

THE TRANSFORMATION OF HILDA IN HAWTHORNE'S  
THE MARBLE FAUN

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A Thesis

Presented to  
the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English  
University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Jean Schneider  
August, 1976

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In the early chapters of The Marble Faun, Hilda seems to be far from Nathaniel Hawthorne's ideal of womanhood. She possesses certain characteristics of his beloved wife, Sophia, but she lacks warmth and humor. Her purity of soul does not compensate for her hardness of heart. She never allows that purity to be tried by life, until Hawthorne forces reality upon her and transforms her from a marble maiden into a human woman.

Hilda seems to be a comment of Hawthorne on Transcendentalism and its weakness as a way of life. Like the early Emerson, Hilda saw only the beauty of the world, ignoring the evil and the ugliness. Carrying her search for perfection to the extreme, she had shut herself away from humanity, fearing to stain an originally spotless soul. Pleading humility, she was really proud and selfish, seeking a perfection beyond the capability of man.

Hawthorne admired Hilda's piety, but he realized that she was destroying her humanity. When she observes the weakness of her friend, she is shocked out of her crystal of idealism, becoming more like Sophia, sacrificing some of her spiritual gifts for human ones. Hilda begins as a gifted, pious girl, frightened by life and the human condition into seeking an existence on an earthly plane. For Hawthorne this had frightening implications and he felt compelled to subject Hilda to the witnessing of Miriam's sin, which saved her as it transformed her.

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## I. THE METAMORPHOSIS

On December 22, 1859, Nathaniel Hawthorne addressed a letter to his American publisher, William Ticknor. Therein, he remarked that he should "like" to call his latest novel Saint Hilda's Shrine.<sup>1</sup> If he made this suggestion in a spirit of irony, we shall never know it. (He does not seem to mention it elsewhere.) But the fact that Hilda's name is mentioned at all suggests that to her creator she seemed to be a more important part of The Marble Faun than critics generally admit.

While early reviewers admired Hilda, almost unreservedly, they tended to regard her as static. Charles Gale, writing in the North American Review, in 1860, contrasted her "beautiful and sinless" life with the "dark and guilt-stained career of Miriam."<sup>2</sup> Like most of his contemporaries he apparently saw no weakness in her, nothing to detract from her saintly personality, and therefore no need for any change in her character before the end of the novel.

Hyatt Waggoner has led modern critics in denouncing Hilda as one of Hawthorne's weaker characterizations, for precisely the reason Gale admired her. Claiming that Hawthorne does not "require" young girls to grow in knowledge of the world,<sup>3</sup> he suggests a static quality in Hilda's piety. But for him, as for most modern critics and readers, this makes Hilda unacceptable as a person or characterization.

In the following pages, I shall try to indicate, as others have,

that Hilda is not static and is not ideal, even by Hawthorne's standards. Furthermore, I shall try to show that Hawthorne became aware of her true character as he created her and that she dissatisfied him in three ways. First of all, she was too much of a Transcendentalist. Secondly, she did not fulfill his idea of what a woman should be. Third, she was a great deal like his wife, Sophia, whom he loved devotedly, but who caused him some pain by her near perfection. Because Hilda proved unsatisfactory in these areas and because he still admired her greatly, Hawthorne felt to improve the snow-maiden. He effected a transformation that we will consider in the next pages.

In considering the Hilda of the early chapters, let us first view her in the perspective of allegory. From Martha Tyler Gale, who, in 1861, recognized Hilda as "Conscience" to Miriam's "Soul" and Kenyon's "Reason,"<sup>4</sup> to Charles Fiedelson, who calls her a "purely allegorical creature equipped with white robe, tower, lamp and doves,"<sup>5</sup> there is a tendency to remove Hilda from the realm of the material and set her up as a Medieval guide to spiritual perfection.

It is easy to see Hilda as purely allegorical, for in the sixth chapter she appears to us as study in iconography. She dwells in a tower, far above the streets of Rome. Thus she is spiritually safe from contact with the original sin of mankind. "Only the domes of the churches ascend into this airy region, and hold up their golden crosses on a level with her eye; except . . . (for) the column of Antoninus . . . with St. Paul upon its summit, the sole human form that seems to have kept her company."<sup>6</sup>

Hilda is fair like all of Hawthorne's "good" heroines, and, as a stronger suggestion of her purity, she is robed in white so often that her fellow artists call her "the Dove," recognizing her affinity for the gentle birds that nest in the room next to her own. Like the doves, Hilda "(spreads) her wings, and (seeks) such ethereal and imaginative sustenance as God ordains for creatures of her kind."<sup>7</sup> She leads the life of a dove, surrounded by them and imitating them in dress and manner.

Termed a "sunshine character"<sup>8</sup> and the unquestionable symbol of Heaven by Richard Fogle,<sup>9</sup> Hilda dutifully trims the lamp of the Virgin Mary, in the early chapters. According to tradition, the lamp must not go out or the property on which it rests will revert to the Catholic Church. Hilda seems more concerned with providing a beacon for her friends and more generally and symbolically, for the world. This is the allegorical picture of Hilda in the early chapters. She symbolizes purity, separation from original sin and guidance for less fortunate souls. The allegory has changed, however, by the end of the novel.

In comparing the early Hilda to the later, art must also be considered. Her acquaintance with evil brings about a change in her appreciation and talent. Perhaps this change is easier to recognize than the internal one. In the beginning, she is a superb copyist, but there are already hints that Hawthorne's admiration of her sacrifice of fame for "the better part" or reproducing the Old Masters is tempered by his suspicion of her gift.

She is "no machine" of reproduction, he tells us at one point. Yet

she acts like a medium for the perfect recreation of the great works of art. Sometimes she even reaches beyond the original artist, producing a result that he sought but never attained. The implication seems to be that the souls of the Masters were not quite pure enough to achieve the ideal they were striving for. While copying the Beatrice Cançi portrait, Hilda feels herself guided by the spirit of Guido and produces a copy that changes even as one looks at it and contains every possible nuance of the subject's personality.

Hilda has "perfect" comprehension of the pictures that "interest" her, but the dismal and unpleasant never do. Hawthorne admits that her original works lacked reality, though he attributes this to her youth and her lack of worldly experience. He implies a genuine weakness in her art however when he suggests that the years might bring to her pictures the relief they "need." Mary Dichmann has suggested, in a study of Hawthorne's "Prophetic Pictures," that his attitude was one of ambivalence toward the artist. On the one hand, he sympathizes with the absolute level of one like Hilda, who strives to reach an ideal. But he also sees the necessity of association with other human beings, if the artist is to produce anything genuine.<sup>10</sup> This ambivalence colored many of his stories and his own life as well.

The most important aspects of Hilda's comprehension and creation of pictures seem to be, first of all, her obliviousness to anything unpleasant and her admiration of whatever seems nearly perfect. There is also a medium-like quality that allows her to transmit the most perfect imitation of the greatest artists and, in some cases, to reach beyond



them and into the Divine Mind. Third, she is selective in her reproductions. Not only does she fail to see anything ugly or unpleasant in life, but her perfect comprehension applies only to pictures that interest her and she will only attempt to reproduce that portion of a picture that strikes her as most precious.

Like the allegory she moves in, Hilda's art has changed significantly by the end of the novel. Hawthorne does not try to determine whether the change is for better or worse, but she is not the same character he began with. Drawing was not merely her profession. It was her life and even her religion, for she was a kind of worshiper at the shrines of the Old Masters, giving lip-service to the evils of idolatry, but performing all her sacrifices and receiving most of her guidance from Raphael and Guido.

Another aspect important in Hilda's transformation is her religion. At the beginning of the novel, Hilda's faith seems unshakable. Sacvan Bercovitch has noted that Hawthorne refers to her four times as a "daughter of the Puritans," and suggests that he is hinting, with delicate irony, that the very firmness of her religious foundation is a moral limitation.<sup>11</sup> Certainly Hilda always had a religious answer for every problem, but does her firmness come from conviction or from a studied ignorance of reality? She avoids evil in life as she avoids it on the canvas. "Blessed be providence, which has rescued you out of that miserable darkness!" she exclaims, when Miriam appears safe in the catacombs.<sup>12</sup> Any rescue from the darkness of the world relieves her in the same measure.

Hilda begs Miriam to forget about Beatrice, if the portrait pains her; she cannot bear to suspect Miriam lacks faith and convinces herself that her friend does not mean what she says about the "Archangel." In addition to this cultivated skill in ignoring the unpleasant side of life, Hilda possesses a "great and tremulous faith in marvels" that causes Kenyon to risk her displeasure by poking fun at her.

Her interest in the supernatural and the marvelous seems to be the attraction Catholicism holds for her. Her imagination is intrigued by the cult of the Virgin Mary, whom she wishes to emulate. Though she wonders if her devotion is entirely proper, she manages to convince herself that Mary is merely a mother-figure, replacing Hilda's own lost parent.

Enshrined in her tower, Hilda finds her religion satisfactory. It provides her with answers to most abstract questions and she ignores those areas where it cannot suffice. Her flirtation with Catholicism worries her occasionally, but like other things that disturb her, it can be ignored most of the time. There is one suggestion of the harshness of the Puritanism she professes when she censures Beatrice, but she does this only because Miriam forces her to recall the unpleasant history behind the painting and we assume her judgement would be gentle if she did not have to consider reality. She prefers a mild religion that does not require dependence on any "earthly king."<sup>13</sup> Hawthorne, however, does not leave her with such a faith. He forces her to bring her religion to earth.

Finally, it is in Hilda's relationship to other people that the

greatest change seems to occur, though it is a change many critics deny. In the early chapters, she seems to prefer the company of doves to that of human beings. She maintains a reserve that is supposed to protect her from the real world and from true friendship.

She is limited to "a friend or two" in Rome and Miriam is referred to as her "first" friend, suggesting that Hilda was always more or less alienated from the rest of the world. Her very freedom of movement in Rome suggests a separation from the people on the streets. As in art and religion, she seeks an impossible perfection in mankind and particularly in her friends. She can brook no thought of Miriam's imperfection, when Kenyon suggests it. She cannot conceive of any romantic relationship between Donatello and her friend. Not only does she desire the ideal, she presumes it and her idealism partly explains why serious imperfection is such a shock to her.

Even Hyatt Waggoner admits, rather grudgingly, that Hilda "becomes human enough to marry Kenyon,"<sup>14</sup> and a number of critics have recognized that some change does occur in her. Merle Brown has suggested that the entire structure of The Marble Faun is based on the transformation of all four major characters, citing Hilda's recognition of the need for human contact as her particular change.<sup>15</sup> Bernard Paris calls the maturation and humanization of Hilda a sub-plot of the novel, noting that she retains her point of view at the end, but that her actions are now motivated by sympathy and love.<sup>16</sup> None of these critics seem to see her change as particularly significant. Though they recognize her need for humanization, they do not connect it with Hawthorne's own

idealism. For them, she does not seem to be in danger of perdition or even of withering spiritually. She is regarded as relatively unimportant and the transformation Hawthorne effected in her is considered to be an afterthought. I suggest that these critics do not reach far enough into the creative process of the novelist, in dealing with Hilda's transformation, nor far enough into his heart.

The critics who do accept the transformation of Hilda seem to be in the minority. Roy Male probably speaks for many readers when he argues, in Hawthorne's Tragic Vision, that Hawthorne "intended" Hilda to be "delicately transformed into a woman," after her confession, but that he failed in his attempt and that "Hilda's purity is never more apparent and never more repulsive than it is in the final scene with Kenyon."<sup>17</sup> At the end of this chapter, I will try to suggest why Hilda, though not the warm and passionate woman we would like to see emerging from the cocoon, is far warmer than she was at the beginning of the novel. The very fact that she does not enjoy a complete change of personality indicates the realistic approach of the author. The snow-maiden of the early chapters would be unlikely to become a Hester Prynne, no matter what she experienced.

✧ In considering Hilda's actual transformation, her relationship to Miriam is extremely important. She responded to the dark-haired maiden's overtures with "the fervency of a girl's first friendship."<sup>18</sup> This suggests that she was quite isolated in her little sphere and that only because of the "strong, yearning grasp" Miriam's affection laid on her, did she actually begin to return some of the love she received.

Throughout the early chapters, Hilda's affection for Miriam is very obvious. She truly appreciates the dark woman's friendship. Miriam is a year or two older and more experienced in the ways of Rome. She is a perfect guide for Hilda, helping the New England girl arrange her way of life. It is Miriam to whom Hilda turns for counsel whenever she feels discomforted by her devotion to the Virgin. More strikingly, she turns to Miriam even when Miriam has been the cause of her anguish. She begs, "Miriam, you were my dearest, only friend. Advise me what to do."<sup>19</sup> Hawthorne notes the irony of her request and suggests that it is proof that the bond between the two women is too strong to be severed completely, either by Miriam's crime or Hilda's harshness. It seems to me that we may further conclude that Miriam was more than an ordinary friend to Hilda. By her seniority, her passionate affection for Hilda, and her wisdom and experience, she appears to have partially fulfilled the need Hilda felt for the mother she had lost. When Miriam disappoints her, Hilda's first cry is for her mother, whom she seems to have lost a second time.

The unusual quality of this friendship causes Hilda to idealize Miriam still further, denying any possible weakness in her. Twice during "A Stroll on the Pincian," Kenyon manages to incur the gentle maiden's anger by suggesting something about Miriam that Hilda cannot accept. First he wonders aloud if there is any change of a romantic attachment developing between Miriam and Donatello. Hilda, who has gently scolded Miriam in the past for not being kinder to the Italian, exclaims, "Miriam! she so accomplished and gifted! and he a rude,

uncultivated boy! No, no, no!"<sup>20</sup> When Kenyon dares to pursue his speculation, she draws away from him and he is properly chastened. A few moments later however, he foolishly asks Hilda if she is "sure" of her friend. Again, Hilda is angry. This time, "with an angry blush, for her friend's sake," she exclaims, "I am sure that she is kind, good, and generous; a true and faithful friend, whom I love dearly, and who loves me as well! What more than this need I be sure of?"<sup>21</sup> A relationship as precious as theirs must be protected from reality. The psychological trauma of being confronted with proof of Miriam's guilt is greater than most critics seem willing to admit. Miriam is not merely Hilda's "best friend." She is virtually Hilda's only friend and a mother substitute besides. Hilda has built around Miriam an aura of perfection that no mortal could live up to and when that aura is broken, the girl's world is shattered.

Lawrence Hall mentions, in Hawthorne: Critic of Society, the significance of the fact that Pearl, in The Scarlet Letter, wanted a grief to humanize her.<sup>22</sup> The tears she sheds over her father's anguish on the scaffold are "a pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it."<sup>23</sup> Like Pearl, Hilda is unreal in the early chapters of the novel. Her perfection makes her inhuman and she requires some deep sorrow to make her one with humanity. Her awareness of evil seems to take four steps before she is overcome with confusion and inadequacy. First comes her recognition of evil in Miriam, followed by her ability to imagine it in herself. Third, she loses the rose-colored view of the world. It can

never again be quite perfect for her. Finally, she attempts to separate herself even further from mankind.

In the chapter, "Miriam and Hilda," Hawthorne suggests Miriam as a messenger from Providence, commissioned to teach Hilda of the evil in the world. He dwells upon the importance of her being a trusted friend, one "reverenced too highly." From her grief at realizing the guilt of Miriam, Hilda turns back to their discussion of Beatrice Cenci and she is horrified to note a similarity between her copy of the portrait and her own face in the mirror. "Am I, too, stained with guilt?" she wonders. But the thought seems to arise more from her awareness of her friend's crime than from the picture. Though Hawthorne attributes the look on Hilda's face to her acquaintance with Miriam's sin, the seed has been planted in her mind that she is capable of sin. The freshness of this idea seems to be what leads to her final estrangement from Miriam.

In the final words of this chapter, Hawthorne tells us that Eden has been destroyed again, this time for Hilda, and that every sin brings about evil to the innocent as Adam's brought suffering on his children. Hilda's reaction to the discovery of the serpent in her garden is an even further retreat from humanity. She turns first to the statue of the Virgin and Hawthorne hints that she prays to her. Then she haunts the picture galleries, hoping to find some comfort there. She has cast out Miriam and rejected her advice to consult with Kenyon. Her alienation from mankind is total.

Melvin Askew has commented that this failure to accept the "facts

of the fallen world" causes certain of Hawthorne's characters, like "Young Goodman Brown," to live disoriented in a "temporal, human hell."<sup>24</sup> Certainly, this describes the existence of Hilda in the chapters immediately following her witnessing of the murder. For Spencer Hall, her isolation from mankind is as necessary a part of her experience of sin and sorrow as her later acceptance of humanity.<sup>25</sup> Charles Smith also points out that, while a later effect of the murder is her gradual recognition of original sin, the more immediate one is her withdrawal.<sup>26</sup> Hawthorne employs enough realism in his characterization to prevent Hilda from an immediate appreciation of her relationship to the world.

Hilda's religious heritage has always provided her with the answers. Her own reserve has protected her from considering human problems. Having dropped some of that reserve with Miriam, she can no longer remain unaffected by grief and sin. Confusion, a sense of her own inadequacy, and the uselessness of blind trust in Calvinism overcome her. This time she cannot pray away her agony. She wishes for a mother, a friend, a sympathetic listener. For the first time, God is not enough.

Her first impulse is to consult Miriam, but she becomes confused, realizing that her desire is illogical and finding fault with the advice she does receive. Confronted with Miriam's forgiveness, she becomes more aware of her own guilt and heartlessness in casting her friend away. Yet, it is quite reasonable to assume the impossibility of her returning to the old relationship. She cannot forgive Miriam for having spoiled her Eden and she cannot forgive herself for being unable to accept the loss of innocence and forgive the despoiler. She would not



have enough insight to recognize the sins of presumption and intellectual pride that Marden Clark discusses in "The Wages of Sin in Hawthorne," but Hawthorne would have seen them. Though Clark does not attribute these sins to Hilda, he notes that she lacks something, despite an apparent perfection. He seems to suspect her of being potentially guilty of them.<sup>27</sup>

A final step in Hilda's confusion comes during her experience in the convent. She comes out of the nunnery, torn between a wish to spend her life in the company of such pious maidens and a realization that it would be an unsatisfactory life for her. She attributes her unwillingness to become a member of the community to "one or two disturbing recollections" and to her heritage from the Puritans, but we suspect she has finally realized how wrong it is to shut oneself away from the world to avoid the confusion and the sense of inadequacy that human relationships sometimes bring.

An experience as important as her observation of the murder is Hilda's confession to the Catholic priest. Henry Fairbanks has discussed Hawthorne's interest in the sacrament and suggests that the novelist saw confession as more than a psychological release from guilt. For him it was also an admission of the need for acceptance of responsibility of evil.<sup>28</sup> This would apply to Hilda, who avoided evil so righteously and finally became so involved in it. By the very act of confessing, even a crime she did not commit, she implies her own guilt. Carl Van Doren has also noted that somewhere in the course of the action Hilda actually acquires the responsibility of the sin of Donatello

and Miriam.<sup>29</sup> It would seem that she does fall by a genuine personal sin, not merely by her act of witnessing.

Aside from representing Hilda as guilty of some real sin, Hawthorne's use of confession shows her realization of the need for human contact in dealing with life. Leonard Fick, though he argues Hilda's estrangement from society is no fault of her own, recognizes Hawthorne's suggestion that the priest, as forgiver, represents society rather than God.<sup>30</sup> Hilda, an upright pillar of Protestantism, would not need a mediator to receive God's forgiveness, no matter what she had done. She has direct contact with Him and is confident of His forgiveness. Her estrangement from mankind is not so easily overcome. It requires someone from the human race to hear her confession, before she can finally accept the world as it is and her own share of the responsibility for evil. The humanization Donald Ringe attributes directly to the witnessing of Miriam's crime<sup>31</sup> is achieved only when Hilda becomes capable of dealing with this psychic shock.

Roy Male regards Hilda as essentially unchanged when she emerges from the confessional and Waggoner considers her becoming "human enough to marry Kenyon" a small transformation. Leslie Fiedler concurs, claiming that Hawthorne marries Kenyon off to "a good woman, as pallidly Anglo-Saxon, as improbable in the marriage bed as himself."<sup>32</sup>

Hilda has changed in the last chapters of The Marble Faun. First of all, the allegory around her is different. The tower, the lamp, the doves, and the white gown are all mentioned at the end of the novel. It is significant that she retains only the last mentioned. When Kenyon

beholds her at the casement window, she is clad in a white domino, the masquerade costume that does not mask her identity. Her purity remains, even though she has become capable of accepting the impurity of the world. Waggoner is correct in claiming that Hawthorne did not demand the same worldly knowledge of woman that a more modern writer would. He admired the purity of good young women and feared too much "experience" in them. The fact that he does not change the white gown to one of a more brilliant or more somber color indicates that, for him, Hilda's innocence was unchanged by her acknowledgement of the fact of evil.

The other symbols do change. Hilda comes down from the tower. The chapter called "Hilda's Tower" does not dwell on the title at all. It is no longer the "Virgin's Shrine." Hawthorne uses these pages to discuss his own ambivalence toward Rome and the Church of Rome. Like him, Hilda has been drawn to the city and her tower has faded into the background. It has ceased to be a refuge. She now seeks consolation from the picture galleries, the churches, and finally from the people. The passage where Hawthorne describes her actual descent and transformation from trimmer of the Virgin's lamp to "household saint," seems rather trite, perhaps,<sup>33</sup> and is less striking than the simple absence of the tower as a symbol in the last chapters. Hilda is seen there only when Miriam appears to her. Then, excepting her brief return to kindle the lamp and feed the doves before marrying Kenyon, she spends most of her time in the streets of Rome, realizing that the isolation of the tower has not protected her from the pain of original sin.

At first the doves give her some degree of comfort. At the beginning of the novel, Hilda was practically one of them, and as innocent and inhuman. In the first stages of her anguish, they often fly in through the tower windows, "bringing her what sympathy they (can)." It is not enough, however, and she is not really one of them. Sometimes Hilda moans with the doves, but she finds only a "temporary relief" in imitating them. Only a "little portion" of her sorrow can be conveyed to these innocent friends. She is gradually learning that she is as human as the rest of Adam's children.<sup>34</sup>

Later, when she can no longer feed her flock, all but one (Hope or Despair, wonders Kenyon) desert the tower after a few days. Hilda is their mistress in this passage, not the sister Miriam called her earlier.<sup>35</sup> She has gained insight enough to accept her human condition, as she gained a sense of superiority over the doves. She no longer seeks her sustenance as they do. Her purity has been retained, but she has been elevated to humanity.

Finally, there is the symbol of the Virgin's lamp. Through no fault of her own, Hilda is forced to neglect its trimming. Though Sacvan Bercovitch cites her devotion to this duty as an indication that Hawthorne meant Hilda to play the "wise virgin" to Miriam's foolish one, there is no indication in the article that the extinguishing of the flame has any particular significance.<sup>36</sup> For Kenyon, it is an evil omen. Realizing that only some very untoward circumstance could make Hilda neglect this self-imposed duty, he fears for her safety.

The fact that the lamp is later rekindled suggests, as Richard

Fogle claims, that Hilda was tempted by and received the advantage of confession, but remained faithful to "the 'white light' of a simple and more purely supernatural communion."<sup>37</sup> The fact that the Virgin's lamp is a Catholic shrine presents no problem. Hilda tends it with a religion born out of her faith in the mysterious, her devotion to the abstract mother, and her housewifely nature. The lamp does go out and Hilda's spiritual life is never quite the same. The lamp is rekindled and burns "as brightly as if it had never been extinguished."<sup>38</sup> Hilda's soul is as bright as ever, appearing all the more so from its experience with darkness.

As for her art, Hilda was probably never "so perfect a copyist thenceforth." The talent which Hawthorne refused to call mechanical, but which certainly smacked of the medium-like was gone. When Hilda returns to her work, her insight is as profound, but she has acquired that truth in observation and touch that Hawthorne suggested she needed, in an earlier chapter. Aware of evil, she is no longer so "pliable to the influence of other minds."<sup>39</sup> She realizes that the Old Masters were as imperfect as Miriam. She retains a great deal of love and veneration for Fra Angleico and Guido and other painters that Hawthorne, himself, believed to be divinely inspired. But she has become more realistic in her expectations. She no longer anticipates an Eden on earth, nor angels to inhabit it. Her love for the beautiful and the ideal has not diminished, but she does not need to deny everything unpleasant or shadowy in life to appreciate what is lovely.

Gary Scrimgeour has wondered just "how admirable is (Hilda's)

total dedication to looking at pictures?" He points out that, for Hawthorne, artistic taste like Hilda's was artificial and removed from natural simplicity and cites passages from the Italian Notebooks to substantiate his claim.<sup>40</sup> Further on, in the same article, he argues that Hilda's slavery to the Old Masters had to be replaced by a "more critical, safer attitude," or she might be destroyed.<sup>41</sup> Hawthorne may have suffered some regrets at the loss of her unusual talent, but he seemed more satisfied with a woman who could recognize truth both in life and in art, then he had been with Saint Hilda, the divine copyist.

Kenyon is panic-stricken when he sees Hilda leaving the confessional. Her actual explanation and description of the change in her religious attitude does not leave him much more optimistic about her spiritual state. "I do not know quite what I am," she remarks frankly. Puritanism does not offer her the same security it did earlier. She has come to accept the good Catholicism may have to offer and, while Kenyon takes the speculation that "if its ministers were but a little more than human, above all error, pure from all iniquity, what a religion it would be,"<sup>42</sup> as sarcasm, that does not seem to be the case. It seems more likely that her sarcasm (and Hawthorne's) is directed toward her former self and toward all those who demand perfection in religion which, though divinely inspired, is built by man.

It is Kenyon now, who looks for security in religion and denies the "Catholic propensities" in Hilda, hoping to make them disappear by denying them or by driving them away with ridicule. Hilda seems more

gentle in her rebukes now. She does not fear being attracted to the religion of Rome, for she has learned to recognize its place in the universe. When she says, "I revere this glorious church for itself and its purposes; and love it, moreover because here I have found sweet peace, after a great anguish,"<sup>43</sup> she refers to the Catholic Church as well as to St. Peter's. She has developed an ecumenical attitude that allows a place for the church of Rome, as well as for that of New England. She no longer believes that there is a simple answer to the quest for faith and truth. Although she shrinks with horror from Kenyon's suggestion about a fortunate fall, she responds to his plea for guidance with a tearful, "We are both lonely; both far from home! I am a poor weak girl, and have no such wisdom as you fancy in me."<sup>44</sup> Despite a very natural refusal to jettison all her previous faith in morality and human goodness, she has become aware of her own inadequacy as an oracle and does not presume to guide anyone else along straight paths.

Beyond a broader outlook in religion, there are two other changes in this area. First of all, Hilda is more genuinely optimistic. Where she saw only punishment and suffering for Beatrice Cenci, she sees "sunlight on the mountaintops" for Miriam and Donatello. Before her change, she could not conceive of evil, except in the abstract. It was easy for her to assume eternal punishment for sin, probably of the horrendous type described by Cotton Mather to her ancestors. By the end of the novel, she realizes that there is always hope, even for the worst sinner. Having sin removed from the abstract has forced her to

accept the grey areas of the spiritual. While the passage about her hopeful soul may seem trite, it must be remembered that this new hope is based on reality, rather than on imagination.

Secondly, Hilda has acquired a sense of humor. Perhaps this is not really a part of her religion, but with the reputation Puritanism has for severity of mien, she may have felt obligated to forego the pleasure of laughter, while playing the role of "daughter of the Puritans." (And it is a role, as I shall try to indicate in the next chapter.) Kenyon observes a "glow of happiness" when she emerges from the confessional, but later, when he sees her on the balcony, he actually recognizes a "gleam of delicate mirthfulness in her eyes, which he had seen there only two or three times in the course of their acquaintance, but though the most bewitching and fairy-like of all Hilda's expressions."<sup>45</sup> Hawthorne notes that this "soft, mirthful smile caused her to melt, as it were, into the wild frolic of the carnival, and become not so strange and alien to the scene." The scene is life and humor has softened Hilda to be a part of it.

An entire chapter is devoted to Hilda's reassessment of her interpersonal relationships, specifically the one with Miriam. She has second thoughts about her arbitrary dismissal of her friend, both before and after her confession. Although Terence Martin claims that her severity is necessary for her own protection,<sup>46</sup> and Bercovitch says that neither Hawthorne, Hilda, nor the Puritans would "presume to forgive,"<sup>47</sup> there seems to be ample evidence in the chapter, "Reminiscences of Miriam," that Hilda does reconsider her initial feelings and action and



that, while she does not presume to forgive the crime (leaving that to God), she does finally forgive her friend for betraying her trust in the goodness of those she loves, just as she hopes to be forgiven for her selfishness and cruelty.

The early Hilda avoided close relationships with people. Now, she becomes a part of the carnival. She has enjoyed, to some degree, the communal life of the convent. She and Kenyon return to America and "the reality of life," where they will be among close friends and relatives. Though she argues bitterly with Kenyon about the black and white aspects of sin, her conscience demands that she forgive Miriam and atone for her own selfishness by recalling and carrying out the errand at the Palazzo Cenci. Hawthorne claims, as author, that he does not suspect Hilda of selfishness, but that is hard to believe, when he makes her feel so very guilty. Only his position as a neutral storyteller requires him to ignore his best judgement. In another chapter, I shall try to show that it would have been virtually impossible for him to approve Hilda's self-protection from evil and her selfish attitude toward Miriam's guilt. Donald Ringe has suggested that Hilda's acceptance of Miriam is symbolized by her acceptance of the bracelet as a wedding gift, despite its questionable history.<sup>48</sup> It may be that with her acceptance of Miriam comes acceptance of the human race.

Finally, Hilda assumes her rightful place as wife and, presumably, mother. In the early chapters, she shrinks from romance and human love for Kenyon. During her transformation, she wishes Kenyon were near, but still wonders at the wisdom of letting herself down enough to love him.

At the end of the novel, she has become human enough to realize that no woman belongs in a nunnery and she seeks the fire-side of Kenyon as her proper sphere. Just as she accepts her mission as a human being, in carrying out Miriam's errand, so she accepts her position as a woman by marrying Kenyon and following Melvin Askew's "psychological pattern of love, acceptance, responsibility, maturity, and life."<sup>49</sup>

## II. HILDA AND TRANSCENDENTALISM

For an appreciation of the ambivalence that Hawthorne felt toward Hilda, especially as she represented Transcendentalism, one must turn to the novelist's own religious background and philosophy. Born into a fashionably Congregational family, he had absorbed enough of his Puritan heritage to influence him considerably and was, in his adult life, tempted by both Transcendentalism and Roman Catholicism. I will try to show more clearly that Hilda is basically a Transcendental figure, influenced by the churches of Calvin and Rome, as well. Hawthorne lowers her from the cloudy world of Emerson to the earthly one of the sculptor. He seems to admit his dissatisfaction with the Transcendental movement and the ethereal world where his wife appeared to live.

Hilda passes through the influences of Puritanism and Catholicism and emerges, as Hawthorne did, with a more realistic view of the world, an acceptance of its imperfection, and some degree of openness to new ideas. She cannot accept the doctrine of the fortunate fall, but neither does she claim to have complete revelation herself and she does not entirely reject any religion even the Roman one that seems to threaten Kenyon.

Hawthorne does not reject Hilda or Transcendentalism either. There are many critics who suggest that for him Hilda represented Heaven, purity, and any number of precious concepts, not the least of which was his own

wife. Much as he admired her, however, and much as he admired the philosophy she espoused, he seemed to have distinct reservations about both the woman and the religious movement. He may even have felt that Sophia could have been improved by opening her mind to thoughts that were not Transcendental.

Four religious philosophies seems to have influenced Hawthorne. Although he was brought up in the established Congregational faith, Calvinism is the strongest thread in his literature. Vernon Loggins, in The Hawthornes, deals extensively with the ancestry of the novelist and devotes several pages to the harsh justice of the Puritans, who attempted to preserve the "true faith" in God's state of Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup>

That Hawthorne was fascinated, perhaps morbidly so, with his Puritan background is evident from his numerous short stories dealing with that period in history and the fact that the two novels generally regarded as his best are based on the world of the Puritans.<sup>2</sup> Waggoner speaks for a number of critics when he insists that Hawthorne was better at portraying guilt, isolation, and darkness than otherwise,<sup>3</sup> and this feeling frequently leads to the suspicion that Hawthorne was a kind of latter-day Calvinist himself.

The basic doctrines of Calvinism, according to Henry Fairbanks, are predestination, limited atonement, irresistible grace, final perseverance, and total depravity. Such a religion, he goes on to point out, could create monsters or saints, but not men.<sup>4</sup> It would, however, have the advantage of not requiring much thought or action on the part of man. If he was already depraved, he could not be improved

by his own efforts. If grace was irresistible, he did not have to worry. If everything was foreordained, there would be nothing he could do about his fate. Hawthorne was somewhat insecure and timid about his own efforts and abilities,<sup>5</sup> and, in his early years, he would probably have welcomed a philosophy that demanded little effort or thought.

Calvinism held a further fascination. An admitted "romancer," Hawthorne must have been intrigued by the wealth of story in such a dark religion. Witches and devils could be tacitly introduced into tales featuring Puritans. Heaven and Hell could be described in rich detail, when the characters believed in the literal existence of both. Hawthorne always suggested the possibility of dreams in describing supernatural occurrences, but, when the setting anticipates the literal attack of Satanic forces and the counter-assault of an angry God, these strange events become more acceptable to the reader.

Along with the security and romance offered by Calvinism was Hawthorne's own heritage. As surely a "son of the Puritans" as Hilda was a daughter, he seems to have possessed some degree of guilt for the conduct of his ancestor, Judge Hawthorne, in the witchcraft trials. Maule's curse was really placed upon one of the novelist's ancestors and, in The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne seems to do a kind of penance by confession, while taking advantage of the history that provided him with so much material for his stories. The structured nature, the supernatural implications of Calvinism, and Hawthorne's own feeling that it was his heritage pressed the religion against his mind and soul.

By the time Nathaniel was born into the Hawthorne family, Calvinism

had been modified to Congregationalism. His mother, Elizabeth Manning, had worshiped at the liberal East Church of Salem and had heard the doctrine of Unitarianism preached by the radical Dr. Bentley. When she married Nathaniel Hawthorne, however, she became a member of her husband's conservative First Church and, according to Loggins, "under the Reverend Mr. Prince's guidance, she was soon to be an old-fashioned Congregationalist, qualified to acquaint her children with the doctrines of original sin, total depravity, divine election, and a Providence working wonders."<sup>7</sup> While these doctrines were still taught, it must be realized that the emphasis had begun to shift from the depravity and divine election of man to the marvels of Providence. Furthermore, the Hawthornes could not have been terribly caught up in their religion, as witnessed by the fact that their first child, Elizabeth, was not baptized until her brother was born.<sup>8</sup> Further still, Elizabeth Manning Hawthorne returned to the home of her parents soon after her husband's death, which occurred when Nathaniel was four. The more liberal doctrines of her youth probably came back to her there and whatever spiritual instruction she imparted to her children was likely Unitarian in everything except the matter of the Trinity. The mother led an extremely secluded life, as a widow, and it is improbable that the children received much experience with the institutional church. Nathaniel, in particular, spent a good deal of time at Sebago Lake, in Maine, a vacation that deepened his love for solitude and moved him further away from the stricter tenets of Congregationalism and toward a broader personal religion.

A rather conventional philosophy seems to have evolved for Hawthorne, as he grew older. The Calvinism of his ancestors was pleasantly dark, but some of its basic premises must have been nearly impossible to accept, though according to Agenknecht, he continued to cling to a vaguely traditional Christianity, depending upon Providence, while believing in his own ability to shape his destiny.<sup>9</sup>

Fairbanks has shown, in "Theocracy to Transcendentalism," that even "the mild yoke of Unitarianism" proved oppressive to some of Hawthorne's contemporaries.<sup>10</sup> First of all, it still possessed many of the forms and rituals of the Congregational church. Secondly, it contained a cold rationalism which the contemporary philosophers found unnatural. In response, Transcendentalism grew up, in a kind of parallel to the Romanticism flourishing in Europe. Broader self-determination became the watchword and the spirit life of the individual became more important than any structure of society. Like Romanticism, the American movement attempted to salvage the emotions and imaginations of man from the encroachment of science. The Transcendentalists, however, stressed the search for perfection in the human soul, while the Romantics assumed the natural goodness of man, especially in his most primitive state.

Hawthorne was certainly attracted by the Transcendental movement. He had read Thoreau long before he met Sophia Peabody, who determinedly led her future husband to the brook of Transcendentalism, confident that proximity would induce him to drink.<sup>11</sup> Despite a reluctance to attend the lectures of Emerson, even when Sophia sent him tickets,<sup>12</sup> and a studied avoidance of the philosopher's company, at first,

Hawthorne seems to have found Emerson pleasant company during their years in Concord. The Old Manse was, in fact, something of a center for the Transcendental movement and it does not seem likely that Hawthorne, much as he adored his bride, would have borne the almost constant company of Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Channing and Fuller, if they had not afforded him some measure of intellectual stimulation and emotional comfort. He did, indeed, stand firm when Margaret Fuller suggested the possibility of her sister and brother-in-law vacationing at the Manse. Eden, he informed her, was strictly for Adam and Eve.<sup>13</sup>

The novelist was an admirer of Transcendentalism as believed and practiced by Thoreau. His first impressions of the philosopher are as follows:

He is a keen and delicate observer of nature, --- a genuine observer, --- which, I suspect, is almost as rare a character as even an original poet. And Nature, in return for his love, seems to adopt him as her especial child, and show him secrets which few others are allowed to witness.

Further on, in the same journal notation, he comments on an article by Thoreau in Dial:

Methinks this article gives a very fair image of mind and character, --- so true, so innate, and literal in observation, --- yet giving the spirit as well as the letter of what he sees, even as a lake reflects its wooded banks, showing every leaf, yet giving the wild beauty of the whole scene. There is a basis of good sense and of moral truth throughout the article, which is a reflection of his character.<sup>14</sup>

In Thoreau, Hawthorne saw the best of Transcendentalism and the remarks above suggest that perhaps he would have liked to be as close to nature as the young man he admired. Likewise he admired Hilda's affinity for her doves and envied her immunity to disease, a special gift from Nature.



Another Transcendentalist whom Hawthorne admired was Margaret Fuller. Though there was some ambivalence in his regard for her, Darrel Abel and Mason Wade have shown that any dislike the novelist may have entertained for her was far outweighed by the pleasure he received from her friendship.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, he respected and enjoyed the company of Ellery Channing and Bronson Alcott and was more or less eager to experience the communal life of Brook Farm.<sup>16</sup>

Catholicism held a fascination for Hawthorne long before he visited Rome. As early as 1849, when he was preparing to publish The Scarlet Letter, he toyed with the idea of making Dimmesdale a Catholic priest and allowing him the comfort of confession. Only the difficulty of positioning him in a Puritan environment seems to have dissuaded him.<sup>17</sup> Years later, when he spent several months in Italy, his journal became filled with references to the practice of Catholicism. For the most part, he seems to have approved of it.

Like Transcendentalism, it held the attraction of idealism. Like Calvinism, it implied great security by its claim to divine leadership in the Holy Spirit and the employment of a particular saint, sacrament, or prayer for every occasion. Furthermore, the Church of Rome allowed the imagination considerable scope in the realm of the supernatural. The main reason Hawthorne finally rejected the Catholic church seems to have been Hilda's. He could not accept the wide variation between ideal and practice. The priesthood disturbed him and, much as he was intrigued by the value of confession, he does remark on the irony of offering a prayer immediately before picking a pocket.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps, too,

the realistic side of the novelist could not accept the imaginative collection of saints and miracles for his personal faith so well as he could for his stories.

He rejected Calvinism primarily because it denied man's capability of planning his own destiny and because its harshness grated on Hawthorne's gentle nature. The world was too beautiful and there were too many rosebushes blooming by prison walls for him to accept the avenging God of his forefathers. There might be devils and Hell, but if man allowed himself to become acquainted with them, it was his own fault, not that of some divine Ordainer. W. Stacy Johnson has summarized this attitude in an article in the Hibbert Journal, entitled "Sin and Salvation in Hawthorne."<sup>19</sup>

As for Hawthorne's rejection of Transcendentalism, Sophia's early attempts to interest him in the superior qualities of Emerson, both as a philosopher and a friend, were cleverly dodged for some time. His love for her and a desire to keep peace in his family, however, finally brought him into intimate contact with a number of Transcendentalists and he seems to have enjoyed their friendship throughout his life.

Waggoner, however, in "'Grace' In the Thought of Emerson, Thoreau and Hawthorne," has called 'the contrast between Hawthorne and his two contemporaries "immense."<sup>20</sup> Despite the idealistic and metaphysical assumptions he may have shared with them, Hawthorne considered Transcendentalism essentially "foggy," Waggoner tells us. The emphasis of the movement on interior harmony with nature outside the self disturbed Hawthorne. He had experienced such solitude in his early years that

he looked upon response to others as a necessity for true harmony.

Two areas which apply to The Marble Faun and Hilda are particularly evident in Hawthorne's quarrel with Transcendentalism. First of all, the isolation he believed was required for their "inner harmony" disturbed him. Secondly, the attempt of Transcendentalism to attain spiritual perfection bothered him as being unrealistic and unnatural for man.

Hawthorne's mother committed a kind of New England suttee when her husband died. She retired from the public view even more as she grew older. Though she does not seem to have imposed isolation on her children, they grew up with her example of solitude before them and they must have been influenced by it. Hawthorne's love of loneliness was also enhanced by his long vacations in the Maine wilderness. Added to these experiences was an injury to his foot, suffered while playing ball at the age of nine. The resulting confinement encouraged his appreciation of being by himself. Loggins says, "He was lied to, flattered, pitied and pampered . . . He wished to be left alone."<sup>21</sup> Hawthorne's early solitude probably had a beneficial effect upon his literature, but it was certainly an abnormal childhood. His sister, Ebe, never really overcame the youthful experience of isolation and, when she lived with Nathaniel and Sophia, took her meals alone the way her mother did and rarely encountered either of them, though they shared the same house for several months.<sup>22</sup>

Nathaniel seems to have spent four rather ordinary years at Bowdoin College, finding two of his closest and life-long friends there, Franklin Pierce and Horatio Bridge. When he returned to his mother's house, however, he seems to have fallen under the influence of Ebe, who had

become a confirmed recluse at twenty-five. She saw no visitors, studied and wrote until late and already took her meals in her room.<sup>23</sup> Nathaniel made good use of the quiet and solitude on Herbert Street by embarking on his literary career. He read extensively and published some of his short stories. By the time he was thirty-five, however, loneliness was beginning to wear on him and, unwilling to follow Ebe's example further, he began to move back into society.

James Mathews insists that, for Hawthorne, isolation was the basic sin of mankind and that it precipitated other sins.<sup>24</sup> Once he freed himself of the influence of his mother and sister, whom he admired and adored, he apparently began to appreciate the benefits of communion with his fellow-man, even though such contact might not necessarily be pleasant. Elizabeth Peabody has recorded a conversation with him, concerning the solitary life at Herbert Street:

Elizabeth: Don't you ever see your mother?

Nathaniel: Yes. In our little parlor. She comes and sits down with me and Louisa after tea --- and sometimes Louisa and I drink tea together. My mother and Elizabeth each take their meals in their rooms. My mother has never sat down to table with anybody since my father's death.

Elizabeth: Do you think it is healthy to live so separated?

Nathaniel: Certainly not --- it is no life at all --- it is the misfortune of my life. It has produced a morbid consciousness that paralyzes my powers.<sup>25</sup>

Thus Hawthorne seems to condemn the way of life he shared for many years. Later, when he tried to break out of the habit of solitude, an overwhelming shyness seems to have gripped him. Elizabeth Peabody goes on

to describe an early meeting with her future brother-in-law:

Your father looked almost fierce with his determination to conquer his sensitive shyness, that he always felt was his weakness. He was nicely dressed, which was another device of his to conquer himself (as he afterwards told me).<sup>26</sup>

Hawthorne did not entirely approve of the isolation of religious orders either. While he is kinder to nuns than to monks in his Italian Notebooks, he still seems to regard their sheltered life as unnatural and, therefore, unsatisfactory.<sup>27</sup> As for the solitary hermit, we have some hint of his feelings in Kenyon's response to Donatello's consideration of becoming a monk:

A monk, --- I judge from their sensual physiognomies, which meet me at every turn, --- is inevitably a beast! Their souls, if they have any to begin with, perish out of them, before their sluggish swinish existence is half done. Better a million times, to stand star-gazing on these airy battlements, than to smother your new germ of life in a monkish cell! They serve neither God nor man, and themselves least of all, though their motives be utterly selfish. Avoid the convent, my dear friend, as you would shun the death of the soul!<sup>28</sup>

And the remarks Hawthorne makes about monkish solitude, in the Italian Notebooks, are of like character.<sup>29</sup>

To be fair, it must be recognized that Transcendentalism did not preach isolation. In fact it encouraged the brotherhood of man in theory. It was, however, a brotherhood of congenial man and the doctrine of inner peace and personal contentment virtually demanded a separation from society until one came to terms with himself and nature. Marcus Cunliffe notes that Emerson, himself, recognized an absence of closeness to Thoreau and Hawthorne, in particular. In his journal, he remarks "how pathetically insular and solitary" his acquaintances are.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps

introspection should not breed isolation, but the Transcendental view seems to have been that man's only duty is truth to self. This would seem to be a lifetime search and it would be difficult to include all of society in it.

Thoreau spent years in solitude at Walden, enjoying a loneliness that Hawthorne might have appreciated, but which would have disturbed him, according to A. N. Kaul, because of his contention that loss of a sense of community, obsession with self, exploitive individualism were the particular dangers latent in a so-called democratic society.<sup>31</sup> The nature of his disillusionment can be seen fairly clearly in The Blithedale Romance, and it seems safe to suppose that he was disappointed to find that it failed to fulfill the promise of brotherhood and equality that it had made.

Just as Hawthorne decried the solitude of his mother and sister and just as he disapproved of the isolation of the Transcendentalists within their own movement, so he admired openness in individuals. Lawrence Hall, in his comments about Hawthorne as a "critic of society," notes the author's observation that Lady Byron appears to be an "intolerably irreproachable person," and he asks, in his English Notebooks, if she can possibly be warmhearted, receiving the praise she does from her admirers.<sup>34</sup> The warmth he seems to have demanded in truly ideal people is not present in the early Hilda. Perhaps he did not find a great deal of it in his "irreproachable" wife, who was an admirer of Lady Byron, herself.

Hawthorne admired the "citizen of the world." He describes a

little cabin boy from Lalaga, in one of his letters to Sophia, as one who "takes the whole world for his home, and all mankind for his family."<sup>35</sup> The wistfulness with which he describes the openness of the child suggests his own attempts to become more truly a part of the human scene. A single reference to the value of physical labor tends to confirm this impression:

I do not mean to imply that I am unhappy or discontented; for this is not the case; my life is a burthen, in the same way that it is to every toilsome man, and mine is a healthy weariness, such as needs only a night's sleep to remove it. But from henceforth, forever, I shall be entitled to call the sons of toil my brethren, and shall know how to sympathize with them, seeing that I, likewise, have risen at dawn and borne the fervor of the midday sun, nor turned my heavy footsteps homeward till eventide. Years hence, perhaps, the experience that my heart is acquiring now will flow out in truth and wisdom.<sup>36</sup>

This was possibly a romantic notion of Hawthorne, in his early weeks as Custom House keeper. But, despite his later assertion that labor was a curse, there seems to be a genuine desire, in the above passage, to be a part of humanity, rather than to rise to a higher plane as recommended by the Transcendental movement.

Annette K. Baxter has pointed out that Hawthorne's sensibility of the physical separation in his own life helped him to appreciate the fact that the artist was, in a special way, threatened by "the specter of isolation." For him, she says, total absorption in creativity seems to have meant a loosening of the ties binding him to "the mass of humanity," which he seems to have desired consciously.<sup>37</sup> A number of Hawthorne's novels and short stories deal with the theme of isolation and show that the solitude required by the Transcendental introspection of Hilda was viewed with alarm by the one who created her.

Hilda is very like the "Man of Adamant," in her isolated perfection. Granted that the central character of that story is a madman, who believes that he has discovered the answer to the universe, his rejection of the companionship of his dead love indicates a refusal to come out of himself and results in a hardening of his soul to make him useless to mankind and to himself.

In The Dungeon of the Human Heart, Edwin Bowden discusses The Scarlet Letter in reference to the problem of human isolation. He notes that Dimmesdale, despite his apparent openness to humanity, is really estranged from society, partly because of his secret guilt, but more by his refusal to join Hester in her humiliation. Hester, though she lives apart from the community, is not isolated in spirit, for she does not reject any part of mankind. For Bowden, humility is the key answer to isolation. He sees the theme that no one can live a completely self-contained existence as central to the novel.<sup>38</sup> The Transcendental movement meant to be based on humility. Emerson and Thoreau believed themselves incapable of improving the condition of their neighbors' souls, so they concentrated upon their own. Unfortunately, this emphasis on self-improvement gradually led to some estrangement from the community. A spiritual pride grew out of spiritual humility. The Transcendentalists were not unlike Dimmesdale, who felt himself unworthy of his neighbors and separated himself from them, in an effort to erase the stain from his own soul. Hester, for her penance, devotes herself to the welfare of her fellow-man, an act far more worthy, in Hawthorne's estimation. Dimmesdale is not capable of such a deed, concerned as he is with his



own salvation.

Clifford and Hepzibah Pycheon, in The House of the Seven Gables, are perfect examples of the evil effect of isolation. Though society imposes seclusion on Clifford and encourages Hepzibah in hers, Hawthorne does not seem to entirely forgive either of the characters for allowing it to happen so finally and completely. He sympathizes with the withered maiden sister, but implies that some effort to maintain contact with the rest of humanity would have kept her more fit for the return of her brother and there is the suggestion that Clifford's delicate artistic nature might well have driven him to a different kind of solitude, if he had not been imprisoned. A dark, solitary figure like Hawthorne might sympathize with these characters, but the sad picture he paints of their seclusion, and the effect of it on their old age suggests that he would never have allowed it to take a firm hold on a character like Hilda, whom he loved and planned to make nearly ideal.

Hawthorne's experience with Brook Farm did not entirely please him. In The Blithedale Romance, there is another "man of Adamant" in Hollingsworth. Though he does not seek the confines of a monkish cave, he does plan a kind of seclusion. He attempts to isolate an entire community, as Brook Farm and the Transcendental movement tried to isolate themselves as groups apart from the rest of the world. Apparently Hollingsworth, like the early Hilda, felt that if his subjects were not contaminated by the ordinary sons of Adam, there would be a better chance for their self-realization. Hawthorne may have sympathized with this ideal, but he could not accept its validity. Instead he saw Hollingsworth

as mad for seeking to separate men from the community. For Coverdale it is an unreal world, that of Blithedale. For Hawthorne Brook Farm was also unreal and separated, after his first flush of idealism and hope had worn off. In Blithedale, the cool reception given Priscilla by Zenobia seems to suggest the selectivity of the commune and the exclusivity of Transcendentalism.

Interpretation of "The Minister's Black Veil" is beyond the scope of this paper, but it does deal with isolation and though we do not receive a clue as to the exact significance of the veil, its effect is striking. When the minister separates himself physically, for whatever reason, the outcome is tragic. His is not an isolation of the soul, like Dimmesdale's. It is more like Hester's, perhaps, a physical separation that is not a real one. The veil symbolizes the isolation of every man from his fellows. Even though Hawthorne saw the black veil on every face, he wanted to show the effect of exaggerating the separation and implies awful consequences from a genuine separation of the soul from its fellows, a separation far more terrible than that of the kindly minister behind his frightening mask. The grotesque quality of isolation pervades the tale. In a sense, it suggests a good deal of Hawthorne's ambivalence toward isolation. He believed the impossibility of avoiding isolation altogether, but he dreaded the consequences of a seclusion sought by the individual and exaggerated.

Again, to be fair to the Transcendentalists, it must be admitted that they did not preach the necessity of human perfection. They did, however, imply it. Johnson notes that while man was not, for Hawthorne,

"the fixed and limited animal of T. E. Hulme," neither was he the "bland self-perfecting god of Emerson."<sup>39</sup> The Transcendental movement saw such capabilities in man that he would have to spend a lifetime striving to achieve the degree of perfection that was his, by his divine nature.

Hawthorne, himself, cherished the concept of the ideal. He was never satisfied with his own literary efforts, always dreaming of creating the perfect novel or short story.<sup>40</sup> Of Sophia, he once said, "She was let down from Heaven to show the human soul's possibilities."<sup>41</sup> While this could be a lover's exaggeration, it indicates that Hawthorne considered the possibility of perfecting the human soul. Baxter suggests that he also experienced ambivalence in his attitude toward attainment of the artistic ideal. She claims that while he realized the tragedy involved in the achievement of or the striving for something like perfection, he also believed in the inevitability of the artist's attempt to create something ideal.<sup>42</sup> This might explain something of Hilda's idealistic work and her glimpses of the ultimate in art. It would also explain why Hawthorne could not allow her to go on seeking perfection. He could not bear to have her suffer the pain involved.

Along with an awareness of the unhappiness involved in the search for perfection, Hawthorne saw the futility of the idea. In the Italian Notebooks, Hawthorne records his disappointment in a second view of the Venus de Medici.<sup>43</sup> Like Hilda, he came to realize how ordinary sculpture could appear after some acquaintance with it. Many of the masterpieces he had looked forward to seeing proved a disappointment to him. In

later years, Sophia commented to her mother that Hawthorne was apparently coming to accept the imperfection of the world, after many years of dissatisfaction.<sup>44</sup>

Though his disillusionment with the sublime beauty of art seems to have culminated in the Italian tour, Hawthorne wrote several stories that suggest both the futility and the danger of striving for perfection, earlier in his career. Leo Levy suggests that Hawthorne shrank from the infinite unless he could assimilate it into a framework of familiar ideas. He cites "The Great Carbuncle" and several other stories of "religious zeal and fanaticism" to prove that the novelist believed it impossible to achieve perfection or to experience the Transcendent.<sup>45</sup> Certainly, in "The Great Carbuncle," the author suggests that only those with the humblest aim are allowed to view the divine light and they become aware that any attempt to use it for earthly purposes would be error.

In "The Artist of the Beautiful," Owen Warland aims at the perfect creation and critics have been divided as to whether his aim was of the highest or the most foolish. L. H. Moore sees Hawthorne's attitude toward art as ambiguous. He claims that the novelist is basically distrustful of such high aspirations. He sees the artist as guilty of a number of sins, not the least of which is a "presumptive attempt to rival and even surpass God." Moore's final comment on the achievement of Owen Warland is that he "aims for the sublime and skirts the abyss of destruction."<sup>46</sup> Certainly, the young mother, who sees her child as a more perfect creation than the magical butterfly, is important.

Hawthorne was devoted to his own children, regarding them as small miracles. Even in his bachelor days, he made a number of notations in his journal, describing the precious qualities of children. He was writing for children long before he had any of his own and he would probably have appreciated the rightness, perhaps with some regret, of the child destroying what Owen Warland had no right to make, something more beautiful and more perfect than a child.

"Young Goodman Brown" also suggests Hawthorne's distrust of the search or desire for perfection. Fred Erisman sees the story as "a cautionary remarking on the embryonic stages of Transcendentalism," claiming that it singles out for criticism the qualities of the Romantic, in general, and of the Transcendentalist, in particular.<sup>47</sup> The protagonist, believing himself safe from Temptation, presumably by virtue of some superior grace, comes to see the faults of everyone he has admired, magnified into the blackness of evil. By suggestion the possibility of a dream, Hawthorne gives him the chance to accept the world as he finds it and to appreciate the goodness of Faith. But Young Goodman Brown chooses to demand perfection, or, at least, to be dissatisfied with any hints of imperfection. He suffers and there seems to be no merit in his suffering. His demand for perfection seems to have magnified the flaws of the world.

Marden Clark discusses the sins of "intellectual pride" and "presumption," in "Lady Eleanor's Mantle" and "The Birthmark." In an article entitled "The Wages of Sin in Hawthorne," he also cites The Blithedale Romance as an example of the passion for reform and perfection that leads

to evil, especially when human sympathies are subordinated to the search.<sup>48</sup> It is hard to imagine that Hawthorne, who accepted those he loved with all their imperfections, could have admired the attempt of Aylmer to improve upon God's creation of Georgianna. He might have sympathized with the desire, but he was too conscious of the horrible consequences of such an ideal to give any story with this theme a happy ending or even a hint that such suffering was not in vain.

Aylmer, Goodman Brown, Warland, and Hollingsworth fail to be heroes. The searches of Rappacini, Chillingworth and Ethan Brand for something beyond human capabilities turn them into villains. They set themselves above or at least equal to God and the others named are very near the same error, saved because human love has touched them enough to cause them sorrow. In some way, their suffering lets them atone for their mistakes. The three who go beyond the human, in their attempts, are lost.

In the early chapters of the novel, Hilda is as Transcendental as the youthful Emerson, despite her Puritan heritage. She rises above the grosser aspects of nature in her tower and, by ignoring evil, maintains an artificial purity of spirit. Her first duty is to herself, that is to attain an inner perfection, to maintain the spotlessness of the soul God has given her. In an effort to achieve an ideal inner state, she deliberately isolates herself from the rest of humanity. She avoids the intimacy of genuine friendship much as Emerson did. A fear of becoming emotionally involved, so that she could not devote herself entirely to her perfect canvases, seems to be her primary reason for avoiding the company of others. When she rejects Miriam, when the

friendship threatens her peace of mind, we begin to see her work as copyist as symbolic of her work on her soul. Her devotion is not so much to the perfection of the Old Masters as to the soul of Hilda. Further evidence of this comes when she rejects most of these same artists, as being far from perfect and when she begins to exhibit a more realistic view of those she continues to admire.

Her worship of the beauty in art suggests her worship of the beauty of her own soul, a beauty she tried to capture on her canvas and in her life. Like the Transcendentalists, she felt compelled to prevent her soul from being tarnished by the imperfection of others. Like them, her only method was isolation of the spirit. She could not believe that any other human soul was pure enough to touch spiritually. Moreover, she seems to have felt little responsibility to the souls of others.

As she separated herself from the intimacy of human contact, she also strove to attain perfection, both in her painting, despite her protestations to the contrary, and in her spirit. She tried to repair tiny flaws in her character just as she tried to improve upon Raphael. The thought of a shadow on her soul filled her with horror. She rose above the common people, in her tower, and, since she lacked the company of angels, she sought that of the white, winged creatures she knew. At one point, she suggests her ability to fly out over Rome with the doves. Miriam is more realistic, admitting that she would miss her friend, should she disappear into Heaven, but fearing more the bricks of the Roman street.

Peter Zivkovic has considered the possibility hinted at by William

Dean Howells in 1900, that there is something ugly in Hilda.<sup>49</sup> Zivkovic cites some of Hawthorne's short stories to prove that the author was preoccupied with the "isolated intellect." He then notes the ambivalence of Hawthorne toward the quest for perfection as the reason for the "error" of Hilda.<sup>50</sup> Mark Van Doren had admitted Hilda's "obsessive desire for perfection," adding that it drove her beyond nature, though he still admired her loveliness and felt that Hawthorne saved her from being a prig.<sup>51</sup> Zivkovic insists that this unnatural goodness was a part of Hawthorne's attempt to portray the high possibility of human nature (like Sophia's). He sees, in Hilda, a similarity to the wine of Monte Beni, finding perfection only in seclusion.

He goes on to show, however, that while Hawthorne pictured her as "good incarnate," which would be evil for him, he did not realize what he was doing and never recognized Hilda as a companion figure to some of his other searchers for the ideal. According to Zivkovic, Hawthorne could not have been aware that his precious Hilda was treading as closely to that abyss of destruction as had Owen Warland.<sup>52</sup> But, if this was the case, why did he change her?

It seems difficult to accept Zivkovic's contention that the older Hawthorne grew, the less he liked the truth.<sup>53</sup> It is equally difficult to believe that the creator of such pathetic figures as Goodman Brown and the Man of Adamant would have failed to recognize the dangers inherent in the character of Hilda. He may have planned her to be perfect, but the fact that he changed her suggests that he was not satisfied with her and some of his dissatisfaction seemed to lie in her Transcendental



philosophy.

Mark Van Doren shows that Hawthorne tested every Transcendental theory and found the whole thing confused.<sup>54</sup> Hilda's philosophy is more confused, in the early chapters, than it appears to be. Like Transcendentalism, it includes the theory of the duty of man to perfect himself and its necessary corollary of isolation from the influence of other human beings.

It cannot be denied that Hawthorne held genuine admiration for Hilda's pure soul. As her character gained substance, however, he must have begun to shudder at her separation from mankind, though it might result in an inner beauty rivaling that of the angels. She is not human and she should be. Like the Transcendentalist, she is too concerned with her own soul, her own goodness, her own spiritual development and too little interested in the hardships or joys of her fellowman. Ambivalent as Hawthorne may have been, he could not allow her to develop into a monstrous saint and be devoured by the Giant Transcendentalist. The transformation he effected in her may have been painful for him, as he saw the glow around her diminish, but to suggest that the change was unintentional and that he did not recognize her isolation is to suggest that he had forgotten many of his earlier stories or that he was blind to the possibilities of one of his favorite characters.

In the next chapters it can be seen that Hawthorne felt forced to change Hilda because she was going away from his ideals of womanhood, as well. It also seemed that she represented the character of his wife, whom he loved devotedly and admired as a saint, but whose apparent

perfection and separation from reality must have pained him occasionally. It would seem that he had, in her Transcendental nature, though, enough reason to transform Hilda. She was in danger of swallowing the philosophy whole and of continuing in her unnatural quest for perfection at the expense of her humanity.

Mark Van Doren sets Hawthorne by Melville and Whitman in their terror of solitude against Emerson who preferred it.<sup>55</sup> This may have been somewhat exaggerated, for Hawthorne did have moments of isolation, which he enjoyed and his reaching out to humanity seemed more a duty than a pleasure. Still he seems to have found the forced solitude implied by Transcendentalism even more frightening than the doctrines of Calvinism. He would not have accepted the theory of total depravity, but neither could he believe the possibility of man's perfecting anything, especially his own soul.

In "The Celestial Railroad," Hawthorne replaces the giants of Bunyan with Transcendentalism. His description of the monster should be enough to convince anyone that however much he might admire individual Transcendentalists, he was not satisfied with their philosophy and questioned the actual condition of their souls.

(He) makes it his business to seize upon honest travelers and fatten them for his table with plentiful meals of smoke, mist, moonshine, raw potatoes, and sawdust. He is a German by birth, and is called Giant Transcendentalist; but as to his form, his features; his substance, and his nature generally, it is his chief peculiarity of this huge miscreant that neither he for himself, nor anybody for him, has ever been able to describe them. As we rushed by the cavern's mouth, we caught a hasty glimpse of him, looking somewhat like an ill-proportioned figure, but considerably more like a heap of fog and duskiness. He shouted after us, but in so strange a phraseology that we knew not what he meant, nor whether to be encouraged or affrighted.<sup>56</sup>

It is well to remember that this tale was published a year after Hawthorne's marriage to Sophia and some five years after she had begun acquainting him with the charms of Transcendentalism.

Whether the story was an attempt to show his wife or her friends what Hawthorne really thought of the movement or merely a philosophical comment is unimportant. He did not approve of their philosophy and he did not approve of Hilda while she symbolized it. She comes down to earth. She will never be as human as Miriam, Hester or Zenobia, nor would Hawthorne have wanted her to be. He feared close contact with earth as much as with Heaven. He does allow her to enter the realm of Phoebe, sharing the trials and joys of humanity and forgetting her own spotlessness in her concern for others.

### III. HILDA AS IDEAL WOMAN

Hawthorne was extremely ambivalent toward Hilda in the matter of religion. He admired the depth of her faith and the purity of her soul, but as his characterization of her blossomed, he recognized in her many of the facets of Transcendentalism, a philosophy he distrusted, despite his admiration for some of its practitioners. Though her professed faith seems to have been the established descendent of Calvinism, Hilda sought to perfect it by the spiritual isolation of the Transcendentalists and, like them, she believed in the possibility of keeping herself perfect for her ultimate reunion with God. Though Hawthorne shrank from the harsh tenets of Calvinism and the easy solutions of Catholicism, he apparently realized that, in trying to make Hilda ideal, he had relieved her of all humanity. He seemed to find it necessary for his peace of mind and for the sake of the novel to remove her from the clutches of the Giant Transcendentalist, who had taught her to ignore everything unpleasant and to concentrate upon her own inner perfection.

Hilda's religion is not changed completely at the end of the novel. She still pales in horror when Kenyon suggests the possibility of the fortunate fall. She has, however, become much more open-minded and more open-hearted. She can accept the possibility of good in religions other than her own and she can see the good in other people without ignoring their weaknesses. Hawthorne never ceases to admire her purity

of soul. He merely lessens her own concern with it. Hilda retains some of her Calvinistic and Catholic propensities, but Hawthorne accentuates her new extroversion and her compassion at the spiritual pain of others.

As he apparently attempted to make a perfect soul, Hawthorne also seems to have set out to create, in Hilda, an ideal woman. Frederic Carpenter sees, in the fair women of Hawthorne, as in those of Melville, a worship of "the adolescent ideal of purity." Along with the romantic attraction to the dark exotic princess of long ago and far away, these two authors seem to have held an equal interest and fascination in the medieval image of the Virgin Mary and the virgin saint.<sup>1</sup> It seems that, in a novel written as his career and life were beginning to ebb, Hawthorne would have sought to capture the essence of the pure woman. For years, it was tacitly assumed that he had done exactly that, that Hilda was the ideal of womanhood, and that Kenyon was as unworthy of her as most nineteenth-century youths imagined themselves unworthy of pure women.

Hyatt Waggoner notes Hawthorne's "too often expressed admiration of Hilda" causes "the whole novel to stand in awe of her." A few pages later, he refers to her as "a nineteenth-century stereotype (of a good woman) and Hawthorne's tribute to Sophia."<sup>2</sup> The novelist's adoration of his wife and his general satisfaction with her, as a woman, probably influenced him in trying to produce a perfect heroine, filled with nineteenth-century "divinity" and set upon an even higher and more unrealistic pedestal than that of the Middle Ages.

John W. Bicknell sees, in Hilda, the "ideal woman as no other work of Hawthorne gives her to us." He claims that she is "supposed" to receive the "unqualified admiration" of the reader, though he (Bicknell) regards her as a pallid, selfish angel.<sup>3</sup> Bicknell agrees with Waggoner and Carpenter that Hilda was meant to be ideal. Hawthorne certainly admires her. Even when she errs he cannot bring himself to condemn her, except by implication. In her purity of womanhood, however, as in her purity of religion, she becomes too extreme even for her creator and she fails to exemplify what was to him the genuine ideal of womanhood, a comfortable combination of the Virgin Mary and Mother Eve.

The Hilda of the early chapters of The Marble Faun is first of all attractive. William M. White has written that Hawthorne "cares little enough for an ugly woman no matter how virtuous she might be," adding that Hawthorne's squeamishness over that which is old, fat, or ugly is unwholesome."<sup>4</sup> Certainly the ideal woman would have to be physically beautiful and, indeed, no defect seems to mar Hilda's countenance or figure. "She is pretty at all times" and every few moments becomes "beautiful and striking." Her form is characterized with "a gentle picturesqueness" that suggests an idealization of her form, which, for Hawthorne, seems to have suggested an inner perfection, when it was "in our native New England style."<sup>5</sup>

Hilda is also unobtainable. Kenyon struggles for several chapters against his base admiration of her and acknowledges his own unworthiness, not even daring to kiss the marble likeness of her hand, because it has "assumed its share of Hilda's remote and shy divinity."<sup>6</sup> Contained in

the passages describing the hand, however, are references that suggest Hawthorne did not mean to imply Hilda was as cold as the marble in which Kenyon had captured her. He describes the hand thus: "Such loving care and nicest art had been lavished here, that the palm really seemed to have a tenderness in its very substance. Touching these lovely fingers you could hardly believe that a virgin warmth would not steal from them into your heart."<sup>7</sup> These words indicate that Hilda and her marble pure womanhood were warm and desirable to Hawthorne. As modern readers, steeped in the passion of twentieth-century heroines, we may not find her particularly attractive, but the author did, at this point. She was lovely, pure, and so perfect that she could not be touched and Kenyon, as Everyman, felt totally unworthy of her.

Hilda is never seen engaged in the housewifely tasks that characterized femininity for Hawthorne. The novelist frequently pictures women at the task of needlework, as a peculiarly feminine occupation. In the "New Adam and Eve," the unschooled heroine is quite at home with housewifely tasks and an entire chapter is devoted to "Hester at Her Needle," in The Scarlet Letter. It is significant that Hilda never seems to undertake any of the ordinary household duties that absorbed Phoebe Pyncheon. She does not cook, clean, sew, or do much of anything except paint and look at pictures. Though Miriam ascribes to her a certain "housewifeliness," and calls herself a "careless sort of person in these matters," it is Miriam that Hawthorne shows 'engaged in the feminine task of mending a pair of gloves." It is Miriam, moreover, who helps Hilda put her way of life in order, not the reverse. Perhaps,

like the lilies of the field, Hilda did not need to lower herself to ordinary tasks. Whether her creator realized it or not, he could not long remain satisfied with a perfect woman who did not engage in feminine occupations.

To appreciate Hawthorne's attitude toward women a little more fully, it is necessary to consider his relationships with women in childhood and maturity and his portrayal of women before he came to Hilda. His ambivalence began very early and, in his characterization of Hilda, he did not overcome it. Every woman, dark or fair, pure or sinful, strong or weak, dependent or liberated, intellectual or housewifely, held for him her own particular fascination. His realization that he was pigeon-holing Hilda into a definition of ideal woman and his addition of more womanly characteristics to her personality suggest a change in him. As he grew older, knew more women, and lived longer with Sophia, he became more aware that the "ideal" of woman as of religion could not possibly be "perfect," without sacrificing essential qualities of humanity.

In childhood, Hawthorne was surrounded by women. Both his mother, Elizabeth Manning, and his older sister, also Elizabeth, but called "Eve," were what might be called "strong-minded women" and they awed the young Nathaniel. Julian Hawthorne, in his biography of his father, claims that Nathaniel once remarked, "The only thing I fear is the ridicule of Elizabeth."<sup>8</sup> She was a few years older than her brother and, because of a certain precocity in walking and talking, was generally regarded as the brilliant member of the family. Nathaniel,



on the other hand, was petted and considered quite ordinary, even though he was the only boy. He fought against Ebe's dominance and his uncles apparently saved him from being over-protected, but he still grew up in considerable awe of his overbearing sister and his mysterious mother, who spent her widowhood in seclusion and whom Hawthorne considered a woman of "strong will."<sup>9</sup>

When he became engaged to Sophia Peabody, Hawthorne was persuaded by Ebe to keep the news from their mother, on the grounds that such news would be distressing to the point of illness. For some time he acquiesced. When he finally broke down and told her, she was only surprised that he had waited so long to announce his intentions. His timid respect for her feelings and his trust in his sister's judgement had not allowed him to assert himself. Later, in his love letters, he hints to Sophia that he will never allow himself to be dominated by her, as he was by these two women. When she seeks to advise him on a matter of publication, he reassures her firmly, "I love thee infinitely, and admire thee beyond measure, and trust thee in all things, and will never transact any business without consulting thee--though on some rare occasions, it may happen that I will have my own way, after all."<sup>10</sup> Hawthorne was prepared to be suspicious of any feminine attempt to dictate to him. He always felt slightly threatened by women who sought to have their own ways at the expense of his.

The third woman who was particularly close to Hawthorne, during his childhood, was of another type. His younger sister, Louisa, was soft and clinging and Hawthorne adored her because of her dependence

and loyalty. Julian calls her "commonplace," "a pleasant, refined, sensible, feminine personage, with considerable innate sociability of temperament."<sup>11</sup> It was to Louisa that Hawthorne wrote many of the letters from Bowdoin College, seeming to confide his inmost thoughts to her from a sense of trust, to his mother from a sense of duty, and to Ebe, rarely. Few would question his genuine devotion to any of these women. His protective attitude toward Louisa never waned, even in adulthood. Neither did his timid respect for his solitary mother. His childhood submission to Elizabeth was modified only into a grudging acceptance of their equality. He might be angry with her, even rebuke her harshly, but he could never be sure of the last word.

Though he loved his delicate, submissive younger sister, Hawthorne was more intellectually stimulated by Ebe and they were probably closer, in spite of their arguments and struggle for dominance. As an adult, Hawthorne ran into a similar situation regarding the "new woman," who was making her appearance in artistic, literary, and philosophical circles. The conversations of women like Elizabeth Peabody, Margaret Fuller, Louisa Alcott and his own sister fascinated him, but he mistrusted their independence from the protection of men and probably feared their intellectual competition.

In the American Notebooks, Hawthorne describes a pleasant encounter with Margaret Fuller, in the wooded Sleepy Hollow area of Concord:

We talked about autumn, and about the pleasures of being lost in the woods, and about the crows, whose voices Margaret had heard, and about the experiences of early childhood, whose influence remains upon the character after the recollection of them has

passed away; and about the sight of mountains in the distance, and the view from their summits; and about other matters of high and low philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

In another notation, he remarks upon an article of hers on Canova. He calls it "quite good," without his customary reservations about women writers.<sup>13</sup> Despite these comments, many critics insist, with Wagenknecht, that Hawthorne had no liking at all for Margaret, partly because of her unattractiveness. Wagenknecht admits that Duyckinck thought she looked much like Sophia, but claims the comparison would have displeased Hawthorne. More likely, Hawthorne would have noticed the comparison, himself, if only unconsciously.<sup>14</sup> Wagenknecht also notes that Hawthorne denied he modeled Zenobia, in The Blithedale Romance, upon Margaret Fuller, but regards the denial as unconvincing. Surely it is, but it does not follow that this portrait suggests dislike of Margaret, for Zenobia is certainly one of the novelist's most attractive, if misguided, heroines.

Elizabeth Peabody was another woman in whose intellectual charms Hawthorne seems to have been greatly interested and for whose mind he had a hearty respect. Both Julian Hawthorne and George Lathrop turned to her for information when they began their biographies of the novelist and she was able to provide them with some extremely full accounts of conversations she had enjoyed with her brother-in-law. In many cases, she seems to have drawn him out considerably. Norman Holmes Pearson notes a hint, in her accounts to Julian, "of what must have been Elizabeth's own intense unhappiness as she saw Sophia win a love which her older sister had hoped to claim for her own."<sup>15</sup> Despite this hint,

which seems stronger because of the intellectual similarity between the older sister and Hawthorne, Elizabeth accepted Hawthorne's choice and did all she could to assist the lovers, when their desires became evident. She seems to have been a confidante of Hawthorne, as indicated by his confession to her that he considered the seclusion of his family "no way of life at all." She was too much like Ebe, however, for him to consider a lifetime relationship. Years later he came to resent her "interference" in his own family life and was quick to let her know it.<sup>16</sup>

Hawthorne not only enjoyed the intellectual stimulation of certain liberated females, he also seems to have admired their independence to some degree. Certainly, he does not seem shocked at the freedom of Hilda and Miriam. Frederic A. Sharf notes that Hawthorne was fascinated by Louisa Lander's way of life, using it as a model for that of the female artists in The Marble Faun.<sup>17</sup> While sitting for a portrait bust she did of him, he observed her closely and his remarks about her are generally favorable. "There are very available points about her and her position: a young woman, living in almost perfect independence, thousands of miles from her New England home, going fearless about these mysterious streets."<sup>18</sup>

Hawthorne is also considerably impressed with Delia Bacon's Shakespeare theory and, despite later disillusionment, he gives her a great deal of support, especially in trying to get it published.<sup>19</sup> He does not deny what he refers to as her "monomania," but is amazed at her "intellectual" capacity, which has been improved, he feels by her dedication to her thesis. His support of her efforts indicates an

admiration of her independence and her intellect. He could not have tolerated either in the woman he loved, but they held a fascination for him. That he finally came to reject the "unwomanly" aspects of the liberated woman, his admiration of her was never completely erased.

Fairbanks comments on Hawthorne's hostility toward female emancipation in an article that deals primarily with the ambivalence already noted.<sup>20</sup> Though Fairbanks blames Sophia for a certain amount of the novelist's failure to accept the liberated and independent female, he readily admits that the "wholesome New England girl," who stayed close to the hearthstone where she belonged, was present in the writing of Hawthorne long before he met Sophia. His wife may, in fact, have been prevented from exercising a talent for writing that is recognized by Ellen Olds in her collection of Sophia's letters to Annie Fields.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps she could have been more independent than her husband would have wished.

Hawthorne's letters to James Ticknor are filled with comments that pale his reference, in The Marble Faun, to "pretty fancies of snow and moonlight; the counterpart in picture to so many feminine achievements in literature!"<sup>22</sup> He refers to "Passion Flowers" by Mrs. Howe, calling them "delightful," but adding that "she ought to have been soundly whipt for publishing them." Another female author is credited with "no genius or talent, except for making public what she ought to keep to herself---viz. her passions, emotions, and womanly weaknesses." Likewise, he expresses admiration for Fanny Fern, but only because "the restraints of decency" have been thrown off, the only time, in

Hawthorne's estimation, that woman's books possess value.<sup>23</sup>

It may be well to consider why Hawthorne took such umbrage with female authors. Wagenknecht notes that Hawthorne was sympathetic toward women who were forced by circumstance to earn their own livings, but that he preferred they do it in a feminine way, operating cent-shops like Hepzibah Pyncheon or taking in needlework.<sup>24</sup> He seemed to feel that venturing into the world of serious business, philosophy, or the arts was a dangerous effort for women, especially if their work was winning the fame and profit he coveted and, of course, deserved. He writes with extreme bitterness from England that he has given up writing for the time being, because "America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash."<sup>25</sup> Much of it was, indeed, trash, but there is a suggestion in all of his letters about female authorship that he felt more threatened by the weak literary efforts of women than by those of the men who were also producing their share of excuses for poetry and novels. He objected to the loss of revenue he knew he deserved, but he may also have feared being dominated by these women, who were outshining him in popularity, much as his older sister had, in childhood.

James W. Mathews points out, in an article comparing the heroines of Hawthorne and William Dean Howells, that both novelists portray "the determination of woman to force the issue of her equality with man in a man's world" as "the result of improperly channeled emotion."<sup>26</sup> Even feminine philanthropy, when it reaches the extreme, comes under this

heading, suggesting that, for these nineteenth-century males, women were best left at home, channeling their emotions toward their own families and leaving such serious business as art and philanthropy to their husbands.

Darrel Abel, though he recognizes the strong attraction that Margaret Fuller had for Hawthorne and denies that Hawthorne disliked her more than he admired her, notes the "strong division lines" in the mind of the novelist between the roles of male and female. He suggests that Hawthorne attempted to reach a happy medium in his heroines, allowing them a certain amount of freedom of conscience and movement, but forbidding them to cross the lines of sexual determination on pain of punishment.<sup>27</sup>

Hawthorne admired women and was charmed by their wit and intellect until it began to threaten him. Gloria Erlich, discussing Hawthorne's "dark women," suggests that he showed similar ambivalence in his writing. His virgins offer no threat to masculinity or purity, but his dark women are far more tempting to him, even though they "dwell near some region of unspeakable horror," into which they may drag their male victims. Erlich goes on to wonder if Hawthorne felt compelled to "separate the pure, God-given spirit of Woman from (this region)," which was apparently a legacy from Eve.<sup>28</sup>

Before considering Hilda, it may be appropriate to consider Hawthorne's other heroines, particularly in the categories of romanticism, sexuality, and morality. Critics have shown that Hawthorne's fictional women may be pretty well divided into "fair" and "dark" groupings. It

is not really necessary to dwell on the division. Hilda is quite typical of the fair and pure, as Miriam is of the dark and guilty. Hawthorne's ambivalence toward both women can be appreciated by considering his ambivalence in three areas mentioned.

First, both types presented Hawthorne with the substance for romance. The saintly virgin on the pedestal was a direct literary descendent of the pure Medieval heroine, who received slavish devotion from unworthy admirers, the exotic, dark-haired heroine of the Decameron and the novels of the contemporary Melville were also appealing to Hawthorne.<sup>29</sup> He read extensively and his letters from Bowdoin are filled with references to romances that he was enjoying, but which he felt might better be kept from his relatives. Julian was intrigued with one particular scrap of a letter that suggested to him a risque side to his father's literary taste. He quotes from the scrap: "That Ass brought the book, and gave it directly to your Aunt Mary. I hope you were wise enough to pretend to know nothing of the matter, if she has said anything to you about it." (signed) Nathaniel Hawthorne. "Who was the Ass?" wonders Julian and "What was the book?"<sup>30</sup> Almost surely it was a romance, very likely containing a romantic dark-haired heroine.

Hawthorne probably succeeded better in romanticizing his dark heroines than his blonde ones. His fair maidens were, for the most part, too close to the ground to be as Medieval as Carpenter suggests. As many critics would call the sensible, housewifely Phoebe the ideal woman for Hawthorne, as they would Hilda. Priscilla, of The Blithedale Romance, becomes fairly romantic by her association with mediums.



Georgianna, in "The Birthmark," and Edith, in "The White Old Maid," both assume a romantic aura that has nothing to do with guilt. Their Medieval holiness is storybook material enough.

Of the dark-haired maidens, Hester Prynne is probably the most popular, but Zenobia and Miriam are more exotic and more romantic, in a technical sense. Hawthorne makes them the mysterious and ill-used heroines of situations that the reader never completely understands but that are filled with evil implications. These experiences stain the dark women and it is significant that only the dark, foreign women are stained. Priscilla is untouched, morally, by her experience with the practice of mediums and Phoebe is unaffected by the family curse.

Hawthorne could employ either the dark or fair maiden romantically, and he obviously did. He seemed to enjoy both the marble purity of the saint and the dark fascination of the sensuous temptress. Like the Medieval romancer, he was torn between the images of Venus and the Virgin Mary, when he sought material for his art.

Wagenknecht devotes an entire chapter to Hawthorne's attitude toward sexuality, in Hawthorne: Man and Writer.<sup>31</sup> He recognizes more of the ambivalence we have considered, noting references to nudity and sexuality in the journals of the novelist. Sophia edited these journals extensively and many of her husband's more startling references have come to light only since Randall Stewart and Norman Holmes Pearson went through what remained of the original manuscripts and corrected much of what had been published by the widow. As Wagenknecht suggests, Hawthorne was far from being a prude. Many of the inhibitions he seems

to have had regarding sex can be attributed to the century in which he lived. The remarks he makes about women in his journals and the subtle, but effective sensuality present in his literature belie the remark attributed to Sophia that all of Nathaniel's "passions (were) under his feet."<sup>32</sup>

Hawthorne's dark heroines are extremely sensual. Zenobia, her exotic beauty accentuated by hothouse flowers, approaches some of Melville's South Sea maidens in her earthy splendor. Likewise, Miriam's darkness is portrayed in such warm-blooded terms that no man could fail to be tempted by her, a fact that leads some critics to question the masculinity of Kenyon. Hester's "badge of shame" makes her a more compassionate woman. Rappacini's daughter is as tempting as any female spider to her prey, despite her possible innocence.

Hawthorne's fair maidens, however, have a sexuality all their own, possibly excepting Hilda. Most of his earth-bound New England girls, particularly Phoebe Pyncheon, are so close to the center of the home that they can only be seen as "se-objects" of future husbands. There is something akin to provocativeness in Priscilla, in spite of her pallor (her affection is important here), and also in Phoebe, who is so very much a woman, so at home in the garden or the house. Hawthorne may well have been as ambivalent in his sexual feelings as in everything else about women, one moment desiring the "good girl" of his Salem boyhood, the next casting a longing thought or two after the dark, experienced princess of a faraway land. Most of his heroines are attractive sexually. Hilda is certainly the least sensual, unable to respond to

Kenyon's romantic overtures. Here Hawthorne found her incomplete. Dark or fair, a woman had to be desirable to him and Hilda was too much like marble or snow.

Hawthorne's heroines are also supposed to be divided on the issue of morality. The novelist, however, found it difficult to create an immoral woman. His dark heroines are all guilty, but nearly always because of the sin or influence of another party. He can create villainous men, but never evil women, at least if they are young and beautiful. Elderly witch types do not seem to count as women. Wagenknecht spends some time trying to explain Hawthorne's ambivalence toward Hester's guilt.<sup>33</sup> It is certainly a difficult problem to solve. Hester was obviously guilty and of a sin Hawthorne deplored. But he blames Chillingworth, Dimmesdale, society and everyone possible for her crime. The fair and virtuous Phoebe or Priscilla do not commit sins, but even the dark maidens are not so much blamed for theirs as pitied. Even the women Hawthorne disliked, like Mrs. Bullfrog and Lady Eleanore, do not become villainesses. The question of Rappacini's daughter is left open to the reader. Hawthorne might condemn a man to eternal punishment, but never a woman, whether fair and innocent or dark and sinned against.

Numerous problems face those critics who try to discover exactly where Hawthorne stood on the matters of romance, sex, and morality, when he created his heroines. The attempts to label these women "dark, romantic, sensual, and guilty," or "fair, dull, frigid, and innocent" are fraught with difficulty. Hawthorne was as ambivalent toward the women

in his books as toward those in his life. It was impossible for him to portray a satisfactory "ideal woman" in Hilda. She may not have been his greatest literary figure, nor a particularly attractive personality. She does seem to suggest Hawthorne's recognition of the ambivalence within his soul regarding women.

Hawthorne's intellect, heart, and romantic tendencies vied with one another in determining what he wanted in a woman. The dark, mysterious lady tempted and frightened him. The fair, homespun one soothed and bored him. The intellectually superior female, who possessed the mind and temperament to make her way in a man's world challenged and stimulated him, but threatened his masculinity. Her clinging opposite strengthened his self-image, but never seemed quite "whole" to him. He found Elizabeth Barrett Browning charming, but she was so delicate he could scarcely regard her as real.<sup>34</sup>

The only love affair that seems to have impressed Hawthorne scholars, aside from his genuinely happy marriage, is the one apparently reconstructed in "The Mermaid: A Reverie," which was changed, significantly, on the eve of his marriage, to "The Village Uncle: An Imaginary Retrospect." Even Julian saw fit to include the episode in his biography, though he is careful to assure the reader that Susan never influenced his father, except as the material for a story.<sup>35</sup> He may have felt compelled to mention her because his Aunt Ebe had carefully made the story available to him and he did not want to omit any details of his father's boyhood, especially if George Lathrop was including them.

Elizabeth Hawthorne may have had less than altruistic motives in

making public the story of Susan. It is fortunate that she did, because "The Mermaid" is probably as close to the ideal woman as can be seen in his literature. Time would have paled his impressions, it is true, but Ebe's assurances that this romance was genuine gives us reason to suspect that the simple daughter of the fishermen was more ideal in her imperfection than the marble Hilda in her purity. Perhaps Hawthorne may have recalled some of her charm, when he realized his mistake with the snow-maiden:

But where was the mermaid in those delightful times? At a certain window near the centre of the village, appeared a pretty display of gingerbread men and horses, picturebooks and ballads, small fish-hooks, pins, needles, sugar-plums, and brass thimbles, articles on which the young fishermen used to expend their money from pure gallantry. What a picture was Susan behind the counter! A slender maiden, though the child of rugged parents, she had the slimmest of waists, brown hair curling on her neck, and a complexion rather pale, except when the sea-breeze flushed it. A few wrinkles became beauty spots beneath her eyelids. How was it, Susan, that you talked and acted so carelessly, yet always for the best, doing whatever was right in your own eyes, and never once doing wrong in mine, nor shocked a taste that had been morbidly sensitive till now? And whence had you that happiest gift, of brightening every topic with an unsought gaiety, quiet but irresistible, so that even gloomy spirits felt your sunshine, and did not shrink from it? Nature wrought the charm. She made you a frank, simple, kind hearted, sensible and mirthful girl. Obeying nature, you did free things without indelicacy, displayed a maiden's thought to every eye, and proved yourself as innocent as naked Eve. [Oh, Susan the sugar heart you gave me, and the old rhyme --- "when this you see, remember me" --- scratched on it with the point of your scissors! Inscriptions on marble have been sooner forgotten, than those words shall be on that frail heart.]<sup>36</sup>

Among other changes inflicted upon the original manuscript was the removal of the bracketed passage, "as a matter of delicacy."

Certain critics maintain that the wholesome, attractive New England girl was more of an ideal for Hawthorne than the pale and marbly innocent

one. Wagenknecht ties Phoebe and Hilda together, in the name of "girls that (Hawthorne) really loved." He spends most of the ensuing paragraph on Phoebe, however, claiming that the novelist knew, too, "that Phoebe is as good as bread and milk --- and that those who find these commodities insipid are lost already --- that she is the salt of the earth, that she has in her soul and in her body just what a man needs to cure him of his vagaries and bind him in a destiny-fulfilling way to life."<sup>37</sup> Hilda receives in the same discussion only a footnote, denying Waggoner's claim that she is pallid. This suggests that, to Wagenknecht, Hilda was less close than Phoebe to Hawthorne's ideal of womanhood, even though Hilda may have been his great attempt at creating the perfect woman.

For all his attraction to the earthbound daughters of fishermen and farmers, an intellectual concept of womanhood seems to have intrigued Hawthorne and he seems to have pursued it as a mathematician might have pursued the concept of the perfect circle. Despite the reputation Medieval romance has acquired for adulterous love affairs, it frequently tried to idealize woman and depicted her as a kind of ideal soul, far above the knight who sought her. It was on this aspect of Medieval literature that the nineteenth-century reader dwelt. The perfect heroine was beautiful, young, blonde, and allegorical. In the tales that nineteenth-century critics held to be superior, she was also spotlessly pure, her mind and soul concerned with a love far beyond anything her lover was capable of. The allegory surrounding Hilda is Medieval and suggests the Medieval influence on Hawthorne, heightened

at this point in his career by his European travels, where he was able to view firsthand the architecture, painting, and sculpture of an era that set great store upon attaining the ideal, upon reconstructing the images in the Divine Mind.

Another point to consider in examining the portrait of Hilda is the accepted influence of Edmund Spenser.<sup>38</sup> The highly symbolic characterization of Elizabeth in The Shepherd's Calendar is reminiscent of Hawthorne's picture of Hilda:

Of fayre Elisa be your silver song,  
that blessed wight:  
The flower of Virgins, may shee florish long,  
In princely plight.  
For she is Syrinx daughter without spotte,  
Which Pan the shepherds God of her begot:  
So sprong her grace,  
Of heavenly race,  
No mortall blemish may her blotte.<sup>39</sup>

Whether Hawthorne was trying to create a real woman in Hilda, who happened to embody the characteristics of ideal womanhood, or whether he was merely borrowing a literary technique from Spenser and the Middle Ages to illustrate the ideal of femininity, is not certain. He may not have known, himself. It seems fairly evident that when Hilda became a viable creation, the novelist took a second look at her womanliness, as well as her religious philosophy and found her unacceptable.

Several character traits in the early Hilda would have served to make her unacceptable to Hawthorne. First of all, she is far too perfect. Scholars who criticize her or who believe Hawthorne himself was critical of her are generally in accord about this defect in her personality. Hall feels that Hawthorne would like Hilda to be an angel, but that his

"imaginative vision" would not allow such a view. He does not admit that she ever acquires real guilt in the eyes of the novelist.<sup>40</sup> Fogle has commented on the "limited perfection" of Hilda, which can refer to her womanliness as well as to her religion.<sup>41</sup> Marden Clark comments that, while Hilda represents "the human soul as near perfection as is possible on earth," she seems to lack something.<sup>42</sup> Clark notes that Hilda recognizes her own weakness and becomes able to participate in normal human relationships, but he does not suggest that the transformation occurs because Hawthorne saw the failure of his portrayal of ideal womanhood. Virginia Birdsall notes that Hawthorne "asks too much of Hilda" and that she consequently "falls apart,"<sup>43</sup> but he seems to realize the problem himself and attempts to salvage what remains of womanly charm in her.

Joel Porte has dealt rather extensively with the idea that Hilda is not "a cardboard representation of unspotted virtue," but "a credible portrait of a woman in desperate flight from her own sexuality." He uses the obvious symbolism of Kenyon's discovery of a "marble woman" to illustrate his thesis and goes on to suggest that Hilda equates defloration (marriage) with death.<sup>44</sup> Porte does Hawthorne a service in recognizing that Hilda is more than a symbol of purity and that she is not an unrealistic, one-dimensional figure. Hawthorne seems to discover much of what Porte sees in Hilda after he has begun her characterization. His efforts to improve her psychological health and make her a more normal woman cause him to effect her transformation. Daniel J. Schneider has suggested that the central theme of The Marble



Faun is the achievement of a central balance between the spirit and the flesh<sup>45</sup> and, in Hilda's case, this seems to have been Hawthorne's ultimate aim.

There is evidence that Hawthorne would have found Hilda too perfect to satisfy his own idea of womanliness. A number of notations in his journal exist, some of which will be quoted in the last chapter, to illustrate his mild dissatisfaction with a perfect wife. He remonstrates with Sophia not to be too much of an angel, saying that "the angel could not have the tenderest of human natures, too." (In another letter he refers to her as a "woman and an angel.")<sup>46</sup> These, with other references to angels not being satisfactory earthly companions, can be related to an idea for a story that Hawthorne jotted down in his journal. He toyed with the idea of stripping the "draperies" from a beautiful woman to show that she is not an angel, but merely an ordinary woman.<sup>47</sup> One critic sees this as plot for "Mrs. Bullfrog," a story that Sophia deplored and that Hawthorne apologized for,<sup>48</sup> but Hawthorne's regard for all womanhood and his belief that the most ordinary womanhood was quite sacred, suggests that he did not believe the "stripping of the draperies" to be such a disaster and that he might well have preferred the ordinary woman underneath.

Several critics have speculated on the possibility that Hawthorne was not altogether pleased with Hilda, though they do not suggest his displeasure was enough to cause him to make some change in her. Berco-vitch's suggestion of Hawthorne's "gentle mockery of Hilda's moral zeal" has already been noted. Howells also wondered if Hawthorne saw something

"ugly" in his gentle heroine. The perfection that should have made Hilda such a delightful woman makes her unacceptable to the modern reader and seems to have made her equally so to her creator. Fairbanks has noted Hawthorne's concern with "the natural modesty of American woman" and suggests that the novelist looked for "wholeness" in women as in everything else.<sup>49</sup> This might have solved some of the dilemmas present in the author's ambivalence toward woman, could he have achieved it, but "wholeness" was like the ideal circle, unachievable. Jean Norman suggests that, for Hawthorne, "purity" was "mere nullity of the heart."<sup>50</sup> Hilda's perfect purity spoiled her wholeness and made her heartless.

Hawthorne was threatened by the dominant female and Hilda is definitely dominant. Waggoner has noted the obvious parallel between Hawthorne's love letters to Sophia and Kenyon's request for guidance, but he ignores other remarks that suggest the novelist's determination not to be ruled by his bride. Three comments seem particularly significant and suggest that Hawthorne could not have allowed Kenyon to go on quailing before Hilda's displeasure:

Oh, my poor little Dove, thou dost need a husband with a strong will to take care of thee; and when I have the charge of thee, thou wilt find thyself under much stricter discipline than ever before.

This awe (of you) does not prevent me from feeling that it is I who have the charge of you and that my Dove is to follow my guidance and do my bidding . . . my love gives me the right and your love consents to it.

Whenever you need my counsel, or even my reproof, in any serious matter, you will not fail to receive it.<sup>51</sup>

None of this is to suggest that Hawthorne was a harsh or forbidding husband. He was extraordinarily gentle and helped Sophia with the care of the children and house more than most men would.<sup>52</sup> He allowed her a great deal of freedom, trusted her implicitly, and did rely on her for a kind of "guidance" in spiritual matters. But she leaned on him, as well, and the foregoing passages show that he could not have appreciated Hilda's superiority enough to condone her treatment of Kenyon for very long. In the end, when he asks her for guidance, she has to admit her inability to give it to him. She is, after all, "only a poor, weak girl," the kind that made Hawthorne feel secure and protective.

Another point to consider briefly is Hilda's self-reliance in Rome. Though Hawthorne spoke gently of Louise Lander, her prototype in the journals, he preferred his women at home, busy with their needlework, and Hilda is too busy with her career and her soul-searching to stay where she belongs. Goldfarb claims that Hawthorne condemns Emersonian self-reliance, in the person of Hilda.<sup>53</sup> It is not only the philosophy that the novelist condemns. He disapproves of her Transcendentalism, but self-reliance is also "unwomanly." Hilda is given every opportunity to assume her proper role and she rejects them all. The essence of womanhood is too cold, too dominant and too independent and frightens Hawthorne almost as much as the dark heroine that Gloria Erlich discusses.

Hilda is a different woman at the end of the novel in several ways. Her religious philosophy broadens without being weakened. She still

believes in the beauty of the world and the goodness of man, but she is less self-centered and unrealistic. As a woman, she also recognizes her imperfection and so does the reader. She overcomes her virginal resistance to Kenyon and allows herself to be taken in marriage. Not only does this suggest that she is not so much of an angel as to be beyond the grasp of mortal man, but it also indicates her submission as woman to man. Even F. O. Matthiessen notes that Hilda's voice is not the "dominant" one at the end of the novel.<sup>54</sup> Hawthorne forces her to subordinate her judgement to that of Kenyon, or at least to realize that she is no better judge than he. For a time after her experiences with Miriam and the priest, she enjoys a parallel relationship with the sculptor, described by Hawthorne as being "on the hither side of passion."<sup>55</sup> Finally, however, she becomes capable of accepting the "richer" delights of the flesh and submits her spirit as well as her body to those of the superior male.

Finally, she gives up her independence. When she returns to her painting, that curious gift of perfect imitation is gone and the realism she has achieved will never bring such reward. She has been accosted on the streets of Rome, after all. Her maidenly reserve and Emersonian self-reliance have not protected her from the Roman law and church. She cannot take care of herself and needs to be "enshrined and worshipped as a household saint in the light of her husband's fireside."<sup>56</sup> For Hawthorne, this is where she belongs. The reality of womanhood is the warm, dependent, submissive combination of Mary and Eve. Hilda probably fails, in the last analysis, at being ideal in any sense, but she is

a good deal more than a poor characterization. She represents Hawthorne's acceptance of his own ambivalence toward women. He had planned her as an ideal woman, but he was able to recognize her for what she was and began to change her. There was no "ideal" woman for Hawthorne, except in theory, and he seems to realize this, as he gives in and transforms Hilda from theory to fact.

#### IV. HILDA AS SOPHIA

Hilda has been accepted for some time as a portrait of Sophia Peabody Hawthorne and there does not seem to be much evidence that she is not. Hawthorne, according to his journals and letters, regarded her as nearly perfect or had convinced himself that he did. In 1858, while he was contemplating The Marble Faun and in 1859, while he was writing it, the novelist was subject to two influences. His romanticism had been whetted by exposure to the European culture and first-hand acquaintance with many of the scenes and artifacts that fascinated him since childhood. He was, however, in his middle fifties by this time and age and experience had taken their toll. Rome, furthermore, was disappointing to him in many respects and his experience there was made less pleasant by the serious illness of his daughter, Una. Perhaps The Marble Faun and its portrait of Sophia reflect the ambivalence of Hawthorne's own feelings, rising as they do out of a period in his life when romance clashed more violently than usual with reality.

It seems quite possible that The Romance of Monte Beni began as a kind of super-romance. Hawthorne admits that it was supposed to have been his best work, confessing to Ticknor that "if I have written anything well, it should be this romance; for I have never thought or felt more deeply, or taken more pains."<sup>1</sup> Yet he later called the novel a failure.<sup>2</sup> His ambivalence held true even to his own criticism of the

work.

Hawthorne seems to have begun his romance, as regards Hilda, with an ideal woman practicing an ideal religion and projecting the image of an ideal wife, whom he had idealized further during their long separation while he was in London. But Hilda's religion proved frightening and Hawthorne realized just how much he disapproved of Transcendentalism. As a woman Hilda also proved something of a failure, embodying few of the "womanly" qualities Hawthorne admired. Yet in many ways she is very like Sophia. Hawthorne seems to have been aware of this similarity, at least unconsciously. When he changed Hilda he seemed to imply that Sophia was not so ideal after all, either in her religion or her femininity. Furthermore, by leaving Hilda so far removed from any sort of ideal at the end of the novel, Hawthorne seems to have suggested that Sophia was not capable of changing much. The romantic glow seems to have gone and replacing it is a mature and happy acceptance of the good things in their marriage, tinged only mildly with the regretful realization that Sophia is neither the marble statue nor the exotic temptress and that if she were, he would not want her.

To appreciate Hawthorne's attitude toward his wife, let us consider Sophia herself. Her childhood and youth were spent within the protective circle of a devoted family and did not in the least prepare her for contact with a real world. Louise Tharp notes Sophia's own early "romantic imaginings" that led her to consider herself a member of a kind of exiled nobility. Her mother made much of the glorious part the Palmers had played in the American Revolution and Dr. Peabody, perhaps in answer

to these stories, had persuaded his young daughters that they were descended from the warlike Boadicea, Queen of the Britains. All the girls were quite impressed with their illustrious ancestry and, for the quiet Sophia, this family pride took the form of a quiet acceptance of her own superiority by birth and as a refusal to admit any reason for erasing social inequalities.<sup>3</sup> Growing up in such a family, it was almost inevitable that Sophia would be protected from contact with the real world. Her mother, for example, "never left her children with ignorant servants but always with some genteel woman who liked to read Shakespeare."<sup>4</sup>

Religiously, Sophia had been brought up more or less a Unitarian, at a time when controversy raged between the traditional Calvinists, and the modern liberal Christians. Her mother and one of her aunts were never swept back into Congregationalism and Elizabeth, her older sister, was especially anxious that young Sophia should never be exposed to anything unpleasant in religion. Elizabeth wrote many years later:

I took Sophia (with Mother's consent) under my religious guardianship, determined she should never hear any of the terrible doctrines; and she was an instance . . . of a child growing up full of the Idea of God and the perfect man Jesus, --- and of the possibility as well as the duty --- but rather privilege than duty, --- of growing up innocent and forever improving, with the simple creed that everything that can happen to a human being is either for enjoyment in the present or instruction for the future; and that even our faults and all our sufferings from others' faults were means of development into new forms of good and beauty.<sup>5</sup>

Hilda might have had such a mentor in her youth and Sophia took her sister's teaching seriously enough to preserve a Pollyanna attitude throughout her adult life.



Protected from the ugly side of life by her reasonably aristocratic heritage and from the unpleasant aspects of traditional Christianity by her sister's instruction, Sophia was further protected from having to pay too much attention to life by an extraordinary illness that seems to have been precipitated by a difficult teething experience.<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth ascribes her sister's delicate health to a weak constitution, made worse by "the heroic system of medicine which was then in vogue." An attempt to teach "a little class of children in Miss Davis' school, for the sake of learning to draw" threw her into "a sickness from which she never rose into the possibility of so much exertion again." At the same time, "a slight accident disabled her hand so that she could not draw."<sup>7</sup> When Nathaniel Hawthorne appeared, however, Sophia made a miraculous recovery and was never really an invalid again. Sophia's mother is frequently blamed for encouraging her daughter's withdrawal from the world, reminding her of how delicate she was, hoping perhaps that this tractable child would always remain close to her side. Sophia herself, however, was probably not averse to the romance involved in being an "invalid." Her sickness provided her with the best of all possible excuses for avoiding anything that seemed difficult or unpleasant and for taking great credit when she attempted anything so ordinary as getting out of bed.

Elizabeth also tells Julian that his mother's "drawing was so perfect that it looked like a model." She describes the lessons that Sophia took from the artist, Doughty:

She would lie on the bed, and he had his easel close by. Every day, in the interval of his lessons, she would imitate on another canvas what he had done. And her copy of his landscape was even better than the original, so that when they were displayed side by side, everybody guessed her copy to be the one that Doughty painted.<sup>8</sup>

Should she err, the injured hand would protect her reputation. Another artist, Allston, suggested that she go to Europe and devote herself to art, but as might be expected, her illness prevented her from chancing such an experience. Allston, according to Elizabeth, went on to maintain that Miss Peabody should never copy anything but masterpieces.

Thus, throughout her youth, Sophia consistently protected herself and was protected by her family from whatever she did not like to consider. At first, marriage seemed to fit this definition. Elizabeth writes to Julian, in reference to her sister's first meeting with Hawthorne, "I thought what if he should fall in love with her; and I heard her say so often nothing would ever tempt her to marry, and inflict upon a husband the care of such a sufferer."<sup>9</sup> Of course, when the handsome novelist appeared in her parlor, Sophia was overcome by temptation and her vow of celibacy disappeared with her delicate constitution.

It was not her first opportunity to marry. Louise Thrap discusses, in some detail, the proposal of James Burroughs, an agent for Cuban planters, and a fairly wealthy man in his own right.<sup>10</sup> Sophia apparently enjoyed the attention, but she did not love the man. When the time came, she was able to end the romance, despite what seems to have been some indiscretion of manners and letters on her part, by placing herself in

the hands of her sisters, who sincerely believed that her ill health rendered her incapable of flirtation.

Perhaps one of the mistakes Burroughs made was promising Sophia a hacienda in Cuba, where she "should have plenty of slaves and be waited on hand and foot."<sup>11</sup> Sophia had been waited on for most of her life, and the suggestions of Nathaniel Hawthorne that she was capable of defeating her illness and doing things for herself, probably intrigued her more than a life of indolence. Moreover, he was undoubtedly the handsomest man she had ever seen. Her two sisters were enchanted with him and she may have felt she wanted to excel in this one matter of capturing the most eligible bachelor ever to set foot in the Peabody house. Besides he was only five years older than she, and Burroughs had been fifteen years her senior. Since she was herself slipping towards thirty and the romance of celibacy was apparently fading, she seems to have allowed herself to fall in love with Hawthorne and marry him. Julian recalls his mother's story that his father's presence exercised such a strong magnetic attraction upon her that she drew back instinctively.<sup>12</sup> Her resistance was no match for his charm, but, like Hilda, she felt compelled to resist the earthy attraction until she could safely romanticize it in her own mind.

Their marriage was apparently happy. Aside from the storybook atmosphere of their early years in the Old Manse, they both seemed to work hard at keeping each other contented. Sophia subordinated her own talents fairly well to the fame of her husband, encouraging him and comforting him, complaining little of their early poverty. Nathaniel, on the other

hand, was a devoted husband, helping her with the care of the children and trying not to be too vocal in his opinions of the Transcendental movement. The letters he wrote to her are full of love and, though most of Sophia's love-letters were destroyed, her letters to others about her husband are full of praise and affection. Their children seem to have assumed that their parents were deeply in love. Superficially, at least, the Hawthornes had an extremely happy marriage.

Yet, in many ways, their lives were parallel. Both had devoted families, who tended to force the loyalties of husband and wife. The strained relations between Nathaniel and Elizabeth Peabody and even his gentle mother-in-law and those between Sophia and Ebe are apparent in much of their correspondence. Though each tried to love the family of the other, it was an impossible task and they seem to have spent a good deal of time apart, even in the early years of their marriage, visiting their own relatives, usually taking one or more children with them. Furthermore, Nathaniel was never able to share Sophia's Transcendental fervor. Indeed, she spent their entire married life and the years of her widowhood trying to convince, first her husband and later his public, that there was not a dark, melancholy side to his nature. Her editing of his journals suggests that their attitudes may also have run parallel on the matter of sexuality.

Few would deny that the Hawthorne marriage was a happy one and few would deny that Nathaniel Hawthorne really loved his wife, right up to the end of his life. However, his continued protestations about her perfection suggest that she may not have pleased him so much as his

romantic soul would have liked. Religion and womanliness seem to be the two points on which Hawthorne faults her in his portrayal of Hilda.

In regard to her Transcendentalism, it might seem like overstatement to say that she worshiped Emerson, but a passage from one of her letters to Elizabeth is significant:

I told Mary I thought Mr. Emerson was the Word again. She exclaimed, "You blasphemer." "Do you really think it blasphemy?" said I. "Oh no," she replied. "It is the gospel according to you." Was not that a happy saying.<sup>13</sup>

Sophia tried hard to convert Hawthorne to the creed of Emerson. During their courtship, she sent him tickets to Emerson's lectures, which he gently but firmly declined to attend. She never ceased in her efforts to win him over, surrounding him with Transcendental friends. But Hawthorne never became involved in the movement. For Sophia, the idea that, by avoiding evil and the unpleasant, she could concentrate on truth and the perfection of her soul had been firmly implanted in her childhood. Transcendentalism furthered her ability to avoid reality in adulthood as well. After the death of her husband she wrote:

I have "enjoyed life," and "its hard pinches" have not too deeply bitten into my heart. But this has been because I am not only hopeful and of indomitable credence by nature, but because this temperament together with the silent ministry of pain, has helped me to the perfect, the unshadowed belief in the instant providence of God; in his eternal love, patience, sweetness; in his shining face, never averted. It is because I cannot be disappointed on account of this belief . . . With "lowering clouds" I have never been long darkened, because the sun above has been so penetrating that their tissue has directly become silvered and goldened. Our own closed eyelids are too often the only clouds between us and the ever-shining sun. I hold all as if it were not mine, but God's, and am ready to resign it.<sup>14</sup>

Life could be beautiful, if one only approached it correctly, and one's

soul was a special possession of God's, to be resigned to Him in as ideal a condition as possible.

There is not any doubt that Sophia embraced Transcendentalism and its high priest, Emerson, as the answer to her need to keep uninvolved with reality. Like Hilda, she professed traditional Christianity, but her faith, according to Julian, was "more artistic" than that of her husband and she possessed less of the "arrogant, uneasy Puritan conscience."<sup>15</sup> Like Hilda, too, she managed to subdue the unpleasant aspects of Christianity (sin and Hell) under the airy cloak of Transcendental ethics. Though Hilda never mentions Transcendentalism, she certainly adheres to many of its tenets. Sophia, on the other hand, admitted an interest in the philosophy, but never completely abandoned her traditional faith.

Sophia's femininity can be considered from three viewpoints. She was a housewife, a helpmate, and a sex object. There is little evidence that she was a Phoebe around the house. Wagenknecht makes a good case for the idea that she and her husband tended to "swap roles" with regard to household tasks.<sup>16</sup> Sophia's weak constitution had almost certainly prevented her from gaining much experience in the household arts and her intellect probably dissuaded her from indulging in them for recreation. ✓ She was, however, a devoted wife and mother. She writes to her own mother, shortly after the birth of Una, "I have no time, --- as you may imagine. I am baby's tire-woman, handmaiden, and tender, as well as nursing mother." But she confesses, "My husband relieves me with her constantly, and gets her to sleep beautifully. I look upon him with

wonder and admiration."<sup>17</sup>

She did not have a great deal to do with the housework, apparently, for they employed "little Mary Brian" at the reasonable wage of three dollars a week to do the cooking and cleaning. But Sophia did find herself forced to make all of Una's baby clothes and could not afford baby nurses. When their financial condition improved ever so slightly before the birth of Julian, her first luxury was the delegation of some of the clothes making to the ladies of Brook Farm. Sophia seems to have been drawn more to the artistic life than to that of the housewife. There seems to be a hint of superiority in her mind when she compares Phoebe to Hilda. She calls the latter "artistic, pensive, reserved, contemplative, delicately appreciative," while she seems to dismiss Phoebe, calling her "an enchanting little housewife with energy, radiance and eglantine sweetness," probably incapable of appreciating the finer things in life.<sup>18</sup>

As a partner, Sophia could not have been better for her husband. She would never have admitted it, one suspects, if she had not been supremely happy, and to maintain a congenial atmosphere, she seems to have met her husband at least halfway in all matters. She inspired him and she left him alone to write. She encouraged him when he was despondent and cut corners cheerfully when the need arose. Sophia shared Eden happily, but she also shared the exile, and made the darker moments of life together more bearable for her husband. She even contributed to their income with her painting. Hawthorne enshrined Sophia much as Kenyon did Hilda and he found that the artistic aristocrat

whom he so idealized was quite practical in respect to finances and quite easy to live with.

But Sophia's talent made her a potentially liberated woman. Hawthorne once wrote to her of how glad he was that she would never think of writing for profit, but he did admire her painting, particularly when she specialized in copying. Her capability in meeting crises and her strength of character, however, must have intimidated him slightly, even though she was as frail a heroine as Hawthorne could have wanted. Like Hilda, she seemed to possess a shield that protected her from harm and from real unhappiness. The possibility that she might prove very capable of taking care of herself, by virtue of her talent and her ability to meet reversals, may have seemed a little threatening to her husband, who was willing to see her as angelic, but probably not as superhuman.

Wagenknecht makes much of the fact that Sophia and Nathaniel Hawthorne were quite passionate lovers, but many Hawthorne scholars would question this. Wagenknecht, himself, goes on to explain that there is a vast difference between "fallen" and "unfallen" sexuality and that the latter, which the Hawthornes possessed, must "relate itself properly and reasonably and realistically to the other aspects, claims and interests of life," never using the partner "for the gratification of personal passion without proper regard to his dignity as a human being and a child of God."<sup>19</sup> Despite a willingness to display certain nude figures in her home, probably because she considered them artistic, Sophia comes through to most of the twentieth century as a



bit of a prude. In fairness to her, she was probably no more prudish than most of her contemporaries and no one can ever know how much of their passion came beyond a romantic ideal. Hawthorne seems to have been more openly appreciative of the sensual than his wife, who protected her daughters, in particular, from any knowledge of sex, fearing to send them to the coeducational Sanborn Academy because of the danger of "this commingling of youths and maidens at the electric age." Sophia insisted that her husband fully shared her horror of this "flaring open of girlhood and boyhood,"<sup>20</sup> but his early experience with Susan, his "Mermaid," suggests that he may have had a bit more sympathy with youthful romance than his wife did. It would be hard to believe that Sophia, however much her husband loved her, came close to the sensual heroines her husband wrote about. On the other hand, she did not intimidate him as a Zenobia would have and he was obviously satisfied with her responsiveness. However, it can be surmised that their attitudes toward sex were not entirely alike.

Most critics agree that the idealistic picture Hawthorne draws of Hilda, especially in the early chapters, is a tribute to his wife. Hyatt Waggoner assures us that "essentially, Kenyon and Hilda are Nathaniel and Sophia." He bases this on the similarity between Kenyon's request for "guidance" and Hawthorne's letters to Sophia.<sup>21</sup> Waggoner calls Hilda "at once a nineteenth-century stereotype and Hawthorne's tribute to Sophia," insisting that the only saving interpretation of her is ironic and that this will not do "if we consider all the evidence."<sup>22</sup> It is probably true that Hawthorne meant Hilda to be a tribute to his

wife, but Hilda did not altogether please the author when he realized what lay beneath the surface of her character. The implication is that the tribute to Sophia became a portrait of her that was too revealing and had to be changed.

Wagenknecht supports both Sophia and Hilda, arguing that neither woman could help the century in which she was produced.<sup>23</sup> Certainly this is true, but when Hawthorne introduces evil into Hilda's life and bases the improvement in her character upon that evil, one begins to suspect that he regarded his "perfect" wife as less than satisfactory. It is possible that he never realized his dissatisfaction until he saw Sophia in Hilda.

Leslie Fiedler remarks that "we are told" Hilda is "a spiritual portrait of Sophia" and calls the happy ending of the novel a concession to the wishes of Hawthorne's wife.<sup>24</sup> F. O. Matthiessen sees the result of Hawthorne's attempt to recreate Sophia in Hilda as "terrifying"<sup>25</sup> and so it may have been to Hawthorne. Fairbanks also assumes that Hilda is "another version of Hawthorne's wife."<sup>26</sup>

Julian Hawthorne quickly denied any serious similarity between Hilda and his mother. The denial comes in reference to a suggestion that Hilda might be a portrait of the young governess, Ada Shepard, a suggestion that Julian denies even more emphatically. In reference to his mother, Julian says of Hilda:

Hilda --- whose fault, if she have any, as a creation is that she is too much of an abstraction --- has in her some traits of Mrs. Hawthorne, though the latter, and perhaps Hawthorne, himself, were not aware of it. Mrs. Hawthorne's was much the larger and broader nature of the two, and was remarkable for a gentle humor and

sunniness of disposition, in which Hilda is conspicuously deficient. Nevertheless, Sophia Hawthorne, with her more winning characteristics omitted, would have furnished ample materials for a Hilda; but of Miss Shepard the latter shows no trace.<sup>27</sup>

Julian, like the twentieth-century critics, instinctively recognized his mother in Hilda, but could not help seeing certain character traits in the latter that distressed him and would have made his father equally unhappy.

Like Peter Zivkovic, Julian seems to deny his father credit for realizing that he was portraying his wife in the novel. But it is more likely that Hawthorne did begin Hilda as a tribute to Sophia. If she appears somewhat idealized at the beginning of the novel, it is only because he idealized his wife. When he saw her on paper, he did not deny that she was Sophia. He probably felt she was. Instead, he changed her to a slightly improved Sophia, one who could reach out to humanity and accept it as she found it. Nor does he change her so much as to suggest that he was really unhappy with her. The subtle changes in her personality suggest an awareness in her creator that Hilda was not satisfactory and that Sophia did not always measure up to her husband's standards of femininity and humanity.

Hilda differs from Sophia in many ways. She is an orphan and Sophia was the center of a large and devoted family. Perhaps the family seemed a little too restrictive to Hawthorne, or perhaps he wanted to suggest the purity of Hilda's background, uninfluenced by her family. Hilda is also extremely healthy. Hawthorne makes a great deal of the fact that she is virtually immune to the diseases of Rome. Sophie was

sickly in her youth. The two differences could be related. Sophia without a family would probably have been much less "delicate." Perhaps Hawthorne suggests in his early Hilda that an ideal Sophia would have been unencumbered by a family and ill health.

Julian Hawthorne noted the other most apparent difference between his mother and Hilda. Sophia must have seemed far more outgoing and far warmer than Hilda. She forced her husband into company. We are told she had a sense of humor. If the initial portrait of Hilda is accepted as one of Sophia, it suggests that the latter's warmth and sense of humor seemed superficial to her husband, or at least elusive. This is especially possible, if his early letters are considered. In them he is anxious that she retain the "naughty Sophie Hawthorne" in his personality. Sophia seems to have been too well-loved by those nearest her to have been cold and humorless, but she was probably selective in choosing those for whom she displayed her most winning characteristics. To outsiders she probably appeared far less warm and delightful than she did to her son. It is possible that Hawthorne felt she should have shared these winning characteristics with the world.

Despite certain differences between them, Hilda seems to be Hawthorne's best effort at portraying his wife. In later years, he seems to have called Sophia "Phoebe" more than "Dove." However, it is difficult to find much of Sophia in the heroine of Seven Gables. If, then, Sophia is the prototype of Hilda, it seems that, while Hawthorne set out to draw an ideal, essential Sophia, a "complete Dove," he became dissatisfied when he saw her on paper and changed her to

something a little closer to his real wish.

There is more evidence to upholding the critics' belief that Hilda must be Sophia. Elizabeth Peabody believed her sister to be a "perfect" copyist like Hilda. Sophia's talent seemed to be as divinely inspired as Hilda's did. Undoubtedly, Hawthorne heard a great deal from the Peabodys about his wife's unusual talent. Had she not been in such delicate health, she might well have followed Hilda to Rome and been very like her, while in residence there.

Elizabeth also remarked that sin would kill Sophia. Hawthorne must have heard this and, whether or not he believed it, it must have become a part of the charisma surrounding his wife. In the novel, sin does not kill Hilda. It improves her, forcing her out of her shell. In the ideal portrait of Sophia, before Hilda is tainted by Miriam's crime and realizes her own state of original sin, the realization of her own relationship to Adam appears to be too much for her delicate soul to stand.

Another similarity between Hilda and Sophia is their independence. Despite her delicacy, the latter was prepared to make her own way in the world at a time when women generally didn't. Her excuse was that she did not want to burden a husband, but it seems possible that she did not want to burden herself with a husband she did not love. Like Hilda, she held herself back, unwilling to be drawn by the power of a man and perfectly capable of taking care of herself. The only difference between the two women seems to be that Hilda was forced by circumstances to achieve independence and Sophia was encouraged by her mother.

Hilda is undoubtedly Sophia, a tribute to her perfection of character

and purity of womanhood. The differences noted between the Sophia of Massachusetts and the Sophia pictured in *Hilda* seem to lie in Hawthorne's attempt to draw an idealized portrait of his wife, an essential portrait of Sophia in good health, unencumbered by her family, so perfect in her character that there was no masque of warmth or good humor to soften her.

Two articles help to bear out the suggestions that Hawthorne was less than satisfied with his fair wife and that, as he matured, he became more aware of his own feelings or at least allowed them to surface in his writing. Marjorie McCorquodale considers the distinct possibility that Herman Melville's Pierre was inspired by his good friend Nathaniel Hawthorne. Pierre is involved in an incestuous relationship with his dark half-sister and finally rejects the good angel, Lucy Tartan, whether because he feels unworthy of her or because he simply does not want her, we are left to conjecture. Dr. McCorquodale shows the similarity between the looks, character and life of Pierre and those of the equally Byronic Hawthorne. She then proceeds to consider the possibility that the dark secret that seems to have marked Hawthorne's life and literary style was a kind of psychologically incestuous relationship with his mother and sisters, during his long period of seclusion in "Castle Dismal,"<sup>28</sup> compounded by his knowledge that an ancestor of his mother, Captain Nicholas Manning, along with his two sisters, was charged with incest by his wife. Dr. McCorquodale suggests that, while the portraits of Nathaniel and Sophia as Pierre and Lucy may have been acceptable, Hawthorne may have been somewhat unnerved by the extent of the incest theme and that this could well have accounted for the sudden cooling of the

friendship between the two greatest American novelists of the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup>

To accept the theory that Hawthorne was the inspiration for Pierre, it must be accepted also that Hawthorne, like his literary counterpart, was drawn into a somewhat guilt-ridden relationship with his mother and sister, sometimes rejecting the delicate Sophia, at least subconsciously. In later years, his portrait of the perfect woman in Hilda, who is so like Sophia, seems to have been an attempt to make it up in his own mind and to the woman he knew he ought to prefer. But he felt the weaknesses in his creation and was too honest to continue his admiration of the good angel without making some subtle but definite changes in her.

It is easy to accept Hawthorne's distress at having to "choose between" Sophia and his family. There is evidence of this in his letters, where he begs Sophia to be patient, while he waits for the right moment to announce their engagement. Fortunately, Sophia was patient and Nathaniel wanted her enough to force himself to approach his mother, eventually, despite what Julian calls the Machiavellian devices of Ebe.<sup>30</sup> It must be admitted that Sophia tried hard to accept the Hawthorne women. She may have been a little too generous, in fact, irritating Elizabeth at least. It was Sophia who cared for Mrs. Hawthorne in her last illness, being the only nurse the latter cared to have by her.<sup>31</sup> The hint of ordinary family difficulties is apparent in much of the Hawthorne correspondence, however, and this compounded by the sensitivity and guilt that Nathaniel seems to have possessed, must have confounded the man and increased his ambivalence.

Virginia Birdsall notes that Phoebe, Priscilla and Hilda manage to suggest Hawthorne's gradual disillusionment with the "redemptive powers" of the pure New England girl.<sup>32</sup> She points out that where Phoebe is active and "love creative," in The House of The Seven Gables, Priscilla is passive and uncreative in The Blithedale Romance. Hilda actually seems to oppose the creative process and is withdrawn. Dr. Birdsall goes on to suggest that, for Hawthorne, the question of the importance and even the feasibility of genuine purity and innocence was far more open at the end of his career than at the beginning. She feels that Hilda enjoys a "feeble victory on a narrative level," but that the variance between the three heroines suggests growing doubt in Hawthorne's mind about the worth of his fair-haired maidens.<sup>33</sup>

These two articles seem to confirm the suggestion that, while Hawthorne was genuinely devoted to his wife and believed that he ought to consider her perfect, he did experience some ambivalence about her and could not accept her as absolutely ideal. Furthermore it seems reasonable that, in his later years, as Dr. Birdsall suggests, he became more realistic and more aware of his own feelings, particularly toward the fair maiden. A moderate amount of guilt for not worshiping his wife could have stimulated him to try to enshrine her in the marble statue of Hilda. An honesty that even guilt and romanticism could not weaken, by the time he was in his fifties, may have prevented him from completely carrying out his design. Hilda is changed just enough to suggest Hawthorne's dissatisfaction with Sophia, perfected as she would have liked to be.



Hawthorne saw in Hilda several traits that reminded him of Sophia. He saw a perfection of character that seemed heavenly. Taught by her mother to protect herself from the ugliness of life,<sup>34</sup> Sophia must have seemed to the sensitive, morose and guilt-conscious Hawthorne an angel of marble, cool and uncomplicated, saintly and capable. Her virginal loveliness attracted him as would that of a Medieval nun and it reminded him equally of his own unworthiness. Over the years he continued to admire her, continued to call her his guide in spiritual matters and seemed to believe that if he ever enjoyed heavenly peace, it would be through her intercession and example. The perfection suggested in Hilda, as she first appears in The Marble Faun, corresponds to that he saw in Sophia during their courtship and the early years of their marriage. It is genuinely admired without any trace of irony. The ambivalence he seems to have encountered in his feelings toward Hilda, later in the novel, corresponds to his struggle against accepting some of his true feelings about his wife. The subtle changes he makes in Hilda's character at the end of the novel suggest his final realization that Sophia could not be changed greatly. Indeed he would not have wanted to be married to Hester or Zenobia. But the transformation of Hilda seems to show that there were underlying traits in Sophia's character that did not entirely please her husband and these he could have wished to see changed.

In Hilda, the ideal Sophia, Hawthorne saw spiritual perfection, but he also saw spiritual selfishness, spiritual pride and a refusal to associate with the rest of God's creatures, many of which she did not

seem to approve of. The unworldliness that he had always admired in Sophia becomes escapism. The purity of soul takes up so much of her interest that she loses concern for her fellow-man. Hilda and Sophia might profess traditional Christianity, but Hawthorne saw Transcendentalism covertly in Hilda and overtly in his wife. The philosophy neutralized certain aspects of Christianity that Hawthorne considered essential to the Christian ethic. Hawthorne was not exactly an extrovert, but he believe he ought to be more a "citizen of the world." It must have distressed him somewhat that Sophia, with her apparently outgoing personality, reserved her charms and concern for those in her immediate circle. Her attitude toward the disadvantaged and the sinful was distinctly superior and, unlike her husband, she never seemed to feel any guilt about it.

Furthermore, in Hilda, Sophia's emotional dominance, her calm superiority and her evident ability to take care of herself showed through and must have given Hawthorne a mild shock. Here was his fragile wife on paper, accurately portrayed to the best of his ability. Yet she was exhibiting some of the characteristics that intimidated Hawthorne most, when he observed them in women.

Artistically, Hilda may fall far short of Hawthorne's best work, but she definitely seems to have been an attempt at showing something important. Through her, he appears to have been showing how Sophia might have changed some of her underlying personality traits and pleased him even more than she did. Hilda becomes more open to other creeds, more accepting of the possibility that others could have part of the

answer to life. She recognizes the need to associate herself with humanity, especially with the sin that is Everyman's burden, according to traditional Christianity. Far from killing her, her acquaintance with sin makes Hilda more aware of her place in the mainstream of life, the grotesque but earthy carnival. Her hopeful nature at the end of the novel is more realistic than at the beginning. She is hopeful for everyone, not just for herself and the few others capable of perfection.

As a woman, Sophia, in the guise of Hilda, is quickly brought down to earth. Enshrined she may be, but it is by the fireside, where there are ashes and cinders, as well as warmth and beauty. She has left the sterile tower where we first saw her. Sophia was very close to her husband's fireside, but it does not seem like her natural setting. Hilda's transference from Heaven to earth suggests that Hawthorne might have preferred that Sophia accept her housewifely tasks a little more willingly, even though he was always anxious to help her with them.

Hilda also becomes submissive toward Kenyon. Like Sophia, she finds this difficult and without the masque of love that Sophia seems to have adopted so early, she continues to berate Kenyon for his unorthodox suggestion of the fortunate fall. She gives way, however, to the extent that she admits her own inadequacy to make philosophical judgements. Perhaps this is why the question is left open-ended. The truth or falsity of the fortunate fall may be no more important to Hawthorne than a last gasp of domination from Hilda. Kenyon soothes her, but he may be merely biding his time until he can convince her that, wise male that he is, his awareness of the real world makes him

a fitter judge in these matters. Hawthorne might not have possessed such courage of conviction, but he might have projected it into Kenyon, his counterpart in the novel.

Finally, Hilda becomes dependent on Kenyon. Not only does she come down from her tower and take up residence at an American hearthside, she also loses her talent. It seems significant that she does not give up her career voluntarily. She will probably never again be so good a copyist and thus she will probably never again earn quite so good a living. She will be financially dependent upon Kenyon. So, for Hawthorne, Hilda becomes more acceptable. He shows, in his final view of her, a more open-minded and a more submissive, dependent woman. He is not disillusioned by her. He still admires Hilda and he adores Sophia. But those personality traits that he never particularly noticed in Sophia, before, appear to have surfaced in Hilda and he cannot resist pointing them out and suggesting a change.

We have considered before why Hawthorne did not make some startling change in Hilda, if he was really dissatisfied with her and this is a good point for review. It seems unfair to charge Hawthorne with failure in regard to her. She is not a delightful personality, even at the end of the novel. She seems rather dull to us and still quite self-centered and romantically religious. But the changes are important, even though she does not meet twentieth-century heroine requirements.

A number of critics attribute the "weak" ending of the novel, including the mildness of the change in Hilda, to the influence of Sophia. Zivkovic, when he suggests that Hawthorne is "blinded" by Hilda, implies

that he is also blinded by consideration of his wife.<sup>35</sup> Fairbanks claims that Hawthorne's fair women always "win" because of the "deus ex machina of genteel tradition" combined with the "presence of Sophia in the wings."<sup>36</sup> Certainly Hawthorne would not have destroyed the picture that Sophia enjoyed so much, the picture of the "sensitive and delicately appreciative" Hilda. Hilda had to remain essentially the same person she was at the beginning. Radical changes in her might have provoked a reaction from Sophia like the one toward Mrs. Bullfrog.

Another more satisfactory reason for the moderation of change in Hilda would be Hawthorne's realism, or at least his sense of reality. He could not possibly have changed the frigid, fleeing girl that Joel Porte discusses,<sup>37</sup> into an exotic woman or even into an earthy little housewife like Phoebe. The best Kenyon could reasonably expect, in the way of passion, was an acceptance of his proposal and a gradual submission to himself and to the real world. Perhaps genuine passion and creativity would come later. At least Hilda, by the end of the novel, was no longer fighting them.

Finally, it seems that Hawthorne did not believe it possible to change Sophia greatly. Nor does it seem likely that he wanted her to be vastly different from the original Hilda. He was deeply in love with his wife and if age and experience had led him to a more honest assessment of her personality, he was still happy with her. In changing Hilda, he suggests a few areas where Sophia might be improved, but he does it so slightly that, for most people, Hilda hardly seems to change at all.

## V. SUMMARY

In the foregoing chapters, my primary aim has been to suggest the significance of the transformation of Hilda. Critics, from time to time, have admitted that there is a change of sorts that she undergoes. However, most of these critics regard her transformation as unimportant to the theme of the novel, unconscious on the part of Hawthorne, and unsuccessful in producing a new woman in Hilda. I suggest that her transformation was as important to Hawthorne as any part of the novel. The fact that he first considered calling the romance St. Hilda's Shrine points up her value for him. He seems to begin the novel with Hilda representing an unworldly perfection generally reserved for the heroines of Medieval allegory. Somewhere in the center of the novel, Hawthorne seems to become dissatisfied with his marble heroine. Her reaction to her friend's crime is too harsh. Hawthorne seems to sympathize with her inability to accept the tragedy, but he also seems to realize that if Hilda is to be a genuinely "good woman," he must change her. Furthermore, Hilda, representing Sophia Hawthorne, seems to exhibit certain character traits that Hawthorne had never consciously noted in his wife. Sophia was much loved and revered, but there are suggestions in their life together that she did not always please Nathaniel entirely, whether he would admit it or not. It seems to me that Hawthorne began the portrait of Hilda as a tribute to his wife, an essence of pure

womanhood and perfect devotion to personal goodness. He seems, however, to have recognized the "frightening" aspects of such a creation and to have used the very experience that should have destroyed her to revive her instead.

Hilda is transformed in several ways, as we have seen. Hawthorne completely changes the allegory around her, bringing her down from the lofty tower, driving away her doves, extinguishing the lamp, allowing her to blend into the carnival scene. The one change he does not make is in her white gown. Hilda's purity has not been damaged by her acquaintance with evil. She can be a "citizen of the world" without sacrificing her genuine goodness. The other changes in her are small enough to confirm the suggestion that Hawthorne never rejects Hilda, nor certainly her prototype, Sophia. He merely attempts to improve Hilda, fearing that she is likely to become a rather frightening person, if allowed to proceed in the direction she has chosen. He also seems to suggest that some of the underlying character traits of his wife are a little frightening to him and that they may be the reason for some subconscious dissatisfaction with her and with "the pure New England maiden" in general.

The two points in Hilda's character that I have concentrated on, points where Hawthorne seems to institute the greatest change, are in regard to religious philosophy and to her femininity. In the last chapter, when we consider Hilda in her relationship to Sophia, it seems quite possible that Hawthorne saw much of Sophia in Hilda, with regard to her failings in these two areas. First of all, Hilda changes her

religious viewpoint. She rejects Miriam and then comes to accept the fact of her friend's crime. Before, she had always managed to ignore the evil around her. Then she sees herself in the mirror and realizes the similarity between her own face and that of Beatrice Cenci. She realizes for the first time that she, herself, is a member of Adam's race and that she is at least capable of sin. She tried to pray but finds that God is not enough. She talks to the doves, but they are not able to sympathize properly. She cries for her mother, but her mother is dead and Miriam, the substitute mother she has leaned upon in Rome, has failed her. Her whole perfect world has come tumbling down upon her. In St. Peter's she is drawn to the confessional, not because she feels the need of a mediator so much as because she feels the need of human contact. The priest mediates between Hilda and the human race and draws her back into it.

From the confessional, Hilda emerges somewhat changed. She is now aware of sin in the world, sin in herself, a need for acceptance of humanity. She can now accept Kenyon as a confidante, no longer fearful that love of man will blind her to love of goodness. She can look at Miriam more objectively, realizing that evil is pervasive and can strike the most innocent. She makes some amends to Miriam by carrying out the errand she has been asked to do. At the same time, she admits the possibility that she herself may have been guilty of some sin herself against Miriam, in rejecting her.

Furthermore, Hilda has lost the gift of copying that set her apart from the real world. She no longer perceives the divine inspiration



behind the paintings she views. But she does see the "truth" in them, and it seems to be a truth of this world. Hilda has been transformed from angel to human, just as Donatello changed from animal to human. Despite the pain each must suffer, Hawthorne seems to feel both are better off in the human state, and he seems to feel just as strongly about Hilda as about the Faun. As an angel, a dove, a marble venus, Hilda was unreal. Hawthorne prefers to see her as a woman, a human being, a warm, living creature. He would have preferred Sophia to be a woman and an angel, too, just as it seems he would have preferred that she strip off the veneer that allowed her to forget the pain and evil in the world. He would have liked less of the Transcendental philosophy which made her so mindful of her own perfection and kept her so apart from the rest of the world. He changes Hilda as he never could change Sophia.

As a woman, Hilda becomes submissive. She no longer turns on Kenyon in anger. She admits her weakness as a person. She becomes dependent. Her peculiar talent is gone. Hawthorne's ambivalence toward various kinds of women apparently led him to prefer a woman of this type. She is a woman who would not challenge him, but would be submissive to him in all things. He was willing to allow Sophia to guide him in spiritual matters to some extent, but he specifically reminds her that he will have his own way, after all. Hilda does not give the appearance of being a dominant female, nor does Sophia, but both could appear quite threatening, for all their frailty.

Hilda most certainly does change. She is a new woman, a new human

being. There is evidence that Hawthorne, in portraying Sophia in her, meant to suggest some dissatisfaction with his fair wife, though he would not have wanted to change her drastically, any more than he changed Hilda. Nor does he admire her less because he can see the need for improvement in her. His admiration for Hilda never fades. He merely fears for the direction her philosophy is taking and is slightly intimidated by her, as a woman. Hawthorne's ambivalence toward women and religion seems to be responsible for the subtle transformation of Hilda in The Marble Faun.

## FOOTNOTES

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