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THE MARBLE FAUN: HAWTHORNE'S ELEGY FOR ART

NINA BAYM

HAWTHORNE wrote *The Marble Faun* after a lapse of some years in his authorial career; his last completed work, it brings to a close his decade of literary prominence which had been inaugurated with *The Scarlet Letter*. The dense, rich texture of this fourth romance contrasts strikingly with the spare economies of the first; yet the mass of new symbols and metaphors derived from Hawthorne's Italian experience is manipulated to express themes and values common to all the long works. Its point of view is more unorthodox, however, and its anguish more extreme, than in any of the other romances—the author's attempts to disguise himself as a conventional Victorian moralist are therefore more than usually frantic. The result is a book that appears confused and self-contradictory. Yet despite its agitated rhetoric, *The Marble Faun* has a driving unity and a surprisingly straightforward narrative line.

As in the other three romances, the plot coheres around a character who stands a little apart from the action. Though he appears almost a bystander, the narrative is ultimately his because all events in it derive their true significance from their effect on and meaning for him. Kenyon's story is—like Dimmes-

dale's, Holgrave's, and Coverdale's—the story of the failed or destroyed artist. A young American sculptor of considerable promise, he goes to Rome to develop his talent. He is, however, ignorant and innocent; he does not really know either what art is or what demands it makes on the artist. In Rome he becomes involved in the lives of two mysterious and beautiful Europeans—Miriam and Donatello—whose symbolic function is to teach him those things he does not know and to offer him the gift of great artistic powers if he masters their teachings. The artist's creative powers, he learns, are one with the life force that permeates nature. They rise from the subterranean depths of the self, are essentially erotic in character, and thoroughly abhorrent to society. The lesson terrifies him, and he flees backwards towards the safety represented by Hilda. Her virginal conventionality is antithetical to the disruptive sensuality of Miriam and Donatello; in his shattered, enervated panic, Kenyon gladly makes the exchange.

The book falls into three parts of roughly equal length. The first, which runs through Chapter 19, introduces all the characters, themes, and symbols of the novel, and concludes with its pivotal event—Donatello's murder of Miriam's phantom persecutor. Coming to terms with this killing is, for the readers as well as the characters, the main business of the romance. The second section chronicles Donatello's struggle with the feelings of guilt that result from his crime, but its point lies less in his eventual reconciliation with Miriam (Chapter 35) than in the role Kenyon plays in promoting it. Kenyon's intuitive response is to see this killing less as a willful deed than as some inevitable and unavoidable rite of passage, and less a crime than an act of heroism (see p. 384).¹ Unaware of the implications of this position, he encourages a reunion of the separated couple. In the third part of the book (Chapters 36–50), Kenyon goes back to Rome and suffers through the effects of his naïvely espoused radicalism—effects all symbolized in the loss of Hilda. He cannot absorb this loss. In order to get

¹ Page references are to volume IV of the Centenary Edition, Columbus, Ohio, 1968.

her back, he reverses himself, repudiates his dangerous ideas, and settles down into the mold of conventional Victorian moralism.

His turnabout much resembles Dimmesdale's. Just as Dimmesdale changes his mind when he comes out of the forest, finding the commitment he accepted so facilely there to be utterly beyond his psychic strength, so Kenyon is unequal to his expectations of himself. Outside the forest, Dimmesdale cannot sustain the idea that his act was not sinful. Kenyon, likewise, once away from rural Italy and back in Rome, finds it impossible to maintain his conviction that the murder was not a sin. The true issue is not whether this "sin" was fortunate, but whether it was a "sin" at all. In all the subtle doctrinal discussion of the fortunate fall with which criticism has overburdened this romance, this crucial point has been overlooked. It is assumed that the term "fall" can be interchanged with "sin." But repeatedly, and in a variety of ways—of which the portrait of Beatrice Cenci is the most striking—Hawthorne advances the idea that one can be fallen and yet sinless. He never doubts that Donatello has fallen through his crime, but he does not believe that Donatello has sinned.

The myth and romance allusions of the murder as Hawthorne stages it serve to depict something very unlike a crime. Miriam's innocence is asserted and reasserted. The model is made so monstrously evil, and is so much an apparition in any case, that he never acquires any human qualities. The killing is therefore brought into the tradition of fable where an imprisoned maiden is rescued from the monster, ogre, or dragon who holds her captive. No fabulous dragon-slayer has ever been considered criminal: on the contrary, they are always heroes. Five of Hawthorne's dozen Greek myths retold for children had focused on the heroic slaying of monsters—the stories of Bellerophon, Hercules, Perseus, Theseus, and Jason. Guido's archangel Michael, trampling on the fiend (to whom Hawthorne gives the model's face) is certainly not a criminal—why then is Donatello?

This, indeed, is the most important question in *The Marble*

Faun. Why is this heroic deed responded to with horror and shock by all? Why is a semidivine deliverer interpreted as, and why does he feel like, a criminal beast? The question is pursued on both the psychological and social levels. On the social level, the monster Donatello has killed turns out to be a part of the social structure, a pious monk in the Holy City. The dragon is thus not the scourge of a kingdom, but its agent—or the agent, at least, of its king. Pushed further, this means that society is envisioned as institutionalized repression and persecution. This idea, though extreme, is implicit in all Hawthorne's representations of the struggle between romantic individualism and authoritarian society. This social explanation, however, is not sufficient for Donatello's case, because he is a nonsocial being and feels himself to be criminal quite independently of any social teachings on the subject. It would appear that his act has spontaneously generated its own set of guilt-feelings, and with them the desire for punishment and restraint that leads men, perhaps, to create the authoritarian institutions that repress them.

This may be Hawthorne's myth of the origins of society; in any event, there is surely some correspondence between what man intuitively feels within himself, and what the society proscribes. What, then, is this transforming and ambiguous deed, that makes man at once heroic and guilt ridden? Simply, it is a parricide. The many references to the Cenci story are utilized for this purpose—to inform us that this is a father-murder. Of course the model is neither Donatello's nor Miriam's father; nothing exasperated Hawthorne more than his readers' demands for the appurtenances of novelistic probability. The "truth" about what happens is to be found in the symbols, allusions, and references through which events are given meaning.

The Cenci legend enables Hawthorne simultaneously to depict this act as a parricide and to generalize its implications. As in Shelley's play, his theme is "the great war between the old and young" (ii, ii, 38), and Hawthorne applies this theme

more extensively than Shelley. Shelley saw his situation in exclusively political terms. Cenci, a cannibalistic father whose wish to drink his sons' blood and whose rape of Beatrice were parallel in murderous intent, flourished only because he was protected by the Pope, a figure of political tyranny and corruption. Identifying radical libertarianism with youth and repressive despotism with age, Shelley moves from the war between fathers and sons to the war of revolutionaries versus tyrants. Hawthorne, by making the model a Capuchin, makes his murder a political crime. He also presents the idea of war between the old and young in a historical or transcendental sense. Rome stands for the great weight of history and institutions which oppresses and kills youthful spontaneity. In the "guide-book" descriptions of the city—especially the long night walk which culminates in the murder—Hawthorne carefully associates the model with every antique and historical sight. The model appears and reappears at each viewpoint, a wicked genius of place. He is therefore both a symbol, as Capuchin, of papal tyranny, and a personification of the weighty, oppressive, killing spirit of Rome.

But most important to Hawthorne is the core of psychological meaning in the deed, and here we have an odd version of the eternal Oedipal triangle. The beautiful and desirable woman—the woman who arouses sexual passion in the male—is never long free in man's mind from the idea of the forbidding father and the need to murder him. The woman cannot long be looked at without being desired, and cannot be possessed unless the shadowing father is eliminated. It is only a step from fearing the consequences of one's desires to fearing the object of them. Thus Miriam's shadow symbolizes both the father and the attractiveness, and the guilt which is the necessary consequence of this conjunction. The passionate youth finds no protection from these ideas except in a woman who has somehow been separated from her sexuality—a woman, that is, whom he does not desire sexually. Hilda, who is such a woman, has no persecutor. Miriam is infinitely desirable, and

after a few months in Rome her "shadow" materializes in the subterranean depths of the city; thereafter she is never free from it. The model is the creation of men's perceptions of Miriam, as she is filtered through their fears and desires; but Miriam, living in a man's world, suffers from this figment as though he were real.

Indeed, since to Hawthorne reality is *in* perceptions, and men's perceptions originate in their minds, the model is simultaneously a figment of the mind and a real being. Donatello kills a real being but also a phantom of the inner life. As a rule, a father is not *really* killed when a man sexually possesses a woman; but, Hawthorne implies, one *really* is in the mind. To reach maturity as symbolized in sexual knowledge one must overthrow (note that the model is literally overthrown) the image of the father, for that image stands between the son and the fulfillment of his desire. That Donatello's act should therefore generate feelings of guilt quite independently of society is perfectly comprehensible; it is a fearful thing to kill a father. That this act should also strike at the very foundations of the social order is also obvious, since submission to paternal authority is the seed from which all social behavior stems in an authoritarian society. Thus Hawthorne carefully parallels the social and psychic structures.² The organization of Rome corresponds exactly to the organization of the psyche—a group of fathers runs it in a fashion which suppresses youth in order to perpetuate the power of the group.

In rescuing Miriam, or killing her persecutor, Donatello performs an act with meaning on many levels. He is trying to free himself or some part of himself from the haunting repressions of authority and force. There is nothing "natural" about his state as faun; like an infant Cupid, the faun is a

² Insofar as it can be abstracted from the romances, Hawthorne's particular version of the "triangle" is most interestingly complicated because the paternal figure is both depersonalized and split. On the one hand, he is a mysterious "shadow," and on the other, a character or even group of characters representing institutional authority. E.g., Chillingworth and the Puritan elders, Westervelt and Hollingsworth, the Capuchin and the vague, oppressive Roman police state.

satire on Eros, a case of arrested development. Alternatively puppy-like or childish, Donatello is pretty to look at but not far from being a half-wit, a child in a man's body.³ The act of passion is the act of maturing; after his deed Donatello is a man. Socially his act is that of a revolutionary hero. He liberates romantic and creative forces represented by Miriam from the festering, guilt-producing tyranny that continually distorts them, perverting their joyous expression to violent outbreaks of rage and despair. We see how Miriam represents a perverted Eros when we see the unfailing subject of her paintings and drawings—fantasies of revenge on her oppressor. Rescued from her persecutor, she is saved from this throttling hatred. She is freed to give herself, as Hawthorne's passionate women invariably do, in self-effacing and eternal love to a man.

Miriam plays a tripartite role in relation to Donatello (and through him, to Kenyon). She is an independent character, with whom the man must unite in order to gain the knowledge and power of his manhood. She is also a personified part of his psyche, a part from which he is alienated, and which he must assimilate into his identity to be whole. And she is, lastly, an agent of certain natural forces—passion, spontaneity, creativity, sexuality—which are offered as alternatives to a dry, oppressive, cruel, sterile rationalism: she is the Heart, as opposed to the Head.

Donatello is a kind of alter ego or surrogate to Kenyon, appointed to act out for him this most crucial of dramas. The relevance of the story of Miriam and Donatello to Kenyon comes about through Kenyon's desire to be an artist. The artist is he who draws upon the erotic, creative forces—who

³ In the preface to his second collection of myths for children, Hawthorne has his youthful and enthusiastic persona-narrator maintain that the great myths originated in a preclassical era, the veritable Golden Age. "Evil," he says, "had never yet existed; and sorrow, misfortune, crime, were mere shadows. . . . Children are now the only representatives of the men and women of that happy era." The notion of a preclassic origin for these myths is, in effect, a justification for Bowdlerizing them for children; for our purposes, the distinction between a classical age where men are adult and a Golden Age when they are children is most illuminating for understanding Hawthorne's intentions with Donatello.

communicates them to his fellows through shapes of power and beauty. Unless Kenyon can accept Donatello's deed, therefore, and recognize its necessity, he cannot hope to fulfill his ambitions. He has begun his career naïvely believing that Victorian "ideal" art is the culmination of artistic progress through the centuries. At home he had industriously turned out a series of busts of public figures of the day, indicating for the reader's benefit that Victorian art, however it justifies itself in terms of eternal ideas, is in fact commercial and conventional, serving institutions rather than men, controlling men rather than liberating them—a tribute not to truth but the status quo.

Kenyon, to be sure, is unaware of the nature of the gods he serves. But the excitement he feels when exposed to classical art plunges him into depression and turmoil, because the true artist in him recognizes how much greater these antique works are than anything contemporary. His dilemma as a nineteenth-century artist is severe, for the classic is great in proportion to its possession of just those qualities that Victorian art prides itself on having left behind. Classical art is an undisguised, though brilliantly controlled, expression of Eros, shamelessly and freely passionate, exulting in the flesh. It is "ideal" in a sense directly opposite to Victorian art. The latter "idealizes" the body by reluctantly employing it to represent a disembodied idea, while classical art makes the body ideal because it sees virtue and beauty in the flesh. The sculptor like Kenyon then cannot recreate classical greatness in his art simply by imitating classic models, because as a creature of his time he cannot honestly bring classic attitudes towards his work.

This is why Miriam opposes the sculpting of nude statues in the present age. They cannot be sculpted with a pure heart, because the sight of nakedness is accompanied by feelings of guilt and prurient discomfort. Contemporary sculptors of the body betray their uneasiness either by an excessive concern for details of costuming, as though to deny the body on which the garment is draped, or by "gilding the lily"—painting nude

statues flesh-colored for example.⁴ A simple, healthy acceptance of nudity is nowhere evident. The nudity of Victorian sculpture therefore conveys not the body's magnificence but its shame, and thus denies the very values art should communicate.

Generalized, the point is that the Victorian idea of art is thoroughly nonerotic. Classical art is purely erotic, or as erotic as anything shaped by a controlling intelligence can be. Midway between these two historical eras is the Renaissance, the era of the paintings Hilda so industriously copies. The great achievement of Renaissance art is its duplicity, its continued celebration of Venus in the guise of celebrating the Virgin, its strategy for preserving Eros in the forms of an anti-erotic culture. This art is easily open to misinterpretation—thus Hilda is said to perfect the works she copies when in reality she is Bowdlerizing them, eliminating their sensuous elements as artistic defects. Hilda is turning Renaissance masterpieces into Victorian masterpieces. Her copying is an expression of the ambivalence felt by the provincial American in the presence of art in which the erotic, though concealed, is yet sensed: she worships and emasculates simultaneously.

Much, therefore, is at stake in the question of Kenyon's development as an artist. His *Cleopatra*, produced in the seething excitement of exposure to masterpieces, solves certain problems peculiar to the sculptor's medium (catching life in stone, transmitting action in a reposing figure) but is especially noteworthy for its effective handling of costume and even more for its undisguised celebration of Cleopatra's anarchically erotic nature. When he begins working on the bust of Donatello, Kenyon makes yet another advance, going beyond Cleopatra's simple eroticism into something far more complex and timely. For he now perceives beauty and virtue in the very qualities of Donatello that are "fallen." The uncomplicated classical or preclassical beauty of the faun strikes him as vapid and monotonous; Donatello has become beautified and moral-

⁴ Hawthorne was obviously unaware that the Greeks painted their statues.

ized precisely through his act of rebellion, an act totally outside the experience of pagan man, and therefore not represented in the features of pagan statues. Since Kenyon believes that sin cannot coexist with beauty, he is led intuitively to believe that Donatello and his Monte Beni are, though fallen, sinless. The fall of man is the story of man's growth from innocent prettiness to moral beauty, rather than from innocent beauty to sinful ugliness. This is an intuition which can make Kenyon a very great artist; it is also social heresy, but Kenyon does not begin at this point to sense its dangerous social implications. On the strength of his feelings, he begins to take an active part in his friends' drama. In the middle chapters of *The Marble Faun* he argues with Donatello, counseling him against remorse and self-indulgent repentance. This midsection of the romance centers on Donatello's conflict, but Kenyon's role in that conflict is more important for the total theme of the book than Donatello's own behavior.

Donatello's inner struggle is realized outwardly in the conflict between Miriam and the Church, Eros and Authority. The mechanism of guilt—the way in which it pushes the soul towards effacement in an authoritarian superstructure—is well demonstrated in his new obsessive Catholicism, and his fixation on the idea of becoming a monk. As a monk he will not merely be repudiating his sexuality, he will be taking on the identity and role of the man he has killed—perhaps, some day, to become Miriam's persecutor himself. Miriam, in this part of the book, is less a character than a force, an exiled part of Donatello's being. Her presence is felt all around the grounds of Monte Beni, whose rampant fertility and subtropical sunshine are associated with her. She has a shrine in the villa, a marble room where "it seemed the sun was magically imprisoned, and must always shine" (p. 279). To escape her influence, Donatello climbs the ancient, masculine tower which reaches away from nature and the earth, but symbolizes neither enlightenment nor freedom: cold, dark, cheerless, it is a monument to the oppressiveness of history, the weight of the church,

the inevitability of death. This strange, sterile phallicism is yet another way in which Hawthorne expresses his idea that without acceptance of sexuality there is no true manliness. Separated from Miriam, Donatello is unnerved and dejected; but she, sundered from him, is likewise faded. She complains of "too much life and strength, without a purpose for one or the other. It is my too redundant energy that is slowly—or perhaps rapidly—wearing me away, because I can apply it to no use" (p. 280). Miriam speaks here not only as an abandoned woman in love, but as the suppressed vital principle of Donatello's own soul.

In this conflict Kenyon at first stands single-mindedly with Miriam. Alarmed at Donatello's morbidity, he tries to point out to him how he is being victimized by his guilt feelings; failing in this, he encourages Miriam to approach Donatello and strive for a reunion with him. But just at the point when a reconciliation is achieved, the sculptor imposes conditions on the renewed relationship. The scene in Perugia demonstrates certain compromises by which Kenyon expects to mediate between mutually exclusive positions. At this moment in his development, Kenyon is unaware of the fact that he is espousing two contradictory points of view; he does not realize even that he is counseling compromise. The salient features of the Perugia scene are, first, the dominant role played in it by the statue of Pope Julius, and, second, the little sermon wherein Kenyon tries to desexualize the future union of Miriam and Donatello. These are interrelated points, whose sum is that the reconciled pair must be readmitted to the good graces of the father, and that they can do so if they forego sexual fulfillment and aim instead for "mutual elevation and encouragement towards a severe and painful life . . . toil, sacrifice, prayer, penitence, and earnest effort towards right things" (p. 322). This formula for forgiveness, as well as Kenyon's sense that such forgiveness is necessary, indicates his fatal imaginative timidity, and foreshadows his collapse as an independent man and artist.

The staging of the reconciliation under the Pope's statue belies, or at least makes light of, the conflict between Miriam and the church, for it appears that the reunion might be socially possible, accomplished within the structure of papal authority. But this benevolent Pope is not real. He is an artist's fantasy, removed from a social context and corresponding to needs and wishes rather than realities. "No matter though it were modelled for a Catholic Chief-Priest; the desolate heart, whatever be its religion, recognizes in that image the likeness of a Father!" (p. 316). In Chapter 18 similar homage had been paid to the statue of Marcus Aurelius, the bachelor emperor transformed by human longing into a figure of divine pater-nity. "'The sculptor of this statue knew what a King should be,' observed Kenyon, 'and knew, likewise, the heart of mankind, and how it craves a true ruler, under whatever title, as a child its father!'" To this Miriam responds fervently, "Oh, if there were but one such man as this!" (p. 166). The point is precisely that no such man exists. In Hawthorne's world, the loving father is a fantasy, the terrible father is real. The Deity in the stained glass windows appears to Donatello to be glowing with divine wrath; Kenyon, demurring, interprets the expression as divine love (p. 306). But Donatello is right; subsequent events will show that he can expect only punishment from the Pope. As for the Deity, he does not exist in this romance save as he is channeled into a social structure; he therefore cannot be distinguished from the Pope.

As the pair clasp hands under the statue, Kenyon feels a sudden conscientious anxiety about their future, and he warns them against seeking "earthly bliss." The most they may hope for, and even this may not be directly sought, is a "somber and thoughtful happiness" (p. 322). These strictures contradict Kenyon's earlier attitudes. He had understood Donatello's sin as the inevitable fall into adulthood, an event through which all men must (or should) pass and which therefore has humanized the faun; now he sees it as something isolating and therefore dehumanizing. Then, too, he had turned to Miriam

in the hope that she would lead Donatello away from remorse and guilt and sorrow, but now he is suggesting that she distort her nature so far as to abet him in a penitential life. This sudden uneasiness on Kenyon's part about what he euphemistically labels earthly bliss shows his inability to handle the full sexual implications of the reunion he has fostered, as well as the inseparable sexual element in the whole Miriam-Donatello story. It suggests his unwillingness to acknowledge the essentially sexual character of Eros. It indicates that Kenyon has deep difficulties in accepting the sexual dimension of his own creative powers.

Such difficulties are also implicit in his fierce and unreasoned attachment to Hilda, an attachment which will be the means of breaking and taming him in the last part of the book. He abjectly relinquishes his judgments and analyses when they run counter to her narrow pieties. Though a seeker and a speculative type, he praises her self-righteously proclaimed ignorance as angelic wisdom. He strives in all other matters for keenness of perception, but becomes willfully blind when it comes to scrutinizing Hilda's behavior. These facts about Kenyon are forced on our attention immediately when he returns to Rome, for he finds Hilda on her knees in the confessional, and resolutely refuses to pursue the implications of what he has witnessed. When we realize that the Catholic city in *The Marble Faun* functions precisely like the Puritan city in *The Scarlet Letter*, it will not surprise us that this self-styled daughter of the Puritans should turn to the church when she is in need. Indeed, the incident in St. Peter's represents no new development of her character. Hilda is simply changing allegiance from one set of fathers to another. She had previously been a superb copyist, obedient and self-effacing before a vision of the old masters as moral authorities. The insight she gains from witnessing the murder enables her to perceive that the old masters are not fathers at all, but rather are lovers celebrating the sensual charms of their mistresses while pretending to extoll chastity. In the light of her

new wisdom their duplicity seems to her a kind of overintellectualized cleverness. Comprehending now that the authority which she attributed to them was an illusion compounded of her need and her naiveté, she seeks a replacement.

For her, as for the other characters in the romance, the conflict polarizes between art-mothers and church-fathers. Her despairing progress towards the confessional is impeded not by her puritanism but by the restraining spirit of her mother, whose presence she feels "weeping to behold her ensnared by these gaudy superstitions" (p. 391). Despite Hilda's doleful and habitual lament about her motherless plight, she repeatedly and predictably rejects all the images of mothers that are presented to her. No mother is good enough for her. Her rejection of Miriam, the older sister (see p. 207) is the obvious example, and Hawthorne iterates the idea by showing her unavailing quest among various paintings of the Virgin (Chapter 38). The point, though simple, needs stressing: Hilda imagines herself to be looking for a mother, but Hawthorne shows her looking, rather, to cast the mother off. Her reason for rejecting the mother-figure is invariably the same, and invariably applicable: the mother is not a virgin. As Hawthorne comments, "She never found just the Virgin Mother whom she needed" (p. 348). And no wonder.

Why is it inconceivable to Hilda that her mother be unvirgin; and how is this particular trait in Hilda's character related to the central core of meaning in *The Marble Faun*? This is surely the most difficult part of the story to encompass. Hawthorne has been analyzing all along the vicious sexual morbidity which underlies the structure of guilt, remorse, misery, inhibition, repression, and hypocrisy which is the atmosphere of *The Marble Faun*. This morbidity is at once cause and chief evidence of the social sickness of his age, and no doubt Hawthorne feels about the matter with such intensity because he shares the sickness even as he understands it. Now he is demonstrating the existence of this morbidity beneath the Victorian idealism of his pure young heroine, the idol of his culture—demonstrating, indeed, that she is the apotheosis

of his culture's ills. He is risking professional destruction; surely there was psychological danger as well. At any rate, his handling of Hilda indicates simultaneous desires to pursue his dangerous course and to protect himself from its consequences.

In the resulting murk of assertion and retraction, only a few points may be firmly asserted, after which one's interpretations become conjectural. Hilda cannot cope with the idea of her mother's sexuality; in the deepest recesses of her being she believes herself to be the product of a virgin birth.⁵ As such a product, she herself is miraculously untainted by normal human sin and guilt—concepts which are interchangeable, in her mind, with the idea of sexuality. Hilda thus has created for herself a birth which frees her from sexuality. In other words, her anxiety is really for herself; she finds the notion of her *own* sexuality intolerable, and she will eliminate from her universe any persons, events, scenes, or statements that suggest the notion to her. This psychic need is the explanation of her mercilessness. She *must* cut out of her life whatever threatens this image of herself, and court whatever encourages it. She dedicates herself to the Virgin; the shrine which she tends is approached through her bedroom and the bedroom, as Hawthorne describes it, is indeed a part of the shrine.

It is ironic, but obvious, that she cannot for any length of time associate with living women. That Hilda, as well as Miriam, resembles Guido's Beatrice means no more than that Hilda, if she is a woman, must share a woman's nature. Woman's nature—her sex—symbolized either by blood or by blood-red gems, is what poor Hilda through no fault of her own possesses, and what her life is dedicated to denying. Association with real women must, inevitably, develop this feared and hated part of herself. "If I were one of God's angels," she tells Miriam in Chapter 23, "with a nature incapable of stain, and garments that never could be spotted, I would keep ever at your side, and try to lead you upward. But I am a poor, lonely girl, whom God has set here in an evil world, and

⁵ There are hints, but hints only, that Hilda even fantasizes herself as a kind of Christ figure.

given her only a white robe, and bid her wear it back to Him, as white as when she put it on. Your powerful magnetism would be too much for me. The pure, white atmosphere, in which I try to discern what things are good and true, would be discoloured" (p. 208). The defloration imagery betrays Hilda's intense sexual anxiety. Association with the fathers—with God, who has imposed this impossible demand on the unfortunate Hilda—is at once the source of the anxiety and the means by which it can be allayed. Association with the mother must inevitably lead to some perception of shared nature, producing guilt and terror and despair.

We do not know what Hilda feels as she witnesses the crime, since Hawthorne discreetly does not say, but her subsequent feelings of guilt and implication are evident. Hilda is quite right in protesting that she has not herself committed a crime, but wrong in the inference that the emotion under which she labors cannot be guilt since she is not guilty. Guilt can arise merely from having the potential to feel sexual passion. Witnessing the crime, Hilda has somehow been apprised of this potential within herself. She repudiates Miriam as a temptation to be expunged from her life, but this is not enough. She must deny not only her temptation, but her capacity to be tempted. Only the paternal institution which fosters the cults of chastity and celibacy can accept such a denial, and therefore Hilda finds relief in its conventions.

The method by which Hilda attains relief can only carelessly or hypocritically be called a confession. Criticism has made much of her sophisticated attempt to receive absolution without committing herself to Catholicism, but nowhere has her far greater perversion of the confessional been noticed—her use of it to "confess" other people's sins rather than her own. The whole point of confession is to acknowledge, and be helped to bear, one's own sinful nature; Hilda's purposes are the very opposite. She does not confess, she tattles. Out of the complexities of her own anguish, she acts as an agent of the Roman government.

In general, in fact, Hilda is an agent of authority. A woman

like her is, ultimately, the supreme creation of the Victorian authoritarian system (the system which is, whether it is presented as Colonial Boston or Papal Rome, Hawthorne's target). She is also the chief means by which the system is upheld. The authorities seek to preserve themselves in power by de-eroticizing men and women. The sexless ideal celebrated by Hilda makes the erotic disreputable. Innocent Miriam cannot escape suspicion and innuendo. Her passionate nature is a source of misery to her, of discomfort to men. Men seize eagerly on the cult of virginity to rationalize, legitimize, and ultimately idealize their flight from passion. They feel threatened by Miriam's sexuality, and they fear it; yet Hilda, whose name means "battle-maiden," has the "remorselessness of a steel blade" (p. 384) and is the true castrator.

Once these points are grasped, the events in the last third of the book can be seen to work out, with pitiless inevitability, the destruction of Kenyon's short-lived romantic independence. The plotting here has been much criticized for its series of blatant coincidences; but to interpret the timing of episodes in the late chapters as coincidental is to miss their necessary interconnections. Hilda's disappearance coincides with Kenyon's articulation to her of some part of his new radical stance; the reappearance of Donatello and Miriam in Rome coincides with this disappearance; and finally, the restoration of Hilda coincides with the surrender of Miriam and Donatello to the authorities. Kenyon's statements to Hilda indicate his holding of a romantic view personified by the "fallen" Miriam and Donatello. This view is incompatible with that represented by Hilda, who therefore disappears, and must be given up before she can be returned to Kenyon.

These events, to be sure, have little or no relevance to the romance of Miriam and Donatello, and if one has placed the focus of *The Marble Faun* in that story one is faced with a series of discontinuities, fragments, abrupt, and unexplained shifts. There is no explanation for Donatello's renewed sense of guilt, and the linking of his return to Rome with Hilda's disappearance seems mere caprice. Miriam and Donatello are

very differently treated in this last third of the book. They are much more remote, much more mysterious than they had been earlier. They invariably appear in costume, a fairly trustworthy sign in Hawthorne's works that they are figures of fantasy. In the last part of the book, I suggest, they are not "themselves" any longer, but rather are phantoms in Kenyon's consciousness. The whole phantasmagoric character of the last chapters contributes to this impression. Precisely as Miriam in the Monte Beni sequence was less a character than she had been in the book's early chapters, and more a force in or part of Donatello's conflict, so now Miriam and Donatello both are less whole characters than fragments of Kenyon's suddenly exploded psyche.

As the conflict in the Monte Beni sequence had been symbolized in the poles of Miriam and the church, so now the conflict is polarized between Miriam-Donatello and Hilda. The incompatibility of these forces had not been earlier evident; indeed, the book opens with a scene of friendship and harmony. But at that time, the crime had not yet been committed, and Hilda was misguidedly dedicated to the Old Masters. The events of the book have brought to light a conflict which cannot be resolved.⁶ Once it has surfaced, Kenyon has really no choice about which side to take, for he cannot survive without Hilda.

This is plainly seen in the mental collapse he suffers when she disappears. He is saved from madness only by the sacrifice of Miriam-Donatello. His breakdown may be attributed to the loss of Hilda's firm and shaping moral vision, on which he has depended far more than he was aware. Or it may be a crisis of guilt, brought on by his sudden awareness of how Hilda must judge his romanticism; this idea is supported by the conclusion of the book, when Kenyon once again raises his heretical ideas, this time formally to repudiate them as the price of

⁶ A similar movement from an initial harmony to a total fragmentation is seen in the plot of *The Blithedale Romance*. The relations between Zenobia and Westervelt also resemble those between Miriam and the model. On the other hand, there is far less similarity between Priscilla and Hilda than is commonly maintained in the criticism.

Hilda's hand. Or it may be the surfacing of insupportable sexual anxiety, as suggested in the grotesque figures that attack him during the carnival. Whatever the cause, it is clear that Miriam and Donatello are not worth the emotional cost to Kenyon that is represented by his loss of Hilda.

The sacrifice of the couple, then, is a simple exchange for Hilda. The scene on the *campagna* takes its meaning from this idea. In this strangely mythic and magic episode, Kenyon is offered the choice of great artistic powers or Hilda. His choice is never in doubt. "Ah, Miriam! I cannot respond to you," he says, impatiently. "Imagination and the love of art have both died out of me" (p. 427). Thereupon, he is told that he shall have Hilda back. This event on the *campagna*, digressive though it may appear, is in many ways the novel's matrix. All its leitmotifs are employed. The scene occurs in a spot at once underground and yet in the sun, in the country away from Rome and yet within the enclosure of a Roman ruin. A magic animal leads Kenyon to what we must consider a sacred spot, and there he unearths and assembles the fragments of an exquisite antique Venus. Venus, at once the great goddess of love and the mother of Eros, is Hawthorne's archetype here for the power within and without man from which he is so profoundly alienated, and without which he is so desperately sick. The order in which Kenyon puts together the pieces of this shattered work—torso, arms, head—represents the progressive embodiment of the fundamental erotic drive in an ideal human form. This is the humanization of the life force, a paradigm of the artistic process as it should be.

No sooner has Kenyon completed his work than Miriam and Donatello appear—Venus and Eros in the flesh—and we learn that they are the original discoverers of the statue which they have left for Kenyon to put together. The interplay of these two discoveries suggests that Miriam and Donatello have acted as a part of Kenyon in making this find; they are the power within him that can grasp and create great art. But Kenyon is no longer able to use the faculty they personify. Once briefly united with them, he is now irrevocably sundered from

them. He explains his sudden change, his revulsion from art and his choice of Hilda, by identifying Hilda with life and the Venus with dead marble. Frederick Crews puts it admirably: Hawthorne "seems to be saying that Kenyon's human love is supplanting his cold aesthetic taste. . . . Yet when we reflect that vapid Hilda is here dethroning a supple and lovely Venus, the surface meaning becomes exactly reversed."⁷ The "surface meaning" is no more than Kenyon's neurotic rationalization; victim of his age's malaise, he chooses the Virgin over Venus, a commitment which as Crews says is "simply a form of panic."

Yet Kenyon's panic is in a sense justified—this is Hawthorne's most bitter perception—for without Hilda he will surely go mad. In other words, Kenyon is ludicrously inadequate for the vocation he had so bravely chosen for himself. The carnival scene represents the final capitulation. Its relation to many other Walpurgisnacht scenes in Hawthorne's fiction is evident; indeed, Hawthorne himself witnessing his first Roman carnival must have felt much as though he were watching a dramatization of one of his own tales. The psyche in a state of anarchic turbulence throws up into the light of consciousness a myriad of horrible fears and fantasies, grotesque and terrifying figures out of the world of dreams, mostly with sexual import. The carnival fails utterly in its cathartic function for Kenyon; far from purging his nightmares, he is drowned in them. At the climax of the scene, Miriam and Donatello appear to take a ritual farewell of their friend. "Donatello here extended his hand (not that which was clasping Miriam's), and she, too, put her free one into the sculptor's left; so that they were a linked circle of three, with many

⁷ *The Sins of the Fathers* (New York, 1965), 239. Buford Jones, in "A Checklist of Hawthorne Criticism 1951-1966" *ESQ*, 52, Sup.:1-90, lists some ninety articles on *The Marble Faun*. These divide primarily into articles on structure, mostly new-critical in influence, which means that structure is discovered in thematic or symbolic rather than narrative elements; and discussions of the fortunate fall, viewed primarily in the light of Hawthorne's assumed orthodoxy and conservatism. There is virtually unanimous agreement among critics that *The Marble Faun* is a seriously defective but extremely interesting work; a minority find it confused and monotonous as well.

reminiscences and forebodings flashing through their hearts. Kenyon knew intuitively that these once familiar friends were parting with him, now. 'Farewell!' they all three said, in the same breath" (p. 448). Soon thereafter Kenyon overhears a conversation implying that the pair have been arrested, and "just as the last words were spoken, he was hit by . . . a single rose-bud, so fresh that it seemed that moment gathered" (p. 451). This dewy messenger signifies the end of Kenyon's feverish season in purgatory. Hilda is restored, and he is safe. At the same time, he is also hit by a cauliflower, and one is tempted to imagine that Hawthorne himself has hurled this expression of contempt for the sculptor's pitiful weakness.

One is tempted, also, if one feels any fondness for Kenyon, to imagine that Hilda like Persephone has passed a renewing season underground, and has come back humanized and warmed. But this, clearly, has not taken place. Once again Kenyon puts to her his forbidden ideas, and Hilda shrinks from him "with an expression of horror [*sic*] which wounded the poor, speculative sculptor to the soul." Fresh from this soul-wound, and only recently recovered from his long depression, the unfortunate man cries out, "Forgive me, Hilda! I never did believe it! . . . Were you my guide, my counsellor, my inmost friend, with that white wisdom which clothes you as a celestial garment, all would go well. O Hilda, guide me home!" (pp. 460-461). The idea of once again losing her is unbearable, and, lying like a frightened child to placate her, the hurt sculptor wins "the gentle Hilda's shy affection" (p. 461).

We cannot be certain that Kenyon will abandon his art, but we may feel sure that there will be no more feline Cleopatras or broodingly beautiful fauns. Speaking with Hilda about his loss of interest in his more ambitious productions, Kenyon had earlier said, "I should like, now—only it would be such shameful treatment for a discrowned queen, and my own offspring, too—I should like to hit poor Cleopatra a bitter blow on her Egyptian nose, with this mallet" (p. 378). In effect this is what Kenyon has done to his two offspring, the "glad Faun of his imagination and memory" (p. 393) and the "beautiful woman,

such as one sees only two or three, if even so many times, in all a lifetime; so beautiful, that she seemed to get into your consciousness and memory, and could never afterwards be shut out, but haunted your dreams, for pleasure or pain; holding your inner realm as a conquered territory” (p. 48). It is the final act of his imagination to transform these into figures of penitence, guilt, and remorse, linked by crime. Donatello, as the artist’s surrogate, is consigned to prison forever; Miriam (like Hester) is readmitted as a penitent “on the other side of a fathomless abyss” (p. 461) and thus made acceptable to the imagination that cannot forget her.

The gesture of the artist destroying his own works is a familiar literary motif, one that Hawthorne made in his life, and that he wrote about. The conventional moral ending of *The Marble Faun*, with Miriam and Donatello condemned and punished, Kenyon and Hilda living happily and virtuously ever after, represents in its reversals of the book’s values and desires a defacing not only of Hawthorne’s own ideas about great art and romanticism, but a defacing of *The Marble Faun* itself. In its evocation of the story Hawthorne would like to tell but finally cannot, of the types of human figures he would like to celebrate but dare not, of the ideas he would like to espouse but has relinquished as unworkable in his culture, *The Marble Faun* concludes with a gesture of heartsickness and despair, of hopes denied, effort repudiated. In its ending Hawthorne deals just such a blow as Kenyon proposed to aim at his Cleopatra, desecrating the things his imagination most loved, and elevating for our approval a couple whose intertwined lives represent a living death for Miriam and Donatello, “the beautiful man, the beautiful woman” (p. 323). *The Marble Faun* is like the Venus of the campagna, created by Hawthorne’s imagination, then discolored, disfigured, and shattered by his prudence, his conscience, his fatigue, his sense of futility. Discolored, disfigured, shattered—but not finally destroyed, for one may still discern, as with the Venus, “the beautiful Idea . . . as perfect to the mind, if not to the eye, as when the new marble gleamed with snowy lustre” (pp. 423-424).