Hawthorne and The Human Way

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One of the most universally accepted critical judgments of Hawthorne concerns his conscious ambiguity; that he intends his works to have ambiguous resolutions is often the only thing that is clear. An excellent example is "Young Goodman Brown"; Hawthorne himself insists on the ambiguity of both the action and the moral in that tale. "Whether Faith obeyed he knew not," (p. 121)[1] says Hawthorne, and adds:

> Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting?
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> Be it so if you will; but alas! it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown. A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become from the night of that fearful dream. (p. 121)

As this passage intimates and as criticism has come to agree, the question of the physical truth of the story is irrelevant, for the lesson is that the world is an ambiguous mixture of Good and Evil. Both the physical and moral resolutions (or irresolutions) of the tale are evocative of that ambiguity.

But Hawthorne's affirming ambiguity to his readers is merely the first step in the progression. Perhaps even more than the ambiguity itself, he is frequently concerned with the *reactions* of his characters to the threat or knowledge of ambiguity. Thus in the passage quoted above Hawthorne is very intersted, even primarily interested, in the

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1) All references to any of the tales of Hawthorne are from Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Selected Tales and Sketches*, ed. Hyatt H. Waggoner (New York: Rinehard Editions, 1950, 1964.)

reaction of Goodman Brown to the ambiguous nature of Evil. Hawthorne sketches the life of a man who *believes* the devil who says, "Evil is the nature of mankind." (p. 120) His failure to accept ambiguity leads to his failure in human sympathy, described in the story's last paragraphs. This response is not one that Hawthorne approves: "it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown."

Throughout his writings we find Hawthorne concerned with the ways people do or do not face the ambiguity of life, particularly as their denying ambiguity leads them to refuse sympathy to those who suffer. As "the truth of the human heart" is the one requisite for the romance writer, so the truth of the human heart can bypass the hard "truths" of unambiguous simplicity. The acceptance of ambiguity and the consequent offering of sympathy are at the center of Hawthorne's conception of full humanity. We are none of us untouched by evil or devoid of good, and we should acknowledge our common humanity with whoever asks our help, whatever they have done.

All of Hawthorne's themes can be subsumed by this one, for the ambiguity to be faced takes many forms, and these forms are what are normally called his "themes": the ambiguity of the Puritan past, of sin, of freedom, of idealism, of art. All these can be both evil and good. Characteristically, while refusing to choose either side of an ambiguity, Hawthorne shows us characters who *do* choose, who *do* believe in answers, who deny ambiguity. By examining both these and the few who avoid the error of simplicity we can find many oversimplified ways of facing life, and understand better Hawthorne's conception of full humanity.

The most obvious example of a character becoming fully human through a rejection of simplicity and an acceptance of the ambiguity of life is in *The Marble Faun*. In this novel Donatello is clearly humanized by suffering. Hawthorne both suggests and retreats from the thesis that the evil and the suffering it brings are therefore good. When Miriam suggests that Donatello's fall is a fortunate one, Kenyon (the

voice of Hawthorne, however imperfectly) recoils: "It is too dangerous, Miriam! I cannot follow you!··· Mortal man has no right to tread on the ground where you now set your feet." (p. 311)[2] Yet Miriam counters:

> At least, she [Hilda] might conclude that sin—which man chose instead of good—has been so beneficently handled by omniscience and omnipotence that, whereas our dark enemy sought to destroy us by it, it has really become an instrument most effective in the education of intellect and soul. (p. 311)

This is a most economical statement of the thesis of the use of evil, and Kenyon himself has already felt much of the growth that evil has caused in Donatello, in his bust that shows his "growing intellectual power and moral sense." (p. 274) But then Hawthorne backs off again, referring to "these meditations, which the sculptor *rightly* felt to be so perilous." (p. 312, italics mine) Perilous perhaps, but not necessarily wrong, for Kenyon expresses Miriam's theory as his own speculation to Hilda shortly thereafter:

> He perpetrated a great crime; and his remorse, gnawing into his soul, has awakened it; developing a thousand high capabilities, moral and intellectual, which we never should have dreamed of asking for, within the scanty compass of the Donatello whom we knew.······
>
> Here comes my perplexity··· Sin has educated Donatello, and elevated him. Is sin, then—which we deem such a dreadful blackness in the universe—is it, like sorrow, merely an element of human education, through which we struggle to a higher and purer state than we could otherwise have attained? Did Adam fall, that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier paradise than his? (p. 329)

As he would not accept Miriam's statement of the same theory, so Hilda

2) All references to *The Marble Faun* are to the Signet Classic edition (New York: New American Library, 1961).

will not hear him, and Kenyon withdraws his speculation, saying, "I never did believe it." (p. 329) Yet this seems more a result of his love for Hilda and his desire that his speculations *not* be true than any real belief that he is wrong.

Donatello has moved from simplicity to complexity and ambiguity, and the movement has "educated" and "elevated" him. Richard Fogle sees this movement as what the novel is about:

> The central suspension of *The Marble Faun* is an opposition between simplicity and complexity, which rests deliberately unresolved at the end. Simplicity is Donatello the faun in his original innocence, complexity is Donatello humanized, matured, and saddened…… Simplicity is heaven itself (which will cause us most difficulty); complexity is human earth. Simplicity is, in fact, either sub-or superhuman, while complexity is the stuff of humanity.[3]

Donatello before his fall was sub-human; he was consistently described in terms of the lower animals, his cheery disposition was seen as thoughtless, and his love for Miriam as having no intellectual depth. His was a purely physical simplicity.

But Donatello's is not the only simplicity in the novel; Hilda is equally simple, equally far from being human, but in the direction of spirituality, not physicality. Fogle points out that "As representative of heaven's simplicity, she consistently rejects the complex. Despite her gentleness, her moral judgments are relentless."[4] Miriam first accuses Hilda of this:

> Oh, Hilda, your innocence is like a sharp steel sword!··· Your judgments are often terribly severe, though you seem all made up of gentleness and mercy. (p. 55)

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3) *Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark* (Norman, Okla., 1952, 1964), p. 192.

4) Fogle, p. 198.

She is like her ancestors, the "men of iron." This indictment is repeated throughout the book with some reason, for Hilda rejects Miriam when she needs human sympathy. She cannot accept Kenyon's speculations on the fortunate fall:

> Do you not perceive what a mockery your creed makes, not only of all religious sentiments, but of moral law—and how it annuls and obliterates whatever precepts of Heaven are written deepest within us? You have shocked me beyond words. (p. 329)

Our judgment falls against Hilda because her simple view does not correspond to the true facts of the world of *The Marble Faun*. "The simplicity of Hilda is inadequate for a complete judgment of human motives and values."[5]

Hilda and the early Donatello demonstrate two of the highest possibilities of simplicity, one of spiritual purity, the other of animal health. The difference between them is that Donatello can accept complexity and ambiguity, while Hilda continues to demand a world where there are answers. Donatello never fails to offer sympathy as Hilda does, and through his sympathy comes the suffering that humanizes him. The novel tries to say that Hilda has changed, that she has moved toward human compassion and away from the angelic through her remorse for rejecting Miriam and through her confession in the Roman Catholic Church, an ambiguous institution that has some value despite its corruption. Unfortunately, this is not convincing. Compared with the growth of Donatello and Miriam through sin, that of Hilda is minimal. Certainly Hilda's being "shocked" by the idea of the fortunate fall does not indicate any full acceptance of ambiguity. Despite her happy ending, she represents the simplicity of seeking heaven by escaping earth and humanity, whereas the only way to heaven is *through* earth, sin, suffering, and humanity.

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5) Fogle, p. 199.

The value of accepting ambiguity is a constant theme throughout Hawthorne's writings, though seldom stated so explicitly before *The Marble Faun*. The most important single tale that demonstrates this is "The Maypole of Merry Mount," another contest between two oversimplified views of life. The men of Merry Mount are like Donatello in their animal and pagan vitality; the Puritans are the original "men of iron" of whom Hilda is a descendant.

Hawthorne's attitude toward the two sides is unstable—each side gets at one time admiration, at another, undercutting irony. But most interesting of all, and central to the story, are the reactions of the young couple. First in the midst of the "jollity" of the May dance they have thoughts of gloom:

> "Oh, Edith, this is our golden time! Tarnish it not by any pensive shadow of the mind; for it may be that nothing of futurity will be brighter than the mere remembrance of what is now passing."
>
> "That was the very thought that saddened me! How came it in your mind too?" said Edith··· "I struggle as with a dream, and fancy that those shapes of our jovial friends are visionary, and their mirth unreal, and that we are no true Lord and Lady of the May. What is the mystery in my heart?" (pp. 141-2)

The mystery in their hearts serves as more than a dramatic foreboding of the coming of the Puritans; it is a vision of the complexity of life that the simplicity of Merry Mount misses completely. But so do the Puritans miss the vision by considering all of Merry Mount to be evil, though it should be noted that it is Endicott himself who throws the garland of roses around the necks of the couple, a significant gesture of understanding compassion. The ending of the story clearly indicates they have accepted the complexity and ambiguity of human life, if not with an intellectual understanding with the more important understanding of a way of living:

> It was a deed of prophesy. As the moral gloom of the world overpowers all systematic gaity, even so was their home of wild mirth made desolate amid the sad forest. They returned to it no more. But as their flowery garland was wreathed of the brightest roses that had grown there, so in the tie that united them were intertwined all the purest and best of their earthly joys. They went heavenward, supporting each other along the difficult path which it was their lot to tread, and never wasted one regretful thought on the vanities of Merry Mount. (p. 149)

It is the young couple who symbolize what Hawthorne hopes the new world will become, a fusion of "jollity and gloom" that gives absolute victory to neither, that accepts complexity and ambiguity. If gloom wins publicly, privately only the *vanities* of Merry Mount are forgotten. The good of Merry Mount is taken into the Puritan community in the form of the symbolic rose garland, the recognition of the value of love by Endicott, and the uniting power of trust and sympathy in the couple.

That such trust and sympathy are real accomplishments is seen by contrast with "Young Goodman Brown," where the confrontation with ambiguity leads, as we have seen, to failure. Starting with the simplicity of untested faith, Goodman Brown fails to keep any faith while accepting evil, and falls completely into the even more erroneous simplicity of cynicism, denying all sympathy. Fogle claims that "He finds strength to resist the devil, and in the ambiguous conclusion he does not entirely reject his former faith."[6] In contrast I see the final lines of the story as the most telling indictment; at his death "they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone, for his dying hour was gloom." (p. 122) The role of the heaven beyond the ambiguity of life is extremely important in Hawthorne. Here he says that by losing all faith Goodman Brown has lost heaven, in contrast with the "went

6) Fogle, p. 16.

heavenward" of the couple from Merry Mount.

Denial of ambiguity leads to sharp judgment, judgment leads to a withholding of sympathy, which in turn leads to the isolation of self from humanity. Marius Bewley notes that this is one of the central themes of American literature:

> For man there are two possibilities, either to live in isolation, imprisoned in himself, or to live in community, in some sort of reciprocal sympathy with his fellow-men… the fullness of life, the release from the prison of one's isolated identity, can only come about through self-surrender, through a refusal to withhold oneself, or any part of one's personality, in a human relationship.[7]

Bewley is discussing Rev.Hooper in "The Minister's Black Veil," which "does not symbolize self-surrender in any positve sense. Its teaching is negative. It stands as a terrible warning to the parishoners."[8] Rev.Hooper is not demonstrating his own failure but that of the parishoners who deny him because of his veil. Hooper's own offering of sympathy is very effective despite the veil because he is able to see the evil "on every visage" (p. 137) as ambiguous and the people as still worthy of help.

Wakefield, without any such lesson to teach, becomes even more isolated and ends us as "the Outcast of the Universe." (p. 89) Richard Digby, the "Man of Adamant," is scarcely human, for unambiguously seeing every evil but his own he isolates himself totally:

> Yet, grown people avoid the spot, nor do children play there. Friendship, and Love, and Piety, all human and celestial sympathies, should keep aloof from that hidden cave; for there still sits, and, unless an earthquake crumble down the roof upon his head, shall sit

7) Marius Bewley, *The Eccentric Design: Form in the Classic American Novel* (Columbia paperback, 1963), pp. 131-2.

8) Bewley, p. 132.

> forever, the shape of Richard Digby, in the attitude of repelling the whole race of mortals—not from heaven—but from the horrible loneliness of his dark, cold sepulchre! (p. 173)

Once again Hawthorne makes the equation of celestial and human sympathies.

Another one who fails to see an ambiguous mixture is Giovanni in "Rappaccini's Daughter," who conceives of Beatrice first as an angel, then as a devil. Only for a moment at the end does he think of "returning within the limits of ordinary nature, and leading Beatrice, the redeemed Beatrice, by the hand." (p. 297) By then it is too late, and Hawthorne insists his failure of sympathy has blighted their love as Rappaccini has blighted his daughter.

In "My Kinsman, Major Molineu," Robin undergoes an initiation into ambiguity; the tarring and feathering of his kinsman is at once just and callous, majestic and funny, noble and shameful. Robin seems to recognize this and grow from it. Though he begins as a figure like Donatello, afterwards "his cheek was somewhat pale, and his eye not quite as lively as in the earlier part of the evening." (p. 33) But again in contrast with "Young Goodman Brown," Robin's confrontation with ambiguity does not make him a cynic; his story is one of rare success.

Other failures are the singleminded scientists and artists who overlook human feeling and sympathy. Ethan Brand's cold manipulation of people in his search for the Unforgiveable Sin transmutes that sin into his own marble heart, and he burns in a symbolic Hell. He, Rappaccini, Westervelt, Chillingworth, and Miriam's model are the damned, believing singlemindedly in Evil, and totally cut off from humanity.

"The Birthmark" illustrates the dangers of the opposite simplicity. Though Aylmer seems a devilish figure, he has, like Hilda, the goals of perfection and heaven on earth. Being unable to accept the ambiguity of the birthmark and thus striving for what human beings cannot attain on earth, Aylmer has a failure of sympathy; he does not realize what

he is doing to his wife, whom he does love in his fatal way.

> Yet, had Aylmer reached a profounder wisdom, he need not thus have flung away the happiness which would have woven his mortal life of the selfsame texture with the celestial. The momentary circumstance was too strong for him; he failed to look beyond the shadowy scope of time, and, living once for all in eternity, to find the perfect future in the present. (p. 221)

As in "The Man of Adamant," Hawthorne is saying that the only way to Heaven is through humanity.

In *The Blithedale Romance* and *The House of the Seven Gables* the themes of ambiguity and sympathy are important if not thematically central. In the former Hollingsworth is a good example of a man who starts with simplicity and grows to understanding. He begins like Rappaccini or Brand, an idealist-scientist who is willing to manipulate people to gain his ideal ends. Yet the death of Zenobia is a shock that overcomes his blind simplicity, and he becomes capable of giving happiness to another, to Priscilla. Yet Hollingsworth ends with "a depressed and melancholy look, that seemed habitual." (p. 282)[9] Like Donatello, his understanding does not lead to his necessary happiness, only to his humanity.

Priscilla is a heroine somewhat like Phoebe and Hilda, but she has suffered enough to avoid "swordlike judgments" and she easily offers love and compassion to Hollingsworth, accepting the man's ambiguity even if she does not understand it completely. Zenobia is a more complex case, for throughout the novel she exerts a tremendous attractive power through her sexuality and her vitality. Yet through Coverdale Hawthorne judges her unsparingly: "I recognized no severe culture in Zenobia; her mind was full of weeds." (p. 68) Hers is the simplicity

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9) References to *The Blithedale Romance* are from the Dell Laurel edition, ed. David Levin (New York, 1963).

of egocentricity. Her lack of sisterly sympathy for Priscilla supports our judgment of her, and her death should not overshadow her limitations, though it is so powerfully written that it tends to do so.

In *The House of the Seven Gables,* Hawthorne's most cheerful book, any growth or learning that takes place does so without pain. Phoebe is the most nearly human of Hawthorne's "Pure White Virgins," and the change that takes place in her is a natural result of her being in Pyncheon House:

> A change grew visible; a change partly to be regretted, although whatever charm it infringed upon was repaired by another, perhaps more precious. She was not so constantly gay, but had her moods of thought, which Clifford, on the whole, liked better than her former phase of unmingled cheerfulness··· She was less girlish than when we first beheld her alighting from the omnibus; less girlish, but more a woman. (p. 155)[10]

Aside from this Phoebe, who is so "firmly rooted in the Actual," so commonsensical and sure of what is right and wrong, does not change. The reason is that she is not confronted with an ambiguous case of evil mixed with good. Clifford she accepts with an instinctive compassion that does her credit, and the possibility of his being criminal is not considered. Judge Pyncheon she judges as the petty reflection of the "man of iron" that he is, and her judgment needs no qualification, for his evil is unqualified by any human good needing sympathy. It is futile to speculate what her reaction to Donatello's case would be— within the context of this novel her compassion and acceptance of complexity are sufficient.

Similarly, Holgrave does not change greatly. Though he begins as an artistically detached observer, his detachment is never manipulative

10) References to *The House of the Seven Gables* are from the Signet Classic edition (New York: New American Library, 1961), ed. Edward C. Sampson.

or unsympathetic, as is shown by his refusal to hypnotize Phoebe. (p. 187) He "offers whatever aid I can," quite early (191) and foregoes all feelings of vengeance to which his family ties might seem to entitle him. He accepts the ambiguity that though Hepzibah's house may be ill-gotten, yet good may come of it. A more serious problem might be his sudden shift from reformer to conservative, but that irony does not alter his knowledge of complexity and humanity.

In *The Scarlet Letter* the obvious example of a person becoming fully human is Pearl. Hawthorne makes it explicit for us:

> Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it. (p. 238)[11]

Hawthorne here reveals his interests in the very words I have been using—he is concerned with sympathies and with human joy and sorrow. The *mixture* of joy and sorrow is what Hawthorne sees as the essence of humanity. Charles Feidelson's excellent discussion of Pearl's humanization makes us realize that hers is unlike any of the other "simplicities" we have seen. As a symbol she is complex, varied, and ambiguous even before she becomes human:

> Her incarnation as "a noble woman," foreseen by Hester, will be a conversion of her "infinite variety" into human freedom by means of the suffering that is the sign of human limits.[12]

Thus Pearl would seem to contradict the thesis that becoming human

11) References to *The Scarlet Letter* are from the Signet Classic edition, ed. Leo Marx (New York: New American Library, 1959).

12) "*The Scarlet Letter*," *Hawthorne Centenary Essays*, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (Ohio State, 1964), p. 74.

is a removal of simplicity. However, the distinction must be made between what Pearl functions as and what her attitude is toward the world around her. She *is* complex; her attitude, however, is one of utter freedom from all human ties, and one of utterly candid, precocious, and sharp judgments, notably of Dimmesdale. But Dimmesdale's death calls forth her sympathy and overthrows her condemnation of him; she loses both her inhuman freedom and, we assume, her preternatural judgments:

> So extreme is Pearl's sense of absolute freedom that all the drama of Dimmesdale's final agony is needed to complete her transformation. In some sense, of course, she must already have entered the human world, the world of sorrow, in order to feel his loss at all.… Just as the kiss he asks from her is his last concession to the world of human relations that he rejects in his dying speech, so her bestowal of the kiss is her first act within the human world to which he has drawn her.[13]

But if Dimmesdale functions to draw Pearl into humanity, he does not seem to be so successful with himself. Like Goodman Brown, he is never capable of facing the thought of ambiguity in good and evil. His only thought is of the evil of his sexual sin, whereas a comparison between his moral state and Hester's shows that the greater evil, as in "Roger Malvin's Burial," is not in the deed but in the concealment of the deed. Even in his last moments Dimmesdale does not recognize this, nor that any good (Pearl, for example) has come from his deed:

> "Hush, Hester, hush!" he said with tremulous solemnity. "The law we broke!—the sin here so awfully revealed!—let these alone be in thy thoughts! I fear! I fear! It may be, that, when we forgot our God—when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul—

13) Feidleson, pp. 74-5.

> it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion." (p. 239)

This is similar in context to Hilda's quieting of Kenyon. In fact, Dimmesdale in some respects is comparable to the Pure White Maidens of the later romances. Perhaps more important, like them his deeds somewhat belie his verbal hostility to any suggestion of moral ambiguity. He does turn at the end to Hester and Pearl, in an awakening of human sympathy, and he does beg for the final kiss from Pearl. Perhaps his mild achievement of human sympathy is meant to represent adequate growth, as it is supposed to for Hilda, but his final speech still seems more a casting off than a realization of humanity.

Hester is frequently compared in her vitality and sensuality to Zenobia, but her mind is, if unguided, far stronger. She is more like Miriam; she speculates her way to a view of the ambiguity of evil that is very like that which Miriam propounds to Kenyon in *The Marble Faun*. She reaches a balance between the forces of Chillingworth, Pearl, and Dimmesdale. Feidelson discusses Hester's growth in terms of such forces:

> If the world exemplified in Chillingworth, though it has the substance of evil, is ultimately without good, the world of absolute freedom is finally without substance, without "truth." It is the example of Dimmesdale that brings this home to Hester and thereby helps to restore her intellectual balance. For in her conversation with him she is fighting against this realzation as much as she is combatting the claims of the scarlet letter.[14]

There is little doubt that Hester achieves a sense of human sympathy, for through her own suffering she has learned what others suffer. Her sickbed watching and other work is not merely penance (though it is surely that) but compassion for others, whether sinful or not. Certainly

14) Feidelson, p. 60.

her acquaintance with sin in general leads her to doubt the sin of her sin, to suggest fleeing to Europe. She wanders "in a moral wilderness" where she looks at "human institutions, and whatever priests or legislators had established; criticizing all with hardly more reverence" than an Indian. (p. 189-90) Thus she says, "What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so!" (p. 186) and at the end can say "Surely, surely, we have ransomed one another, with all this woe!" (p. 239)

The greatest evidence of ambiguity and of good coming with evil is in the scarlet letter itself, which not only comes to stand for "Able," but after Dimmesdale's death completely ceases to be a symbol of sin:

> In the lapse of the toilsome, thoughtful, and self-devoted years that made up Hester's life, the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world's scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence too. And, as Hester Prynne had no selfish ends, nor lived in any measure for her own profit and enjoyment, people brought all their sorrows and perpexities, and besought her counsel, as one who had herself gone through a mighty trouble. (p. 244)

At the end of the novel Hester returns to Boston; "here is 'real life,' for here is the locus of sin, sorrow, and penitence."[15] She has realized that the ambiguity of her scarlet letter and the offering of her sympathy are the center of human life and the way to heaven. She has become not only fully human, but one of the best of humanity.

The comparison of Hester with Miriam is thus far more useful than that with Zenobia; she is like Miriam in her speculation and in becoming fully human through suffering. The logical comparison for Pearl is with Donatello, another free creature on whom human bonds fall only lately and through suffering. Dimmesdale is like Hilda in his Puritan fear of ambiguity, and Miriam's demonic model resembles the

15) Feidelson, p. 62.

demonic Chillingworth. Thus in terms of the themes of sympathy and ambiguity the structures of *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Marble Faun* are remarkably similar, for example in the love of Donatello/Pearl for Miriam/Hester, the dark sin in the past of Miriam/Hester known by the model/Chillingworth, and the failure of Hilda/Dimmesdle in sympathy toward Miriam/Hester. In each novel Miriam and Hester are at the center of the forces of the same three simplistic views: pure Evil, absolute freedom, and Puritan pietism. These heroines struggle through suffering to reject all these simplicities and to choose complexity.

In Hawthorne's work we have seen many varieties of simplicity and its attraction, in Hilda, Goodman Brown, Aylmer, Hollingsworth, and others. We have also seen a few people who achieve the acceptance of ambiguity that Hawthorne seems to value. Frequently the shift is small, as in Phoebe and Hilda, and in the tentativeness of Kenyon's final statement.

But Kenyon's final drawing back from the theory of the fortunate fall is significant, and indicates that Hawthorne felt somewhat ambiguously about ambiguity itself. Kenyon's is not the only drawing back from ambiguity. In *The Scarlet Letter*, in addition to Dimmesdale's hushing of Hester when she suggests ambiguity on two occasions (pp. 186, 239) the author also makes it emphatic that her years of speculaton, while they taught her freedom, "taught her much amiss." (p. 190) Then again, in *The House of the Seven Gables* the philosophy that is given final approval is that of Phoebe, who never wanders from the unambiguous "sharp judgments" handed down to her by tradition. This thrust toward simplicity can also be seen in the very characters of Hilda, Phoebe, and Priscilla. One part of Hawthorne desired a world where there *are answers*. In most of his stories, he resists the wish and presents the world as being ambiguous, as he knows it is—but the desire is significant.

Furthermore, a consideration of the characters who *achieve* what I have been calling "full humanity" does not reveal any conventional

happiness. Marius Bewley puts the problem in perspective by commenting that:

> The conflict in Hawthorne's character was deep. Hawthorne invests such characters as Zenobia, Hester, and Miriam with a rich emotional fullness, a deep flow of life. But consider then the hideous fate he deals out to them while apotheosizing the insufferable Priscillas and Hildas to whom he gives his full intellectual approval.[16]

I think that the error here is that Hawthorne does not give Priscilla and Hilda his *full* in tellectual approval, though he finds them (in contrast to Bewley) intellectually attractive, for they have a faith in simplicity which he wishes he could accept but cannot. But Bewley is right that the happy endings go to the spiritual simlifiers like Hilda, Priscilla, and Phoebe, and that suffering is the only earthly end of those who achieve humanity. Thus the final ambiguity in Hawthorne might be called the ambiguity of ambiguity itself—whether the acceptance of ambiguity and human sympathy is *good*, even if it is nearer the truth.

The answer is that *any* position involves some loss. Phoebe in coming to be a woman loses her girlish joy; Donatello in becoming mature loses his animal spirits. The simplifiers lose even more, for even if they attain happiness, they never achieve a true vision of this world, and they cut themselves off from much of humanity through judgment. With the exception of *The House of the Seven Gables* where there is no conflict between them, Hawthorne values the truth of complexity above earthly happiness.

Part of the cause for the ambiguity of ambiguity is in a motif that has come up again and again in the quotations in this paper, the promise of heavenly happiness. Heaven is the desired world where there are answers. Heaven remains a magnetic value comparable to the

16) Bewley, p. 160.

central ambiguity of human life.

> His only reconciliation is acceptance of life's differences and contradictions. The solution he offers is the moral at the end of "The Birthmark": heaven exists and earth exists—accept your human imperfections, and wait. The lot of man is "care and sorrow, and troubled joy," but there is perfection elsewhere. Life is heaven, and earth—and neither of these can be ignored. This theme in itself might seem a solution. The difficulty is, however, that man wants heaven immediately. This irrational desire he cannot master, but can only hold in check at best.[17]

Like Aylmer, Hawthorne did not always succeed in holding it in check; significantly it is the *spiritually* simple, like Hilda, to whom he gives happiness. He wishes to bypass the "difficult path heavenward" that the Merry Mount couple take, the way of suffering and complexity.

But as Hawthorne must have known, unless Hilda *really* is an angel (as he tries to make her up to a point), her pose fails. In heaven, where all things will be known, her sharp judgments will be correct (though infinite sympathy will remain.) On earth such judgments are fallible and wrongheaded. The world is ambiguous. To judge and demand heaven (or hell, as does Chillingworth) on earth is to be too simple. The hope for simplicity is a hope for heaven, and Hawthorne, in all but the wishful moments of relaxed control in which he created Hilda, knows he is writing on earth and about human beings. In fact, Hawthorne's concern in his fiction is not really with heaven, despite his references to it. He is not primarily a Christian writer, however steeped in the Christian tradition he may be. Rather, he uses spiritual language and Christian symbolism to talk about the life of this world. Thus throughout his writings he asserts the value of facing and accepting the complexity and ambiguity central to the fully human life.

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17) Fogle, p. 220.

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