

## Review

# The Fictional Forte and Literary Achievement of Nathaniel Hawthorne with a Focus on Spiritual Development through Sin and Suffering as Pictured in His *Marble Faun*: A Brief Analysis

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### Abstract

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This paper is an attempt to examine the fictional art and forte of Nathaniel Hawthorne with a special focus on his literary achievement and also spiritual development attained through experience of sin, guilt and sufferings, by projecting him not only as an American novelist and short – story writer but also a new England Puritan disapproving severe and harsh codes of the Puritan morality and a psychologist delving deep into the study of human nature. It studies and reveals how Hawthorne used fiction as a medium for pursuing poetic truth; that is the truth of human heart and used his novel especially as a tale of human frailty and sorrow by pouring all the passion of his sensitive and lonely heart into his fictional composition. It finally attests to the fact that the outraged suffering humanity must learn to live with the blackness that lies everywhere beneath us.

**Keywords:** Fictional forte, curious coincidence, spiritual development, sin, guilt, human suffering, Puritan morality, poetic truth, sensitive heart.

## INTRODUCTION

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), American novelist and short-story writer, was born into an old New England family in Salem, Massachusetts. It was a curious coincidence that he was born in 1804 on July the 4<sup>th</sup>, which is the day of the American Independence. Hawthorne was American to the core, a New Englander, descended on both sides from early Puritan settlers and steeped in their traditions. He was very much aware of his ancestors. The Hawthorne's had participated in the notorious Salem witch trials in the seventeenth century and later in the Quaker persecutions. Nathaniel Hawthorne, reflecting on the past, always felt a sense of guilt and this is a theme that dominates many of stories including his novels. Turning to the historical past, Hawthorne found Puritan New England a congenial

setting for his work. Claiming the privileges of a Romancer he deplored the lack of material for the artist in contemporary America, which he called a land of shadowless daylight. His precise, almost classic prose style decorated with symbol and allegory, made a great impression not only on his contemporary Melville, but also on later American writers like Henry James and William Faulkner. He has to his credit publication of such notable works as 1. *The Scarlet Letter* 2. *The House of the Seven Gables*, 3. *The Blithedale Romance* 4. *The Marble Faun* and many short stories.

It is said that Hawthorne wanted to use fiction as a medium for pursuing poetic truth, that is, the truth of the human heart. Being a descendant of the Puritans and an avid student of New England history, he was fascinated

by the problems of sin and salvation and by the questions of right and wrong that had preoccupied his ancestors. To produce literary masterpieces that could challenge the literary achievements of such literary giants as Washington Irving, Fennimore cooper and Edgar Allan Poe was more than a feather in Hawthorne's literary cap. Hawthorne himself describes his novel as a tale of human frailty and sorrow'. He calls it 'a hell-fired story'. He poured all the passion of his sensitive and lonely heart into his fictional composition. **The Scarlet Letter** is a story of sin, repentance, suffering death and salvation. Hawthorne, like Melville, believed that there is preponderance of evil in this world. He thought that all person may be classed a sinner, only because he thinks of sin without his even committing it. He may be guilty, because of his guilt in dream but Hawthorne is not oblivious of the difference between thinking of guilt and its execution. **The Scarlet Letter** is a novel in which the sin perpetrated before the commencement of the story is the type of the original sin. It is a novel imbued with deep significance enshrining the cramping Calvinistic doctrine which frustrated gratification of legitimate human urges. What was entered in his 'Note Books' in 1844 is, "The life of woman, who by the old colony law, was condemned always to wear the letter 'A', sewed on her garment in token of her having committed adultery." In **The Scarlet Letter**, Pearl is the result of the sinful acts of Hester and Dimmesdale. Hester is made to put on the letter 'A' on her bosom for her sin, but it has the effect of cross on a nun's bosom. Though the man wishes to indict and punished her for her sin by making her put on the letter 'A', this enables her to adjust with the milieu and environment. Thus, the good comes out of evil and the sin improves human nature.

Hawthorne, a New England Puritan disapproving severe and harsh codes of the Puritan morality is essentially a moralist, a metaphysician, preoccupied with the problem of evil, sin and guilt and a psychologist, delving deep into the study of human nature. His romances and short stories like "Wakefield". "Ethan Brand", "David Swan" enshrined his moral concern. Hawthorne professes faith in the inexorable working of natural laws and the inevitability of consequences. Similar to Emerson, his faith is in the inevitable result of the cause and effect. Most of his moral questions link then to the human guilt. **The House of the Seven Gables** is nothing but the study of human guilt. James Russell though **The House of the Seven Gables** better than the better known **The Scarlet Letter** and called it "the most valuation contribution to New England history that has been made": (Batra in Preface). The novel admirably blends realism and fantasy with a moral outlined by Hawthorne himself in the preface: "The wrong doing of one generation lives into the successive ones and.....becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief". This is illustrated through the tale of

Hephzibah and Clifford, and their tormentor, Judge Pyncheon. **The House of the Seven Gables** uses physical degradation and decay to mirror the spiritual decay that the pyncheon family suffers. The house of the seven gables itself is an obvious symbol of the declining pyncheon fortunes.

Hawthorne, with his faith in humanitarianism, democracy and reform found vices and divergence between theory and practice. The imperfections and evils of society have engendered a doubt and scepticism in his attitudes. He has lashed the vices with his satire and irony he has introduced powerful ironical situations lending poignency to his satire in his **The Blithedale Romance** which is an indictment of the idea of reform, idealism and Transcendentalism which Hawthorne acquired through his association with 'Brook Farm'. **The Blithedale Romance** is nothing but a critique of the Brook Farm experiment and superb analysis of the urge to utopia the corrupting effects of unexamined desires for leadership and the undetermined and tragic effects feminist emancipations. For his last completed novel, **The Marble Faun** (1860), Hawthorne places his action in Italy; the Italian count Donatello, the mysteriously European Miriam and an American couple form a triangulation of his familiar themes. **The Marble Faun** is a story of the fall of the man into evil. It reveals the guilty conscience of man, "the impact of the past on the present, the relations of head and heart, of the past on the present, the relations of head and heart and the path to redemption through the union of the two all brought together in a structure dominated by the Eden myth. "With this theme has ben juxtaposed the concept of European culture and American morality". The plot of the romance centers round count Donatello's love for a woman Miriam who has some past sense of guilt in Room. The count is an innocent person who is more natural in his traits and is unscrupulous. He commits murder for her love. He has his knowledge of good and evil and his friends also are involved in the sin. Hilda is a pure woman who dreads the idea of sin but later is actively entangled in human life. Kenyon has more contemplative interest and wonders whether sin is fearful. He proposes Hilda who has cautioned him against the dangers inherent in his speculative ideas. Thus, both are united. The story has symbolic significance and the meaningful images. The count Donatello has his furry ears which represent the modern faun. Kenyon suggests head. Hilda and Donatello, the two innocent characters are pure and innocent, residing in towers.

**The Marble Faun** (1860) is a romance of crime and punishment, a myth of the fortunate and necessary fall from innocence to maturity and the relative purity on New world youth in wicked old Europe His career is at the center of the American tradition of apprehension concerning the nature of permanent evil in a society dedicated to and capable of infinite progress. Hawthorne

was deeply preoccupied with the modern themes of alienation, isolation and guilt consciousness and with modern spiritual problems generally. Not sin but its consequence in human life is Hawthorne's major theme. The novelist is said to have specialized in psychological topics, frequently dealt with morbid states of mind. Sin and evil, ubiquitous in his work, are analysed not as static human psyche. Most of Hawthorne's characters speak of sin, meaning sin against God or against divine law but in the author's view, the characters suffer the consequences of guilt because they exist only in their minds. Thus, the effects of guilt are the more certainly inevitable because they are psychological.

Hawthorne is short, was a theist who thought of himself as a Christian, but he was skeptical of all claims, whether Puritan or Roman Catholic, to know the details of the Divine will. Brought up as a Unitarian, he associated himself with no church at all, yet preferred Bunyan to the religious liberals of his day and impressed family and friends as a religious man falling in line with the view of Austin Warren who writes:

"Theologians distinguish two kinds of sin, 'original' and 'actual'. 'Original sin', that sin in which, according to the psalmist, our mothers conceived us, that propensity to sin which we have inherited from our generations of forefathers whose sins are visited upon us, follows as a consequence of the Fall of Adam, the archetypal man. Consciously and voluntarily indulging this hereditary propensity, we fall into actual sin" (P XXVI)

Hawthorne was the product of the Puritan society. Being brought up in a Puritan environment, he was prone to seclusion, which provided him with ample opportunity to ponder over the moral aspect of the Puritan faith, especially in its approach to sin;

"In Adam's fall,  
We sinned all" (Levin 18)

***The Marble Faun*** consumed Hawthorne's whole career to write his "story of the fall of man". Loss of innocence, initiation into the complexities of experience in a world of ambiguously mingled good and evil, experience of guilt to obscurely related to specific acts as to seem more original and necessary than avoidable, all these had been this subjects in story after story. Hawthorne stresses his belief that the commitment of sin is central to the spiritual regeneration of man, since God wishes man to chasten and purify him by making him go through suffering and repentance. He delves deep into the subtle working of guilt in the human heart. ***The Marble Faun*** partakes of Hawthorne's artistic craftsmanship and is not an unworthy companion to its fore runners. Like ***The Scarlet Letter*** and ***The House of the Seven Gables***, the world of ***The Marble Faun*** is a fallen world. The fall is a fall from harmony to discord, from fellowship to isolation. This isolation is caused by men's own action and

behavior, the result of thinking himself too good or too bad. Our sin, in short, is both original and ever renewed. We are like the later pyncheons, in part, victims of the house, in part, perpetrators of fresh sins-until love release us from our inheritance. Hawthorne was more interested in guilt as a necessary human condition than he was in any specific sinful act. So he treated the central action in ***The Marble Faun*** in such a way that it is just as impossible to decide that Donatello is really responsible for the murder he committed. Miriam, herself a victim of a dreadful evil, is at least as responsible as Donatello, and the murdered men both invited and deserved his fate. All Rome, all history made the crime inevitable and its spreading effects leave no one untouched, not even the spotless Hilda. This murder is no ordinary crime but a reenactment of the archetypal fall.

***The Marble Faun*** is about man's lapse from Primal innocence and his possible regeneration. As Kenyon asks, "Did Adam Fall, that we might ultimately rise to far loftier paradise than his?" (Hawthorne 854). It is concerned with the way in which nature and spirit, innocence and evil, time and nature and spirit, innocence and evil, time and eternity may be conquered and reconciled in a moment of incarnation. It is the story of a murder in which an innocent young man falls into sin and rises into maturity. The perfectionistic values which had been the basis for Hawthorne's tales and novels are in ***The Marble Faun*** formulated explicitly as myth in the history of the Monte Benin. The characters in this last major novel are measured against the perfectionist possibility of gaining greater humanity. As the novel opens, each of the four characters is in a state of withdrawal from the active, time-affected world, out of touch with society, and out of sympathy with other peoples; Donatello in his Arcadia is too animalistic to be called fully human; Hilda lives in an angel's untouchable world; Miriam broods in the dark cave of bitterness; and Kenyon lives in the cold marble world of art. Each must, if he is to reach a higher form of being, first enter a period of self-scrutiny, become fully aware of his own ignominy and as Donatello finally does, emerge from self-centeredness to commit himself in love to other mortals.

Donatello, human with a touch of faun and a link between man and animal, stands for natural innocence. There is a murder; he sins for Miriam's sake and she acquiesces in his sin. A New England girl, Hilda, is the accidental witness. In the fourth chapter, Kenyon is in love with Hilda and watches with sharpened senses and an inquiring mind what takes place. Their complicity makes spiritual partners of Donatello and Miriam. Tortured by what she knows, the Puritan Hilda ends by kneeling in a confessional at St. Peter's and disburdening her soul of the weight upon it. The Crux of the novel is in Kenyon's words:

"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 would otherwise have attained” (TMF854)

The innocent, faun-like Donatello is an anomalous creative’ mystified between the real and the fantastic. He has grown up in a rural Arcadia where he has been close to nature. He encounters evil in the corrupt city and ends by committing a murder, but is apparently deepened and matured by this experience. He is suddenly awakened to moral consciousness and remorse by this unpremeditated murder. In *The Marble Faun* Hawthorne deals with the old problem of the Fall: Donatello is as innocent as Adam, until the Crime that derives him from paradise awakens his moral consciousness Donatello, the admirer of Miriam, enraged beyond endurance and encouraged by a glance from Miriam, grasps her model and flings him from the Tarpeian rock to his death.. From that incident, Miriam and Donatello are linked together by their guilty secret, and the happy, headless, faunlike Donatello becomes the remorseful Conscience-stricken man. After the murder of the model, Donatello experiences first an ecstatic and exhilarating sense of freedom which is much like the one experienced by Arthur Dimmesdale following his forest interview with Hester Prynne. Then comes the reaction: the terrible fact of loneliness, the sense of being an alien to the world. Donatello withdraws, to his ancestral home only to find that innocence is a condition of the mind rather than of a place. Finally a new Donatello returns, first to Perugia where he meets Miriam, his partner in crime, then to Rome.

Donatello’s fall from innocence leads him to the kind of intelligence, restraint, and self-awareness that define the full human condition. He is matured, resents a higher state of existence; through experience of guilt, sorrow, confession and remorse have come a ‘vivified intellect’ and an altered, deepened character. His pre-moral innocence has given way to life is a specifically human sense. In his transformation, Donatello takes on nothing of the tragic dignity of Adam, penitent for having sinned against his God. But like Dimmesdale, Donatello rises spiritually and intellectually:

“Donatello does eventually achieve what the perfectionists would call a higher humanity is supported by the growth of a mature love from Miriam and by the awakening of a moral sense which leads him to deliver himself up to the world for judgment” (P 593)

Like Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, Donatello knows confusion, struggle and pain as he travels a tortuous penitential path, and like Hollingsworth, he humbly acknowledges the evil he has done. Donatello, who with his faun’s ears is himself something of a grotesque figure, learns the painful lesson of moral uncertainty through the crime that unites him with Miriam in an ambivalent bond

of love and over Miriam’s shoulder, he sees the moral calamity of uncertainty that Miriam herself had seen dimly reflected in the Trivia Fountain. It suggests that the knowledge of the human heart is composed of anguished ambivalences.

Hawthorne thus confines the term of Donatello’s Faun-like innocence to the period of youth; he must either be catapulted into the human condition or settle gradually into a sensual, surely animality. Clearly, despite his new liability to sin and sorrow, to remorse and regret, Donatello’s transformation cannot be lamented. Though he seems to defy age, his youth-like all youth is transitory; and age without humanity, would offer him nothing but a sluggish, forlorn concentration of self. Donatello is really responsible for the murder he committed. He knows enough to be free to choose. Twice Donatello is ready to kill the model-monk who preys upon Miriam. Donatello’s intention is to kill. He has the consent of the third person present. He is aware of the changes in himself and his world. This murder is typical of the archetypal fall. After that, the light hearted creature, overwhelmed by the weight of his sin, becomes miserable, despondent and unable to bear the presence of her who had so lately been the entire world to him. He gains the capacity to learn from his sin and crime. After he has committed murder, Donatello begins to brood over the ugliness and morality of his soul and is unable to admire or find peace in nature and other things. When Donatello and Kenyon stop in a Gothic Church, Kenyon admires the stained-glass windows, which he says are “dim with tenderness and reverence, because God himself is shining through them” (Hawthorne 766). Donatello sees them not as tokens of divine mercy and utters, “He glows with divine wrath! (The Marble Faun 767). It is Kenyon who warns him of the dangers of sustained inwardness:

“Believe me, “said he, turning his eyes upon his friend, fall of grave and tender sympathy, “you know not what is requisite for your spiritual growth, seeking, as you do, to keep your soul perpetually in the unwholesome region of remorse. It was needful for you to pass through that dark valley, but it is infinitely dangerous to linger there too long; there is poison in the atmosphere, when we sit down and brood in it, instead of girding up our loins to press onward.....”(The Marble Faun 747)

In order to grow, the soul must take a new direction. The perfectionists hope of a greater life for a man who dedicates himself in love to humankind is reflected by Kenyon and then by the narrator they anticipate Donatello’s emergence from remorse. Kenyon advises him to avoid the life of seclusion and to make his new life among men. Miriam’s model is at once the most suggestive and the most obscure figure in *The Marble Faun*. He arrests the reader’s attention and he alone knows the meaning of Miriam’s guilt and despair. The principal deed of *The Marble Faun* is the joint murder of

this villain by Miriam and Donatello a murder which separates them from all brotherhood and sisterhood, clearing the way for a later ambiguous union but at the same time demanding an eventual repentance. Surely it is no coincidence that this obscure figure from Miriam's earlier days is thought to be the one obstacle between Donatello and Miriam's love. In death, the model does achieve full definition as a representative of the uncanny's is in determinary. He will not remain hidden. His murder fixes epistemological and moral bewilderment evermore centrally in the lives of the romance's characters.

Miriam is basically a blossom of mystery. Everything about her is shrouded in mystery. She is a member of an aristocratic Italian family and was at one time engaged to marry the man who haunted her. Legally innocent but morally guilty, affianced to satanic evil, Miriam obviously bears more than casual resemblance to Eve after her first depravity. Her original crime, like Eve's was rebellion against the father. The crime of Hester Frynne was, after all, only that of a normal or at least natural, sexual desire and its fulfillment. The crime of Miriam is that of being an accessory to a murder. Like Hester and zenobia, however, she is linked not only to guilt but also to the vessel of purification; she is potentially a second Eve.

Miriam holds that crime has lifted her poor Faun to a level superior to innocence; that Adam's sin, repeated by Donatello, has brought his posterity to a higher, brighter level of happiness. It is remorse, Miriam tells us, which has awakened and developed in the Faun a thousand more and intellectual faculties unknown till then. However, "Donatello and Miriam have learned the lesson the guilty, painful knowledge constituted by sympathy and estrangement. However imperfect, however treacherous - are the only truths human beings have. In Hawthorne's imagination, to own this knowledge and to be human are the same thing" (Michael 156). Miriam ceases to suffer in isolation and thinks only of himself, falls in love with Donatello and dedicates her life to penitence and to the service of the one she has wronged. That there is no earthly cure for suffering is clear from the careers of Miriam and Donatello but that suffering and acknowledgement of mutual complicity in guilt are necessary preludes to any redemption possible to man is clear from the careers of all of them. Miriam is considerably more sinned against than sinning and in her remorse and English she needs Hilda's pity. Hilda is Miriam's closest friend; they are like sisters of the same blood', containing between them the essence of women hood.

Hilda is a character of action whose action is a conscious and determined endeavor to remain untouched by human society to maintain her individual, isolated virginal purity in the midst of all the earthly evils of social inter course. Here is a different kind of isolation. She is an orthodox idealistic being whose intellect is isolated.

Thought she does not herself realize the full meaning of her compulsion, Hilda seeks out the confessional St. Peter's Cathedral. In her confession, she experiences the purification ordinarily undergone by those who purge themselves of the guilt of real sins, and gains effective absolution. She is restored to the bliss and tranquility that had temporarily left her. In milder experience than Donatello's she has gained full experience of humanity through sin.

The novel *The Marble Faun* presents us with two kinds of innocence: the subhuman innocence of Donatello and superhuman innocence of Hilda. Hilda's innocence suffers no more change than to be somewhat sophisticated by the knowledge that evil exists in the world. Kenyon, the sculptor, is a moralizing extension of Coverdale. He is too pleased with himself to undergo any sort of agony comparable to Dimmesdale's. He does not so much love Hilda as worship her angelic goodness. Finally, he takes himself too seriously to recognize his own pomposity. The fall of Faun is compared with the first fall of man, where the consciousness of guilt supersedes the happy play of childhood and innocent animal life. Indeed, it is just through sin and suffering that we, like the fury-eared Faun, must ascend to the higher levels of consciousness and feeling, to the level of humanity. Throughout Hawthorne's writing the acceptance or rejection of human love usually marks the choice of salvation or damnation.

Donatello encouraged by Miriam, has committed the murder. The deed has had a variety of important effects upon the characters in the play. The evil deed has humbled the proud Miriam. It has broadened and deepened the sympathies of Kenyan. It has enlightened and softened Hilda, making her less self-sufficient and more responsive to Kenyon's love. It has educated Donatello, who has lost his faun like simplicity and innocence and gained maturity and depth of character. There is more than Puritanism in the speculation of Kenyon, which shocks Hilda but which touches the theme very sharply:

"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 pure state than we could otherwise have attained" (P 854)

## CONCLUSION

It may be said that *The Marble Faun* deals with the effects of the sin of murder rather than the murder itself. It suggests that the knowledge of the human heart is composed of anguished ambivalences. Its theme as that of *The Blithedale Romance* is spiritual development through sin and suffering. The outraged suffering

humanity must learn to live with the blackness that lies everywhere beneath us.

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