

# The Wages of Sin in Hawthorne

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"Each human soul is the first-created inhabitant of its own Eden," Hawthorne remarks in one of his sketches.<sup>1</sup> And much of his work is a serious attempt to find out what happens to that individual soul when it introduces sin into its Eden. In a sense Hawthorne recreates the scene in the Garden over and over again in order to investigate from every angle man's soul following the introduction of sin. It is this series of probings, already often explored, that I trace in this essay with the hope of shedding more light on the development of Hawthorne's art and his view of human experience. Since the theme of sin is almost everywhere in his work, I treat only those tales and novels that are concerned more or less directly with the question, What happens to the individual after he sins?

In preface to the consideration of Hawthorne's sinners we need to note that nearly all the sins in the tales and novels can be reduced to a form of intellectual pride or to a kind of violation of the sanctity of another's individuality—the two are closely related, one often following from the other—usually with a resultant isolation of the sinner from his fellow humans. Often, as we shall see, this takes the form of the scientist whose intellectual devotion to science leads him to violate the personality or soul of his victim in the interest of scientific experiment.

Although the villain of *Fanshawe* foreshadows many of Hawthorne's later sinners, the first tale to consider specifically the wages of sin is "The Hollow of the Three Hills." Each of the successive visions the old hag conjures up for the unnamed lady reveals people who have been hurt by her sins: her forlorn parents, her deserted and maddened husband, her dead child. And after the last vision she herself apparently dies. The wages of sin is suffering and death.

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In "Roger Malvin's Burial" the sin of Reuben Bourne is his failure to keep his promise to the dying man to return and bury him—Hawthorne is ambiguous about whether his leaving Roger to die was wrong—and in his lying to Dorcas about her father and about Reuben's own actions. The last half of the story is a somewhat mechanical working out of the idea that sin brings retribution, here retribution through Reuben's remorse and eventually through the horror of his killing his own son at the site of the old man's unburied bones. In this act and the suffering which follows it, Roger's guilt is expiated, an ending noteworthy because Hawthorne does not allow it many times.

In "Lady Eleanore's Mantle" Hawthorne treats the specific problem of the intellectual pride that isolates. Symbolized by her mantle, Lady Eleanore's evil pride isolates her from human sympathy and brings pestilence to the province and death to herself. Dying, she summarizes not only her own sin but much of what Hawthorne has been saying in the early tales:

The curse of Heaven hath striken me, because I woulst not call man my brother, nor woman sister. I wrapped myself in PRIDE as in a MANTLE, and scorned the sympathies of nature . . . (980)<sup>2</sup>

"The Birthmark" treats a kind of pride that leads to a specific sin. In Georgianna, Aylmer has a wife as nearly perfect as humans can be, except for the small birthmark. There is a horrible presumption in Aylmer's desire to remove the mark and thus have her perfect. The desire becomes an obsession which drives him to the fatal attempt to remove the mark, an act obviously considered by Hawthorne a violation of her soul as well as her body. The horror of his act is increased by the broad symbolic significance which the birthmark gradually acquires, the symbol of the necessary imperfection of all mortal men. Aylmer does succeed in removing the birthmark almost completely; but the same draught which removes the mark kills Georgianna.

Pride is again explored in "Egotism; or, The Bosom Serpent," though the sin is presented much more abstractly. The result of the sin is isolation, symbolized by the serpent that gnaws at Roderick's heart. But here, for the first time since "Roger Malvin's Burial," is presented a possible redemption

from the evil effects of sin. Roderick knows the cure. "Could I for one minute forget myself, the serpent might not abide within me. It is my diseased self-contemplation that has engendered and nourished him" (115). And the serpent does leave when he forgets himself in the idea of another, his wife whom he had deserted years before.

In "Rappaccini's Daughter" and "Ethan Brand" Hawthorne reaches the highest artistic statement in the tales of the sin-destruction theme. Rappaccini is almost the ultimate of Hawthorne's fiends. In his scientific detachment he commits what to Hawthorne is the worst of sins by infusing his own daughter with a poison deadly to any living thing which contacts her—a violation of the sanctity of her soul which could have no other than tragic results. It has cut her off from any normal intercourse with humanity, but not through any sin of her own. When Giovanni does come into her life, bringing companionship and love, to him also is gradually imparted the poison until he not only is able to touch Beatrice, but is himself poisonous to others. Beatrice dies trying to rid herself of the poison with an antidote which Giovanni has obtained. Her death, one feels, is the only possible end. But Rappaccini is not the only sinner. Giovanni's mad curse of Beatrice for knowingly, he thinks, imparting her poison to him in order to have someone to love is also sin, perhaps as bad a sin, contributing to her death and bringing misery to Giovanni, who is just beginning to hope that they could find some kind of life and happiness together in spite of the poison. For both Giovanni and Rappaccini, the wages of sin is disaster and death to the loved one and isolation for the sinner.

"Ethan Brand" repeats the theme. Ethan Brand develops his intellect by contemplation until he becomes an incarnate fiend: ". . . he was now a cold observer, looking on mankind as the subject of his experiment, and at length, converting man the woman to be his puppets, and pulling the wires that moved them to such degrees of crime as were demanded for his study" (1194). The worst of his violations of the individuality of his victims in his search for the Unpardonable Sin is that of "the Esther of our tale," whose soul he had "wasted, absorbed, and perhaps annihilated" in the process. His search, though, is suc-

cessful; he has found the Unpardonable Sin in his own breast:

The sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its own mighty claims! The only sin that deserves a recompense of immortal agony! (189)

And having found the sin, he has nothing more to achieve. Ethan Brand throws himself into the infernal pit of the lime kiln, just as he had thrown his soul into the greater pit earlier.

From this survey of the tales, two or three significant observations can be made. The early tales were a more or less mechanical working out of the theme that sin brings retribution, that the wages of sin is death, that when the soul introduces sin into its Eden, the soul must necessarily be blighted. Only occasionally and almost incidentally does Hawthorne introduce the idea of a possible redemption from sin, as he does, rather mechanically, in Reuben Bourne's expiation at terrible cost or, more specifically, in Roderick's redemption through forgetting himself in love of another. But there is evident, even in the brief sketches given above, an increasing awareness of the complexity of his problem and an increasingly complex treatment of it. For one thing, Hawthorne is aware that it isn't merely the sinners who suffer. Beatrice and Georgianna, both depicted as at heart completely pure, are innocent victims. And Esther, though we are told nothing about her own innocence or guilt, must have suffered horribly under Ethan Brand's evil experimenting. Another idea, later to become very important, is introduced in Ethan Brand's final declaration, "Freely, were it to do again, would I incur the guilt. I accept the retribution." Hawthorne seems to be suggesting here that, at least for Ethan Brand, sin carries not only its own retribution but also its own reward. Still another idea can be noted in the fact that Rappaccini's sin is not confined to himself; it results in Giovanni's sinful curse of Beatrice. The theme that sin begets sin Hawthorne explores at greater length in *The Scarlet Letter*, and it becomes the primary theme of *The House of Seven Gables*. In a sense, then, Hawthorne's tales can be looked upon as an apprenticeship for his more extensive and involved probing of the human soul in its Eden, probing that could be handled only in the greater scope given him by the novel form.

*The Scarlet Letter* is the most complex of Hawthorne's explorations of the effects of sin and will require rather extensive analysis. In it all the themes we have noted in the tales are brought together in a kind of grand assault on the problem of evil. The sin as such is pushed into the background. The apple has been eaten a full year before, and it is Hawthorne's problem to see what happens to the souls of Hester Prynne and Dimmesdale, together with that of the wronged husband, Roger Chillingworth, at first more sinned against than sinning. Chillingworth is the simplest of the three, another of the line of cold-blooded scientist-demons that includes Rappaccini and Ethan Brand, perhaps even the most vicious of them, for Chillingworth is motivated by a cold and long-continued desire for revenge and by an even colder scientific experimentation. The means is a diabolical variation of the familiar violation of the sanctity of the human heart. As Dimmesdale's leech—the word here, of course, is double edged—he is able not only to find out Dimmesdale's true connection with Hester, but to keep the unknowing minister in a state of perpetual remorse, anxiety and pain the like of which no mortal man might endure and live. Contriving to keep Dimmesdale's body alive, Chillingworth keeps his mind and soul in torment. As Chillingworth describes himself, "A mortal man, with once a human heart, has become a fiend for his especial benefit" (186). In Hawthorne's thinking, and, I imagine, in any system of either human psychology or Divine retribution, such monstrous action could result only in absolute deterioration, a deterioration which is symbolized in the parallel physical deterioration and increasing ugliness of Chillingworth. And once Dimmesdale is placed beyond him by confession, Roger himself, his object of revenge gone, "positively withered up, shrivelled away, and almost vanished from mortal sight," dying within a year. It is the familiar sin-begets-destruction theme of the tales, but worked out more elaborately and in a more complex character. For Roger is carefully painted as "calm in temperament, kindly, though not of warm affections, but ever and in all his relations with the world, a pure and upright man," before his design for revenge shows him progressively becoming a devil by undertaking a devil's office.

Dimmesdale's sin is also a variation of a type familiar in the tales. His original sin, of course, is the adultery, but it is not this that results in his deterioration so much as it is his self-centered pride—reminiscent of that of Roderick in "Egotism"—and his resultant hypocrisy. That this is Hawthorne's view of Dimmesdale is seen by the repeated emphasis on this trait. Aware of the healing power of confession, Dimmesdale loves too much his position in the eyes of the world to give it up for the ignominy of confession. Suffering remorse enough from his original deed, he sees that remorse multiplied many times over by his own awareness of the falseness of his position. He even does confess his "vileness" before his congregation, but he does so equivocally so that his hearers think him but the more nearly divine:

The minister well knew—subtle, but remorseful hypocrite that he was!—the light in which his vague confession would be viewed. He had striven to put a cheat upon himself by making the avowal of a guilty conscience, but had gained only one other sin, and a self-acknowledged shame, without the momentary relief of being self-deceived. He had spoken the very truth, and transformed it into the veriest falsehood. (169)

His remorse drives him to the mockery of his midnight stand on the scaffold, but it can bring him to public confession only after he has reached his ultimate public triumph, in the election sermon, and is dying anyway. It is indicative of the real Dimmesdale that when Hester reveals to him her relationship with Chillingworth he cries out,

O Hester Prynne, thou little, little knowest all the horror of this thing! And the shame!—the indelicacy!—the horrible ugliness of this exposure of a sick and guilty heart to the very eye that would gloat over it! Woman, woman, thou art accountable for this! I cannot forgive thee! (199)

The Dimmesdale who has let Hester bear alone her public degradation at the scaffold thinks first of his own shame, and he cannot forgive the woman who has been only indirectly responsible because of her love for him.

But if Dimmesdale's sin, first of passion then of pride and hypocrisy, brings about his destruction, it does more. It is by his very sorrows that Dimmesdale is able to achieve his extraordinary success as a minister: "His intellectual gifts, his moral

perceptions, his power of experiencing and communicating emotion, were kept in a state of preternatural activity by the prick and anguish of his daily life" (167). The destruction comes, but first Dimmesdale receives positive benefits from his sin and suffering.

Through Hester Prynne, without doubt Hawthorne's most complex and noble character, Hawthorne explores this possible regenerative effect of sin, a theme only hinted at in his earlier work. Hester's sin with Dimmesdale brings her almost unbearable suffering and humiliation. But from the very moment of her appearance at the door of the jail there is almost no evidence that the sin itself brings her real remorse of conscience. By the strength of her own will she bears her humiliation and suffering, gathering in turn strength and development from them and from her unselfish service to suffering humanity. It is not at all certain from Hawthorne's handling of her that she really considers her action sin or that she felt it something to repent of. She wears her badge of shame with great dignity, almost with pride and at times defiance. In response to Dimmesdale's comparison of their sin with that of Chillingworth, her famous cry is, "What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so!" (200) Though one can make too much of this, it surely must be taken as indicative of Hester's attitude.

But the significant thing about Hester is what happens to her as a result of the sin and the wearing of the scarlet letter. Though she early dedicates herself as a "self-ordained Sister of Mercy," Hawthorne interprets this as an act of volition rather than one of true feeling or human sympathy, for "her life had turned, in great measure, from passion and feeling, to thought." What she is experiencing is an intellectual development which leads her into deep speculation in the realms of morality:

Standing alone in the world . . . , She cast away the fragments of a broken chain. The world's law was no law for her mind. It was an age in which the human intellect, newly emancipated, had taken a more active and a wider range than for many centuries before . . . Men . . . had overthrown and rearranged . . . the whole system of ancient prejudice, wherewith was linked much of the ancient principle. Hester Prynne imbibed this spirit. She assumed a freedom of speculation . . . which

our forefathers, had they known it, would have held to be a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter.  
(181)

Hawthorne is grudging about it. He represents Hester as having wandered "without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness," though gaining freedom through her speculations:

The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers,—stern and wild ones,—and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss. (202-3)

But there can be little doubt that Hawthorne considered Hester's freedom, her strength and her intellectual development as tending toward a higher morality. His obvious respect for her, the appealing personality with which he endows her, plus his comments about her, make any other interpretation very difficult. Hawthorne could not approve of her plan to run away with Dimmesdale, but he could not hide his respect for the woman with strength and courage to conceive and carry it out. Neither the fact that Chillingworth's diablerie made his plan fail nor the fact that nowhere else does she actually put into practice any of the daring ideas to which her speculations have given rise can be interpreted as nullifying those ideas or the conception of them as a higher morality. For this intellectual development is followed by a return of her capacity for feeling, called forth apparently by her interview in the forest with Dimmesdale, but for Hawthorne probably resulting from and increased by her intellectual development. Hawthorne undoubtedly intended us to view her later life of unselfish service as, if not the result of her higher morality, at least the highest form of Christian morality.

The real contribution of *The Scarlet Letter* to Hawthorne's treatment of sin, then, is in the study of Dimmesdale's partial development and Hester's dual development as a result of their sin. Other themes, too, are there, notably the idea that sin begets sin and the more familiar one that cold-blooded, long-continued sin can result only in destruction.

The sin-begets-sin theme receives its fullest statement in *The House of Seven Gables*, but Hawthorne develops it as a rather mechanical working out of the curse of old Matthew Maule rather than as a dynamic study in human behavior fol-

lowing sin. Hawthorne is aware of the weakness and tries in several places to suggest that each new occupant of the house was aware of the original wrong and by failing to rectify it committed anew the crime and incurred its responsibilities. Old Judge Pyncheon is a villain such as appears nowhere else, as I recall, in Hawthorne. Lacking the motivation and subtlety of the demons like Chillingworth, he yet has an infinite capacity for evil. His major crime is undoubtedly his contriving to send the innocent Clifford to prison. His own destruction as a result of his evil seems much closer to the mechanics of the early tales than to the deep psychological study of *The Scarlet Letter*. But a significant note, an elaboration of the later tales, is the emphasis on the terrible suffering of the innocent as a result of Judge Pyncheon's villainy. Indeed, to me the strongest point about *The House of Seven Gables* is the way in which Hawthorne somehow manages to endow poor old Hepzibah and Clifford with a kind of tragic dignity in their suffering.

In *The Blythedale Romance* Hawthorne turns his attention to a type that had interested him earlier, the reformer whose passion for reform leads him to evil. Hollingsworth, though a type character, makes an interesting study in sin. To his plan for prison reform, evolved apparently with the highest motivation, he dedicates his life. But the plan requires money and support, and in his attempts to carry it out the dedication becomes passion, then obsession. Under its influence Hollingsworth subordinates all human sympathies, conceiving a plan to wreck the Blythedale project in order to use both its land and what it has accomplished, throwing over Miles Coverdale when he refuses to be part of the scheme, casting aside Zenobia when she can no longer be of use to him, and finally planning even to sacrifice Priscilla to it—at least so Zenobia interprets him. But the most interesting aspect of all this is that he has done it in apparent self-deception. Right up to the time that Zenobia finally makes her impassioned charges, he has felt that everything he has planned and done has been just and righteous. Blinded by his own obsession, he cannot see, as Zenobia finally is able to see, that he is all self:

Self, self, self! You have embodied yourself in a project.  
You are a better masquerader than the witches and gypsies

yonder; for your disguise is a self-deception. See whither it has brought you. (568)

And Zenobia is speaking for not only herself but Miles Coverdale and Hawthorne when she tells him, "The utmost that can be said in your behalf . . . is, that a great and rich heart has been ruined in your breast." The results of Hollingsworth's sin follow the now familiar pattern: misery and death to those about him and for himself a complete loss of the power that had been so compelling to Zenobia, Priscilla, and even Coverdale. In the ruin of his heart was also the ruin of his mind and soul.

Hollingsworth is the center of the novel, but it is with difficulty that Hawthorne keeps him there. Zenobia is the most interesting, complex and attractive character in the novel, and in her Hawthorne studies most subtly the complexities of the soul which introduces sin into its Eden. Zenobia's sin is the familiar, though here perhaps indirect, violation of the individual soul. Having apparently the power to prevent it, she either allows Priscilla to fall into the hands of Westervelt or deliberately places her there. Motivated by her love for Hollingsworth and seeing in Priscilla an obstacle to obtaining him, she removes the obstacle, coldly and heartlessly. Hers is the sin of pride, but it is not of scientific detachment. Rather than lacking in humanity, she is most human, most womanly. As she describes herself and her sin,

At least, I am a woman, with every fault, it may be, that a woman ever had,—weak, vain, unprincipled . . . , passionate, too, and pursuing my foolish and unattainable ends by indirect and cunning, though absurdly chosen means, as an hereditary bondslave must; false, moreover to the whole circle of good, in my reckless truth to the little good I saw before me,—but still a woman! A creature whom only a little change of earthly fortune, a little kinder smile of Him who sent me hither, and one true heart to encourage and direct me, might have made all that a woman can be! (567)

Zenobia's sin must be interpreted as resulting in her death. But this is no mechanical working out of the sin-retribution formula. Nothing about Zenobia is mechanical. It is rather a study of a woman. Zenobia drowns herself, not a repentant sinner, but a woman scorned, a proud, beautiful, "magnificent" woman. Indeed, if sin causes her death, it is not her sin toward Pris-

cilla—though that might have helped cause her rejection by Hollingsworth—but the sin of pride, the pride of a woman who has given her heart away only to find the recipient neither desirous nor worthy of it.

Of the other characters little need be said. The mysterious and demoniac Westervelt, another incarnation of evil, always lurks in the background, but his is only a mechanical part in the novel. And Miles Coverdale can hardly be considered blameless. Both he and Zenobia recognize in him the coldly detached observer of life, a type with which Hawthorne has dealt severely before. His unrequited love for Priscilla might be considered just deserts.

*The Marble Faun* is a specific handling of the "soul in its Eden" theme, carried out on a higher level of abstraction and generalization than in any of the other novels. Donatello is presented, both symbolically through the faun resemblance and actually, as a man in the state of natural innocence, as Adam in the garden before sin has entered. Living in this state Donatello is naively happy, loving Miriam but without real depth in his love, having no real sense of moral relationships, hence unable to make decisions involving right and wrong on any basis other than his own naive emotions. It is his very innocence that is largely responsible for his sin. His passion for Miriam leads him to kill her persecutor, simply as a response to the look in her eyes. Had the Hawthorne of the tales been writing here, this murder would have been the beginning of an inevitable process of deterioration, leading eventually to destruction for Donatello. And at first it seems to be just that. After the first avowal with Miriam of kinship in crime, Donatello isolates himself not only from her, but from the rest of the world. Alone in the tower of his castle, he morbidly contemplates himself and his crime, his remorse dominating all other feeling or thought. But something unusual is happening to Donatello during his suffering. Kenyon first notices it when he is finally accepted into the tower of Donatello:

From some mysterious source, as the sculptor felt assured, a soul had been inspired into the young Count's simplicity, since their intercourse in Rome. He now showed a far deeper sense, and an intelligence that began to deal with high subjects, though in a feeble and childish way. He evinced,

too, a more definite and nobler individuality, but developed out of grief and pain, and fearfully conscious of the pangs that had given it birth. (741)

What is happening is more definitely stated a little later when Donatello responds to Kenyon's suggestion that he find relief from his burden by living for the welfare of his fellow creatures: "In the black depths, the Faun had found a soul and was struggling with it toward the light of heaven" (744). The process goes on throughout the wanderings of Donatello and Kenyon until Donatello is able finally to reunite himself with Miriam, a crucial step because she is so much a part of his sin. But the process cannot end there. Together, as Kenyon tells them, they must continue the climb that will bring their souls out of the morass of sin into the light of Heaven, each one of them dependent on the other. Beyond that Hawthorne will not go. He has Kenyon quickly caution them that their bond is of black threads, that it is for one another's good, "for effort, for sacrifice, but not for earthly happiness" (776).

The significance of Donatello's development as a result of sin is expressed in the musing of both Miriam and Kenyon. Miriam, who has much of Hester Prynne's ability for moral and intellectual investigation, notes the change in Donatello and then asks,

Was the crime—in which he and I were wedded—was it a blessing, in that strange disguise? Was it a means of education, bringing a simple and imperfect nature to a point of feeling and intelligence which it could have reached under no other discipline? . . .

. . . The story of the fall of man! Is it not repeated in our romance of Monte Beni? And may we follow the analogy yet further? Was that very sin,—into which Adam precipitated himself and all his race,—was it the destined means by which, over a long pathway of toil and sorrow, we are to attain a higher, brighter, and profounder happiness, than our lost birthright gave? Will not this idea account for the permitted existence of sin, as no other theory can?

And in response to Kenyon's hesitance in following her in her speculations, she adds:

Ask Hilda what she thinks of it . . . At least she might conclude that sin—which man chose instead of good—has been so beneficently handled by omniscience and omnipotence, that, whereas our dark enemy sought to destroy us by it, it

has really become an instrument most effective in the education of the intellect and soul. (840)

To Hilda's horror, Kenyon takes up Miriam's musings, ending with the question, "Did Adam fall, that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier paradise than his?" (854) And though he immediately disclaims his belief of the idea, the idea itself remains.

Before we leave *The Marble Faun*, a brief look at Hilda will shed more light on Hawthorne's treatment of the problem. Hilda is presented as completely pure and angelic, the human soul as near Christian perfection as is possible on earth. But one soon feels that something is lacking in her, something that shows up when she is suddenly confronted with sin. Having lived completely beyond evil herself, she knows not how to cope with even exposure to it. She flings off Miriam at the moment of Miriam's greatest need and goes through a horror of remorse worse even than that of the sinners, a remorse which culminates in her confession before the Catholic priest. When Kenyon later suggests to her that the verdict on them might better be "Worthy of Death, but not unworthy of Love," she recoils in horror, neither knowing nor wanting to know how "Right and Wrong can work together in a deed." To which Kenyon can only respond:

I always felt you, my dear friend, a terribly severe judge, and have been perplexed to conceive how such tender sympathy could coexist with the remorselessness of a steel blade. You need no mercy, and therefore know not how to show any. (811)

Kenyon's suggestion bears fruit; Hilda finally realizes her own heartlessness: "Miriam loved me well, . . . and I failed her at her sorest need." The final result of Hilda's contact with evil is that she becomes able to participate in normal human sympathies and relationships. Before, she had dedicated her life to copying the great masters; now, she is able to respond to Kenyon's love with a self-forgetful love of her own—with the fertility and creativity implicit in such love—and without losing her essential spiritual quality. Not only in Donatello but in Hilda herself Hawthorne dramatizes the positive results of sin that Miriam and Kenyon have only speculated about.

During the writing of his tales and novels, then, Hawthorne has moved—hesitatingly, to be sure, and with several retreats—from a position in which retribution was the only and inevitable result of sin, through one which recognizes and studies the complexities of sinners and the results of sin, to a final one which affirms the possibilities of positive good resulting from sin. The significance of this movement seems to me twofold: first, that Hawthorne became aware of the greater dramatic and artistic potentialities of a more complex handling of the problem; second, and more important, that through his probings into the nature of sin and the human soul, Hawthorne was evolving for himself, just as Hester Prynne had done in her speculations, a higher concept of morality.

The first of these probably needs no proof other than the obvious development toward both a more complex concept of the problems involved in sin and a more complex handling of both characters and problems. Compare, for example, the simple and rather mechanical plots of the early tales with the complex "Rappaccini's Daughter" or, even more obvious, with the complexity of *The Scarlet Letter*. The awareness of the fact that sin cannot be reduced to the formula of the early tales apparently developed hand in hand with the awareness of the greater artistic possibilities involved in the new concept.

But if the first is obvious, the idea that Hawthorne was evolving his own higher morality needs some qualification and explanation, for it is probable that not everyone will agree that it is a higher morality. That it is a changing and broadening concept of morality has, I think, been demonstrated by this review of his work. Hawthorne's own experience, both with art and with life, must have convinced him that it simply is not true that sin is always punished, that the good always prosper and the wicked perish. What Hawthorne was doing—and this is important for me—was recognizing the complexity of human relationships. The good-evil duality was being brought into question, with the inevitable result that Hawthorne began to recognize and to study in his work infinite gradations of good and evil. *The Marble Faun* does not stop with asking what happens when evil is introduced into the soul; the musings of Kenyon and Miriam go on to ask, Why does sin exist?

That the position which recognizes the complexities of human interaction and of moral problems is a higher morality can, I think, be demonstrated, though I do not care to press it here. That it was for Hawthorne in his own mind, I feel, cannot be denied from the evidence of his work. The final question of *The Marble Faun*, "Did Adam fall, that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier paradise than his?" is fraught with so many problems of interpretation and of philosophical import that there can be no hope of agreement of whether it is really a higher morality. But it is significant to note that it is also a theme of other and even greater writers, notably Milton<sup>3</sup> and Dostoevsky.<sup>4</sup> The fact that Hawthorne has Kenyon immediately respond to his own question, "I never did believe it!" suggests that Hawthorne had not solved the problem for himself. He also denies Hester complete triumph in her higher morality, just as he sees only the possibility, not the probability, of real happiness and perhaps eventual salvation for Miriam and Donatello.

It need not surprise us that Hawthorne could not resolve his problem completely, could see only partial salvation for even the best of his sinners. One feels that for him even the principle of love, which he suggests rather often as the nearest thing to an ultimate saving principle, cannot be completely trusted—it is, after all, Hester's completely selfless love for Dimmesdale that forces her to leave him to the mercy of Chillingworth. Hawthorne was unable to find a final solution to his problem simply because he was working with the complexities of human consciousness; and the soul of man cannot be reduced to a formula. Given the intensity of his probings and the seriousness of his nature, it was perhaps inevitable that he arrive at a tragic view of life, just as most other great artists who have probed intensely have done. And it is Hawthorne's triumph, not that he gives us a system by which we might guide our lives, but that he gives us experience and understanding which might help us to better meet the complexities and problems of a world which itself cannot be reduced to a formula.

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1 "Buds and Birds Voices," *Mosses From an Old Manse* (Vol. I, Salem ed.; New York, 1893), p. 165.

2 Page numbers in parentheses refer to *The Complete Novels and Selected*

*Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Modern Library Giant Edition (New York, 1937).

3 See F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York, 1941), pp. 305-312.

4 See Valdimir Astrov, "Hawthorne and Dostoevsky as Explorers of the Human Conscience," *New England Quarterly*, XV (June, 1942), 296-319.