marble Faun and Absalom, Absalom!, the pervasive odor of the over-ripeness of this historical malaise, and one asks, finally, if ripeness come, can rot be far behind?

AFTERWORD

In Studies in Classic American Literature, D. H. Lawrence insists that "you must look through the surface of American art, and see the inner diabolism of the symbolic meaning. Otherwise it is all mere childishness."[1] In Hawthorne and Faulkner, this diabolism cuts through the pre-lapsarian fallacy which so permeates the texture and tone of the American experience, America and its social myths being the available and perfect metaphor for a universal human delusion. Lawrence called The Scarlet Letter "a sort of parable, an earthly story with a hellish meaning"[2] and that places the moral genre of these six romances. But diabolism and hellishness do not constitute the total vision of Hawthorne and Faulkner, for both are darkly romantic in that they affirm dramatically and rhetorically the vital oneness of all living things, yet see almost a total rejection of this dynamic wholeness by men divided against life and their own selves through the positing of abstractions as totalities, of partials as absolutes, or assuming innocence in a fallen world. This affirmation, however, is precarious and hypothetical, and both writers fit Leslie Fiedler's definition of a Gothic novelist as "one

[1] Studies in Classic American Literature (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1923), p. 93.

[2] Lawrence, p. 92.

who makes terror rather than love the center of his work, knowing all the while, of course, that there can be no terror without the hope for love and love's defeat."[3] This is what joins Hawthorne and Faulkner in the dark mainstream of American literature, this and a cosmic pessimism lightened only after the fictional fact by their own accomplished act of the imagination which is a leap in the darkness of the human heart.

[3] "Introduction" to The Lime Twig by John Hawkes (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. ix.

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