

THE AMBIGUITY OF HAWTHORNE'S PURITANISM

A Thesis

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by

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Eric Selous", is written over a series of ten dots.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. "BE IT SO IF YOU WILL" . . . . .	9
III. "WORMWOOD AND WOMANHOOD" . . . . .	32
IV. CONCLUSION . . . . .	45
APPENDIX . . . . .	48
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	53

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Over the years a continuing stream of criticism has dealt with Nathaniel Hawthorne's relation to Puritanism. Sooner or later every critic of the New England-bred Hawthorne, in attempting to evaluate his preoccupation with sin and its consequences, must decide to what extent he was a Puritan. Two problems immediately arise: the difficulty of stating precisely the tenets of the long historical movement known as Puritanism, which inevitably changed over the years, and the difficulty of stating precisely the beliefs of the ambiguous Hawthorne. Then biography creeps into the picture. Was Hawthorne the isolated Puritan artist working in gloomy solitude, or the happy family man with shrewd knowledge of worldly affairs?<sup>1</sup>

Hawthorne did have a Puritan heritage, of course, and was sensitively aware of it. His first American ancestor was Major William Hathorne, who came from England to Massachusetts in 1630, rose to the office of speaker in the House of Delegates, and helped lead

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In the chapter on Hawthorne in Eight American Authors: A Review of Research and Criticism, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York, 1956), Walter Blair distinguishes between a "traditional" view of Hawthorne as a "solitary figure" and "unworldly artist," and a "newer" view (since 1929) of Hawthorne as "better adjusted and more in tune with fellow human beings and the life of his period" (pp. 105, 108). Austin Warren, writing his introduction to Nathaniel Hawthorne: Representative Selections (New York, 1934), speaks of three Hawthornes: "the man of affairs," "the quietly cheerful observer, with a taste for realism, who played with his children," and "the hidden spirit who . . . sat at his desk in a lonely chamber, the haunted mind" (p. xix).

the persecution of the Quakers. Hawthorne writes of him in "The Custom House" as having "all the Puritanic traits, both good and evil," and sadly feels that he is remembered more for "an incident of his hard severity" toward a Quaker woman than for his many better deeds.<sup>2</sup> Major William's son, John, was one of the three judges at the Salem witchcraft trials in 1692, and it was he, according to family tradition, who had a curse pronounced upon himself and all his posterity by one of the witches. Hawthorne takes this curse so seriously that he blames the subsequent decline of his family on it, and prays that it "may be now and henceforth removed." Further, Hawthorne is sensitively aware of his ancestors' attitude toward his occupation as an author. Surely they would think his vocation sufficient retribution for their sins, and would look upon all his aims and any of his successes as worthless and disgraceful. But regardless of their scorn, Hawthorne is certain that "strong traits of their nature have intertwined themselves with mine."

Hawthorne was brought up in a highly moral "Puritan" atmosphere of taboos, conservative taste, and propriety. In England during this time there was a strong moral code; in New England Puritan piety had become Puritan moralism. The first generation of Puritan settlers in America were unable to pass on their zeal to their children, but their strict, comprehensive rules for everyday living hung on. The Puritan energy "everywhere subsided from an ecstasy of zeal into standardized patterns of behavior . . . as men who had dreamed of a holy



community found themselves simply the administrators of a Puritan tradition."<sup>3</sup> Hawthorne was in this tradition of moralistic Puritanism -- and in the crucial area of sexual matters he was entirely proper. Austin Warren speaks of Hawthorne's "immaculate purity" and "rigorous sexual code."<sup>4</sup> Although Hawthorne may at times favor his so-called dark women of experience, such as Hester and Zenobia, it is hard to argue that he was a feminist.

But in spite of the fact that Hawthorne had a strong Puritan heritage, grew up in the locale where much Puritan history had taken place, and felt the effects of the residual Puritanism of his time, a careful critic cannot categorically state that he exhibited only Puritan views in his works. His works contain much anti-Puritan sentiment, both obvious and concealed. Some of his dark ladies do lend themselves easily to a sympathetic reading. The problem is one, then, of determining which Puritan principles he believed in, if any, and which he didn't believe in. This is what the various critics have spent their time trying to do. Since he was an ambiguous artist rather than a systematic philosopher, their job has been one of great difficulty.

What are the principles of New England Puritanism? It is hard to say, for these Puritans were only one branch of the larger movement in England, which was descended in devious ways from the Lutheranism and Calvinism of the Reformation. This English movement began as an attempt to carry the Reformation further and completely purify the

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<sup>3</sup> Alan Simpson, Puritanism in Old and New England (Chicago, 1955), p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> Introduction to Representative Selections, p. xxxv.

services of the Church of England of all Roman Catholic ceremony and decoration. The English Puritans felt that since the Scriptures were the pure word of God, sufficient for all aspects of church doctrine, government, and worship, the Church of England should be reformed according to the Scriptures. Soon these English Puritans extended the authority of the Scriptures to cover every aspect of life, and in so doing disagreed with the Anglicans, who could not believe that every minute passage in the Bible had an integral part in a comprehensive code of laws. (To the Anglican the Bible was only a general guide for the government, worship, and everyday conduct of men.) From the disagreement came civil strife and voyages to the New World.

The Puritans who settled in New England believed in the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures, then, and also in the absolute sovereignty of God, whose pure word was revealed in the Scriptures. They also believed, with Calvin, in predestination, original sin, and Christ's atonement for the elect. Grace was irresistible to those elected or predestined by God to be saved, but those doomed not to be saved from the Fall that depraved all men were yet responsible for their sins. Men lived for the glory of God and could gain salvation only by the strictest obedience to and faith in Him. There was only justification by faith, not by works, since Adam's fall had rendered man incapable of gaining his salvation by good works. The problem was to be sure one had enough faith to be saved, to be certain that one had really undergone a conversion experience. One could become gloomily preoccupied with one's sins, and with the sins of others. One could easily spend one's time in sombre, solitary introspection.



Hawthorne was a complex man, with complex ideas and religious beliefs, a man raised without a father by a mother who may or may not have shown abnormal tendencies.<sup>5</sup> In spite of the work of recent biographers such as Randall Stewart, who attempt to show that Hawthorne's childhood was not so abnormal after all, it seems hard to believe that Hawthorne had an ordinary upbringing. The injury to his foot when he was nine did isolate him from playmates, and make him more introspective: Randall Stewart doesn't deny this. And for all the healthy atmosphere of the Maine woods, it was there he got his "cursed habits of solitude."<sup>6</sup> His sisters never lived normal lives, and his first adult action was to separate himself from the world in his room in the Manning house in Salem, going out only late in the evening. Granted that he was teaching himself the art of writing, was it necessary to spend twelve lonely years doing this? Hawthorne's complex concern with sin and guilt surely has some basis in his boyhood and early adulthood, during which time he may well have developed the Puritan habit of solitary introspection.

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<sup>5</sup> Newton Arvin in Hawthorne (Boston, 1929) shows himself an adherent of Blair's traditional view: Hawthorne's mother secluded herself after the death of her husband, refusing even to eat her meals with the rest of the family. Randall Stewart, however, states in Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography (New Haven, 1948) that "his relations with his mother and his sisters were affectionate" (p. 12). Mark Van Doren in Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1949) goes so far as to say that Hawthorne's mother "has long been the subject of a sentimental legend which no evidence supports" (p. 9) -- the legend being she shut herself away from the world and her children. It is unfortunate that Van Doren brings up the question of evidence, since he doesn't tell where he got his evidence.

<sup>6</sup> J.T. Fields, Yesterday With Authors (Boston, 1901), p. 113.

To be more specific, did Hawthorne, believing in God and deeply concerned with sin, believe in predestination, innate depravity, and saving grace? Did he emphasize the positive side of Puritanism, that is, the hard joy to be won from the glorious knowledge that one is of the elect? Austin Warren, in his introduction to Nathaniel Hawthorne: Representative Selections, says that Hawthorne is essentially negative. To Warren, the New England conscience, which threatens Hell more than it promises Heaven and tends to equate the pleasurable with the sinful, "prevails in Hawthorne's characteristic writing" ( p. xxxix). And Hawthorne saw as empirically true the hereditary evil of the Fall; no speculation by the characters of The Marble Faun proves otherwise. Hawthorne could believe in God's Providence, but only in a deterministic and pessimistic way; such Providence "works out its purposes as much in spite of men's righteousness as of their crimes" (p. xxxiii). All in all, Hawthorne finds this world a sorry one, and men can do nothing about it. Hawthorne is a Puritan in the most pessimistic sense of the word: "Men necessarily sin; but they must be held strictly accountable for their sins all the same. They must repent, but repentance cannot raise the fallen" (p. xl).

F.O. Matthiessen finds Hawthorne more positive. To Matthiessen Hawthorne's tragic vision caused him to recognize that men were a mixture of good and evil; because he was concerned with the courage of his characters' awakened and resolute wills and the possibility of their regeneration, he did not subordinate them to an iron necessity. If men could only maintain a balance between head and heart, reason and passion, their lives would not be tragic. Hawthorne's theme is



not that the fall of man was really his rise, but that there is a norm of harmony that men are somehow able to live up to. Hester and Dimmesdale experience the purgatorial movement of tragedy, and thus are better off because of their sin. Melville realized that Hawthorne's Puritanic gloom was tempered by his sympathy with humanity.<sup>7</sup>

Randall Stewart seems to combine the Puritan and tragic readings. It is Stewart's opinion that Hawthorne had reservations about Puritan intolerance and cruelty, but definitely leaned toward the Puritan view of life. Although Hawthorne may have been concerned with the truth of the human heart rather than with theology, some of the Puritan tenets seemed in many ways to square with human experience. He knew, for instance, that "evil is a reality in the world, the depravity of the unregenerate man is no myth, there seems to be in human affairs a kind of predestination." Yet Hawthorne is basically an analyst of human relations whose moral comprehends the Christian doctrine of charity; sin does educate the characters in The Marble Faun. Hawthorne preaches "the need of man's sympathy with man based upon the honest recognition of the good and evil in our common nature."<sup>8</sup>

Stuart P. Sherman, in the same vein as the Cambridge History of American Literature, rather foolishly denies that Hawthorne is a Puritan at all, finding him instead a "subtle critic of Puritanism from the Transcendental point of view." Sherman never defines Transcendentalism, but bases his statements on Hester's "free specu-

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American Renaissance (New York, 1941), pp. 344, 190.

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In the concluding chapter of Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography, pp. 242-265.

lative impulse" in The Scarlet Letter. Hester is emancipated from the Puritans in a Transcendental way, and it is she whom Hawthorne intended to be the main character in the book. Arthur Dimmesdale dies a Puritan, but this does not mean that Hawthorne's sympathies were wholly on the side of the Puritans. For the "higher law" that will one day be declared in the world transcends Puritan laws.<sup>9</sup>

With the many diverse criticisms at hand, then, this thesis will try to determine as exactly as possible Hawthorne's relation to New England Puritanism, chiefly by examining the works themselves. What critics are right and what wrong, or is this a legitimate question? Are the works helped or hindered by Hawthorne's ambiguity toward Puritanism? Exactly how does Hawthorne's ambiguity work?

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Americans (New York, 1923), pp. 137, 149.

## CHAPTER II

### "BE IT SO IF YOU WILL."

Within the various tales and "romances" Hawthorne is ambiguous toward Puritanism in several ways, all of which contribute to ambiguity of overall meaning. He sometimes uses questions and qualifying phrases that make doubtful exactly what is happening in a tale or romance. Thus Goodman Brown could have sworn, "were such a thing possible,"<sup>1</sup> that he heard his minister and Deacon Gookin passing through the woods on their way to the Devil's communion. Neither is he sure that he really hears the voices of his fellow townspeople coming from the dark cloud overhead (my italics): "Aloft in the air, as if from the depths of the cloud, came a confused and doubtful sound of voices" (II, 98). And what is in the baptismal basin hollowed in the rock at the Devil's meeting? -- "Did it contain water, reddened by the lurid light? or was it blood? or perchance, a liquid flame?" (II, 104).

A second way in which Hawthorne deals ambiguously with Puritanism is by giving the reader a number of explanations for something that happens in a tale or romance. (This is what F.O. Matthiessen refers to as "the device of multiple choice,"<sup>2</sup> and what Yvor Winters

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The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. George P. Lathrop (New York, 1883), II, 97. All future quotations from the works are from this edition, except where otherwise indicated.

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American Renaissance, p. 276.



calls "the formula of alternative possibilities."<sup>3</sup>) In The Scarlet Letter, for example, several explanations are given for the letter A imprinted on Dimmesdale's breast: Dimmesdale may have branded himself, or Chillingworth may have worked magic on him, or Dimmesdale's remorse may have manifested itself in the visible letter (V, 305).

A third kind of ambiguity lies in the ordering of details in certain of the stories. In "The Gentle Boy," for instance, Hawthorne so orders his details as to maintain a careful balance between the Quakers and the Puritans. He makes it obvious that the Quakers are wrong to seek persecution, but that the Puritans are also wrong to treat the Quakers so harshly. And in "The Gray Champion" and "Endicott and the Red Cross," Hawthorne so arranges his details as to introduce

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Ivor Winters, "Maule's Curse," In Defense of Reason (New York, 1947), p. 170. Winters treats this kind of ambiguity unfavorably. He finds it sometimes used to good effect if "the idea conveyed is clear enough," even though "the embodiment of the idea appears far-fetched." For example, we can realize that Chillingworth's countenance has become darker, even if we don't believe that the fire in his laboratory, having been brought from the nether regions, gets his face sooty with infernal smoke. But even such worthwhile ambiguity "becomes a minor cause of irritation through constant recurrence" (p. 172). And Hawthorne is seriously at fault when the situation is reversed so that the physical representation of the idea is perfectly clear, but the meaning uncertain (p. 172). According to Winters, this is what happens in the four unfinished romances, with their symbolic but meaningless footprints, spiders, and elixirs. For contrast with Winters there is R.H. Fogle, in Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark (Norman, Oklahoma, 1952). To Fogle, Hawthorne's ambiguity is "a way of introducing the marvelous without offending against probability" (p. 10), and has the deeper purpose as well of conveying "in legend or superstition a moral or psychological truth" (p. 10). As a whole, "it embodies Hawthorne's deepest insights" (p. 11). Further, it serves to outline "the pure form of truth by dissolving irrelevancies" (p. 11), and to "mark the limit of eyeshot, beyond which is shadow" (p. 11). Because of his ambiguity Hawthorne is "a unique and wonderful combination of light and darkness" (p. 4).



anti-Puritanism even while seeming loudly to praise Puritan patriotism.

I have loosely classified the tales to be examined in this chapter as historical, personal, and doctrinal. Tales such as "The Gray Champion," "Endicott and the Red Cross," "The Maypole of Merry Mount," and "The Gentle Boy" are concerned with Puritan history: the opposition of the New England settlers to Charles I and James II, the Puritan persecution of the Quakers. Tales such as "The Man of Adamant," "Young Goodman Brown," and "The Minister's Black Veil" show specific Puritans' reactions to the world's evil. And such tales as "Fancy's Show Box" and "John Inglefield's Thanksgiving" are chiefly concerned with the definition of sin.

"The Gray Champion" is presumably a patriotic historical sketch showing Hawthorne's approval of the fighting spirit of his ancestors, who could suffer oppression only for a while before revolting under the leadership of a staunch old Puritan temporarily risen from the dead. The surface unity of the sketch arises from its simple, melodramatic structure, which is very similar to that of a modern television Western: the New England settlers of the late 1680's are obviously the "good guys," and the royal administrators of the "bigoted" James II are obviously the "bad guys." Thus the royal governor, Sir Edmund Andros, is said to have been a "harsh and unprincipled soldier," whose administration "lacked scarcely a single characteristic of tyranny" (I, 21); during this administration New England "groaned" under wrongs heavier than those which brought about the American Revolution. And Hawthorne assures us that on the other hand his ancestors, still imbued with the "old spirit" of the first New England Puritans, were restrained from revolt for two years only by "that filial love which had in-

variably secured their allegiance to the mother country, whether its head chanced to be a Parliament, Protector, or Popish Monarch" (I,21).

The basic contrasting scene takes place on King Street in Boston (which Hawthorne is careful to identify as the future scene of the Boston Massacre) during April, 1689. With their rule in some danger due to rumors of the movements of William of Orange (whose success would be no less than "the salvation of New England" — I, 22), Sir Edmund and his councillors, "being warm with wine," have decided to quiet any thoughts of rebellion by an impressive show of strength. As Hawthorne puts it, the steady march of the soldiers who lead the way down King Street is "like the progress of a machine that would roll irresistibly over everything in its way" (I, 25), and these soldiers are quite ready to "deluge the street with blood" (I, 26). And Sir Edmund's councillors, "the bitterest foes of New England," include Edward Randolph, "our arch-enemy"; Bullivant, who scatters "jests and mockery" as he rides along; and the Episcopal clergyman of King's Chapel, who rides haughtily among the magistrates in his priestly vestments (I, 25). Hawthorne is at great pains to defame the royal administrators.

But the Puritan settlers, strong in character and undismayed in expression, have "confidence in Heaven's blessing on a righteous cause" (I, 23). And the Puritan ministers scattered in the crowd, who are "regarded with such reverence as if there were sanctity in their very garments" (I, 23), are all quite ready to assume "the crown of martyrdom" (I, 24). The Gray Champion himself, "the type of New England's hereditary spirit" (I, 31), is the epitome of Puritan staunchness, and as he moves to stand alone against the soldiers and



magistrates, he "raises himself to a loftier mien," and marches "with a warrior's step" in "gray but unbroken dignity" (I, 27). And when this "old champion of the righteous cause" (I, 28) does succeed, in the melodramatic climax, in routing Sir Edmund Andros, Hawthorne gives the Puritans a complete victory: "Before another sunset, the Governor and all that rode so proudly with him, were prisoners . . ." (I, 30).

The tale is not as unified as it appears, however, for certain details work to place Hawthorne's motives in doubt. For instance, after reading Hawthorne's unfavorable treatment of Puritan severity in the first scaffold scene of The Scarlet Letter, one wonders if he is completely serious when he seems to laud the "general severity of mien" and sombre character (I, 23) of the Puritan settlers in the crowd. And surely he is ironic and ambiguous when he seems to praise "the veterans of King Phillip's war, who had burned villages and slaughtered young and old, with pious fierceness, while the godly souls throughout the land were helping them with prayer" (I, 23).<sup>4</sup>

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In "A Bell's Biography" Hawthorne deals unfavorably with such "pious fierceness" on the part of the early New Englanders, who seemed to feel no qualms about killing people of other religions if they threatened the supremacy of their own. Hawthorne draws quite a gruesome picture of the zealous New England rangers rushing upon the Catholic priests in the little chapel in the woods, and slaying them on the very steps of the altar. His comment on the scene is pointed: "If, as antique traditions tell us, no grass will grow where the blood of martyrs has been shed, there should be a barren spot to this very day, on the site of that desecrated altar" (p. 144). "The Snow-Image," The Writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1900), III, 141-152. And as the chapel burns, he says further that some of the rangers "already wished that the altar smoke could cover the deed from the sight of Heaven" (p. 144).

Further, although the settlers are supposed to have great "filial love" for the mother country, there are "old soldiers of the Parliament" in the crowd, who smile grimly "at the thought that their aged arms might strike another blow against the house of Stuart" (I, 23). Although one of the "abominations which had driven the Puritans to the wilderness" is "the union of church and state" (I, 25), the Gray Champion is marked as a man capable of "giving laws" as well as "making prayers," a man of "stately form, combining the leader and the saint" (I, 28).<sup>5</sup>

Even although the basic organization of this tale makes it pro-Puritan, then, Hawthorne's approval of his ancestors is not unqualified. He must have realized even as early as the time of the writing of this tale (about 1828) that the puritan severity that caused so much trouble for hapless sinners and people of other sects was not praiseworthy. And he must have known that the old Puritan governments were more theocratic than democratic, so that to align them on the side of democracy would be to oversimplify.

"Endicott and the Red Cross" is another patriotic tale in which Hawthorne ostensibly praises the democratic spirit of his ancestors; in this tale he seems also especially to praise the Puritans' ways of punishing sinners. Certainly his conclusion is specific enough:

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Alan Simpson in Puritanism in Old and New England explains this paradox: ". . . nine out of ten Puritans (in England) only wanted to separate church and state in order to bind them together again" (p. 26).



With a cry of triumph, the people gave their sanction to one of the boldest exploits which our history records. And forever honored be the name of Endicott! We look back through the mist of the ages, and recognize in the rending of the Red Cross from New England's banner the first omen of that deliverance which our fathers consummated after the bones of the stern Puritan had lain more than a century in the dust. (I, 493).

And Hawthorne is anxious to point out that the many "evidences of iniquity" he has given do not make "the times of the Puritans more vicious than our own":

It was the policy of our ancestors to search out even the most secret sins, and expose them to shame, without fear or favor, in the broadest light of the noonday sun. Were such the custom now, perchance we might find materials for a no less piquant sketch than the above. (I, 488)

In the first scaffold scene of The Scarlet Letter, however, Hester is caused unnecessary grief by the overly severe, narrow-minded Puritans who expose her sins to the noonday sun. And one wonders if Hawthorne is really such an ancestor-worshiper that he sympathizes with the atrocious punishments he lists in his "piquant sketch." We are not too upset by the ignominy of the pillory and the stocks, but the life-long punishments are something else again:

But among the crowd were several whose punishment would be life-long; some, whose ears had been cropped, like those of puppy dogs; others, whose cheeks had been branded with the initials of their misdemeanors; one, with his nostrils slit and seared; and another, with a halter about his neck, which he was forbidden ever to take off or to conceal beneath his garments. (I, 487)

Hawthorne will in "Main Street" refer to the Puritans' witch-hunting as "Universal Madness"; did he not realize when writing "Endicott and the Red Cross" that such punishments as these he has listed are but a short remove from the taking of human life? In "Main Street" too, he will refer to "all the unfavorable influences which, among many good

ones, were bequeathed to us by our Puritan forefathers."<sup>6</sup> Perhaps when he wrote "Endicott and the Red Cross" he somehow couldn't attain an ambiguous balance of good and bad influences.

In the central scene of the tale there is one detail that is obviously anti-Puritan. As Endicott harangues the listening crowd, exhorting them to uphold their civil rights and liberty of conscience, a voice interrupts him from the stocks: "Call you this liberty of conscience?"

It was the Wanton Gosseller. A sad and quiet smile flitted across the mild visage of Roger Williams. But Endicott, in the excitement of the moment, shook his sword wrathfully at the culprit . . . ." (I, 491)

The mere presence of a person who so famously broke with the Puritans dictates against the unity of the tale, but here the mild Roger Williams is placed in strong contrast with the blustering Endicott. The irony of the situation is almost enough to undercut the whole tale.

"Endicott and the Red Cross" gives the reader the same lingering doubt that "The Gray Champion" does. Both tales seemingly emphasize the positive value of the Puritans' fighting spirit, and the close similarity between their aspirations and those of the men of the Revolution, but certain details work to produce an ambiguity of total meaning; in both tales the Puritans are not at all faultless. Barriss Mills seems to have oversimplified when he wrote: "For Hawthorne the real glory of the Puritans was that they laid the foundations of American liberty."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "The Snow-Image," p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> "Hawthorne and Puritanism," NEQ, XXI (1948), 85.



We have bases for anti-Puritanism in "The Gray Champion" and "Endicott and the Red Cross," and there are similar bases in "The Maypole of Merry Mount." One can argue, as R.H. Fogle does, that Hawthorne favors the Puritans: "Puritanism lies closer to the truth than does the paradise of Merry Mount . . . The lovers are absorbed by Plymouth and Puritanism."<sup>8</sup> But there is no striking contrast between good and bad in this tale; Hawthorne at least appears to favor the Merry mounters as much as the Puritans. Hawthorne may say that the gaily dressed, carefree votaries of the Maypole are wasting their lives in the acting out of a daydream: "Sworn triflers of a lifetime, they would not venture among the sober truths of life not even to be truly blest" (I, 76). He may say that they have perverted thought and wisdom: "When Thought and Wisdom came, even these unwelcome guests were led astray by the crowd of vanities which they should have put to flight" (I, 75). And there may be something "vague and unsubstantial," and wrong, about their lives. But the "grim" Puritans are "most dismal wretches" who meet in conclave "to hear sermons three hours long," whose festivals are fast days, and whose chief pastime is the singing of psalms (I, 77). These "grizzly saints," if they dance at all, must do so around the whipping-post: Woe to the youth or maiden who did but dream of a dance! The select-man nodded to the constable; and there sat the light-heeled reprobate in the stocks; or if he danced, it was round the whipping-post, which might be termed the Puritan Maypole. (I, 77)

Hawthorne doesn't seem unfavorable to the idea of celebrating the May: "Bright were the days at Merry Mount, when the Maypole was the banner staff of that gay colony!" His description of the Maypole

on midsummer eve is especially alluring:

Down nearly to the ground the pole was dressed with birchen boughs, and others of the liveliest green, and some with silvery leaves, fastened by ribbons that fluttered in fantastic knots of twenty different colors, but no sad ones. Garden flowers, and blossoms of the wilderness, laughed gladly forth amid the verdure, so fresh and dewy that they must have grown by magic on that happy pinetree." (I, 71)

And if, with "The Puritan of Puritans," Endicott himself, leading them, the meddlesome zealots take the revelers prisoner and cut down the Maypole, yet the Puritan victory is not quite complete, for the two young lovers cannot really be touched by the harsh Puritans.

Without becoming as gloomy as the Puritans, these two have realized that life has "sober truths," is more than idyllic dancing around a Maypole: "From the moment that they truly loved, they had subjected themselves to earth's doom of care and sorrow, and troubled joy, and had no more a home at Merry Mount" (I, 75). Thus even the severe Endicott is softened by their high and pure youthful beauty, so that instead of punishing them, he expresses the hope that he can make them into good Puritans, and throws a wreath of roses from the ruin of the Maypole over their heads. This is a symbolic act: though their "home of wild mirth" is "made desolate amid the sad forest," as their flowery garland "was wreathed of the brightest roses that had grown there, so, in the tie that united them, were intertwined all the purest and best of their early joys" (I, 84). In living life to the fullest they will not be so gay as they have been, but this tie should prevent them from succumbing to the Puritan gloom.

"Jollity and gloom were contending for an empire" (I, 70), and an ambiguous contest it was, for both sides were right, yet both



were wrong; and both win. Perhaps C. E. Eisinger is closest to the truth when he speaks of Hawthorne's "reconciliation of joy and gloom." According to Eisinger, "The emotional barrenness of Puritanism and the sensual abandonment of hedonism have been compromised in the middle way." Hawthorne synthesizes Puritanism and hedonism, and although the synthesis retains more of Puritanism than hedonism, the two hedonists who have learned the true meaning of love do not fare badly. For if one "possesses the joys of nuptial love he shall bear earth's doom with greater fortitude."<sup>9</sup> Life is beginning for the lovers because Puritanism and anti-Puritanism have both been given their due.

The structure of "The Gentle Boy" is similar to that of "The Maypole of Merry Mount" in that Hawthorne again favors the Puritans as little as their opponents, producing a complex, delicately balanced tale. The first three paragraphs set up the contrast: Hawthorne with irony deplores the Quakers' masochistic desire for persecution, but equally deplores such Puritan harshness as the execution of two Quakers in 1659 by a hot-headed governor of Massachusetts Bay. The Quakers, though eligible for martyrdom anywhere on earth, come to the place of greatest uneasiness and peril, Massachusetts Bay (I, 84). They are indeed obliged by the Puritans, and the "attraction" of the fines and stripes draws them with almost supernatural power, all "eager to testify against the oppression which they hoped to share" (I, 85). Their fanatical actions are contrary to the rules of decency

and rational religion, and deserve some kind of punishment (I, 86). But "an indelible stain of blood is upon the hands" of all who consented to the act of execution of the two Quakers, and the governor responsible was a man "of narrow mind and imperfect education," whose "uncompromising bigotry was made hot and mischievous by violent and hasty passions" and whose conduct toward the two "was marked by brutal cruelty" (I, 86).

"The Gentle Boy" is the story of the Quaker boy Ilbrahim, and he is a sympathetic character from first to last. The initial scene at his father's grave beneath the gallows is very sentimental:

"They drove me forth from the prison when they took my father thence," said the boy, "and I stood afar off watching the crowd of people, and when they were gone I came hither, and found only his grave. I knew that my father was sleeping here, and I said this shall be my home." (I, 90)

Cold and hungry and defenseless, the boy is definitely an object of compassion as he weeps bitterly for his father's "innocent blood." Tobias Pearson, who discovers Ilbrahim at the grave, is as good a Puritan as the next man, but his heart stirs with shame and anger at the evidence of such gratuitous cruelty.

The scene that most arouses our sympathy for Ilbrahim is the one in which he suffers at the hands of the Puritan children. Though the essence of kindness and rectitude, and highly sensitive to any bitterness, Ilbrahim is set upon one day by a group of "baby-fiends" whose primitive fanaticism is greater than the bloodthirstiness of their fathers. And among these children is the boy whom Ilbrahim, in nursing back to health, has grown to love very much. This boy calls Ilbrahim to him as if to repay his kindness by aiding him, but as



Ilbrahim approaches, the boy strikes him so hard on the mouth that the blood streams forth. Ilbrahim's spirit is broken, and his eventual death almost assured by this forceful disillusionment.

The Puritans also show their true colors in their treatment of Dorothy and Tobias Pearson. Because the Pearsons have shown kindness to the innocent, gentle boy, who is too good for this world rather than too evil, the love of their neighbors has been turned to hatred. The Pearsons are no longer honored, but reviled, and their substance has been depleted by continual fines. On the night of Ilbrahim's death they are wan and spent.

On the other hand, Ilbrahim's mother is "neglectful of the holiest trust which can be committed to a woman" (I, 115), as she poignantly realizes when the boy she has shunned dies in her arms. Perhaps had she not seen fit to "break the bonds of natural affection" (I, 106), Ilbrahim would not have died. Hawthorne is far from favorable toward her -- as she indecorously addresses the Puritans in the meeting-house, she mistakes a "flood of malignity" for inspiration (I, 101), and her hatred and revenge wrap themselves in the garb of piety (I, 100). Using the same "empire" contrast as in "The Maypole of Merry Mount," Hawthorne favors the Puritan Dorothy over her: "The two females, as they held each a hand of Ilbrahim, formed a practical allegory; it was rational piety and unbridled fanaticism contending for the empire of a young heart" (I, 104). So the Puritans are not entirely to blame for Ilbrahim's death.

If Catherine is eventually softened by the same griefs which once irritated her, perhaps learning a true religion from the memory of Ilbrahim's gentle spirit, the Puritans for their part do "in



process of time" learn a Christian spirit of forbearance toward the Quakers. Hawthorne resolves the tale in the same way he has maintained it, with a careful balance -- the Puritans and the Quakers are both right in slowly learning to live with one another.

As the four tales just discussed have ambiguity with respect to Puritanism, so does "The Man of Adamant," even though in this tale Hawthorne is pointedly unfavorable toward the archetypal holier-than-thou Puritan. Richard Digby is even more extreme than the Puritans who are afraid of being contaminated by the "sweetest infant of the skies" (I, 97), Ilbrahim. Digby, "The gloomiest and most intolerant of a stern brotherhood," has a plan of salvation "so narrow that it could avail no sinner but himself," and he is quite anxious that no one but himself shall benefit from his plan.<sup>10</sup> In the heat of his misplaced religious ardor he thinks Providence has entrusted only him, of all mortals, "with the treasure of a true faith" (p. 226), and he will not have himself defiled by the improper beliefs of his fellows.

The self-righteous Digby finds himself a lonely cave in the wilderness, wherein he seats himself and prays to the God that he thinks he alone knows, exulting in the enjoyment of his happy fortune: "'Of a truth, the only way to heaven leadeth through the narrow entrance of this cave -- and I alone have found it!'" (p. 209). But Hawthorne replies, "If Nature meant this remote and dismal cavern for the use of man, it could only be to bury in its gloom the victims of a pestilence, and then to block up its mouth with stones, and avoid

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"The Snow-Image," p. 226. The following quotations from "The Man of Adamant" are also from this edition.

the spot forever after" (p. 228). The damp cave, in which the moisture seems "to possess the power of converting what it bathed to stone" (p. 229), is no wholesome place for a man already susceptible to stoniness of heart.

Digby's "exclusive bigotry" (p. 231) receives its just reward, for he does indeed turn to stone, with a marble frown on his face. And over a century later, a farmer who discovers him still sitting in his cave, frozen stiff, is so frightened by Digby's repulsive aspect that he heaps stones on the mouth of the cave and covers it with sod, obliterating all traces of the discovery. Grown people and children avoid the despicable spot, but there sits forever the shape of Richard Digby, "in the attitude of repelling the whole race of mortals -- not from heaven -- but from the horrible loneliness of his dark, cold sepulchre" (p. 238). The Puritans' belief that they were the Chosen People could lead to just such spiritual pride, for which Hawthorne had only scorn.

Then where is the ambiguity in such a one-sided tale as this? Hyatt H. Waggoner points out the significance of Hawthorne's qualifying phrase, "as, indeed, it is a great folly," in the first paragraph of "The Man of Adamant":

In his (Digby's) view of the matter, it was a most abominable crime -- as, indeed it is a great folly -- for men to trust to their own strength, or even to grapple to any other fragment of the wreck, save this narrow plank, which, moreover, he took special care to keep out of their reach." (p. 226)

According to Waggoner, Hawthorne's phrase shows his agreement with Digby's doctrine that men should not trust to their own strength (this is justification by faith instead of by works). Therefore Digby is not doctrinally wrong, but simply does not have charity -- he should



be sharing his faith with others if he is sure that he is right. To Waggoner, Digby is a man "who does the wrong thing from a motive not in itself wrong, indeed in isolation high and noble," and a "paradoxical figure the depth of whose error is a measure of the strength of his devotion to what seemed an 'ideal' cause."<sup>11</sup> Hawthorne, therefore, subtly shows the good in Digby.

Another ambiguous tale of gloomy evil is "Young Goodman Brown." And just as Richard Digby recognizes only evil in his fellows, so does Goodman Brown after his experience in the forest. The question is, are men as evil as Brown comes to think them? And is Brown's religion as corrupt as his dream (if it is one) indicates?

Hawthorne's ambiguity arises naturally from the setting of the dark night in the forest (the dark night of the soul?). The Devil's staff, for instance, seems to wriggle like a living snake, but this "must have been an ocular deception, assisted by the uncertain light" (II, 91). Brown thinks he hears his minister and Deacon Gookin riding through the woods, but "owing doubtless to the depth of the gloom at that particular spot" of the forest, Brown can't see the two men. And in the black cloud from which the voices of Brown's fellow townspeople seem to come, there is the voice of a young woman making only feeble excuses for not going to the Devil's meeting. Can it be Brown's wife, Faith? Then as Brown approached the assembled congregation at the Devil's meeting-place, he "could have well-nigh sworn that the shape of his own dead father beckoned him to advance" (II, 102).

Whether or not Brown's experience is dreamed, it is certainly

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Hawthorne: A Critical Study (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1955), p. 97.



an important experience for him. Its climax is the Devil's anti-Puritan communion, at which the supposedly good Puritans consort freely with "men of dissolute lives and women of spotted fame, wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice, and suspected even of horrid crimes" (II, 101), and at which the figure of the Devil himself "bore no slight similitude, both in garb and manner, to some grave divine of the New England churches" (II, 102). The Devil's sermon is a devastating avowal of the complete depravity and absolute evil of all men -- "Behold the earth one stain of guilt" (II, 103). Evil is said to be the nature of mankind, and the Devil's meeting the communion of the human race.

Hawthorne ends the experience vaguely, for we do not know whether or not Brown successfully resists the Devil's baptism, and Brown does not know whether or not Faith does. As the Devil prepares to lay the mark of baptism upon their foreheads, Brown looks to Faith and cries to her to "resist the wicked one" (II, 105). But "whether Faith obeyed he knew not" (II, 105), and the experience is over: "Hardly had he spoken when he had found himself amid calm night and solitude . . ." (II, 105). Hawthorne is not vague as to the effect of the experience on Brown, however; if it was a dream, it was one "of evil omen" for Brown: "A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become from the night of that fearful dream . . ." (II, 106). When he died, "they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone, for his dying hour was gloom" (II, 106).

What is Hawthorne's meaning here?<sup>12</sup> He uses the Devil's meet-

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In Hawthorne's Fiction, R.H. Fogle avoids any statement of the meaning of "Young Goodman Brown": "Hawthorne poses the dangerous

ing to show Puritanism for what it really is -- another human enterprise, as full of evil as any other. But if the Puritans are not as divinely elect as they would think themselves, neither are they as evil as the Devil says. For it would appear from his treatment of Brown after the experience, as a man who exists in a kind of gloomy half-life of doubt, that Hawthorne does not believe in the Devil's message. If a man who believes in Original Sin must live as Brown does, then that doctrine is wrong. Both the Devil, who so resembles a Puritan preacher in advocating the innate depravity of mankind, and Brown, who believes him, are wrong. Man is a complex mixture of good and evil.

"The Minister's Black Veil" is a tale similar in structure to "The Man of Adamant" and "Young Goodman Brown," centering as it does on a gloomy character who recognizes only evil in his fellows. And the Reverend Mr. Hooper is to me as unsympathetic a character as Richard Digby or Goodman Brown.

Hawthorne is quite vague as to the reasons why the minister assumes the veil. Perhaps he is trying to hide his face from God

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question of the relations of Good and Evil in man but withholds his answer" (p. 16). D.M. McKeithan is more definite in "Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown': An Interpretation," MLN, LXVII (1952), 93-96. McKeithan finds that the theme is sin and its blighting effects, and, reading the story as an allegory, says that Brown doesn't go into a forest at night or even dream that he did. He simply becomes cynical as a result of actual sin, and sees sin where it doesn't exist. But Hawthorne doesn't share his pessimism. To T.E. Connolly, in "Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown': An Attack on Puritanic Calvinism," AL, XXVIII (1956), 370-75, Hawthorne is strongly anti-Puritan. Brown discovers "the full and frightening significance" of his faith. Hawthorne's implication is that "the doctrine of the elect and damned is not a faith which carries man heavenward on its skirts, as Brown once believed, but, instead, condemns him to hell -- bad and good alike indiscriminately -- and for all intents and purposes so few escape as to make one man's chance of salvation almost disappear" (p. 375).



because of some secret sin. Or perhaps his eyes have become so weakened by the midnight lamp that he needs an eyeshade. Maybe the minister has assumed a physical manifestation of the veils that all men wear to hide their sins from others.

Whatever the reason, the veil instills only horror in the on-lookers. An old woman mutters at the meeting-house steps that Hooper has changed himself into something awful. As he preaches his first sermon wearing the veil, more than one woman of delicate nerves is forced to leave the meetinghouse, and the others quake with a strange awe (I, 54). Nobody wants to walk by his side after the service, and old Squire Saunders neglects to invite him to Sunday dinner as he has always done. His fiancée, Elizabeth, tries to pretend the veil is not significant, but its terrors overwhelm her. Because of the veil Mr. Hooper becomes an outcast, avoided by the timid and harassed by the bold.

And if he does become a more efficient clergyman with dying sinners, who nevertheless shudder at the veiled face even as he blesses them, he is not very efficient at weddings. Although the handsomest couple in the village are getting married that first Sunday night, the veil "could portend nothing but evil to the wedding" (I, 59). It seems to dim the candles; it makes the bride and bridegroom tremble; and as Mr. Hooper raises a glass of wine to his lips he himself is frightened by his reflection in a mirror, so that he spills the wine on the carpet and rushes forth into the darkness (I, 59).

Mr. Hooper has simply lost sight of the good in men, in the same way that Goodman Brown did. His gloomy morbidity, caused by his



Puritanical belief in Original Sin, has ruined his life and affected negatively the lives of his congregation. There is no secret sin, for on his deathbed he is more self-righteous than prone to confess: "Why do you tremble at me alone? . . . Tremble also at each other! . . . I look around me, and lo! on every visage a Black Veil!" (I, 69). As Brown's dying hour is gloom, so is Mr. Hooper's: "Still veiled, they laid him in his coffin, and a veiled corpse they bore him to the grave" (I, 69).

Hawthorne remains ambiguous in "Fancy's Show Box," a sketch concerned with the definition of sin. Guilt is a stain upon the soul, but how exactly do men's souls contract such stains? It is generally considered true that one's guilty deeds constitute sin, but perhaps one's guilty thoughts do also. Perhaps a person can commit a mortal sin while completely alone, or even while kneeling to pray.

Old Mr. Smith's Fancy conjures up pictures of crimes Mr. Smith never committed, but his Memory recalls that he contemplated just such crimes. Is Mr. Smith guilty? Hawthorne says he isn't: "It is not until the crime is accomplished that guilt clinches its gripe upon the guilty heart, and claims it for its own" (I, 256). And men tend to over-estimate their capacity for evil; that is, they may contemplate a crime for some time without realizing its import or its consequences, then at the last moment realize their error and refrain from committing the crime. "Let us hope, therefore, that all the dreadful consequences of sin will not be incurred, unless the act have set its seal upon the thought" (I, 257).

But Hawthorne modifies his position, and concludes that no man must think he goes to the gate of heaven with a pure heart: "Man must not disclaim his brotherhood, even with the guiltiest, since, though his hand be clean, his heart has surely been polluted by the flitting phantoms of iniquity" (I, 257). Hawthorne's ambiguous definition of sin is perhaps a bit more negative than positive.

To Randall Stewart, Hawthorne's definition is quite negative. There is in the tale sufficient evidence of Hawthorne's belief in universal depravity: "Hawthorne and the Puritans were in complete agreement, therefore, in the belief that human nature is radically sinful. In 'Fancy's Show Box' (1837), the doctrine of universal depravity is stated with sufficient explicitness to satisfy the most rigorous theologian of the puritanical school . . . ." <sup>13</sup> But Henry G. Fairbanks disagrees wholeheartedly with Stewart:

I suggest we shall look in vain for such a statement (the explicit statement of universal depravity made by Stewart). It is not only not explicit. It is not even implicit. Of guilt Hawthorne says that it is a 'stain upon the soul,' not a stain in the soul, or even a soul covered with stains. Of guilt in prospect he thinks that 'men often over-estimate their capacity for evil.' Of man's nature itself he concludes: 'In truth, there is no such thing in man's nature as a settled and full resolve, either for good or evil, except at the very moment of execution.'

Far from being a statement of universal depravity, 'Fancy's Show Box' is no statement at all. If anything, it is speculative rather than declarative . . . . It neither says nor implies that man is depraved . . . .<sup>14</sup>

Hawthorne defines sin in "John Inglefield's Thanksgiving" not only more negatively (to me) than in "Fancy's Show Box," but with very

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<sup>13</sup>

The American Notebooks (New Haven, 1932), p. lxxii.

<sup>14</sup>

"Sin, Free Will, and 'Pessimism' in Hawthorne," PMLA, LXXI (1956), 985-86.



little ambiguity. Prudence Inglefield, the sinful daughter of John Inglefield, returns to spend Thanksgiving evening with her family. But because of her sin her stay can only be temporary -- she is cut off irrevocably from her family, and knows it. She will not touch her younger sister for fear of contaminating her; she does not expect to meet her brother, a clergyman, beyond the grave, for she knows she won't go to heaven. And she won't let her old beau give her too warm a welcome.

It is vague that her appearance seems little changed by her sin; perhaps Hawthorne will save her in the end after all:

If she had spent the many months of her absence in guilt and infamy, yet they seemed to have left no traces on her gentle aspect. She could not have looked less altered, had she merely stepped away from her father's fireside for half an hour . . . ."<sup>15</sup>

She so resembles the late wife of John Inglefield that he can't speak unkindly to her, although he is naturally a stern and rugged man. And that evening, for a short interval of time, she is her old, innocent self -- "a girl of quick and tender sensibilities, gladsome in her general mood, but with a bewitching pathos interfused among her merriest words and moods" (p. 257). Her family and friends are completely captivated by her, and nearly forget that she has ever left them. We almost wonder if she can be forgiven and become her old self.

She can't, however. When family prayer-time comes, she rises to leave, losing all appearance of goodness:

As Prudence passed out of the door, she turned towards them, and flung back her hand with a gesture of farewell. But her face was so changed that they hardly recognized it. Sin and evil passions glowed through its comeliness, and wrought a horrible deformity; a smile

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"The Snow-Image," p. 254. The following quotations from "John Inglefield's Thanksgiving" are also from this edition.



gleamed in her eyes, as of triumphant mockery, at their surprise and grief. (p. 259).

Hawthorne then grimly hammers home his point:

Sin, alas! is careful of her bond-slaves; they hear her voice perhaps, at the holiest moment, and are constrained to go whither she summons them. The same dark power that drew Prudence Inglefield from her father's hearth -- the same in its nature, though heightened then to a dread necessity -- would snatch a guilty soul from the gate of heaven, and make its sin and its punishment alike eternal. (p. 260).

This is far from the Devil's statements on Original Sin in "Young Goodman Brown," but certainly Hawthorne seems pessimistic in this tale. Sin is indeed a powerful negative force to him, one from which it is almost impossible to shake free. With such emphasis on the permanence of sin rather than on God's kind forgiveness, he is more a Puritan in this tale than in any of the eight previously considered. He is also much less interesting.

This inability to hold a person's interest that is characteristic of a one-sided story such as "John Inglefield's Thanksgiving" makes one wonder how valuable Hawthorne's ambiguity is to him as a writer. Stories in which Puritanism and anti-Puritanism conflict ambiguously are more successful than those in which either is dominant. That is, "The Gentle Boy" and "Young Goodman Brown" have a deeper, more powerful meaning than "John Inglefield's Thanksgiving" or even "The Man of Adamant." The logical conclusion seems to be that Hawthorne at his best is a mature "modern" author, who, refusing to simplify, uses two opposing views to develop an admirable tension in his stories; this tension subtly provides the conflict that any good story demands. The combination of sympathy for and rejection of Puritanism thus gives Hawthorne a viable theme for his fiction.

### CHAPTER III

#### "WORMWOOD AND WOMANHOOD"

The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne's only novel dealing directly with a Puritan theme, is generally considered his masterpiece, so much so that there are few if any adverse criticisms of it. Even Ivor Winters in the generally negative "Maule's Curse" concedes that The Scarlet Letter is "faultless, in scheme and in detail . . . one of the chief masterpieces of English prose."<sup>1</sup> And Rudolph von Abele, though of the opinion that Hawthorne is "an interesting failure," must "account for the excellence of the book."<sup>2</sup> Certainly The Scarlet Letter is a poignant, meaningful story of the consequences of sin; its characters live in one's memory long after one has finished reading about them. And because of its narrow focus on the four actors in the special Puritan drama, the story has apparent unity, seeming to move with strict economy toward an inevitable conclusion. But exactly what is the nature of this conclusion, and what, therefore is the total meaning of the book? Hawthorne's ending is actually quite ambiguous, and the various critics through the years have reached no unanimity in their interpretations of it.

Basically, who is the main character in the book, Hester or Dimmesdale? If it is Hester, what is the effect of her sin upon her? Does she repent at the end, is she saved at the end? If it is Dimmesdale, is he saved at the end on the scaffold? Then Hawthorne may be a Puritan for believing in saving grace. Or does Dimmesdale just

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<sup>1</sup>

In Defense of Reason, p. 157.

<sup>2</sup>

The Death of the Artist (The Hague, 1955), pp. 3, 55.



think he is saved, and so proceed to an uncertain fate? Then perhaps Hawthorne is a Puritan for advocating the permanent effects of carnal sin. What are the functions of Chillingworth and Pearl in the novel (or romance), especially at the end?

C.C. Walcutt finds not one or two, but five different readings of the book.<sup>3</sup> There is the orthodox Puritan reading, that the central idea of the book is the permanently warping effect of sin; the absolute sin of Hester and Dimmesdale will never be completely forgiven, and the evil results of it will grow. A variant of this orthodox reading is the Fortunate Fall reading, whereby sin is quite real, but a source of wisdom in a tragic world; man can win greatness only through suffering. Hester and Dimmesdale not only expiate their sins but achieve wisdom and greatness because of them. Romantic readers, however, would insist "that society is guilty of punishing individuals who have responded to a natural urge"; Hester and Dimmesdale commit no absolute sin, for society has "sinned" against nature. Then there is the transcendental reading, that finds sin not absolute, but doesn't romantically deny it either -- the lovers' sin is a failure of self-reliance in not being true to themselves. And finally there is the relativist reading, according to which the sense of guilt has psychological implications, and sin depends upon what the character thinks is sinful, not upon absolute moral law.<sup>4</sup>

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"The Scarlet Letter and its Modern Critics," NCF, VII (1953) 251-264.

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Walcutt furnishes examples of all these interpretations: Austin Warren in his introduction to Representative Selections is firmly orthodox; D.L. Ringe in "Hawthorne's Psychology of the Head and Heart," PMLA, LXV (1950), 120-32 presents a Fortunate Fall reading; F.I. Carpenter in "Scarlet A Minus," CE, V (1944), 173-80 gives a



I do not find my reading of the novel fitting easily into any one of Walcott's categories, however. Not wishing to be simply a romantic, I yet find it hard to be orthodox, mainly because of Hawthorne's ambiguous sympathy toward Hester and Dimmesdale. I don't find the sin absolute in The Scarlet Letter, and don't deny it either, but cannot quite agree with the transcendental reading. The relativist reading is the opposite extreme of the orthodox reading. Perhaps I lean toward a Fortunate Fall reading in finding Hester and Dimmesdale at least partially able to expiate their sins and achieve some kind of greatness through their suffering.<sup>5</sup> There does seem to be a complex mixture of good and evil in the book. At any rate, although I do not wish to be branded a romantic, I do find Hester to be the central character of the story.

The story begins with Hester and ends with Hester, and Hawthorne focuses on her as much as on Dimmesdale, Henry James to the contrary.<sup>6</sup> In the first scaffold scene, which consumes the first three

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transcendental reading; Lloyd Morris in The Rebellious Puritan (New York, 1927) is resolutely romantic; Herbert Gorman in Hawthorne: A Study in Solitude (New York, 1927) is a relativist. (There are other examples besides these.)

<sup>5</sup>But see Reverend Leonard J. Fick, The Light Beyond (Westminster, Maryland, 1955), p. 121 for a distinction between sin as the cause and as the occasion of good. See also Fairbanks, "Sin, Free Will, and 'Pessimism' in Hawthorne," 981.

<sup>6</sup>Henry James, Hawthorne (New York, 1880), p. 109: "The story, indeed, is in a secondary degree that of Hester Prynne; she becomes, really, after the first scene, an accessory figure; it is not upon her the denouement depends. It is upon her guilty lover the author projects most frequently the cold, thin rays of his fitfully moving lantern . . . ."

chapters, it is Hester who is the center of attention, and she remains the central character through the next five chapters, which include her interview with Chillingworth, a description of her life with Pearl, and the scene at Governor Bellingham's mansion. Hawthorne then devotes only four chapters to Chillingworth and Dimmesdale and their ungodly relationship before returning to Hester in chapter thirteen, "Another View of Hester." From here to chapter twenty, "The Minister in a Maze," Hester is the motivating force of the book, and at least shares the spotlight with Chillingworth or Dimmesdale or Pearl. In the last chapters Dimmesdale is to a great extent the central character because of his Election Sermon and his decision to climb the scaffold and confess, but Hawthorne emphasizes with powerful irony that while Dimmesdale is giving the sermon in apparent triumph, the letter he is as much responsible for as Hester "was made to sear Hester's breast more painfully than at any time since the first day she put it on" (V. 293). The only resolution of the book acceptable to Hawthorne would seem to be Dimmesdale's confession, but besides releasing himself from Chillingworth, Dimmesdale by confessing at least partially fulfills his rightful obligation to Hester and Pearl. If he doesn't continue to **do his duty** by them because of his death, then perhaps his death is more a coward's easy way out than a glorious entrance into heaven.

Hester suffers as much as, if not more than, Dimmesdale, and we can sympathize with her as we can't with the rather cowardly Dimmesdale. The total impression one gets of the first scaffold scene is of the great suffering of Hester at the hands of the Puritans.



Thus Hawthorne speaks of "the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law" (V, 72), of the "grim rigidity" (V, 69) and coldness of the Puritan bystanders, of the pillory (which stands so close to the church) being "the very ideal of ignominy" (V, 76), of the Puritan elders being incapable of sitting in judgement on an erring woman's heart (V, 86). Further, Wilson's voice "thunders remorselessly" (V, 91) in the sermon that figuratively drives Hester down into the dirt. But Hester, when coming out of the prison, repels the beadle's assistance "by an action marked with natural dignity and force of character" (V, 73), and her "beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped" (V, 74); such a beautiful woman, with her infant at her bosom, would remind a Papist of the Virgin Mary (V, 77).

It is hard to believe that Hawthorne wishes us to sympathize with the "grim and grisly" (V, 72) beadle; with the self-righteous, prying, coarse, pitiless Puritan matrons who are so jealous of Hester's beauty; with the white man on the edge of the crowd whose love for his wife dissolves very quickly into a facial convulsion of writhing horror and dark emotion (V, 82); or with the narrow-minded elders who think they have the right to drag Hester's iniquity out into the sunshine, and to fling her heart into the street for all to spurn and trample upon (V, 76).

Certainly the Reverend Mr. Wilson has strong opinions on the frailty of women in his "discourse on sin in all its branches, but with continual reference to the ignominious letter" (V, 91); Henry James calls Hester the "tempting woman."<sup>7</sup> But is not Hester more sinned

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<sup>7</sup>Hawthorne, p. 115.



against than sinning? Without dwelling too much on the act of adultery itself, which is not included in the book, do we not wonder if Dimmesdale, with his "strong animal nature" (V, 159), is more responsible than Hester for this act of passion? No doubt he could have easily seduced any of the young virgins in his church who are infatuated with him (V, 174). Hester is a lonely young woman married to an absent husband whom she does not love; can she be blamed for falling in love with her handsome young minister? And it is honest, sincere love she has for Dimmesdale, not the lust that causes a woman to tempt a man; it is a love so powerful that she will not subject her lover to public shame, and in fact would suffer for both of them if she could: "Would that I might endure his agony, as well as mine!" (V, 90). Given such a love, is she not fair game for a minister whose passions are not under the control he would have them under? As the townsman tells Chillingworth shortly after his arrival: ". . . this woman is youthful and fair, and doubtless was strongly tempted to her fall . . ." (V, 84).

Has not Chillingworth wronged Hester more than she him? Standing in Hester's cell he admits that it was his folly to marry a beautiful young girl who told him beforehand she didn't love him; I heartily agree with him when he tells Hester: "We have wronged each other. Mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with decay" (V, 97). And if he had ever deeply loved her, he would not have cast her off quite so abruptly and completely upon his discovery of her adultery; he can excuse himself from sharing her ignominy by not revealing his true identity (V, 145), but his choice to do this shows just how little he ever did love her. Perhaps, then, he married her not because he longed to kindle a household

fire, but merely to satisfy his lust. Then his lack of compassion for Hester would be due to the fact that he is only selfishly jealous of someone's stealing some of his property, in this case the physical body of the woman he "owned." Chillingworth is not the ordinary wronged husband, therefore, and his exulting over Hester's letter and seeking of vengeance on her lover are thoroughly evil.

I have never been convinced by Hawthorne's attempts to show Chillingworth an essentially good man turned into a devil by his wife's sin.<sup>8</sup> Hawthorne is ambiguous to the point of confusion on this matter. Before coming to Boston Chillingworth was supposedly "calm in temperament" and "kindly," "a pure and upright man" (V, 158). And Hawthorne points out the "terrible fascination" and "fierce necessity" (V, 158) that seize upon him as he pursues Hester's lover. Yet very soon after he first spies Hester on the scaffold, "a writhing horror" twists itself across his features, as I have already mentioned. And he quite vehemently replies to the townsman who answers his questions about the woman on the scaffold:

It irks me, nevertheless, that the partner of her iniquity should not, at least, stand on the scaffold by her side. But he will be known! -- he will be known! -- he will be known! (V, 84)

Perhaps excessive desire for revenge has already seized this old man

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<sup>8</sup> Knowing Hawthorne's unsympathetic treatment of intellectuals in many of his works, we may wonder if the intellectual Chillingworth was ever good. Hawthorne does say he was good (V, 158), and Hester observes at her second meeting with him that "the former aspect of an intellectual and studious man, calm and quiet . . . had altogether vanished, and been succeeded by an eager, searching, almost fierce . . . look" (V, 204). Intellectuality and goodness have both been destroyed by Chillingworth's evil obsession with revenge.



because he is so evil to begin with. In the interview with Hester in her cell, it is "a refined cruelty" that impells him to minister to Hester and her child, and as he makes Hester swear not to reveal his identity to her lover, she likens him to "the Black man that haunts the forest round about us" (V, 100). His planning of his revenge at this time shows him as diabolically vehement as with the townsman before the scaffold:

I shall seek this man, as I have sought truth in books . . . I shall see him tremble. I shall feel myself shudder, suddenly and unawares. Sooner or later, he must needs be mine! (V, 98)

It seems implausible to me, therefore, that Hester is responsible for Chillingworth "transforming himself into a devil" (V, 205), because almost no transformation takes place.

I am certainly not convinced that Hester is responsible for any "deep injury" (V, 231) to Dimmesdale, although this is asserted at their meeting in the forest. Hester may have kept her so-called "second secret" too long (her "first secret" is concealing Dimmesdale's identity from the townspeople, and her "second secret" is concealing Chillingworth's true identity from Dimmesdale), allowing Chillingworth to cause Dimmesdale great pain, but Dimmesdale's own weakness is ultimately the source of his troubles. In the first scaffold scene he only hurts Hester more by exhorting her to do what he hasn't the strength to do himself -- to reveal him as a sinner. And he seems obviously relieved when she doesn't expose him: with his hand on his cowardly heart he draws back from the edge of the balcony "with a long respiration" (V, 91), muttering something about the wondrous generosity of a woman's heart. Because of Dimmesdale Hester must suffer alone on the scaffold, and then raise Pearl without a father.



Hawthorne is not lenient toward Dimmesdale. We can recognize as rationalization Dimmesdale's explaining to Chillingworth why some men keep their sins secret:

. . . guilty as they may be, retaining, nevertheless, a zeal for God's glory and man's welfare, they shrink from displaying themselves black and filthy in the sight of men; because, thenceforward, no good can be achieved by them; no evil of the past be redeemed by better service. (V, 162)

Hawthorne calls Dimmesdale a subtle hypocrite who can speak the very truth and turn it into the veriest falsehood (V, 176). Further, Dimmesdale's acts of penitence are but the mockery of penitence, and because he knows that he must confess but continues to be a coward, his soul is merely trifling with itself (V, 180). By the time of the forest meeting with Hester, "all the dread of public exposure" (V, 186) has confirmed him as a "pale, weak, sinful, and sorrow-stricken" man (V, 233), whose moral force "grovels helpless on the ground" (V, 193).

We can, therefore, argue that Hester is a sympathetic character and Dimmesdale isn't, that she is far more wronged by him than he by her. But we must reckon with Hawthorne's ambiguity -- he does say that Hester is partly responsible for Chillingworth's ruin (V, 205), and that she has caused "deep injury" to Dimmesdale. And in his statement that the scarlet letter has not done its office he strongly implies that Hester is wrong in wanting to tear down the whole system of society. Further, although Shame, Despair, and Solitude have taught her to be strong, they have also taught her much amiss (V, 239), so that her plan to flee with Dimmesdale is lawless and unchristian, and Dimmesdale in agreeing to go with her is yielding himself with deliberate choice to what he knows is deadly sin (V, 265). Hawthorne may cast aspersions upon the Puritan society throughout the book, but he

will not have Hester and Dimmesdale changing or leaving it.

What of the ending of the book? There is an argument for Dimmesdale's being capable of salvation. For instance, the Election Sermon comes from Dimmesdale's pen in an impulsive flow of inspired thought, as if God deemed him worthy in spite of all to transmit the grand and solemn music of Heaven's oracles (V. 268). He does seem caught up in forces beyond his control as he energetically marches in the procession to the meeting-house; it is perhaps significant that he seems "utterly beyond the reach" of the woman who has persuaded him to flee with her. And the sermon is a brilliant success, so that after its delivery he stands "on the very proudest eminence of superiority" (V, 296). Further, he firmly resists Chillingworth before mounting the scaffold, and repeatedly says while on the scaffold that he is doing the will of God, who is merciful and will forgive him. He does have the strength to identify himself as Hester's lover before the crowd and to bare his breast to them, presumably showing an A imprinted there.

But Hawthorne ambiguously gives us ample room for doubting that Dimmesdale is capable of salvation. If his Election Sermon is brilliant, perhaps it is not because he is being "elected," but because in a world of mixed good and evil it is quite possible that Heaven would use a sinner as its instrument for good. Actually Hawthorne seems ironically to build Dimmesdale up for a fall by emphasizing the heights to which he has risen. The sainted minister in the church may appear to be triumphant, but the same stigma is on both Hester and him, and he must ignominiously assume his responsibility toward Hester and Pearl, not necessarily to be forgiven by God even then.



Dimmesdale after the Sermon hardly appears confident that he has received divine grace; all the life and energy seem to have gone out of him as he totters along in the procession to the town-hall (V, 297). Once on the scaffold he does throw off all assistance and step passionately forward to reveal himself to the crowd (V, 302), but he needs Hester's strength to support him up onto the scaffold. And in spite of all his talk about the will of God working in him, he turns to Hester "with an expression of doubt and anxiety in his eyes" (V, 300), and has to fight back both bodily weakness and "faintness of heart" (V, 302) before making his confession. His death itself can be said to be God's calling him to Heaven, but the seven years of fasting and scourging must have taken their toll physically, and no doubt he prefers to die rather than live on, perhaps in ignominy, as a responsible husband and father. Pearl may be "humanized" by Dimmesdale's kiss, but ironically the money of his arch-enemy will be used to provide for her in the future.

I would conclude, then, that Hawthorne does not deal with saving grace or absolute sin in The Scarlet Letter. Sin is very powerful in a tragic world, but nothing is completely bad or completely good. Thus Hester's erring heart is "a mesh of good and evil" (V, 86), and her soul is "sacred even in its pollution" (V, 89). And the fallen Hester can "climb to a higher point" after assuming the letter, so that eventually many people believe the A stands for Able, in reference to Hester's many good deeds (V, 196). The letter even comes to have the effect of the cross on a nun's bosom (V, 197). Thus, the cowardly Dimmesdale can preach a brilliant Election Sermon and overcome the obstacles to his confession, dying in at least a semblance of glory. Thus



Pearl is both a blessing and a torture to Hester, and must "alloy whatever comfort she might chance to give with a throb of anguish" (V, 253). Thus the Puritan townspeople, whose scaffold stands close to their church, can be so harsh toward Hester, yet come to forgive her, then by their aroused curiosity on Election Day make the letter hurt worse than ever. And Hawthorne can muse that Dimmesdale and Chillingworth may have come to love each other in the spiritual world, because "it is a curious subject of observation and inquiry, whether hatred and love be not the same thing at bottom" (V, 308).

The Scarlet Letter is not as much a negative Puritan manifesto as a complex, ambiguous sort of tragedy. (H.H. Waggoner speaks of Hester as a tragic protagonist who demonstrates "the dignity and potentialities of man, even in her defeat.")<sup>9</sup> Hester is realistically portrayed, a woman motivated throughout by her love for one man and acting as we would expect a woman forcefully ostracized. It seems doubtful that she ever "repents," that is, becomes convinced that her act of passion didn't have a consecration of its own, but with her harsh treatment by the Puritans in mind, can we say she is wrong to continue to hope for the time when "a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness" (V, 311)? If there is justification by works instead of by faith, as Hawthorne seems to imply, then Hester's many acts of goodness should entitle her to God's forgiveness.

Dimmesdale is wrong to conceal his sin and to leave Hester to suffer alone throughout the book, but he does use some moral courage to escape Chillingworth and confess. In spite of his feelings of guilt,

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<sup>9</sup>Hawthorne: A Critical Study, p. 143.

or because of them, he has been an efficient clergyman, which shouldn't be held against him on Judgment Day. Pearl serves to force Hester and Dimmesdale to the scaffold together, but is then relieved of her duty as moral agent, thenceforth to live as another fallible human being (which is not to say that she is innately depraved). Even old Chillingworth, finding his hatred turned to love in the spiritual world, may also find himself living in the heavenly part of this spiritual world. ". . . to all these shadowy beings, so long our near acquaintances, -- as well Roger Chillingworth as his companions, -- we would fain be merciful" (V, 307). Sin is not relative to Hawthorne in The Scarlet Letter, but not absolute either; God is strong, but not unkind. Perhaps Hawthorne is at best only doubtfully a Puritan in The Scarlet Letter.<sup>10</sup>

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I am aware that few critics except Walcutt's romantics end The Scarlet Letter as positively as I do. Walcutt's own reading in "The Scarlet Letter and its Modern Critics" is orthodox: Hawthorne may write with a sympathy for his erring characters, but he firmly believes sin to be permanently warping. There are those critics, however, definitely not romantics, who read the ending of The Scarlet Letter positively by insisting that though Hester may not be redeemed, Dimmesdale most assuredly is. Roy R. Male in Hawthorne's Tragic Vision (Austin, Texas, 1957) is one example of this approach; with his rather elaborate terminology of the Light, the Word, and the Act (p. 102), Male finds that the Election Sermon is a true utterance of the Tongue of Flame, and that Dimmesdale's confession approaches the saintly level of intuitive truth (p. 103). The Word and the Light (or Flame) are united in the Act of Dimmesdale's confession, and he is thus united with Pearl, who signifies truth or grace (p. 115). Darrel Abel, in "Hawthorne's Hester," CE, XIII (1952), 308, also finds Hester barely saved, if at all. But Dimmesdale, according to Abel in "Hawthorne's Dimmesdale," NCF, XI (1956), 81-105, is "spectacularly saved by God's grace," dying "in that state of triumphant holiness to which every wayfaring Christian aspires." This is the positive side of Puritanism: Dimmesdale becomes one of the joyous elect.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

What is Hawthorne's relation to New England Puritanism? Does he believe in predestination, innate depravity, and saving grace? The general tenor of my discussions of the various works is that Hawthorne was not much of a New England Puritan. He could not give unqualified praise to the early Puritans' democratic spirit; certainly he deplored their intolerant severity, the product of such self-righteousness as that of Richard Digby. He did not share the belief in Original Sin of Goodman Brown or the Reverend Mr. Hooper; in "Fancy's Show Box" he showed that sin, though a powerful negative force in the world, is not terrible beyond belief. In The Scarlet Letter he depicted a tragic world in which men, being sinful but not innately depraved, can be forgiven by God despite the fact that they don't receive some kind of saving grace; this is essentially the world of "troubled joy" of the two lovers in "The Maypole of Merry Mount." As for predestination, Chillingworth may tell Hester it is all inevitable, but he does admit that Hester took a "first step awry" (V, 310). And H.H. Waggoner concludes cautiously:

Though Hawthorne often wavered between his feeling of fate and tentative belief in freedom, he wrote not a single story which must be interpreted as clearly predestinarian in its point of view.<sup>1</sup>

I have moved, then, toward the conclusions of F.O. Matthiessen rather than toward the conclusions of Austin Warren. Hawthorne is less Puritan than tragic.

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<sup>1</sup>

Hawthorne: A Critical Study, p. 214.

Austin Warren's voice remains strong; Darrel Abel in "Hawthorne's Dimmesdale" insists that Hawthorne meant that he was a Puritan. Harry Levin's book, The Power of Blackness, draws its title from Melville's famous comment on Hawthorne's "Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin."<sup>2</sup> H.W. Schneider in The Puritan Mind states that Hawthorne "translated into empirical truths the essential doctrines of Calvinism."<sup>3</sup> And we easily recall "John Inglefield's Thanksgiving," the pro-Puritan "The Celestial Railroad," and the orthodox ending of *The Marble Faun*. In spite of these works and these opinions, can we not argue that Hawthorne was ambiguous and complex because he was describing a complex, ambiguous, tragic world in which there are infinite shadings between the white of the saved and the black of the damned?

Puritanism was a fact inextricably bound up in history for Hawthorne; it supplied him not only with themes but also with a clearly articulated style of life. As artist he asked to what degree Puritanism let people be "human." His answer was that the stern laws of Puritanism unsuccessfully tried to deny that people were "human." Thus the Puritans' God-favored colony went the way of all Utopias, for men are not saints no matter how hard they try to be. Hawthorne could sympathize with Puritanism at the same time that he rejected it because the Puritans were human beings even though they pretended

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<sup>2</sup>  
"Hawthorne and His Mosses," Literary World, VII (August 17 and 24, 1850), p. 126.

<sup>3</sup>  
(New York, 1930), p. 256.



not to be. As human beings they were ambiguous mixtures of good and evil, and such ambiguity is the raw material of great art.

## APPENDIX

Quite a few critics minimize Hawthorne's Puritanism. For instance, Henry James repeatedly urges an aesthetic rather than a Puritan interpretation. According to James, Hawthorne's writing has a "purity and spontaneity and naturalness of fancy," which gives the sense of sin in Hawthorne's mind an "almost exclusively imported character." For Hawthorne transmuted the heavy moral burden of his Puritan heritage "into the very substance of the imagination," and made it "evaporate in the light and charming fumes of artistic production":

The old Puritan moral sense, the consciousness of sin and hell, of the fearful nature of our responsibilities and the savage character of our Taskmaster -- these things had been lodged in the mind of a man of Fancy, whose fancy had straightway begun to take liberties and play tricks with them -- to judge them (Heaven forgive him!) from the poetic and aesthetic point of view, the point of view of entertainment and irony.

Hawthorne's theme was man's conscience, but "he saw it in the light of a creative fancy . . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Henry G. Fairbanks in "Sin, Free Will and 'Pessimism' in Hawthorne" disagrees with James, but also with such critics as Austin Warren who go to the other extreme and exaggerate Hawthorne's obsession with sin into an acceptance of universal depravity. To Fairbanks, Hawthorne did not believe in universal depravity, but in free will; he was not pessimistic, but hopeful and tender. Thus he located sin in man's will rather than in his nature, so that although men might have a strong inclination to evil they were always free to make an "initial moral choice" of good or evil. Sin is essentially negative, but it is deprivation rather than depravity, and it is not ineradicable.

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<sup>1</sup> Hawthorne, pp. 56-60, 177.



And Hawthorne, like Christ, would forgive men: "he had no condonement for the sin, but boundless love for the sinner." It is just that there is among critics a "common tendency to exaggerate the factor of sin and darkness in Hawthorne."<sup>2</sup>

Reverend Leonard J. Fick may well have been the source of some of Fairbanks' ideas. According to Fick, Hawthorne insisted upon the mercy of Almighty God, "an attribute which New England Calvinism had buried beneath the weight of his awful and arbitrary sovereignty." Hawthorne's use of the concept of fate does not lessen his belief in God's favorable Providence; for Hawthorne did not mean to preclude "the free operation of the will both of God and of man." Hawthorne holds "that the will of man is the cause of sin"; and though in speaking of man's tendency to evil he alludes to the consequences of Original Sin, "whether he specifically attributes such consequences . . . to an inherited sin must remain uncertain." Hawthorne is ultimately hopeful: beneath man's outer shell of natural bliss there is gloom and darkness and frustration, but at the very center of life there is a core of "eternal beauty," where God's Providence operates.<sup>3</sup> (Cf. The American Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart, p. 98).

Jane Lundblad finds Hawthorne more a sceptic and a Romantic than a Puritan. He inherited from his forefathers a sensitive conscience; his great theme is sin. But "Hawthorne has too often been termed a Puritan. Puritanism is, in itself, hostile to art, and no conscious artist can be a conscious Puritan." Austin Warren is wrong

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"Sin, Free Will and 'Pessimism' in Hawthorne," 976-984, 988.

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The Light Beyond, pp. 16-21, 99, 174.

to say that Hawthorne's works are not romantic in any of the most current senses, for "there is much in Hawthorne that belongs to Romanticism, though he may not be included in any group." Hawthorne read Voltaire and Montaigne, and "worked, consciously or unconsciously, under the impression of the Gothic school, and of the two French authors, Mme. de Staël and Balzac." After devoting separate chapters to these last three influences, Miss Lundblad concludes:

The roots of Nathaniel Hawthorne's philosophy and work are of a less exclusively American character than most critics have asserted. Strong links of cultural and literary tradition, not only of a classical but also of a contemporary character, connect him with the general international development of literary Romanticism.<sup>4</sup>

Lawrence S. Hall finds Hawthorne the "product and spokesman of democratic society," a creator of tragedy "of a genuinely classical type" because he showed the maladjustment of the individual to society. "A social sense is -- and had to be -- a fundamental ingredient of Hawthorne's art." Sin in Hawthorne, according to Hall, is the culmination of the individual's maladjustment to society, and it is expiated by the individual coming to terms with society -- democratic society. In The House of the Seven Gables there is the social sinfulness of aristocracy; in The Scarlet Letter all the characters are painfully "segregated from the common life." Dimmesdale is not terrified by the consciousness of sin and guilt so much as by a sense of the growing rift between himself and society. Hall concludes that Hawthorne drew together Puritan America and Democratic America: in his preoccupation with guilt and evil he was "as much a Puritan as any Calvinistic divine," but "in his diagnoses and therapeutics he was a thoroughgoing democrat!"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne and European Literary Tradition (Upsala, 1947), pp. 69-80, 190.

<sup>5</sup>Hawthorne, Critic of Society (New Haven, 1944), pp. vii-x, 160-171, 182.



W. Stacey Johnson seems to echo Hall in finding sin the isolating tendency in man's nature and salvation the principle of brotherhood and personal communion. The picture of Hawthorne as a Puritan is "distorted," according to Johnson, and the themes of sin and evil in Hawthorne are "over-emphasized". For the experienced world is dual, both good and evil, and the human soul is not the depraved thing of Puritan theology. Sin isolates man from his fellows, but man can choose "a means of changing and partly escaping the nature of self. The means is love: sympathy, the communion of man with man." Dimmesdale and Hester are isolated, but when Dimmesdale shows his love for Hester and Pearl before society he is saved, and "Hester's spiritual redemption moves toward complete salvation." It is Johnson's conclusion that Hawthorne's "treatment of salvation should make it evident that he could not be a Puritan." Critics should not obscure his "theme of love, manifested socially in the author's ardent espousal of democracy as the political realization of brotherhood, and symbolized artistically in the theme of marriage."<sup>6</sup>

Hyatt H. Waggoner emphasizes Hawthorne's "classic Christianity" rather than his Puritanism. According to Waggoner, modern American scholars and biographers are sufficiently remote from the Christian tradition that they label Hawthorne a Puritan out of ignorance. In "Fancy's Show Box," for example, Hawthorne may be concerned with the Faith-Works controversy (when he says that Penitence must kneel at the gate of heaven, and divine mercy forgive,) but this con-

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"Sin and Salvation in Hawthorne," The Hibbert Journal, L (1951), pp. 39-47.



troversy is not so much Puritan as "at the center of Christian orthodoxy." And Hawthorne doesn't take the Puritan view of salvation by faith anyway, but "places himself squarely in the center." "When he seems closest to the Puritans he is also closest to classic Christianity as that is defined by the Creeds and by the agreements among the greatest theologians."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Hawthorne: A Critical Study, pp. 14-15.

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