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Pride and Penalty in Hawthorne's Tales

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PRIDE AND PENALTY IN HAWTHORNE'S TALES

by

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A typical Greek doctrine of the Golden Age of Pericles was that hybris, an overweening pride and arrogance, would lead to fall and ruin. This idea was reflected in the early Greek tragedies. The fall from happiness to misery for the hero was often the result not merely of adverse circumstances and fate but of a basic tragic flaw within the character of the hero. This tragic flaw in turn was some expression of pride and arrogance.

Later Aristotle in the Poetics observed, among other requirements for the tragic hero, that tragedy depicts characters who are good but who are not so much above ourselves that they lose our sympathy. He stated, "A character of this kind is one who neither excels in virtue and justice, nor is changed through vice and depravity, into misfortune, from a state of great renown and prosperity, but has experienced this change through some human error."¹ Aristotle, therefore, was voicing this principle, that the noble man who is worthy of acceptance as the hero is a somewhat better-than-average man but is still subject to fallibility.

Herein, of course, lies the sympathy of the reader, that he can admire and because of his admiration regret the weakness or flaw in this man whose character is of no mean proportions. He follows with concern

¹Aristotle, Treatise on Rhetoric and the Poetics, translated by Theodore Buckley, (London: Bell and Daldy, 1872), pp. 430-431.

the unfolding misery or destruction of the hero, for in it he hears the warning of the possible fate of every man who does not pluck out the evil thing from his bosom.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was keenly aware of the human flaw in the nature of every man. Although he did not consider all such flaws as tragic, he did see in this human fallibility the source of much of the unhappiness of the individual man. His Puritan heritage colored his analysis of the inner workings of the human heart. He saw values of life most clearly as they related to the moral aspects of individual motivations. His concern was to get at the truth of the human soul. He rejected much of the theology of Puritanism, but he was greatly pre-occupied with many of its tenets. For him evil was a reality in the world to be reckoned with, and that evil stemmed from the human heart. Not only was there the depravity of the unregenerate man; there were also the unregenerate areas in the heart of even the best man.

If Hawthorne's emphasis was more upon sin than upon saintliness, it was probably not so much that he was pessimistic about the potential in mankind as it was that he felt man should not underestimate the difficulties in the struggle to reach toward that potential.²

It is paradoxical and yet quite logical that while Puritanism condemned pride as the basest of all sins, pride was probably the besetting sin of the Puritan nature. It is paradoxical to condemn in others the sin in self; yet it is logical that we see in others that which is most surely a part of our own nature. With Puritanical

²Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne, A Biography, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), pp. 244-245.

intensity Hawthorne sifted the faults of humanity, sought out the besetting flaw in the individual man, and without fail discovered that the impurity of the inward sphere was pride in some one of its varied forms and aspects. He placed very little emphasis on external, overt acts of a sinful or criminal nature. It was rather with the subtleties of the soul that he dealt.³

For Hawthorne pride is the root evil, for it is a voluntary separation by which man sets himself aloof from communication with himself, his fellow men, and God.⁴ Pride is an attitude which takes possession of him first as he allows himself to become blinded to his own faults and inadequacies, next as he ignores the virtues and claims of his fellow men, and eventually as he develops the bigoted idea that since he is superior to the rest of the human race, he must make himself a place on the Godly level. He is now completely isolated from humanity by his own choice, from God by the incongruity of his presumptive claims, and from himself by the absence of any further self-communication on the basis of honest humility.

Many of Hawthorne's heroes are isolated in some such respect. His ". . . characters show many moral gradations of the heart ranging from almost white to almost black with subtle shadings of gray in between."⁵ His short stories furnish an abundance of material for an insight into the human flaw of pride at work. Henry James observes that Hawthorne shows ". . . all the ease, indeed, of a regular dweller in the moral, psychological realm; he goes to and fro in it, as a man

³Randall Stewart, The American Notebooks by Nathaniel Hawthorne, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), p. lxxii.

⁴Stewart, Hawthorne, p. 259.

⁵Ibid., p. 248.

who knows his way. His tread is a light and modest one, but he keeps the key in his pocket."⁶ With this key Hawthorne not only unlocks for our perception the visible acts of mutinous pride but also shows us the seeds and latent possibilities of the kindred guilts of every man. In these stories we are confronted with the possibility that every breast may wear a "Scarlet Letter," either visibly as Hester wore hers or invisibly as Arthur Dimmesdale found the symbol burning into his vitals and estranging him from God and man.

⁶Henry James, Jr., Nathaniel Hawthorne, (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1879), p. 64.

CHAPTER II

PRIDE WHICH STEMS FROM NATURAL DESIRES AND AMBITIONS

The pride which springs naturally from a sense of self-esteem is usually the least odious to one's fellow men and the least harmful to the one entertaining the sentiment. A normal pride is not of itself essentially evil and indeed is a wholesome thing, if by pride we mean a basic respect for self and a faith in one's own powers to achieve desirable goals in life. It is only when such natural pride becomes either perverted or unrestrained that it takes on the complexion of a serious flaw in a man's nature.

Hawthorne delineates some of these natural tendencies to pride in various characters of his tales. Hawthorne was not so Calvinistic in his philosophy of man's nature as to suggest a natural depravity which made every imagination of the heart evil and every personal ambition and desire a sin against God. Rather he introduces these various characters to the reader as worthy individuals but allows us to see the "Achilles' heel" in each life where the darts of personal ambition and desire may strike so deeply as to let loose the torrents of unrestrained pride and make of this character an unhappy figure. Hawthorne traces the progress of this natural pride in a man's soul until in its perversion or intensity it becomes his tragic flaw.

In "Egotism; or the Bosom Serpent" love of self is the aspect of pride which gets out of hand. Man would not survive if he did not have a strong instinct of self-preservation which has as its basis a

strong love of self and concern for one's own well-being. But when this normal concern becomes a preoccupation, egotism is the result, manifesting itself in selfishness, arrogance, and eventually isolation. Hawthorne pictures Roderick Elliston as having become so morbidly introspective that he is actually nursing a serpent in his bosom. His friend, Harkimer, defines the beginning of his evil lot as " . . . a tremendous egotism, manifesting itself in your case in the form of jealousy."⁷

Jealousy is also a normal reaction in certain situations, but when it is nourished, cultivated, and brooded over, it reveals the source of its nature as self-destructive pride which eats into a man's soul, twisting and distorting his perspective. Roderick concedes that the only hope of his cure is to be able for just one instant to forget self. His eventual salvation results from the fact that he does recognize his tragic flaw and sincerely desires to be rid of it.

Hawthorne was always aware of the "presentness" of the past. He felt that one could not escape the past unless he could escape from the conditions of natural existence, and that, of course, is not possible. However, he did feel that the past could be transcended, but only to the extent that it is faced, accepted, and understood.⁸ Roderick's honest appraisal of his past and fancied wrongs did not come quickly or easily. The symbolism in his learning to enjoy intimate converse with the serpent in his bosom is a very keen portrayal of the perverse pleasure one

⁷Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's Works, Standard Library Edition, Vol. II, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, the Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1851), p. 320. (Future references to Hawthorne's short stories will be indicated in the body of the manuscript by volume and page numbers.)

⁸Hyatt H. Waggoner, Hawthorne, A Critical Study, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 261.

gets in nursing his resentments and feelings of wounded pride. Jealousy has within it the claim of one's being mistreated and a pride which resents such ill-usage. Yet the jealous man will return in thought again and again to the offense against him as though he enjoyed making deeper the hurts of his own wounded spirit. Roderick is thus engaged in a perverted cultivation of his sense of outraged egotism, but his desire to be rid of the gnawing thing is great enough to enable him to lay hold of Rosina's love and thus for the one necessary instant turn his thoughts from self to another. In that instant self is forgotten, and the serpent of egotism is driven forth.

Hawthorne also suggests in the character of Roderick the tendency to discern in others the disease which lurks in one's own heart. The self-love which engenders jealousy invents suspicions, and the sanctity of others' hearts and motivations is violated. Roderick wanders the streets as with cankered ingenuity he seeks out his own disease in every other breast. Hawthorne observes, "Whether insane or not, he showed so keen a perception of frailty, error, and vice, that many persons gave him credit for being possessed not merely with a serpent, but with an actual fiend, who imparted this evil faculty of recognizing whatever was ugliest in man's heart" (II, 310).

There is a vast egotism in this spirit which analyzes minutely one's own reaction to every human intercourse and by subjective interpretation sees everyone and everything only in the light of personal reference. Roderick makes his experience and only his experience the criterion by which every man must measure and be measured. Hawthorne seems here to be picturing the soul which is on the periphery of life while believing himself to be the center and wondering why everything is out of focus.

The universality of this sin of egotism is underscored by Roderick when he says, "Oh, there is poisonous stuff in any man's heart sufficient to generate a brood of serpents" (II, 319). It is only when such a man stops hugging himself to his own bosom that he lifts his sights from self and finds release as Roderick did.

Another manifestation of egotism is the fallacy of indispensability. When a man begins to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, he sees his position as so exalted that he begins to suspect that life could not go on if he were removed from the scene of action. Again, it is a normal instinct to want to make one's little niche in the scheme of life, and it is a wholesome satisfaction to feel needed. No one can happily contemplate being a left-over piece in the jig-saw puzzle of life. Hawthorne stressed the warmth of family relationships in much of his writing and certainly believed that people were greatly dependent upon each other. But Hawthorne also suggests that when, in place of this normal instinct, a man fancies himself totally indispensable and avidly grasps and selfishly exploits his little place in life, he is in danger of developing a definite flaw in his character.

Hawthorne reveals in the story "Wakefield" that when this pride of self-esteem is allowed full rein, the individual may desire to prove to himself and others that life truly cannot go on without him. Wakefield seems to want a test case to satisfy his pride that he is indispensable. He performs such an experiment when he leaves his wife and family for twenty years but dwells in the next block, unknown to them, watching the effect of his disappearance on them and eventually returning to resume his role as faithful and loving husband.

There would seem to be no clue to such behavior on the part of the very good and exemplary Wakefield toward a loving and dutiful wife were it not for the hint Hawthorne gives of his nature as his wife knew him. Hawthorne says, "She without having analyzed his character, was partly aware of a quiet selfishness that had rusted into his inactive mind; of a peculiar sort of vanity, the most uneasy attribute about him; of a disposition to craft, which had seldom produced more positive effects than the keeping of petty secrets, hardly worth revealing, and, lastly, of what she called a little strangeness, sometimes, in the good man" (I,155).

The "quiet selfishness" is the tender spot in Wakefield. The human flaw is here. There are vanity and pride in his soul, but he is not the openly aggressive man who seeks responses from others by overt means to attest to his importance. He must seek assurances in a subtle and crafty way. Thus he gratifies this monstrous pride by watching for twenty years his own indispensability. There is no compassion for the grief and loss which his loved ones must feel. A more warm-hearted man would have felt overwhelmingly compelled to rush with assurance to his wife at her first sign of grief. Therefore, his is really a more selfish indulgence than blatant and outspoken egotism. Mingled with Wakefield's pride is a desire to hurt others, to make them suffer so as to appreciate him more. Wakefield is actually desiring to punish his loved ones for even the possibility of their being able to manage without him. Here, according to Harry Levin, is the self-displaced person, attempting to imprison his mistress but becoming the prisoner of his own suspicions.⁹

⁹Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 43.

But this is really a dangerous experiment for any man. Hawthorne observes, "It is perilous to make a chasm in human affections; not that they gape so long and wide—but so quickly close again!" (I,157) No person is utterly indispensable in the final analysis. Hawthorne illustrates this capacity of the human heart to rebound after even the severest loss when he shows Wakefield's wife becoming reconciled to the prolonged absence of her husband. He says, "In the course of a few weeks she gradually recovers; the crisis is over; her heart is sad, perhaps, but quiet; and, let him return soon or late, it will never be feverish for him again" (I,160). Wakefield, of course, in his egotism would not be able to see in such adjustment the highest tribute which his loved ones could pay him, their demonstrated ability to carry on with dignity and self-sufficiency because of their previously well-ordered lives with him. His egotism would rather see them in a demoralized state of helplessness and dependency.

Wakefield resumes his place in life in the same callous way in which he had left it. Hawthorne leaves our imagination to fill in the details of the reunion. He simply says, "The door opens. As he passes in, we have a parting glimpse of his visage, and recognize the crafty smile, which was the precursor of the little joke that he has ever since been playing off at his wife's expense. How unmercifully has he quizzed the little woman! Well, a good night's rest to Wakefield!" (I,164) Such inflated pride would never see nor recognize any signs that life had been going on quite well without him. It would never occur to him that his little joke had boomeranged. He probably did have a good night's sleep, never aware that his only indispensability was to himself.

Hawthorne was also alert to the tendency in man to build his own flattering image of himself and to substitute that image for a less flattering reality. Probably Hawthorne would not have questioned the desirability of a man's having an ideal image for himself as a goal toward which he strives, but when a person ignores what he is and deceives himself by his life-illusion, he develops a foolish and dishonest pride based on self-deceit.

In the story of "Feathertop" (II,254-278) Hawthorne presents the caricature of such a man who walks abroad in all his glittering splendor while he knows himself to be made only of sticks and straw and tattered garments. The irony of his pseudo splendor is evident in the fact that only the instinct of the dog and the unsophisticated appraisal of the small child recognize him for what he really is.

As occasionally every man is caught off guard and forced to take a candid view of himself, so Feathertop just happens to see his reflection in the mirror while he is dancing with Polly. It is interesting that Polly sees his true image first and faints from horror at what she sees. Because of her reaction Feathertop also looks in the mirror and sees what Polly has observed, ". . . the sordid patchwork of his real composition" (II,276). Hawthorne is here stressing the simple truth that often these brief moments of honest self-appraisal come to a man as he sees himself through the eyes of another person who penetrates his sham and self-deceptive pride.

Feathertop is too honest and sensitive to continue the guise, and he returns to Mother Rigby to assume the more suitable role of scarecrow. Hawthorne is not suggesting that if each man were to make an honest self-appraisal he would inevitably bow out of the scene of human interaction. Rather he is saying that if man would rid himself of this

flaw of self-deceit, evaluate himself as honestly as he can and thus more fully understand his own nature, he would cease to pretend to be that which he is not. He could then strive openly and honestly to attain a higher nature. With the flaw of pretentious pride removed, his dignity and moral stature would so increase as to more than compensate for the empty pomp thus sacrificed.

Hawthorne was aware that in some natures there seems to be an inordinate hunger for recognition and personal acclaim. In this he saw the danger of another form of normal pride out of hand. It is true that in "The Artist of the Beautiful" (II, 504-536) the achievement of some high and lofty goal is shown to be satisfaction enough for some, without attendant recognition. In this story Owen Warland eventually creates the butterfly, the perfect thing of beauty, but is not dismayed when the insensitive hand of Anne's child crushes it. Hawthorne here suggests that when the artist has risen high enough to achieve the beautiful, the symbol by which he made it tangible is no longer important, for his spirit can now enjoy the reality of the achievement.

Hawthorne approves a wholesome pride in achievement as illustrated in "The Artist of the Beautiful." However, he clearly recognizes that most of mankind is not satisfied with the sense of achievement alone. The average man wants not only achievement but also its resulting recognition. A satisfaction in such recognition by his fellow men does not of itself constitute an unhappy flaw in a man's nature. To every normal man some acclaim is a tasty morsel. It can whet the appetite for greater and more noble achievement. But in this normal desire Hawthorne sees the asp that can sting. When recognition is no longer viewed as the natural sequence of a dedication to truth or service but

becomes the driving motivation itself, the desire for it does become a sin of pride.

"The Ambitious Guest" pictures the beginning of such distortion (I, 364-374). Hawthorne tells the story of a youth who stops to spend the night with the family in the little cottage perched on the side of a mountain. As the young guest and members of the family share their life dreams, fate in the form of a landslide claims the lives of all. But in the revelation of the young guest's life ambition can be detected his exaggerated dreams of personal recognition. The story is simple but the lesson is, as Frederick Law points out, ". . . as clear as a Greek tragedy and as stern as a New England sermon."¹⁰

The seeds of the young guest's selfish pride are already taking root. Hawthorne says:

He had travelled far and alone; his whole life, indeed, had been a solitary path; for, with the lofty caution of his nature, he had kept himself apart from those who might otherwise have been his companions The secret of the young man's character was a high and abstracted ambition. He could have borne to live an undistinguished life but not to be forgotten in the grave. Yearning desire had been transformed to hope, and hope, long cherished, had become like certainty, that obscurely as he journeyed now, a glory was to beam on all his pathway—though not, perhaps, while he was treading it. But when posterity should gaze back into the gloom of what was

¹⁰Frederick Louk Law, "Eight Great Short Stories from American Literature; 'The Ambitious Guest' by Nathaniel Hawthorne," The Independent, March 12, 1917, p. 454.

now the present, they would trace the brightness of his footsteps, brightening as meaner glories faded, and confess that a gifted one had passed from his cradle to his tomb with none to recognize him (I, 367-368).

Here is the man who can value himself only in so far as other people value him. He lives very largely in other people's opinions of himself. Hawthorne does not deny that it is virtuous to be sensitive to the influence we may exert on the lives of others, but he suggests that when one's every thought and act are motivated only by a consideration of what they will do to his stature in the eyes of others, the personality becomes a virtual slave to the selfish desire for commendation at all costs.

The young guest's kind of pride is exactly opposite to the kind which is destroying Roderick in "Egotism; or the Bosom Serpent," yet it is strangely akin in its selfishness. Although the viewpoints of the two differ, each is concerned only with himself. Roderick can see only himself and is preoccupied with his own reactions. The young guest also can see only himself, but he is preoccupied with how others see him. One lacks the wholesome objective view of his relationships while the other lacks the subjective view. Neither view is sufficient alone. Both are necessary for a well-organized and wholesome personality.

For Roderick isolation would have been the eventual toll of his preoccupation and pride; and, indeed, he had entered into such an isolation until recalled by Rosina's love. Isolation is also the inevitable end for the young guest. In fact, it is already at work in his soul. He has chosen the solitary path, for he believes that he who travels alone travels the swiftest and the farthest. Human companionship would

be a detriment to his progress and might dilute the intensity of his pilgrimage. Such lonely pride chills the warm impulses of one's nature. His ambition is, as Hawthorne tells us, an abstracted thing, disembodied and cold. The young guest makes no mention of a love for his fellow men nor of a desire to leave their lives better for his having lived. He speaks only of achieving his destiny and of building his monument. The warmth of human love has been drained off, for emotions wield great influence and may dissipate ambitious courses which have been rationally plotted.

So free of the need for human fellowship has the ambitious young man already become that he is satisfied to wait for eventual acclaim until his own life is past. To him the one essential for a satisfactory life is the assurance that great recognition will finally be given his name. His unhappy flaw is that he covets most of all the regard of his fellow men but withholds from them the active love and communication which are the only valid means of securing that regard.

As the young guest sits in the little mountain cottage, he is still too young to have crystallized fully into the dehumanized isolationist he is well on the way to becoming. A gentle, transient comradeship expresses itself to the members of the mountain family. The warm fires of humanity are not yet extinguished. But the avalanche brings an end to his dreams, not more surely, if more swiftly, than life would have done. Earthly immortality he could not have found, for already his feet are on the pathway of personal oblivion.

There is a pride which is undoubtedly more superficial than that which springs from the inner workings of the human spirit. It is the pride in externalities. One may feel an exaltation because of his

wealth, another because of his physical attributes, and still another because of his social connections or family prominence. Since this is a pride in obvious advantages, it is fitting that in "Lady Eleanor's Mantle" (I,307-327) Hawthorne treats this kind of pride with very obvious symbolism. The mantle is the source of the disease which eventually spreads pestilence and destroys Lady Eleanor's life. Hawthorne states that it is the symbol of her spirit of arrogance and superiority, and he keeps the mantle conspicuously before the attention of the reader throughout the story.

Haughty as Eleanor is, she is still the Aristotelian heroine of no mean stature. Hawthorne describes her as a person with some noble and splendid traits of character, although she is guilty of showing a harsh, unyielding pride (I,310). Probably to her family and her inner circle of friends she is admirable in many ways, for they would not feel the sting of her proud spirit, since they are on her level in many of the external values which she seems so arrogantly to prize. Nevertheless, the flaw in her character is this pride, and as the story progresses, Hawthorne allows us to see her growing isolation. At the beginning of the story she is seen initiating the isolation from particular groups and individuals, but eventually it grows to a rejection of common mankind. The final tragedy is that the world rejects her.

Hawthorne analyzes the sources and the aspects of her pride. In each instance that which is a source of her pride is a gift to her and is nothing which she has earned or merited. There seems, therefore, to be no justification for her excesses of personal pride. Hawthorne says that she has " . . . a haughty consciousness of her hereditary and personal advantages" (I,310).

Lady Eleanor was a person of rank from England. Hawthorne depicts in this story an early period of American history during the days of the Massachusetts Bay Colony when the emerging American concept of an aristocracy of individual worth was yet in its infancy. But the ideal of democracy was already at work, and Lady Eleanor, suddenly arriving from the class-conscious culture of England, stands forth more vividly in her pride in aristocracy of birth against the American scene.

Hawthorne, however, is pointing up more than the English pattern of class distinction. He is pointing to the tendency in any man who has received superior blessings of heredity or inheritance to lord it over those of inferior gifts. It may be a fine physique and a noble bearing which open doors for him closed to men of less prepossessing appearance. Wealth may make it possible for him to have the outer trappings of success and evident advantage. Hawthorne would probably say that man is most prone to fall into pride over those things which most readily attract the admiration and envy of his fellow beings. The immediate and often extravagant attention thus engendered by his visible advantages is a temptation for him to preen himself and bask in the approval of others, feeling some satisfaction at their envy.

Lady Eleanor's "personal advantages" of beauty and physical charm cause her to gloat in disdain over broken hearts and wounded feelings. A beautiful woman, Hawthorne may be saying, must ever be on guard against her own exploitation of her God-given beauty for selfish and egotistical ends.

There is a glimpse of Eleanor stepping from her carriage onto the back of the pale young man who throws himself down as her footstool. Hawthorne sees in her attitude and action " . . . an emblem of aristocracy and hereditary pride trampling on human sympathies and the

kindred of nature" (I,312). The spirit which scornfully rejects love and heartfelt sympathy is hard and cold, but to accept them disdainfully as so low and mean an offering as to be trampled upon as a passing whim is pride and arrogance of the most heartless kind. When human personality is scorned, more than man is blasphemed, for the spark of the divine is thus accounted as of little worth.

At the ball given for Lady Eleanor, the increased measure of her isolation is evident. Hawthorne says, "She beheld the spectacle not with vulgar ridicule as disdaining to be pleased with the provincial mockery of a court festival, but with the deeper scorn of one whose spirit held itself too high to participate in the enjoyment of other human souls" (I,315). There is the significant suggestion here that her lack of interest in people not of her social class or of like advantages has now increased to a total absence of desire to communicate with any of her fellow beings. Her spirit has indeed become, as Hawthorne says, too aloof to enjoy any association with other human souls.

There may be a kind of necessary communication which continues with selfishly isolated souls, as was the case with Scrooge in Charles Dickens' "Christmas Carol" who dealt with his fellow men from day to day only as the business at hand demanded. But he had long ago cut off all "participation in the enjoyment of other human souls." Social interaction implies a voluntary desire to be with one's fellow men. When that is terminated, one has truly isolated himself from other human souls, even though the business of the day demands incidental contacts. Hawthorne shows that Lady Eleanor has reached this point in her pride in externalities.

As the evening advances, the few who are still tolerated within her inner circle begin to drop away, not from any spoken dismissal from

Lady Eleanor but rather as though they felt the finality of her spiritual isolation and were repulsed by it. Not only has her pride in the superficial things of life built a wall between her and humanity, but at the close of the story we see Lady Eleanor so distorted and ugly from the festering sores spawned by the disease-ridden mantle that all human communication is ended, and even those who loved her feel only revulsion and horror.

Although the stories which we have just considered reveal some of the unlovely aspects of pride, Hawthorne would certainly say that pride is a basic characteristic of man's nature. There would be nothing admirable in a man who had neither self-respect nor self-esteem. When we say that a man has no pride, it is a judgment rather than a eulogy. A man shows a true sense of responsibility when he recognizes that he is important to someone other than himself and cherishes his indisputable place. He becomes a better man as he looks not only at the actual within his own nature but also at the potential. As he experiences an occasional glow from recognition received, he finds it easier to release his own expressions of gratitude to others. And surely a man would lack a proper appreciation of values if he did not cherish his blessings, even though some of them may come to him through no effort of his own.

Hawthorne is not denying any of these values in man's normal pride. Rather he is saying that such pride may become inflated or distorted to such a point that it will gather all the fury of unbridled selfishness and wanton excess. His warning is that man should always stand guard over his pride and control it, temper it, or sublimate it lest it become the ugly flaw in his character while it masquerades as the normal instinct of every man.

CHAPTER III

PRIDE WHICH INTERPRETS ITSELF AS IDEALISM

There is a second form of pride which Hawthorne treats as more insidious and deadly than the exaggerated expression of the simple ego, undesirable as such expression may become. This is the pride which rationalizes itself to be something good and noble, thus operating under the guise of idealistic motivation. The same basic instincts of selfishness, arrogance and ambition press for expression, but now they are dressed in a camouflage which veils their real nature from the individual who rationalizes his motives to be higher and more admirable than they are.

This is a more dangerous pride than pride of the simple ego, for now even the good man of tender conscience and fine sensibilities is subject to its pitfalls. In treating this aspect of pride, Hawthorne shows how virtues can become the very cause of arrogance and intolerance. A partial good can be mistaken for a total virtue, and pride in minute details can destroy the spirit of the whole. Purity can destroy mercy, and self-righteous piety can displace true humility. A pride in self-abnegation can turn soul-searching into self-centered preoccupation. In any idealism there is the possibility that the abstraction of the theory may be mistaken for the substance of action based on the ideal. The idealist may even come to feel a sense of smug superiority because of his fine moral insight.

In calling attention to the dangers of unsightly pride in idealism, Hawthorne does not suggest that man should avoid such aspiration.

All progress in human history has probably come because someone believed that the actual could be better than it was and gave himself to the fulfillment of that belief.

Hawthorne gently probes the consciences of all good men at the point of mistaken idealism in a number of his stories. A surface reading of some of his stories might fallaciously suggest condemnation by Hawthorne of such motivations as search for scientific truth, dedication to religious ideals, and a pilgrimage toward perfection. However, a more perceptive reading of these stories reveals that he is dealing with something else, elusive and sinister, which may attach itself to these worthy aspirations. Hawthorne is attempting to cause man to question honestly whether his dedication is a true commitment to an ideal or rather a cloak for selfish personal ends, the realization of which would destroy precious human values. He is saying in this group of stories that any idealism, no matter how noble its aims, ". . . is a mistaken idealism if it destroys human ties and rends apart the social fabric."¹¹

In "The Minister's Black Veil" (I, 52-69) Hawthorne presents Mr. Hooper as such a man who has a kind of exalted pride which allows his idealism to become insulation against an honest appraisal of its true source. The veil which Mr. Hooper wears is usually interpreted to symbolize the secrecy of men's bosoms. It stands for the impenetrable curtain of the human breast.¹² The minister's wearing the veil is an act of separation, estranging him from the community at large,

¹¹Stewart, op. cit., p. 254.

¹²See, for example, George Edward Woodberry, Nathaniel Hawthorne, How To Know Him, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Publishers, 1918), pp. 75-76.

from his own parishioners, and even from the girl whom he is engaged to marry. Mr. Hooper hints in his defense to Elizabeth that he may be hiding secret sorrows but adds that even if his wearing of the veil be for secret sins, every mortal might well do the same.

The universal secrecy of men's bosoms, however, seems an oversimplification of Hawthorne's meaning. The veil does typify separation of one man from another in the secret places of his soul, but in Mr. Hooper's donning the veil and refusing every persuasion to face his people openly again, there are a wilfulness and a determination that have a strong suggestion of spiritual pride. It is as though a freak of conscience were impelling him to act thus. In dramatically donning the veil, he is making a visual and ostentatious show of his separateness from other men. The sense of loneliness is present in every breast, but Hawthorne seems to be saying that for that very reason men should not seek to magnify it.

This is the spirit of which Jesus spoke when he said, "And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret."¹³

A man may deceive himself that he is displaying a meritorious sense of humility when he dwells on his unworthiness when actually he is enjoying the attention his proclamations are directing toward himself. He may be so much absorbed in the sorrows of his own life that he is

¹³Matthew 6:16-18a, Revised Standard Version.

really getting a perverse pleasure in appearing an object of pity to his fellow men. In Mr. Hooper Hawthorne is portraying these unwholesome tendencies in man.

However, this insidious pride may enter the heart in exactly the opposite response to the burdens of life when a man refuses to admit to anyone that he is carrying a load and engenders within his breast an arrogant, self-sufficient pride that he can carry his own problems and needs no one to help him. Mr. Hooper is really guilty of both of these expressions of pride. He refuses to reveal to any man the cause of his withdrawal, whether it be sin or sorrow, while at the same time he keeps in continual evidence the symbol of his separateness.

In both attitudes, Hawthorne would say, is the mask of spiritual pride which stands as a barrier to true humility and communion of soul with kindred soul. As a man passes through life, he needs the sharing with the human group as well as the secret and personal confronting of his own soul in order to be whole. Only then does he see that ". . . the very sins and aberrations that separate him from others are the one universal bond of humanity."¹⁴ Such a realization deters a man from either dramatizing such inner emotions, as though he were the only one to whom life had brought such experiences, or proudly drawing a veil over them as though to deny one's own mortality.

From the beginning of Christianity, and even before this era, man has at times mistaken asceticism for goodness and has thus confused desire for personal security and escape from the burdens of life with a desire for personal purity and renunciation of all worldliness.

¹⁴Roy R. Male, Hawthorne's Tragic Vision, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957), p. 17.

This flaw in a man's nature begins at the point where he convinces himself that by such asceticism he is now purer than, and therefore superior to, those who are still tainted by the struggles with the world.

Hawthorne suggests this mistaken idealism in two stories, "The Canterbury Pilgrims" (III, 518-530) and "The Shaker Bridal" (I, 469-470). The pilgrims are more honest in their motivation than is Adam Colburn in the second story. However, this may be because the pilgrims are just entering the Shaker community whereas Adam has dwelt there for some time. The four pilgrims admit that their search is a search for security and peace from worldly troubles. The poet is escaping rejection. The merchant is leaving financial failure behind him. The yeoman and his wife are fleeing from the ineffectuality in meeting the daily demands of domestic life and the disappointments of unavailing toil. There is no pride evident in any demeanor of the pilgrims. There is only a vast defeatism.

The reader can feel, if no admiration, at least pity for these unfortunates. One does admire Josiah and Miriam, however, who in spite of the example and admonition of these pilgrims bravely face the world in the strength of their chastened love.

This is really an unfinished story and would have no place as an example of the human flaw of ascetic pride clothed as idealism were it not for the second story, "The Shaker Bridal," which is really its sequel. In Adam Colburn we see a man who passes slowly from a sense of defeatism when he first enters the colony to a monstrous pride in his own ambition coldly realized. Here again the reader does not feel that there is anything unworthy in his having admitted the heaviness of life's burdens. Even the severe Shakers did not judge a man on this basis. Hawthorne says, "The converts of this sect are oftener driven

within its hospitable gates by worldly misfortune than drawn thither by fanaticism, and are received without inquisition as to their motives" (I,472).

Adam Colburn had the seeds of his pride already at work within his nature long before he entered the colony. He refused love and marriage, except on his own terms. His self-love was greater than his love for Martha, for he was unwilling to relinquish the advantages which a single man possesses for improving his own position in the world (I,471). His natural capacities gained for him an important rank in the Society, and thus his selfish ambition to rise in his little world was realized. Hawthorne pictures him in the final scene of his initiation into the Fatherhood of the colony as standing with folded arms in an attitude of satisfied ambition (I,476).

Adam willingly and eagerly takes his place as head promulgator of the doctrines of separation from humanity as preached and practiced by the Society. These people have overcome their natural sympathy with human frailties and affections (I,474). The insidious doctrine has done its work. Adam is no longer a member of the human family. But the deeper tragedy is not in his adherence to this fanaticism of the Shaker doctrine and his vow to promulgate it but rather in the fact that he gives himself to it because within its circle he can realize his own selfish ambition for success and leadership.

Martha, however, has not been receptive to this heresy of pride, and she knows she cannot be human alone. She cannot deny the warm, human part of her nature and her deepest motivation, which has been her love for Adam. His asceticism is her destruction. Her death is evidence that it is as great a denial of God and of the nature of His creation to reject the human part of man's nature as it is to deny the divine.

This mistaken ideal of asceticism has universal implications also. If every man were to withdraw from daily interaction with his fellows and seek out his own security, peace of mind, and personal purity as the only good to be pursued in life, the final result for mankind would be the very thing which old Father Ephraim pronounces as the ultimate goal of the Shaker philosophy, ". . . when children shall no more be born and die, and the last survivor of mortal race, some old and weary man like me, shall see the sun go down, nevermore to rise on a world of sin and sorrow!" (I,475) — the utter extinction of mankind. Whatever the motivation may be which leads a man to embrace such asceticism, Hawthorne seems to be saying that it is a gross pride and effrontery to God to judge man's nature as unworthy of promulgation and survival, thus spurning the human element in God's creative purpose.

Closely akin to the pride of asceticism are the related spiritual sins of bigotry and fanaticism. Spiritual pride of any kind is probably the most revolting in its effect upon human sensibilities. This is due to the incongruity of claims and practices. One may even commend the Devil for the consistency of his evil nature and purposes. But when a person claims superior spiritual attributes and in practice demonstrates brutal intolerance or irrational behavior, it is asking too much of the reasonable mind to accept blindly the doctrines mouthed. It is perhaps because of these incongruities that many men have rejected Christianity, not being able to distinguish between the true ideals of the Christian system and the distortion of its principles through the ignorance and pride of some of its adherents.

Hawthorne stood in a favorable position to analyze such mistaken idealism in the early religious movements of our nation. He

realized that Puritanism, which had escaped from persecution incited by the spirit of bigotry in Europe, set up a rigid bigotry of its own on American soil. On the other hand, Quakerism, with its emphasis on the validity of individual inspiration, ran to such emotional excess of fanaticism in some quarters that the rationality of man was outraged. As Hawthorne dipped into the early history of the New England colonies, these two fallacies of religious attitude, bigotry and fanaticism, were painfully evident to him.

In "Endicott and the Red Cross" (I, 485-494), Endicott is the bigot who rallies his fellow citizens to defy the action of King Charles of England to establish English Episcopacy in the colony. Endicott bases his plea on the dedication of the colonists to liberty to worship God according to the Puritan conscience. The bigotry is glaringly highlighted in the Wanton Gospeller's wearing his label of heresy and in the Episcopalian's and the suspected Catholic's imprisonment in the pillory. Scattered through the crowd are others bearing various marks and brands of religious intolerance imposed by those who are willing to defy the King in order to preserve their own religious freedom. Roger Williams watches the scene with a sad and quiet smile, sensing the tragedy in this mistaken fervor and foreshadowing the persecution which he will suffer from the same spirit.

In "The Gentle Boy" (I, 85-126) Catharine is the protagonist in whom is the tragic flaw of fanaticism. Like others of the Quaker sect, she esteems persecution as a divine call to the post of danger. She and her husband had sought out the Puritan province of Massachusetts Bay precisely because it was the place of greatest persecution and peril. In her fanaticism Catharine relinquishes her son to Dorothy, the Puritan,

choosing to "violate the duties of the present life and the future by fixing her attention wholly on the latter" (I,104). To her, her duty as a mother to her son is secondary, and, in fact, in direct opposition to the zeal for her faith, and without hesitation she chooses the latter.

Hawthorne is as critical of Catharine's fanaticism as he is of Endicott's intolerance. He says that she was naturally a woman of mighty passions and that in her, hatred and revenge wrapped themselves in the garb of piety (I,100). Cantwell is probably speaking Hawthorne's impartial condemnation of both bigotry and fanaticism when he says, "The merciless uniformity and discipline that the Puritans imposed upon themselves and demanded of everyone was plainly withering, but the extravagances of their opponents, the Quakers, their spiritual license, their wild irresponsibility, and their romantic faith in the value of personal inspiration, were equally unbalanced."¹⁵

Hawthorne seems to be setting forth in the person of Catharine's son, Ilbrahim, the unhappy effects of either bigotry or fanaticism. The sensitive boy becomes the one who is innocently caught in the merciless talons of both as he suffers persecution from the Puritans and the perversion of natural affections from the Quakers. A gross wrong is disastrous to even an innocent victim, and Ilbrahim suffers a most unhappy life and an early death because of these mistaken idealisms.

Hawthorne is describing in these stories not only the emotional climate of certain religious groups but also the possible emotional tone of any religious mind. One may be rational and free of fanaticism in his faith but may at the same time be intolerant of those whose

¹⁵Robert Cantwell, Nathaniel Hawthorne, The American Years, (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc.), p. 127.

experience and views differ from his. What he mistakes as adherence to his convictions may really be bigotry, if there is no attempt to reverence the sincerity, if not the tenets of belief, of those who differ from him. On the other hand, one may be as willing for the next man to have his own revelation as he is insistent upon his extreme views for his own interpretation. Yet he may be so reckless in his extreme views and their proclamation as deliberately to bring persecution upon himself and then to consider his suffering a mark of superiority rather than a willing sacrifice for the integrity of his belief.

The line between true and false idealism in the realm of the religious is a fine one. More perhaps than in any other area of life, religious impulses have emotional motivation so that much soul-searching honesty is required for a man to be rational and emotionally balanced at the same time that he is tolerant and unprejudiced toward his fellow men. Hawthorne is not suggesting that bigotry and fanaticism are inseparable parts of man's religion but that man may be vulnerable to vices which he mistakes for virtues in the exercise of his faith.

In "The Birthmark" (II, 47-69) Hawthorne gives another example of the spirit which becomes blinded to the real substance of life by preoccupation with an ideal. Aylmer is a perfectionist. He is the idealist who always sees beyond what is good to that which is better and zealously yearns for the perfect.

Such a spirit of untiring and unsatisfied seeking for greater good is commendable. Many humanitarian achievements, such as advancements in medical skill to relieve pain and avert death, and discoveries and inventions which make life more satisfying, have resulted from the spirit of indefatigable quest for the perfect.

Even in this realm of the dedicated life, however, Hawthorne sees the danger of a selfish pride which may parade as noble idealism. Aylmer has a very beautiful and lovely wife, Georgiana. Her one physical imperfection, a tiny hand-shaped birthmark on her cheek, becomes to Aylmer a great annoyance, since it mars her otherwise perfect beauty. Aylmer's great dedication to science and his faith in man's ultimate control over nature cause this one defect in Georgiana to become increasingly intolerable to him. He gains her consent to its removal and is confident in his ability to correct her one imperfection which has become to him an obsession.

But Aylmer is not as idealistic as he believes himself to be. His attention has become so focused on this one flaw in his beautiful wife that he can no longer see either her physical beauty or her spiritual loveliness. In the "little spectral hand" he sees a mortality which he is not willing to accept. Whereas he thinks that his aesthetic sense is being offended by the imperfection, he is actually indulging in a monstrous intolerance of a fellow being's failure to conform to his ideal. He has a hidden compulsion to seek out the faults in others and by so doing loses sight of the inescapable blending of the mortal and the divine in every man. Aylmer makes the mistake of trying to ground his faith in material perfection. The truly virtuous soul draws nature to itself and thereby is not offended by its earthly aspects but is freed from its limitations.¹⁶

Aylmer performs a successful operation on Georgiana. The birthmark is removed, but his beautiful wife is lost to him in death.

¹⁶Floyd Stovall, American Idealism, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943), p. 65.

What he thought was a dedication of skill to the realization of perfection was only a clumsy attempt to remove the mystery of life which he could not understand. He had set his idea of perfection above God's wisdom in His creation of the nature of man as a blending of the mortal and the immortal.

Hawthorne says that Aylmer flung away his happiness because he did not look beyond the shadowy scope of time and, living in the sense of eternity, find the perfect future in the present (II,69). Stovall emphasizes this judgment by stating, "If the scientist had lived in the eternity of the spirit and grounded his happiness there instead of in material perfection, he would have found that the hoped-for perfection of the future becomes the possession of the present."¹⁷

The insistence upon perfection in this life is not true wisdom. The rejection of the imperfect is still greater folly. Although Aylmer rejects the imperfection in Georgiana, he does not actually intend to reject her. Tragic as the results of his attitude are, it is still a greater evidence of pride when a man rejects both the imperfection and the one who is imperfect. Hawthorne depicts this kind of pride when in "Rappaccini's Daughter" (II,107-148) he has Giovanni renounce Beatrice in scorn and loathing when he finally realizes that her beauty and gentleness of manner are tied inseparably to the death-producing effects of her contact with the magnificent shrub which grows in her father's garden.

There is such complexity in the implications of Hawthorne's development of this story that one may see in Rappaccini's experiment

¹⁷Ibid.

on his daughter the fatality which attends all efforts of perverted wisdom. The antidote which could save Giovanni becomes death to Beatrice, for the poison had been an integral part of her life. In Rappaccini's nature can be seen the most flagrant of all sins, but this will be dealt with in a later chapter.

However one may interpret the main theme of the story, in the character of Giovanni can be seen the flaw of selfish pride, for he loves the beautiful and the virtuous in a woman but is repulsed when he learns that she also has the nature of the carnal in her. Yet Hawthorne suggests in the attraction which Giovanni feels for Beatrice, even while he has definite hints of her dual nature, that it is partly this carnal aspect of her being which attracts him even as it repels him. His condemnation of her is further reprehensible since she has not chosen voluntarily her own dual nature. She is the victim of original sin, ". . . but she has not committed any actual sin, nor is she guilty of any of the capital vices."¹⁸

Giovanni has had many intimations and evidences of the dual nature of Beatrice; yet the attraction toward her has been so strong that he has silenced his doubts and cultivated her presence at every opportunity. Beatrice has repulsed his advances as though trying to protect him from harm. But Giovanni presses on, building in his mind his own perfect image of Beatrice which he wishes to accept, and quieting the misgivings and feelings of horror which assail him from the scenes he has observed of the blighting effects of her touch and of her breath on living things.

¹⁸ Waggoner, op. cit., pp. 108-109.

The question for Giovanni is whether or not his love is great enough to accept her dual nature and cherish her, not for what he would like to believe her to be but for everything she is. Giovanni would probably consider it a virtue of the idealistic in his nature that he rejects her true essence when it becomes undeniably apparent to him. Hawthorne may be suggesting that man is prone to elevate woman in his idealism and then to blame her when he finds she has feet of clay.

Hawthorne makes Giovanni's renunciation of Beatrice a passionate and scathing utterance. "Yes, poisonous thing! Thou hast done it! Thou hast blasted me! Thou hast filled my veins with poison! Thou hast made me as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and deadly a creature as thyself—a world's wonder of hideous monstrosity!" (II, 143)

Giovanni's rejection of Beatrice is not primarily an act of outraged idealism, as he would like to believe, but is rather a selfish fear for his own safety. His shallow love turns to hatred. He must seek first his own protection. Here is the echo of the first Adam saying of Eve, "She gave me of the tree and I did eat."

When his reviling had died away, Giovanni feels a sense of reviving tenderness and a returning hope that he may yet lead Beatrice to redemption and then perhaps to an eventual happy union with himself. Hawthorne, however, dashes such feeble hope at once with the words, "O, weak, and selfish, and unworthy spirit, that could dream of an earthly union and earthly happiness as possible, after such deep love had been so bitterly wronged as was Beatrice's love by Giovanni's blighting words" (II, 145).

There is no such hope. Giovanni has rejected the imperfect by his harsh idealism, and with it all that is good and beautiful in

Beatrice is lost to him. Hawthorne is here picturing the pride of a man who, lacking spiritual insight into that which is earthly, is thus incapable of high faith. He thinks that he is idealistic in wanting the spirit but not the flesh, not discerning that both the spirit and the flesh are united in a deep and true love. So he rejects both. It never occurs to him to sift honestly his own idealism to see if there be anything selfish or insincere in it. As Beatrice is dying, she sees clearly the selfish flaw in Giovanni's nature, for she says, "Oh, was there not from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?" (II, 147)

Hawthorne seems to be saying in this second group of stories that the sin of pride is a persistent reality in the nature of man. Not only is it a natural thing for man to desire to feed his ego in the realm of personal ambitions and aspirations, but pride is also a force to be reckoned with by the man who hopes to attain to something higher in life than the mere achievement of his own personal satisfactions. The good man who aspires to live on a philanthropic level of life must also be on guard lest his commendable motivation become sullied by selfish pride rationalized as idealism. Hawthorne sees the continual danger that such a man may adhere to the idea of a good cause but may at the same time be blind to that which is most worthy of his devotion in actual practice. This fallacy may constitute a love for mankind in the abstract but not a love of the individual man. For the spurious idealist self is still the object of his love, for such a man admires his own lip service to the ideal and not the ideal itself.

Hawthorne would surely advise man to reach for the ideal but to guard the heart so that love of one's fellow men and of God form the basis for his idealism.

CHAPTER IV

PRIDE WHICH BLASPHEMES GOD

There is a third aspect of the human flaw of pride which is more serious in its effect upon human personality than is natural pride which becomes unlimited, or perverted pride which pretends to be something commendable. Human pride may reach such lengths and take such forms in the human heart as to blaspheme God himself. To say that any man is guilty of blasphemy is a serious accusation and not to be made lightly lest the one making the accusation become guilty of the sin himself.

In the Christian sense blasphemy is defined as meaning a contemptuous sacrilege in word or act toward God, directly or indirectly, through men or things connected with God. Any man who ". . . openly denounces as evil that which is plainly good, is exhibiting a state of heart which is hopeless and beyond the scope of divine illumination or divine influence; he is the most high-handed, wilful, presumptuous despiser of the divine. Such a man is guilty of blasphemy."¹⁹

Jesus spoke of the possible forgiveness for all kinds of sins, but for this sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, He said there was no forgiveness.²⁰ Jesus was not speaking of any one isolated act of sin nor of the repetition of any one act of sin. Rather He was speaking of a basic attitude in a man's heart which made of sacred

¹⁹James Hastings, A Dictionary of the Bible, Dealing With Its Language, Literature, and Contents Including the Biblical Theology, Vol. I, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), pp. 305-306.

²⁰Matthew 12:31.

things something to be held in contempt and which ascribed that which was good to low and evil motives, thus twisting and maligning the good both in God and man. Not even for such a passing attitude of mind did Jesus see the sin as unforgivable, but because of its consuming power over every good thought and impulse which a man might have, He saw the blasphemous attitude blocking every possibility of anything good or benevolent entering into a man's consciousness and life. Thus the unforgivable aspect of the sin is within the nature of such a man and not within the will of a forgiving God.

Hawthorne was aware of the pride which leads to blasphemy and the terrible penalty for this sin in the lives of certain men. It will be of interest to examine four of his short stories in which the main characters can be seen to be bordering on this sin of arrogant pride or definitely and irrevocably given over to it.

In "Young Goodman Brown" (II, 89-106) is the experience of a human soul's losing faith in the spark of the divine which is found in the hearts of all sincere men. Young Goodman Brown starts out deliberately upon a journey from which his good wife, Faith, would have held him back. Hawthorne intimates early in the story that the young husband sets out on an "evil purpose" with the resolve in mind that after the night's communion with sinners is past, he will return to Faith and become a model husband and candidate for heaven. But in the night's journey he learns that all whom he has considered of impeccable Christian character are also joining in the communion of sinners. The greatest shock of all is that Faith, his wife, is among the congregation.

Goodman Brown draws back from final commitment to the Devil just in time, but from then on his life is gloomy. He has no faith in

the sincerity of any man's profession of virtue, not even his minister's or Faith's, and when eventually he goes to his tomb, he goes as a gloomy and unhappy man.

Hawthorne is speaking some universal truths in the story. All men are sinners, and all mankind does share in a fellowship of sin and imperfection. There seems to be a certain amount of evil in the nature of every man. Young Goodman Brown seems to see another Fall of Man in the forest conclave, and thus every man's life might be considered as another Fall of Man. But what the young man fails to comprehend is that knowledge of good and evil can be either good or bad, depending upon its effects. As Mark Van Doren suggests, "He had stumbled upon that mystery of sin which rightly understood provides the only sane and cheerful view of life there is. Understood in Brown's fashion, it darkens and sours the world, withering hope and charity, and perverting whatever is truly good until it looks like evil at its worst; like blasphemy and hypocrisy."²¹ So, following this revelation, the young man thinks he detects evil lurking back of every good and charitable deed or moral teaching with which his fellow men occupy themselves. For him the revelation of universal imperfection results not in a deeper compassion and a sense of kinship with all humanity but in an alienation from his fellow men and a condemnation of the fallibility which he is so willing at the outset to condone in himself but which he cannot accept in his fellow creatures.

There is, of course, something symbolic or allegorical in his wife's name, Faith. Young Goodman Brown deliberately goes away from

²¹Mark Van Doren, Nathaniel Hawthorne, The American Men of Letters Series, (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949). p. 79.

his faith and finds that he has lost it and can never fully regain it. Neither does he ever return fully to his wife, Faith, nor to an open, happy trust in mankind. Because he fails to retain a comprehension of the spark of the divine in every man, he not only sees the evil qualities in every man but goes further and reads evil into every act and motive of his fellow men throughout the remainder of life. "The devil has laid hands on his imagination and he is a gloomy man ever afterwards."²²

Brown does not overtly deny God nor curse Him. One may assume that he retains a faith in His perfection and goodness. But by losing faith in humanity and seeing only the evil, both actually and potentially, he is denying the possibility of the power of the Divine operating in human hearts. When he shrinks from the blessing of his good minister, snatches the child from Goody Cloyse's presence, and ignores Faith's greeting with a stern face, he is denouncing as evil that which is plainly good. This, we have said, is blasphemy.

One might question whether or not there is the basic flaw of pride in his attitude, even if blasphemy be apparent. Hawthorne describes Goodman's nature from the night of his unhappy experience as that of a ". . . stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man" (II,106). This does not seem to picture pride, but this is the result of a pride which arrogantly impels a man to set out to sin with the excuse that he may depart from what he knows is right and no one be the worse for it; but when he learns that others also wander from the narrow way, his whole world becomes convulsed and no longer can he believe in the integrity of any man. It is, indeed, an ugly

²²Cantwell, op. cit., p. 129.

pride which says, "I can sin and yet retain my faith in my innate goodness, but if you sin, my faith is destroyed, for I can no longer believe in your basic goodness."

If Hawthorne did not intend to make Young Goodman Brown actually guilty of the pride of blasphemy, at least he places him on the threshold of it with the door ajar.

In "The Man of Adamant" (III, 564-573) Richard Digby is the man who not only sees total evil in all the rest of mankind but also longs to precipitate and supervise personally the punishments of eternity on this side of death. Hawthorne here is holding up to view the spectre of the Puritan spirit of religious gloom and intolerance.

Both Goodman Brown and Richard Digby concentrate on the sins of others, but whereas Brown is depressed and gloomy because of them, Digby gloats over the punishment that is bound to befall them.

Richard Digby is the theological bigot, filled with spiritual pride, who shakes off the dust from his feet against the village where he has dwelt. He invokes a curse on the meeting-house, which he regards as a temple of heathen idolatry, and sets forth to find a hallowed seclusion for himself in the wilderness. He finds this seclusion in a dark and fearsome cave and refuses to leave his Bible-reading and prayers in its gloomy interior even to drink from the pure, bubbling spring of water near the entrance of the cave. Instead he satisfies his thirst from the drippings of moisture from the roof of the cave, which have had an embalming effect upon the sprigs of foliage and the fallen leaves in the cave and have formed stalagmites on the floor of the cave. Even Mary Goffe's loving pleas for him to leave the cave and its exclusive bigotry before the dripping moisture should turn his heart to stone are thrown back upon her in denunciation and vengeance.

Richard Digby is left to his doom, and later generations find his human corpse, embalmed in the same gray stone that forms the walls and portals of the cave.

The depth of Richard's error is measured by the strength of his devotion. His mind is certainly set on God and heaven. He is zealous in Bible-reading and prayers. He will never swerve from the narrow way. In fact, his way becomes more and more narrow until there is no longer room for anyone other than Richard upon it. Soon there is not room for God. Richard reads to himself and reads amiss. He prays but prays to himself. He needs no one now but Richard, for Richard alone has found the true way. He is the perfect man. Here, indeed, is an intense faith, but there is no charity in it for others who are lost and no gratitude toward God for his mercy, for Richard believes that by his own virtue he has earned his salvation and that he is worthy of it himself.

It is a vicious pride which claims the blessings of heaven for self but forbids them to others. For Richard Digby one seems to hear the words of Nelly Dean's judgment of Old Joseph in Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights when she says that he ". . . ransacked the Bible to rake the promises to himself and fling the curses to his neighbors."²³

In such a Pharisaical form of spiritual pride can be seen a more deadly vice than in any specific sinful act. Richard has a too-perfect trust in his own powers of spiritual insight and personal purity. His is the transgression of intolerance which not only sees evil in all his fellow men but sees it with bigoted eyes against the background of his own imagined perfection, which makes it appear blacker by contrast.

²³Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1950), p. 42.

Furthermore, he feels no sadness for their wrongdoings. Goodman Brown was at least horrified and saddened by such discovery. Richard Digby rejoices at man's depravity for a purely selfish reason. He imagines that the wider the moral and spiritual gulf between himself and the rest of mankind, the more it will redound to his credit, and the greater will be the rewards in his one-man heaven.

There is no question concerning the presence of the flaw of pride in Richard Digby, and this is the pride which blasphemes both God and man. Man is held in sacrilegious contempt, and God is made a petty God who with prodigality wastes a universe and millions of those created in His own image to preserve only one of His creation who is not worth the trouble. Mercy and compassion are strained out of the nature of Richard Digby's God, and as a God only of wrath and vengeance, He becomes repulsive and monstrous, recreated into Richard Digby's own image.

In "Ethan Brand" (III,477-498) Hawthorne further reveals the pride which blasphemes God in the character of Ethan who develops a diabolical absorption and gloating interest in sin. He spends eighteen years in travel seeking for the one Unpardonable Sin. He manipulates, through psychological experiments, the personalities of individuals in his ruthless probings for the answer which he seeks. Finally he returns to his own lime kiln, the scene of his former activities when his heart had been benevolent toward all mankind, and he admits to Bartram that he has found the Unpardonable Sin within his own heart. He says that it is " . . . the sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its mighty claims" (III,485).

In Ethan's violation of the sanctity of human personality, he had practiced a tyrannical domination of one mind over another. Sympathy

and reverence for his fellow men were gone. He had adopted falsity for truth and had cultivated a wicked fascination for that which should have awakened pity and horror and led him to a positive emphasis on virtue. Thus, Hawthorne says, "He had lost his hold of the magnetic chain of humanity" (III,495). This has happened because he has allowed his intellectual development to far outrun the development of his moral nature. Consequently his conscience has grown hard and insensitive and there is no longer a balance between mind and heart. A consuming pride had entered into his heart as he felt his mental powers expanding. So consuming has this pride become that even as he confesses to Bartram the sin within his own heart, for which there is no retribution, he says, "Freely were it to do again, would I incur the guilt. Unshrinkingly I accept the retribution!" (III,485) This attitude of willful choice, even when the significance of it is fully understood, is evidence that the unpardonable aspect of such a sin of pride is within the nature of the sinner rather than in the unyielding law and will of God,

Perhaps that which is most unpardonable and blasphemous about the sin which Ethan sets out to investigate, and thereby himself commits, is that he wants to seek it out for its own sake. Hawthorne shows that it is therefore not surprising that he finds it within his own heart.

There is a real similarity between Richard Digby's sin and Ethan Brand's. Both seem to take an unholy joy in the sins of others. Both look upon their fellow men and see only that which is evil in them. However, although Richard takes a perverted satisfaction in contemplating the punishment which will come to these sinners, he at least stays tied to the rest of humanity by the very fact of his emotional involvement in their fate. It is a negative and repulsive reaction of denunciation and

condemnation, but at least he is not emotionally detached, even though he attempts to become so physically.

On the other hand, Ethan Brand has reached that cold detachment by which he stands apart and separate from the rest of humanity, even in his emotions, and coldly manipulates and analyzes his fellow beings with seemingly no concern or care whether punishment will come to them or not. Indeed, the only sin which merits his attention is the one for which the worst punishment of all is a foregone conclusion, the complete and eternal alienation from God. But this ultimate fate of theirs is no concern of his. Cold, intellectual knowledge of the presence of this sin within them is all that he seeks. He is the man who is trying to play God, but again it is a grotesque God, one who stands with a balance in his hand weighing the puppets of His creation with scientific exactness and analysis, prodding them occasionally so that he may observe their weak falterings and may tally up the weight of their sins. Ethan Brand's is a greater sin of blasphemy against man and God than is Richard Digby's.

As in Ethan Brand Hawthorne reveals the pride of intellect which withers, contracts, and hardens the human heart, so in the character of Dr. Rappaccini in "Rappaccini's Daughter" (II, 107-148) he reveals the intellect which becomes the very essence of evil when divorced from the affections which are grounded in moral sentiments. If Ethan Brand is the man who plays God, Dr. Rappaccini is the man who plays Satan and, as Satan, usurps the place of God. He is the brutal egotist who is capable of bending all people and all things to the accomplishment of his idea. He has a great dedication to scientific knowledge, and even his critic, Professor Pietro Baglioni, admits his great intelligence and unswerving passion for scientific truth. But Baglioni characterizes

him as a man who cares infinitely more for science than he does for mankind. His patients are interesting to him only as subjects for experimentation. He would sacrifice human life, even one very dear to him, " . . . for the sake of adding as much as a grain of mustard seed to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge" (II,116).

Throughout history men have received merited commendation for finding, even through the sacrifice of individual lives, including sometimes their own, secrets of nature which would bring good to the greater number of humanity. Dr. Rappaccini cannot be condemned as blasphemous and evil on this basis. The real evidence of the evil in his nature is that he uses all his intelligence, his scientific knowledge, and the fruits of his experimentation to bring evil on the earth and not good. Although he argues with Beatrice that all his work and concentrated efforts would bring great good to her, the curse which he thus plans to bring to the rest of humanity is that much more monstrous. He is acting out the God of distorted love and hate which Richard Digby thinks is his God.

Dr. Rappaccini's garden is a garden of cultivated plants which exude poison and death. His own daughter, Beatrice, has been nurtured on the poison of his botanical creations for so long that the poison is the very essence of her physical being. Hawthorne describes the plants of the garden as having " . . . an appearance of artificialness indicating that there had been such a commixture or adultery of various vegetable species that the production was no longer of God's making, but the monstrous offspring of man's depraved fancy, glowing with only an evil mockery of beauty" (II,128). Rappaccini's dehumanization is not in his experimentations but in the nature of the experiments and the ends which he seeks and is gaining through them.

There are glimpses throughout the story of Dr. Rappaccini's cold, detached, and calculating observation of the progress of his experiments. There is the early suggestion that he may have paved the way for Giovanni's easy access to the garden, and the closing scene confirms his malevolent design. In the chance meeting of Giovanni and Professor Baglioni with Dr. Rappaccini, the Professor interprets Rappaccini's intense scrutiny of Giovanni as a look as deep as nature itself, but without any of the warmth of nature. He is convinced that Giovanni is already the subject of one of the Doctor's experiments.

The climax of this diabolical detachment comes when the reader is allowed a glimpse of Rappaccini standing in the garden, hidden from the view of Beatrice and Giovanni, observing the scene between them which he expects to be the successful culmination of his long experiment. He has planned through Giovanni to give his daughter a companion in her loneliness. He has slowly made of her a creature of so much destructive poison that no other human being can survive contact with her. Only another, impregnated gradually with the same poison, could survive companionship with her; and Giovanni, through Rappaccini's manipulation, has now reached that point of immunization.

But Rappaccini has reckoned amiss. Giovanni's insistent misgivings coupled with Baglioni's specific warnings of the evil in Beatrice, which is now apparent to him, cause him to recoil from her. Furthermore, she drinks the purifying potion which Giovanni brings her and dies from it, for her physical nature has been nurtured to survive only by the poisons to which she is accustomed.

Dr. Rappaccini's terrible blasphemy is made plain when he defends his perversion of her nature by telling Beatrice as she is dying that he has made her so that no power or strength could avail against her, for

he has enabled her to quell the mightiest with a breath. He has made her as terrible as she is beautiful. He asks her, "Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to evil and capable of none?" (II, 147)

Beatrice answers that she would have been loved, not feared. Dr. Rappaccini has sought to invert the nature of God's created beings. There is a correspondence between this story and the Biblical account of creation. The setting is a garden. Beatrice and Giovanni enact the parts of Eve and Adam. Dr. Rappaccini is creating as did God, but he is a corruption of the Biblical God. God created man and woman to find strength through love, and it is this normal longing which Beatrice expresses as she is dying. Rappaccini has attempted through Beatrice and Giovanni to reverse this and to recreate beings whose strength is in evil and whose power is in malignant estrangement from the rest of mankind.

Only a person utterly lacking in love and reverence for both God and humanity could be thus capable of preying upon susceptible individuals to distort the plan and design of God in His creative process.²⁴ God is ruled out, for Rappaccini takes the place of God and compounds his arrogant pride and blasphemy by aberration of the very nature of God.

In these four stories is seen a pride which blasphemes in varying degrees both God and man. Hawthorne seems to be saying that reverence for God and reverence for man are inseparable. If one does not honor his fellow men, he cannot honor God in whose image all mankind

²⁴Stewart, The American Notebooks, p. lxxdi.

is created. If one does not respect God, neither can he respect that which He has made. It would seem from these stories that man's liability to blasphemy usually begins with a belittling, in one form or another, of his fellow men. The progression of this arrogance seems then eventually to lead to a change in one's conception of God. As a man loves his fellow men, so is he likely to love God. As he despises his fellow men, so is he likely to despise God. Hawthorne reveals the tendency to this coordination in a man's viewpoint. The attitude of contempt which is basic to the pride of blasphemy will hold all in contempt, with one exception. Always the blasphemer excludes himself from any relegation to insignificance or scorn, and herein is seen the human flaw of pride in its most regrettable form.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing stories, one is impressed by the fact that Hawthorne had a very keen sense of evil at the heart of life. In his search for truth he looked within the human heart, since for him this was the realm of reality. Again and again he found that sinful pride in some form or stage of development tainted happiness, frustrated ambition, or destroyed life.

That Hawthorne sought out and held up to scrutiny the human flaw of pride in the lives of so many of his characters, however, is no reason to conclude that his was a gloomy and defeated view of the depraved nature of mankind. Instead, Hawthorne seems to have been saying in these stories that only as a man can know the truth about both the good and the evil within his own nature can there be any hope of his making peace with himself, his fellow men, and with God.

Hawthorne's presentation of these characters with their human fallacies of pride does remind us of the Greek tragedies in which hybris was one of the determining factors in a man's unhappy fate. But Hawthorne's doctrine differs somewhat from the point of view of the writers of these early tragedies. The Greek hero was the pawn of a fate to which he was led unswervingly by the human flaw of pride at work within his own nature coordinating with external factors. Although Hawthorne recognized the flaw of pride, he believed that man is still a free moral agent with the power to modify or erase the flaw by exercising his will.

Thus he can determine what his end shall be. Hawthorne would undoubtedly have said, as the Greeks did, that there is always a cause and effect

relationship in the affairs of life, but would have insisted that man has the power to influence the moral causes and thus to affect the end result.

Hawthorne, therefore, presented these characters with their sins of pride as an invitation to growth and not as a commitment of depraved humanity to a hopeless status. He recognized that there is a therapy for the unhappy nature of mankind. This consists of an honest appraisal of one's own fallibility of pride followed by the restoration of sympathy with and a sharing of the common lot. Stewart has summarized it by saying that Hawthorne's moral idea " . . . comprehended the Christian doctrine of charity, the psychological doctrine of participation, the social doctrine of the democratic way."²⁵

Hawthorne saw this life as the opportunity for self-discernment, for restitution, and for growth in social relationships and spiritual stature. Certainly Roderick Elliston is one character who successfully grasps these opportunities. Perhaps Hawthorne was suggesting that a punishment of our sins would be the perception of them; and if, through humility, that perception comes to a man in this life, the final punishment can be transcended. Correction and restitution can be substituted for punishment and despairing regrets throughout eternity. There is hope now if a man will honestly seek to pluck out the pride from his heart.

In "Earth's Holocaust" (II, 430-456) Hawthorne gives his own conclusion to the matter by saying that it is only when the human heart becomes purified that the evils of pride can disappear, for " . . . out of the heart are the issues of life."

²⁵Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne, p. 259.

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