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HAWTHORNE AND HOWELLS: THE MIDDLE WAY
IN AMERICAN FICTION

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Presented to
the Graduate Council of
The University of Tennessee

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	vi
I. HAWTHORNE, HOWELLS, AND THE AMERICAN DICHOTOMY	1
The American Dichotomy	1
The Relation of Hawthorne and Howells	8
II. THEORIES OF LITERATURE AND METHODS OF PROSE FICTION	15
The Romance and the Novel	16
Autobiographical Foundation	32
Symbolism	40
The Dramatic Form	51
III. LITERATURE AND ETHICS	68
Morality and Truth	68
The Ideal of Moderation	73
Religion and Morality	82
The Immorality of Isolation	88
Sympathy or Complicity	99
IV. THE ETHICS OF SOCIETY	112
Democratic Origins	112
The Curse of Materialism	121
Capitalistic Corruption	131
Social Exclusiveness and Pride	149
Reform and Utopianism	162
Individual Maturity and Social Equality	175

CHAPTER	PAGE
V. THE FUNCTION OF WOMAN IN SOCIETY	183
The Equality of Man and Woman	184
Idealism and Self-sacrifice: Virtues Perverted	190
Feminism: Reform and Philanthropy	198
Innocence and Independence	210
Hawthorne's American girl abroad: Hilda	211
Howells' variations of Hilda	217
VI. THE WORLD AND THE SPIRIT	237
Religion and the Supernatural	238
The Necessity for Spiritual Acumen	249
The Spirituality of Art	258
CONCLUSION	273
BIBLIOGRAPHY	278

INTRODUCTION

For a long time readers of William Dean Howells have noted the likeness of his fiction to that of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Although several recent articles and books have mentioned parallels between the two writers, no work has undertaken a complete study of these parallels, much less of their possible significance. The present work is a study of major qualities of the fiction of Hawthorne and Howells, the similarities in these qualities, the development of some of the older writer's methods and themes in the younger man's work, and the significance of this relationship as it illustrates a prominent nineteenth-century fictional trend--the tendency toward the middle way in technique and idea.

Because of the immensity of the corpus of Howells, only his longer fictional works will be considered, though attention will be given to Hawthorne's tales as well as novels. While fiction is the primary source for this investigation, pertinent excerpts from the criticism and personal notebooks of both writers will be included. The latter two sources are included only to afford a deeper understanding of fictional themes and to illuminate more clearly the aesthetic and ideological agreement of the two authors. There is no attempt to make a thorough investigation of Howells' enormous critical production in its bearing on every one of his and Hawthorne's fictional themes.

A major problem encountered has been selection, particularly in the case of Howells. Quite often several examples could be given where

only one is used; thus selection of examples has been made with regard to their representative position in Howells' thought and for balance within the present study. As far as direct influence of Hawthorne on Howells is concerned, no elaborate claims are made. Certain evidences of influence are conspicuous, and these are pointed out. But it is impossible to limit precisely the influences on a mind like Howells', so captivated by multifarious literary and social interests of his own age as well as of the past. Of paramount concern in this study, therefore, is the affinity between the minds of Hawthorne and Howells as it is revealed in their fiction and as it coincides with a major characteristic of nineteenth-century American fiction.

CHAPTER I

HAWTHORNE, HOWELLS, AND THE AMERICAN DICHOTOMY

A. THE AMERICAN DICHOTOMY

It is almost superfluous to point out that romanticism dominated the literary scene during the nineteenth century, but it is significant that in America the extremes of European romanticism never prevailed because of what has been identified as "the survival here of a classical temper" which carried with it "the pressure of common sense."¹ Actually, the position of the major nineteenth-century American novelists was neither classic nor romantic. It was ambivalent, continuously weighing the old against the new, the unseen against the seen, and the spiritual against the material. These dichotomies, which formed the basic themes for the major fiction of the nineteenth century, were noted by Lionel Trilling in The Liberal Imagination and used further as a point of departure by Marius Bewley in his latest work, The Eccentric Design. Richard Chase commenced his recent study of the novel with the statement that "The imagination that has produced much of the best and most characteristic American fiction has been shaped by the contradictions and not by the unities and harmonies of our culture."² Both Messrs. Trilling and

¹G. Harrison Orlans, "The Rise of Romanticism" in Transitions in American Literary History (Durham, N. C., 1953), pp. 170-171.

²The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, New York, 1957), p. 1. Chase delved further into American social and artistic contradictions in the dialogue "The Illusion of the Middle Way" in The Democratic Vista (Garden City, New York, 1958), pp. 29-68.

Bewley avowed that the writers found these "tensions" not in society but in their own minds and that, in the absence of significant social conflict in America, they had for a starting point only abstractions, which resulted from a personal concern with theoretical democracy. "There was really only one subject available to the nineteenth-century American novelist," wrote Mr. Bewley, "--his own unhappy plight. And the essence of that plight was his isolation."³

Indeed, the nineteenth-century American novelist was much more introspective than was his European counterpart, but this introspection was not due altogether to the dearth of native social conflict. Rather, the American writers quite often were personally caught in the middle of the conflict, whereas their European contemporaries were surer of their position: they were either traditional or revolutionary.⁴ Thus the intellectual refusal of the Americans to jump into the fight and to commit themselves wholeheartedly to one side, made them sometimes appear isolated from social and political issues. These writers subscribed fundamentally to the democratic principle of individual rights and the Christian teaching of universal brotherhood, both embraced by romantic ideology. Yet they questioned the absolutism of any doctrinaire movement. Their concern, like that of the Renaissance humanists, was man and what was best for him individually and collectively. For achieving this

³The Eccentric Design: Form in the Classic American Novel (New York, 1959), p. 15.

⁴R. L. Bruckberger recently attributed the successful establishment of American democracy to the refusal of early politicians and statesmen to be misled by extremes, which ensnared their European contemporaries. (Image of America [New York, 1959].)

humanistic ideal, there was no ready-made program. But one thing was clear--there was danger in extremes. Philosophically the majority of the nineteenth-century American writers followed what Ralph Barton Perry called "Post-Kantian Idealism," which strove to balance the extremes of individualism and collectivism. Perry wrote:

Despite, or perhaps because of, the clash of doctrines, American philosophy tends to moderation. Its different ideas rub against one another, after the manner of gregarious Americans. Friction dulls the sharp edges of difference and works against intellectual obsession or monomania. There are very few American thinkers who do not have more than one idea. American philosophy does not tend to fanaticism, to doctrinaire rigidity, to pontifical utterance, or, and this may be held to be a weakness, to system-building. It shrinks from extremes, whether skeptical or speculative.⁵

The resulting introspective analysis of these doctrinal clashes with its tendency toward abstraction came from a desire on the part of the American novelists to work out their own salvation along with society's. Since the domain of the artist was life, he had to grapple with the seeming paradoxes on the theoretical as well as the practical level in order to arrive at even a close approximation of the true order of existence. Among the problems that confronted the American artists was one that was naturally precipitated by their search for a middle-ground position: the relative importance of the theoretical and the practical, or the very nature of true reality itself.⁶ And this struggle

⁵Characteristically American (New York, 1949), p. 55.

⁶Van Wyck Brooks, writing early in the twentieth century, lamented what he felt was still the wide separation between the world of ideas and of practice in America and asked: "But where is all that is real, where is personality and all its works, if it is not essentially somewhere, somehow, in some not very vague way, between?" ("Highbrow" and "Low-brow" in America's Coming-of-Age [New York, 1924], p. 35.)

necessitated the moral earnestness that has been noted and attacked by a number of modern critics.⁷ If the early novelists had been contented to remain with the predominantly abstract, certainly the moral content of the novel would have been appreciably reduced.

The main tradition of the nineteenth-century American novel was concerned with the elemental dichotomies of American life itself. Some of these have been listed by Mr. Bewley as "an opposition between tradition and progress, between democratic faith and disillusion, between the past and the present and future; between Europe and America, liberalism and conservatism, aggressive acquisitive economics and benevolent wealth."⁸ According to Chase, the American contradictions stem from certain peculiar historical circumstances: the solitary and individualistic existence of men in this country from the very beginning, the Manichaeian consciousness of Puritanism, and the American's dual allegiance to the Old and New Worlds.⁹

One of the earliest of the conflicts to assert itself was that between feudalistic and democratic cultures. While a strong patriotism characterized the surface expression of the writers, underneath there was a gnawing distrust of the methods of certain democratic institutions. Our earliest major novelist, James Fenimore Cooper, glorified American

⁷H. L. Mencken voiced the complaint that "the American, try as he will, can never imagine any work of the imagination as wholly devoid of moral content." ("Puritanism as a Literary Force" in A Book of Prefaces [Garden City, New York, 1927], p. 200.)

⁸The Eccentric Design, p. 18.

⁹The American Novel and Its Tradition, p. 11.

individualism in his "Leatherstocking Tales" and apologized for democratic ways and means in Notions of the Americans, but also aligned himself with a ruling class founded on property ownership in The American Democrat and castigated the restless individualism of the lower middle class in his anti-rent novels. Also, Cooper's humane idealism in the "Leatherstocking Tales" shows in contrast to his orthodox and reactionary approach to religion and politics in the "Littlepage" trilogy and the other late novels. Henry James, one of the major links between the earlier and the later fiction of the century, also lauded the independent strength of American character, which he almost always depicted as triumphant over the social and moral intimidations of a decadent Europe. But at the same time he preferred personally to dwell in the surroundings of the older gentility and in his fiction was preoccupied with the activities of the social and intellectual elite.

Aesthetically the American novel reflected the national opposition between the immaterial and the material. Spiritual motives that had prompted early colonization were almost totally obscured in the nineteenth century by more tangible interests. Values became more materialistic when men who had once been at the mercy of the wilderness became its masters and began to exploit its wealth-producing resources. The cumulative impact of scientific thought after 1859 left a wider chasm between the old spiritual idealism and the new concern with the earthly and substantial. Cooper in his own life was involved in the conflict between personal ideals and the commonsense matters of everyday life. He occupied a middle ground in the theory of fiction that was to continue

to the time of Dreiser (notwithstanding Mr. Philip Rahv's ingenious but rather sophistic treatise on the one-sidedness of all nineteenth-century American writers).¹⁰ Although most of Cooper's novels were based on real-life situations which transmit an underlying verisimilitude, his tone was purposely romantic. Without the imaginative coloring, facts remain lifeless, he felt, and "this rigid adhesion to truth, an indispensable requisite in history and travels, destroys the charm of fiction."¹¹ James, writing in the midst of the fight for realism in American letters, despaired of art that was too dependent on surface reality, as one of his fictional artists pointedly remarks about his too genuine model: "She was the real thing, but always the same thing."¹² "The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life,"¹³ James wrote further. "But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say."¹⁴

The freedom to feel and say what life is all about implied an ethical consciousness in the novel, and from Cooper forward writers groped for a weltanschauung that could unite the diversities of a society in turbulent transition. In the loss during the nineteenth century of a

¹⁰See "Paleface and Redskin" in Image and Idea (Norfolk, Conn., 1957), pp. 1-6.

¹¹"Preface" to The Pioneers, The Works of James Fenimore Cooper, Iroquois Edition (New York, 1895-1900), IV, iii.

¹²"The Real Thing," The Novels and Tales of Henry James (New York, 1907-1917), XVIII, 326.

¹³"The Art of Fiction" in Partial Portraits (London, 1894), p. 378.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 384.

dogmatic set of values, the social scene assumed prime importance as a subject for fictional observation, through which a fresh revelation of basic truth might emerge. "Every chronicle of manners has a certain value," Cooper maintained. "When customs are connected with principles, in their origin, development, or end, such records have a double importance."¹⁵ Cooper's novels, consistent with his critical theory, laid stress upon social and political conduct which would illustrate, through comparison and contrast, a universal principle regarding human relationships. Although James justifiably refused to call fiction moral or immoral per se, his view that the writer must illustrate general truth inherent in life's situations coincides with that of most of the other novelists of the century. James wrote: "There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer."¹⁶ In no instance in the making of fiction did the mind of James fail to tear aside the veil of social decorum and to scrutinize the causes of man's moral ineptness.

Chase objected to the idea that the novelists of the nineteenth century were striving "to reconcile disunities rather than . . . to discover a putative unity in disunity or to rest at last among irreconcilables."¹⁷ It is true that a purely aesthetic criticism of a single work

¹⁵"Preface" to Satanstoe, Iroquois Edition, XXVI, iii.

¹⁶"The Art of Fiction," p. 406.

¹⁷The American Novel and Its Tradition, pp. 7-8.

may reflect on the part of a number of writers a certain delight in disorder. But the corpus of such novelists as Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, Howells, James, and Twain reveals impressively these writers' efforts to resolve their perceived dilemmas. The development of the romance, which Mr. Chase saw as indigenous to the United States, was certainly not a deliberate artistic potpourri, but an effort toward unifying the varied forms of prose fiction into one form that could penetrate beyond the chaos of modern life and into the area of a single universal truth. To say, however, that the disunities of the American experience were ever resolved by the novelists is as fallacious as to ignore the efforts toward conciliation. The tragic failure of Hawthorne's last works attests to the author's painful refusal to admit the everlasting irreconcilability of the old and the new, the stable and the transient. Howells, also, after the apex of his social optimism of the late 1880's, seemingly admitted his failure to find a single unifying principle by lapsing during his last years into the escapism of such idyls as An Open-Eyed Conspiracy and The Vacation of the Kelwyns or into a dark acceptance of eternal moral dilemma in The Leatherwood God and New Leaf Mills.

B. THE RELATION OF HAWTHORNE AND HOWELLS

The nineteenth-century American dichotomy is nowhere in greater evidence than in the works of Hawthorne and Howells. The main aversion of both was extremism, and they sought the middle way in both life and art. Thus Hawthorne and Howells are important examples of the American tradition which advocated a kind of golden mean as a resolution to the

dichotomies which they perceived. With regard to Hawthorne's place in America's nineteenth-century ethical dialectic as it appeared in literature, one writer recently classified him in the middle group of "the ironic temperament," which "was characterized by a tragic optimism; by a sense of the tragic collisions to which innocence was liable . . . and equally by an awareness of the heightened perception and humanity which suffering made possible"¹⁸ Howells also shared the position of "the party of Irony," despite the contention of some critics that he was not at all concerned with the darker side of existence.¹⁹

The major contrasts between the writings of Hawthorne and Howells, though striking, exist more as a matter of emphasis than fundamental disagreement. That Howells did concern himself much of the time with the "smiling aspects of life" which permeate social comedy marks him generally as a much more cheerful artist than Hawthorne, to whom the darker side of humanity at times seemed almost overwhelming. But Howells had his darker moments and Hawthorne his lighter ones. The fictional forms chosen by the writers also contributed to making their differences more apparent. Howells' form--reportorial transcriptions of life--by its

¹⁸R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago, 1955), pp. 7-8.

¹⁹For example, F. O. Matthiessen, who wrote: "Howells' quiet decorum, his assurance that, if realism was to be true to America, it must concern itself 'with the large and cheerful average of health and success and happy life,' is evidence of how little he too had shared in Hawthorne's tragic vision" (American Renaissance [London, 1941], p. 263.) As subsequent chapters of the present study will show, Howells during his lifetime vacillated between the comic and the tragic view of life and finally settled upon a weltanschauung, having much kinship to Hawthorne's, in which he accepted both.

very nature did not penetrate many of the darker implications of the reported subjects, and his selection of the scenes to be reported ignored, by and large, unpleasant revelations of man's baser emotions. On the other hand, Hawthorne constantly felt the omnipresence of sin; to him the conflict between good and evil was the reality and the human manifestation of this conflict merely a reflection of the real. Thus his artistic form naturally took cognizance of physical activity primarily for its revelation of the underlying spiritual struggle, and it often chose for graphic illustration man in some of his most degenerate moments. Howells, as a realist in technique, was concerned with the trivialities of average human relationships much more than was Hawthorne, who kept his attention on the fundamental issues in man's spiritual struggle.

Although Hawthorne is usually identified with romanticism and Howells with realism, the work of the two cannot be consigned arbitrarily to extreme literary or ideological movements. Within both are strong elements of classicism as well as romanticism, and the paradoxes of the times are again conspicuous through the influence that both schools had on their writing. The striving to reconcile discordant elements characterizes their aesthetic theory as well as the themes that they selected for fictional treatment. A high moral earnestness was the inevitable result of Hawthorne's and Howells' search for the golden mean, but it is a fallacy to dismiss them as conventional moralists. Both were religious agnostics, and they considered pre-established and dogmatic standards a major deterrent to an ethical balance which would achieve a harmonious relationship among individuals.

That Howells regarded Hawthorne as the greatest of his American predecessors is evident from Howells' personal reminiscences and from his several reviews of Hawthorne's works. In recollecting his first visit to New England, Howells wrote of "Hawthorne, the exquisite artist, the unrivalled dreamer, whom we still always liken this one and that one to, whenever this one or that one promises greatly to please us, and still leave without a rival, without a companion"20 Earlier, in his review of Henry James's critical biography of Hawthorne, he had given the highest position among writers of prose fiction to the New England "romancer": "It is not enough to say of a book so wholly unexampled and unrivaled as The Scarlet Letter that it was 'the finest piece of imaginative writing put forth in' America; as if it had its parallel in any literature."²¹ Whenever Howells made a list of the exemplars of the highest in literary art, he always included Hawthorne, and he confessed that "more truly than any other American author he has been a passion with me"22 In his address on the art of prose fiction, Howells named The Scarlet Letter and The Marble Faun as the "greatest" in the field of romance.²³

Many of Howells' contemporaries noted the Hawthornian tendencies

²⁰Literary Friends and Acquaintance (New York, 1901), p. 10.

²¹"James's Hawthorne," The Atlantic Monthly, XLV (February, 1880), 283.

²²My Literary Passions (New York, 1910), p. 139.

²³"Novel-Writing and Novel-Reading: An Impersonal Explanation," ed. William M. Gibson, Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LXII (January, 1958), 20.

in his works. William James, writing to Henry in 1870, lauded his brother--and Howells as well--for following Hawthorne's style:

It also tickled my national feeling not a little to note the resemblance of Hawthorne's style . . . to yours and Howells's. . . . That you and Howells, with all the models in English literature to follow, should needs involuntarily have imitated (as it were) this American, seems to point to the existence of some real American mental quality.²⁴

James Russell Lowell, in a critical notice of one of Howells' early works, compared him to Hawthorne "in his sensitiveness of observation."²⁵ Calling attention to Howells' non-committal style in The Undiscovered Country, Thomas Wentworth Higginson wrote: "Mr. Howells has too much of Hawthorne in his temperament to find any difficulty in evading all assertion of his personal belief or disbelief in these wonders."²⁶

Howells, early in his career, admitted being influenced by Hawthorne--at least in one instance, as he revealed in a comment about Suburban Sketches in a letter to Higginson, January 7, 1871: "Thanks that you like S. S. I couldn't keep the drowned girl out. Besides she was no worse than Zenobia--was Zenobia, in fact, on Putnam street, Cambridge."²⁷ In two Howells novels the central character is a practicing novelist who writes psychological romances, in frank imitation of

²⁴Quoted by Van Wyck Brooks in Howells: His Life and World (New York, 1959), p. 121, n. 4.

²⁵"[Review of] Suburban Sketches," North American Review, CXII (January, 1871), 237.

²⁶"Howells's 'Undiscovered Country,'" Scribner's Monthly, XX (September, 1880), 793.

²⁷"The Letters of Howells to Higginson," ed. George S. Hellman, Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Bibliophile Society (1929), p. 28.

Hawthorne. Percy B. Ray in The World of Chance, during one of his hopeful reveries, imagines his publisher's voice shaking "with emotion in haling Ray as the heir of Hawthorne" ²⁸ In Fennel and Rue, the novel of Philip Verrian is decidedly Hawthornian:

[It was] quietly artistic and psychological, whatever liveliness of incident it uttered on the surface. [Verrian] belonged to the good school which is of no fashion and of every time, far both from actuality and unreality ²⁹

Allusions to Hawthorne or his works are found in half a dozen Howells novels: A Chance Acquaintance, The Undiscovered Country, Indian Summer, The Coast of Bohemia, The World of Chance, and The Son of Royal Langbrith. And intermittently during his career Howells employed the fundamental style of the psychological romance instead of reportorial realism, in such works as The Undiscovered Country, The Shadow of a Dream, The World of Chance, The Landlord at Lion's Head, The Son of Royal Langbrith, The Leatherwood God, and The Vacation of the Kelwyns.

In formulating their individual theories of aesthetics, Hawthorne and Howells were both searching for a medium which would represent true reality and also portray the essentially American experience. And similarities exist in many phases of their life and art. Indeed, one can see that much in the tradition of American fiction passed from Hawthorne to Howells.

Many of these similarities grew naturally out of two minds conditioned by like backgrounds. The formative years of youth led both men

²⁸The World of Chance (New York, 1893), p. 70.

²⁹Fennel and Rue (New York, 1908), p. 27.

into a withdrawal from society and fostered an intense personal analysis of their own inner conditions. When this position was changed to that of active participant, they were able to give social conditions an even more sympathetic analysis. Hawthorne and Howells were humanists in the fullest sense of the word. They were sincerely troubled by the discordant elements that deterred the highest realization of the human potential, but they absolutely refused to establish a legalistic system of ethics that might reduce one evil at the risk of magnifying another. Howells was more interested in systems than was Hawthorne and was for a while an active agitator for socialistic reform. But this was just a phase, as the Brook Farm society was a momentary experiment for Hawthorne. In their social criticism Hawthorne and Howells both came to a denunciation of extremes of reform and sought to unite all men through moral and aesthetic enlightenment. And in dealing with specific problems of the social order, such as the place of women and artists, they constantly demonstrated their penchant for the golden mean, which they implied could be found in nature itself. In all aspects Hawthorne and Howells epitomized the nineteenth-century mind as it hovered between two worlds and intensely strove to reconcile the prevailing dichotomies.

CHAPTER II

THEORIES OF LITERATURE AND METHODS OF PROSE FICTION

To say that Nathaniel Hawthorne and William Dean Howells held and practiced literary theories that are in any way similar would seem to exhibit a gross misunderstanding of their work. Both occupy unique places in American letters for the perfection of what are usually considered two distinct forms of prose fiction. The mark of literary excellence lies in part in an author's individuality, and one of the distinguishing characteristics of Hawthorne and Howells among nineteenth-century writers is the high degree to which they deviated from the popular tendencies of their day and, indeed, from each other. In their criticism both writers expressed a preference for different literary genres, but in practice they moved along lines that frequently intersect and become common. And the convenient literary classifications such as romanticism and realism tend to break down when one begins to compare all aspects of the work of these two. Howells, obviously, was influenced by romanticism in both ideology and technique. But this was not the extreme romanticism of the primitivists nor the sentimentalists. It was more nearly the restrained romanticism of Hawthorne, who ironically exploited the very techniques of the romanticists in his criticism of their excesses.

That Hawthorne and Howells employed methods which are broadly dissimilar frequently leads to the feeling that the two were entirely unlike in all phases of their art. On the contrary, the literary theory of

both, embodying the aim and end of that prose fiction which could call itself literature, dealt with the presentation of truth. The methods of the two writers, despite their general divergence into what seem to be contrasting styles, are also strikingly similar, as this chapter will point out. First to be considered are the broad literary genres used by Hawthorne and Howells, the romance and the novel, which have more in common in the case of these two authors than most critics recognize. Then certain of their specific techniques of fiction will be shown to be similar: the autobiographical foundation, the use of symbolism, and the dramatic form. Morality, which both authors held to be inherent in true art, will be discussed in Chapter III.

A. THE ROMANCE AND THE NOVEL

Hawthorne called his long fictional works romances, rather than novels, using a distinction he may have borrowed from Sir Walter Scott.¹ In the prefaces to The House of the Seven Gables, The Blithedale Romance, and The Marble Faun, he presented to his readers in a half-apologetic way his reasons for not writing in the form of the novel, which, he said, "is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible,

¹Hawthorne checked out of the Salem Athenaeum, October 26, 1833, Volume VI of Scott's Miscellaneous Prose Works (1829), containing "An Essay on Romance," in which Scott differentiated the romance from the novel. (Marion L. Kesselring, Hawthorne's Reading, 1828-1850 [New York, 1949], p. 60.) On the other hand, Richard Chase pointed out the similarity of Hawthorne's definition of romance to that of William Gilmore Simms, as given in the preface to The Yemassee, first published in 1835. (The American Novel and Its Tradition [Garden City, New York, 1957], pp. 15-21.)

but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience" (III, 13).²

The particular freedom that the romance allowed the writer of The House of the Seven Gables was "the attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us" (III, 14), and it is the reader's prerogative to take the legend of the past and make of it what he will. He, "according to his pleasure, may either disregard, or allow it to float almost imperceptibly about the characters and events for the sake of a picturesque effect" (*ibid.*). In The Blithedale Romance Hawthorne chose a setting in keeping with the liberties that the romance would allow, for it is "a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of [the author's] brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives" (V, 321). For The Marble Faun, Hawthorne selected background even farther removed from ordinary experience than Brook Farm, the prototype of Blithedale. This was Italy, "where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon as they are, and must needs be, in America" (VI, 15). In the prefaces to the two last-named works Hawthorne seemed to lament the fact that America did not afford the artist an appropriate background of antiquity in which his imagination and fancy might have complete freedom. There is no "Faery Land" in America, and "this atmosphere is what the American romancer needs. In its absence, the beings of imagination are compelled to show themselves in

²Unless otherwise indicated, citations from Hawthorne in this chapter are to Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. George Parsons Lathrop (Boston, 1883), 15 vols.

the same category as actually living mortals . . ." (V, 322). After considering the high suitability of Italy as a setting, he said: "No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land" (VI, 15).³

This latitude which Hawthorne allowed himself in his long fiction, as well as in his short tales, proved to be his spot most vulnerable to the attack of many late nineteenth and early twentieth-century critics who, either taking his own comments too seriously or failing to understand his imaginative purpose, censured him severely for his presumed neglect of real life. One of the most caustic and extreme of these critics was W. C. Brownell, who insisted that Hawthorne had failed to capture even a semblance of reality. Denouncing Hawthorne's use of allegory, as did Poe and, to a lesser extent, Henry James, Brownell wrote:

His subject is always something other than its substance. Everything means something else. Dealing with the outer world solely for the sake of the inner, he is careless of its character and often loses its significance in mere suggestiveness. His meaning is the burden of his story, not the automatic moral

³Washington Irving voiced similar dissatisfaction with the kind of subject matter which America offered the romancer. "But Europe," he continued, "held forth the charm of storied and poetical association. . . . I longed . . . to escape, in short, from the commonplace realities of the present, and lose myself among the shadowy grandeurs of the past." ("The Author's Account of Himself" in The Sketch Book, The Works of Washington Irving, Standard Library Edition [New York and London, n.d.], XIII, 17.) Yet the statements by both Irving and Hawthorne are rather ironic when one considers their successful and extended use of America's picturesque aspects.

complement of its vivid and actual reality. Hence the sense of reality is absent from it, and for this nothing will atone in any form of art where the sense of unreality is sought instead.⁴

In place of imagination, Brownell said, Hawthorne employed fancy. "The end of art, in brief, is illusion, but the illusion of reality. Hawthorne may be said to have conceived it as hallucination"⁵ And presuming dangerously upon Hawthorne's biography, Brownell further asserted: " . . . Hawthorne cared nothing for people in life and made extraordinarily little use of them in his books. In no other fiction are the characters so little characterized as in his, where in general their raison d'être is what they illustrate, not what they are."⁶

Even so recent a critic as Alexander Cowie appeared preoccupied with the elements in Hawthorne's work that are devoid of the sturdiness of reality. To Cowie Hawthorne was "meagre in powers of invention, not gifted in characterization . . . seldom moved by the comic, inclined toward careful finish rather than intensity, interested in line more than color or mass" and "produced faint, ethereal etchings. . . ."⁷

It must be acknowledged from reading Hawthorne's own comments about his purposes and from reading the works themselves that Hawthorne fashioned a literary method that would not slavishly duplicate life as we know it from day-to-day experiences. But just how far he actually

⁴American Prose Masters (New York, 1909), p. 77.

⁵Ibid., p. 89.

⁶Ibid., p. 90.

⁷The Rise of the American Novel (New York, 1948), p. 327.

departed from the ordinary is the question whose answer will also give fuller meaning to his theory of fiction. In the Preface to The House of the Seven Gables, he advocated a temperate use of the unusual. The writer, he said, "will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and, especially, to mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public" (III, 13). Cowie admitted that Hawthorne "was capable of great authenticity in background material: there is much faithful Salem detail in The House of the Seven Gables; The Blithedale Romance carries a few real descriptions of Roxbury which may be searched out; The Marble Faun has a secondary value as a 'guide-book to Rome'; and although the setting in The Scarlet Letter never reveals crudely Hawthorne's patient investigation of seventeenth-century conditions it is much more authentic than most novels which wear history on the sleeve."⁸ In the light of Hawthorne's very careful selection of authentic background, whether it be in the past or present, in Europe or America, his remarks in the prefaces become ironic apologies for the unusual application he made of the ordinary. Thus his insistence that he used Brook Farm simply because it afforded a setting "a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel" may be an anticipatory defense of the great fidelity to real life that some of the situations have. Who then can take seriously his comments lamenting the lack of an American realm of fantasy when he was able with such skill to transform

⁸Ibid., p. 347.

mundane Boston of Hester Prynne's day and Salem of Phoebe's into his own "Faery Land"? One must concur with Jesse Bier's observation that "Hawthorne's attitude toward the real world never suggests complete divorce."⁹

Even though Hawthorne, in the development of his themes, took artistic liberties with the backgrounds and characters that he was so careful to authenticate in the beginning of his works, he was ever cognizant of truth throughout. The romance, he wrote, "sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart . . ." (III, 13). What Hawthorne strove for, according to Charles H. Foster, was "an idealization which was not a beautiful realm of escape from actuality but was actuality shaped so that it was universal truth."¹⁰ Several of Hawthorne's short fictional pieces, as partially pointed out by Foster, illustrate further the romancer's commitment to the truth of ultimate reality.

A defense of the poet is voiced by the guide in "The Hall of Fantasy," who ridicules the traditional idea that society at large is less influenced by unreality than are men of letters. "The poet," he says, "knows his whereabouts, and therefore is less likely to make a fool of himself in real life" (II, 201). The basic paradox of Hawthorne's own art is inherent in the theme of this sketch: that in unreality there is the true reality. That such was merely a re-statement of the then current romantic philosophy would be the reader's immediate reaction, but

⁹"Hawthorne on the Romance: His Prefaces Related and Examined," Modern Philology, LIII (August, 1955), 18.

¹⁰"Hawthorne's Literary Theory," PMLA, LVII (March, 1942), 244.

Hawthorne was rescued by moderation from an unrestricted flight into fancy. "Let us be content, therefore, with merely an occasional visit, for the sake of spiritualizing the grossness of this actual life, and prefiguring to ourselves a state in which the Idea shall be all in all" (II, 211). In "A Virtuoso's Collection" and "The Devil in Manuscript," Hawthorne spoke out decidedly in favor of substance. To the Virtuoso, who suggests that the narrator rub Aladdin's lamp for any type of abode he desires, he replies: "'I might desire a cottage . . . but I would have it founded on sure and stable truth, not on dreams and fantasies. I have learned to look for the real and the true'" (II, 543). The despondent writer in "The Devil in Manuscript" destroys his entire production because "'I am surrounding myself with shadows, which bewilder me, by aping the realities of life. They have drawn me aside from the beaten path of the world . . .'" (III, 576). In the longer fiction, Hilda of The Marble Faun is conspicuous as an indictment of the escape from reality, for since she knows nothing of real-life experience, she must be content to copy the masterpieces of other artists rather than produce her own. On the other extreme lies Mr. Lindsey of "The Snow Image," who is so pragmatic that he will not even admit the existence of the snow child whom he has led by the hand into his own parlor. His wife, however, by keeping "her heart full of childlike simplicity and faith . . . sometimes saw truths so profound that other people laughed at them as nonsense and absurdity" (III, 406).

Thus without falling into the clutches of extreme romanticism, Hawthorne was able to create a new kind of romance. His point of

departure was always a real-life situation which, through symbolism (to be discussed later), acquired the broader signification of universal truth. What placed him in a position harmonious with that of the earliest American realists in matters of technique was his continual alternation between the imaginary world and the solid ground of actual human experience. Merely a cursory reading of Hawthorne's novels and tales discloses that he seldom mentioned the extraordinary without providing an ordinary explanation as an alternative.

Thus the step from Hawthorne to William Dean Howells was not a very long one. Howells and the realists were likewise fighting against the distortion of real life that much of the romantic fiction of the day fostered. When Howells became editor of the Atlantic Monthly in 1871, "his very first change . . . was to introduce a department of 'Recent Literature' which set out to acquaint Americans with what was happening in European literature, especially in France and Germany."¹¹ In this column Howells began to take note of the realistic movements that had begun to gather force in Europe,¹² and he opened the pages of the magazine to pioneering American realists such as Mark Twain and Henry James. Howells' own first novel, Their Wedding Journey, which was completed also in 1871, evinced his compliance with realistic technique and contained in his words as narrator his statement of belief in the ordinary as the

¹¹Edwin H. Cady, The Road to Realism (Syracuse, New York, 1956), p. 174.

¹²Clara Marburg Kirk and Rudolf Kirk, eds. Criticism and Fiction and Other Essays by William Dean Howells (New York, 1959), pp. 89-90.

basis for fiction:

As in literature the true artist will shun the use even of real events if they are of an improbable character, so the sincere observer of man will not desire to look upon his heroic or occasional phases, but will seek him in his habitual moods of vacancy and tiresomeness. To me, at any rate, he is at such times very precious; and I never perceive him to be so much a man and a brother as when I feel the pressure of his vast, natural, unaffected dullness. Then I am able to enter confidently into his life and inhabit there, to think his shallow and feeble thoughts, to be moved by his dumb, stupid desires, to be dimly illumined by his stunted inspirations, to share his foolish prejudices, to practice his obtuse selfishness.¹³

After Howells went to Harper's Monthly as writer in 1885, his fight for realism became still more vigorous, particularly through a new column called "The Editor's Study,"¹⁴ which formed the basis for the later compilation of Criticism and Fiction. Herein Howells, who himself had continued to write fiction aimed at representing real life, not only encouraged anew like-minded writers but also struck out severely at practitioners of the sentimental and sensational novels that "tickle our prejudices and lull our judgment, or that coddle our sensibilities or pamper our gross appetite for the marvelous"¹⁵

This, however, was not a universal condemnation of those who did not employ precisely the same technique that Howells espoused, for he made exception to the writers "of the finer kinds of romance." In Howells' eyes the champion of the romance was Hawthorne, who

¹³Their Wedding Journey (Boston, 1872), pp. 86-87.

¹⁴Cady, The Realist at War (Syracuse, New York, 1958), p. 2.

¹⁵Criticism and Fiction, p. 47.

had the insight and the power to create it anew as a kind in fiction; though I am not sure that *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Blithedale Romance* are not, strictly speaking, novels rather than romances. They do not play with some old superstition long outgrown, and they do not invent a new superstition to play with, but deal with things vital in every one's pulse.¹⁶

As indicated by a review of Dickens' Our Mutual Friend in Round Table, December 2, 1865, Howells had begun, early in his career, to make a distinction between the novel and romance.¹⁷ A true romance could not be evaluated according to the realistic requirements for the novel, Howells stated in 1873 in a review of Victor Cherbuliez' La Revanche de Joseph Noirel: "The book is a romance, not a novel, and it would not be right to judge it by the strict rules of probability applicable to the novel"¹⁸ Later, in his review of Henry James's critical summation of Hawthorne, Howells censured his friend for his inconsistent evaluations, which were apparently due to James's confusing the romance and the novel:

No one better than Mr. James knows the radical difference between a romance and a novel, but he speaks now of Hawthorne's novels, and now of his romances, throughout, as if the terms were convertible; whereas the romance and the novel are as distinct as the poem and the novel. Mr. James excepts to the people in *The Scarlet Letter*, because they are rather types than persons, rather conditions of the mind than characters; as if it were not almost precisely the business of the romance to deal with types and mental conditions.¹⁹

¹⁶Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁷The Road to Realism, p. 188.

¹⁸"Recent Literature," The Atlantic Monthly, XXXI (January, 1873), 105.

¹⁹"James's Hawthorne," The Atlantic Monthly, XLV (February, 1880), 283.

Since Howells was able to accept the romance but not romanticism,²⁰ how then could he reconcile the romance and the novel, which he considered as opposed in technique? Evidence of what Howells demanded in both the romance and novel is found in his general appreciation of a number of writers, composed in 1897:

Until after the war we had no real novels, in this country, except "Uncle Tom's Cabin." That is one of the great novels of the world, and of all time. Even the fact that slavery was done away with does not matter; the interest in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" will never pass, because the book is really as well as ideally true to human nature, and nobly true. The romances of Hawthorne I do not call novels; but they are my favorite romances.²¹

Here Howells praised truth in a novel--truth in fact as well as in general application--just as he admired Hawthorne for dealing "with things vital in every one's pulse." Fifteen years earlier in the essay on Henry James, Howells had acknowledged the emergence of the school of psychological fiction which was fusing the techniques of the novel and romance and of which James was "chief exemplar." He wrote:

The new school derives from Hawthorne and George Eliot rather than any others; but it studies human nature much more in its wonted aspects, and finds its ethical and dramatic examples in the operation of lighter but not really less vital motives.

²⁰Howells sometimes used the term "romanticistic" to designate inordinate idealism and sentimentalism. In this regard he wrote that "there was the widest possible difference of ideal in Dickens and Hawthorne; the difference between the romanticistic and the romantic, which is almost as great as that between the romantic and the realistic. Romance, as in Hawthorne, seeks the effect of reality in visionary conditions; romanticism, as in Dickens, tries for a visionary effect in actual conditions." (*Heroines of Fiction* [New York, 1901], I, 162.) In the present study "romanticistic" will be used with Howells' implication of deprecation.

²¹"My Favorite Novelist and His Best Book," Munsey's Magazine, XVII (April, 1897), 22.

The moving accident is certainly not its trade; and it prefers to avoid all manner of dire catastrophes.²²

The requisite, then, of acceptable prose fiction--the romance or novel--was truth, as Howells explained in Criticism and Fiction:

We must ask ourselves before we ask anything else, Is it true?--true to the motives, the impulses, the principles that shape the life of actual men and women? This truth, which necessarily includes the highest morality and the highest artistry--this truth given, the book cannot be wicked and cannot be weak; and without it all graces of style and feats of invention and cunning of construction are so many superfluities of naughtiness. It is well for the truth to have all these, and shine in them, but for falsehood they are merely meretricious, the bedizement of the wanton; they atone for nothing, they count for nothing. But in fact they come naturally of truth, and grace it without solicitation; they are added unto it. In the whole range of fiction we know of no true picture of life--that is, of human nature--which is not also a masterpiece of literature, full of divine and natural beauty.²³

While Howells preferred the less complicated approach of straight realism, he was willing to accept the psychological romance as art as long as it observed "the truth of the human heart," the condition dictated by Hawthorne, whose works became a "passion" for Howells because of their superiority even to others of the same genre, for

. . . there is always something fatally weak in the scheme of the pure romance, which, after the color of the contemporary mood dies out of it, leaves it in danger of tumbling into the dust of allegory But none of Hawthorne's fables are without a profound and distant reach into the recesses of nature and of being. He came back from his researches with no solution of the question, with no message, indeed, but the awful warning, "Be true, be true," which is

²²"Henry James, Jr.," The Century, XXV (November, 1882), 28.

²³Criticism and Fiction, p. 49.

the burden of the Scarlet Letter²⁴

Since either the romance or novel was acceptable to Howells as long as it remained faithful to the eternal principles permeating human action, the requisites of Howells for form seem less demanding. One critic summarized Howells' concern thus: "In essence, Howells felt that authenticity concerning human character was the touchstone of great art and that problems of method were secondary."²⁵ Of this acceptance by Howells of either literary method, Everett Carter wrote:

The fight of Howells, it can be clearly seen, was not a struggle against romance. He understood that there were several roads to literary truth, that one of the best, perhaps, he would occasionally admit, even the best, might be the road that led to the stars--the road of romance; he simply felt that it was his call, and the call of his age, to be earthbound, limited, humble. His was the perceptive stroll down main street, not the vault into the unknown. His opposition was to sentimentalism--to the telling of the currently popular lies about life in order to satisfy the prejudices and preconceptions of the audience.²⁶

Though Howells voiced again and again his personal fidelity to a literary presentation of truth through reproduction of life's ordinary and frankly dull moments, his actual practice, in the final analysis, was not so far from the method of the psychological romance as his criticism would at times indicate. Firkins, writing just after Howells' death, commented:

I am sometimes doubtful whether romanticism proper is the

²⁴My Literary Passions (New York, 1910), p. 140.

²⁵Louis J. Budd, "W. D. Howells' Defense of the Romance," PMLA, LXVII (March, 1952), 32.

²⁶Howells and the Age of Realism (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 49.

true object of Mr. Howells' antipathy. He abhors stale tricks; he detests the morbid in morality and immorality alike. These things are not infrequent in romance, but it is not clear that they constitute its essence, or that to its essence he is inherently hostile.²⁷

Detecting this same tendency, Wagenknecht wrote:

Howells's practice was often wider and more generous than the theory behind it. Take him literally . . . and you will sometimes find him denying the distinction between literature and life, ignoring the importance of style, ruling the personality of the creator quite out of his creation, and apparently looking forward to the day when art shall be done away with altogether and a scientific factual report enthroned in its place. But when the creative force had him in its grip, he was wiser than when he was giving and taking thwacks in opposition to what seemed to him the shoddy romanticism that must be destroyed before anything like an honest or morally wholesome fiction could have its day.²⁸

Edd Winfield Parks found Howells decidedly inconsistent in criticism and fiction and addicted to some of the same habits in technique that he opposed in others. Parks wrote in summary:

For all his talk of the art of the novel, Howells was fundamentally more interested in his point of view toward subject matter than toward technique; he was more interested in portraying types than in creating characters. He insisted that the cosmos of a novel should embody the world of reality, but he seems never to have been content to allow the world of reality to exist solely and completely . . .²⁹

To a casual reader of Howells' novels, the matter-of-fact, reportorial style is often deceiving, for Howells moved slowly and meticulously

²⁷Oscar W. Firkins, William Dean Howells: A Study (Cambridge, Mass., 1924), p. 279.

²⁸Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel (New York, 1952), p. 131.

²⁹"Howells and the Gentle Reader," South Atlantic Quarterly, I (April, 1951), 246.

from situation to situation without seeming to take an interest in the underlying motives of his characters and the complexities that have conditioned their response to the given situation. He did not inform the reader, as Hawthorne did, through lengthy personal comments, about the infinite number of possible meanings and results of a character's action. Howells frequently had his "asides" to the reader, but for the most part he was content to allow his characters to speak for themselves and for their actions to suggest indirectly the subtle implications of their conduct. This objectivity in getting at motive and meaning is the principal characteristic of Howells' realism that seems to remove him from the area of the romance. Yet the very core of Howells' situations is the concern for universality which Hawthorne sought in his romances. And in the apparently objective representations of situations lifted from real life Howells was able to imply truths with the same force that the romance attained. When one takes into consideration the final achievement of Howells' fiction, it seems to be not alone the introduction of realism, but a unique contribution to the development of the psychological romance—the half-way ground between Hawthorne and Henry James.

Throughout his career--from Their Wedding Journey to The Vacation of the Kelwyns--Howells wrote what had best be called, then, psychological romances.³⁰ His early novels (Their Wedding Journey, A Chance Acquaintance, A Foregone Conclusion, Mrs. Farrell, The Lady of the Aroostook, The

³⁰The dominance of the technique of the psychological romance in Howells' work was pointed out by Kirk and Kirk in "Introduction" to William Dean Howells: Representative Selections (New York, 1950), pp. lxxiii-xciv.

Undiscovered Country, A Fearful Responsibility, and Dr. Breen's Practice), written from 1872 to 1881, all emphasize unmistakably the awakening of human character to some truth related to the social or moral scheme of the universe. While these works show definite kinship to the light comedy of manners, the earnestness with which the ordinary situations of life are presented suggests to the reader a more general application. Even in the novels in which the situations are precipitated by economic and political factors (A Modern Instance, The Rise of Silas Lapham, The Minister's Charge, Annie Kilburn, A Hazard of New Fortunes, The Quality of Mercy, and The World of Chance), the spotlight continues to play on contrast of character, out of which ultimately evolves an implied but nonetheless penetrating truth. In the other novels from 1890 on (including such diverse works as The Shadow of a Dream, The Landlord at Lion's Head, The Kentons, Fennel and Rue, and The Leatherstocking), Howells returned to the milieu of his early productions and ventured further into the realm of psychological romance by means of adroitly delineated pictures of humans caught up in rather delicate social situations—sometimes comic but very often nearly tragic. Many of the works of the period following the so-called political and economic novels show definite kinship to Hawthorne's, because of their concern with personal problems that border precariously on the tragic. Although only two of the works of this period--A Traveler from Altruria and Through the Eye of the Needle--were subtitled by Howells "a romance" because of their background of fanciful countries, all show a Howells who went straight to the heart of matters of human conduct in a manner combining the best techniques of the reporter

and the analyst.

B. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FOUNDATION

As the foregoing discussion has shown, both Hawthorne and Howells demanded truth in fiction, and fidelity to externals was not enough. Fiction must be true to the nature of men and women and to the impulses that stir them into external action. The shortest and most valid means to the truth was, for both writers, personal experience. While it is true that Hawthorne quite often perceived experience in immediate abstract terms and Howells was compelled by his preoccupation with reporting to allow experience to speak for itself, both authors employed autobiography as a foundation. It is incontrovertible that most works of art reflect in some degree the life of the artist, but the carefully planned use of autobiographical material assumes special importance in the case of Hawthorne and Howells because it further illustrates the similarity of their determined quest for truth.

It seems quite natural, therefore, that the first long fiction to come from either Hawthorne or Howells was highly autobiographical. Conspicuous both in Hawthorne's Fanshawe (published privately in 1828) and in Howells' Their Wedding Journey (1871) are characters and events modeled on the early-manhood experiences of the authors. Hawthorne's foundation was one used by many authors before and since his day--the college experience,³¹ and Howells' basis was essentially the events of a trip

³¹Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography (New Haven, 1948), pp. 28-29.

that he and his wife took across the Northeast.³² As unlike in plot as any two works could be (Hawthorne's has too much plot and Howells' too little), these novels reveal a keen observation of real-life situations that was to play a great part in the authors' future achievements.

In his study of Hawthorne's early years, Cantwell pointed out several of the real-life models for Fanshawe. These included Ward's Tavern in Brunswick and two of Hawthorne's classmates, Franklin Pierce and Gorham Deane (who became Edward Wolcott and Fanshawe in the novel). And as Hawthorne's suggestion for the pirate-kidnap plot, Cantwell cited the numerous cases of piracy in Hawthorne's day that the young author would have known about.³³ Philip E. Burnham further identified the surroundings of the fictitious Harley College as those of Bowdoin, though the college itself was not modeled on Bowdoin (Cantwell thought it was Dartmouth of a century earlier); the characteristics of Dr. Melmoth as those of Bowdoin President Allen; and the appearance of many of Hawthorne's characters as drawn from actual Bowdoin students.³⁴ In this first exercise in longer fiction, Hawthorne was not attempting to write history; nor did he intend to authenticate every allusion as would the local colorist. His primary concern, certainly, was an adventure story with Gothic overtones, but the frequent borrowings of actual persons and

³²The Road to Realism, p. 159.

³³Robert Cantwell, Nathaniel Hawthorne: The American Years (New York, 1948), pp. 121-122.

³⁴"Hawthorne's Fanshawe and Bowdoin College," Essex Institute Historical Collections, LXXX (April, 1944), 131-138.

things indicate that Hawthorne was not oblivious of the importance that real life could have even for the romance.

In Their Wedding Journey Howells used for the itinerary of Basil and Isabel March the same one that he and his wife had followed on their first trip together after returning from Europe.³⁵ Reflections of Howells' own experiences fill the novel. Some of these were pointed out by William Gibson: the name of the steamer Banshee, on which Howells had taken an earlier trip; the New York heat, which sorely afflicted the Howellses; the indifference of the hotel clerk; Isabel's disappointment at her first view of Niagara; the brides on the rocks and the newly-wedded couples at Goat Island; the French boy in the cathedral; the pale young priest in a country church; and the lavishly-decorated soldier on guard duty in Quebec.³⁶ For all Howells' interest in details, Their Wedding Journey is not just an autobiography or travel book; it clearly anticipates the novel of psychological realism, for in this unpretentious beginning Howells took pains to elicit character reaction, particularly that of the inexperienced Isabel, to certain situations chosen from real life and strategically placed in the novel. Howells' delightful blending of real life and romance is effected through the intimate comments of the author as narrator, who reveals what is going on in the characters' minds and philosophizes about major incidents.³⁷

³⁵The Road to Realism, p. 159.

³⁶"Materials and Form in Howells's First Novels," American Literature, XIX (May, 1947), 164.

³⁷Pointed out in The Road to Realism, p. 160.

Since this chapter does not purport to make an exhaustive study of the sources of Hawthorne and Howells, but only suggests some similarities in autobiographical approach, the examples that appear are of necessity only typical ones. A similarity that merits attention is the important use that the authors made of themselves and members of their family: Hawthorne based Pearl in The Scarlet Letter on his daughter Una and Coverdale in The Blithedale Romance on himself, and Howells employed himself and his wife in a series of novels.

Hawthorne's method of using his own daughter in fiction is found by comparing certain passages of The American Notebooks with The Scarlet Letter.³⁸ Throughout the notebook for 1848 and 1849 Hawthorne entered his impressions of Una, who was "so full of spirit and life that she was life itself."³⁹ Characteristics of Una show themselves in Pearl's physical perfection, her uneven temper, her mimicry, and her isolation from other children. In the novel Hester Prynne wonders "whether Pearl were a human child. She seemed rather an airy sprite, which, after playing its fantastic sports for a little while upon the cottage floor, would flit away with a mocking smile" (V, 116-117). And Hawthorne had recorded a similar view of his own daughter: "I now and then catch an aspect of her, in which I cannot believe her to be my own human child, but a spirit strangely mingled with good and evil, haunting the house where I dwell."⁴⁰

³⁸Discussed in detail by Randall Stewart in "Introduction" to The American Notebooks of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New Haven, 1932), p. xix.

³⁹The American Notebooks, p. 210.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 210-211.

As Hawthorne transformed Una into Pearl, he was always true to the basic enigmatic nature of the child. Pearl was a real child first of all and she had to be believable. But within the antics of his own Una, at times completely unfathomable to the adult mind, he saw the possibility of interpretation that would magnify the theme which he had already conceived. Pearl would be real, but in addition she would suggest a higher principle of human nature. Thus she became the "emblem and product of sin" (V, 118). She became a magnification of the discordant lives of her parents, Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale.

Of the many uses Hawthorne made of himself as a character,⁴¹ the most easily detectable is the person of Miles Coverdale in The Blithedale Romance. Arlin Turner pointed out the remarkable resemblance the narrator has to Hawthorne in station in life as well as in attitudes.⁴² Both were none-too-successful writers, retiring by natural inclination, and rather suspicious of schemes to re-channel the normal course of society. In his preface to the novel Hawthorne admitted that he had Brook Farm in mind as the setting, and though he insisted that there is "not a very faithful shadowing" of the Utopian community, most critics have felt that he was more realistic than he cared to admit. It is interesting that Howells ranked The Blithedale Romance second only to The Scarlet Letter

⁴¹A full but highly subjective discussion is Amy Louise Reed, "Self-Portraiture in the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne," Studies in Philology, XXIII (January, 1926), 40-54.

⁴²"Autobiographical Elements in Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance," University of Texas Studies in English, IV (July, 1935), 42-46.

among Hawthorne's works because of the "realism" of the former.⁴³

Not only did Hawthorne use the essentials of himself for a character in this novel but he continued throughout to draw faithfully the setting of Brook Farm, including its activities and many of its personages. The place was snowbound when he arrived, and the first incident of his own life there was catching a severe cold which kept him in bed.⁴⁴ Both situations were carried over into the opening chapters of The Blithedale Romance. One of the temporary residents of the colony--a vivacious, almost other-worldly girl in her teens--became for Hawthorne the prototype of Priscilla in the novel.⁴⁵ Later, in 1845 near Concord, Hawthorne took part in an event that he duplicated for the tragic ending of Blithedale: the raising of the body of the young teacher Martha Hunt, who had apparently drowned herself in the river.⁴⁶

Neither in The Blithedale Romance nor in any other of his long fictions did Hawthorne duplicate events for the sake of letting them stand for themselves. A severe disappointment comes, as Waggoner warned, when one attempts to read Blithedale as a history of Brook Farm,⁴⁷ for then the misty and remote aura with which the author purposely covered

⁴³Literary Friends and Acquaintance (New York, 1900), p. 55; and Heroines of Fiction, I, 176.

⁴⁴Cantwell, p. 323.

⁴⁵The American Notebooks, p. 82.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 112-115.

⁴⁷Hyatt H. Waggoner, Hawthorne: A Critical Study (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 174.

the events becomes a defect in craftsmanship. Here, perhaps more than in any other of his novels, Hawthorne had a factual basis that would lend itself with but slight modifications as a vehicle of general truth. It so happened that Hawthorne found at Brook Farm a segment of society which, when tinted with the artist's faint touches of ethereality, developed a oneness with all life. In The Blithedale Romance Hawthorne achieved a rare blending of unreality and verisimilitude.

The most extended use that Howells made of himself and his wife was in the series of novels containing Basil and Isabel March, who have already been mentioned in relation to Howells' earliest autobiographical work. Howells used the pair in seven novels, two travel sketches, and one short story, through which he carefully portrayed the various changes in viewpoint that he and his own wife had experienced. The Marches grow old just as did the Howellses, and they are both participants and on-lookers during the social flux of the late nineteenth century.⁴⁸

Like Howells, Basil March is a journalist and editor and even duplicates Howells' move from Boston to New York, where, in A Hazard of New Fortunes, he becomes the imaginary editor of Every Other Week. The Marches take a vacation trip to Saratoga Springs in An Open-Eyed Conspiracy and, because of Basil's overworking on the magazine, go to Europe in Their Silver Wedding Journey, just as the Howellses did.⁴⁹ Basil March, wrote Mrs. Kirk,

⁴⁸Carter, p. 104.

⁴⁹Clara M. Kirk, "Reality and Actuality in the March Family Narratives of W. D. Howells," PMLA, LXXIV (March, 1959), 150-151.

became the mouthpiece for Howells' evolving ideas on "literature and life," from which grew his critical theory of realism. The romantic outlook of Basil March and his wife, through a span of thirty years, changed to a deeper grasp of reality, paralleling from afar Howells' own evolution. Without losing their pleasure in romance, the Marches learned to look more directly at their experiences, even the unpleasant ones.⁵⁰

Though Basil March is like Howells, he was not Howells; and despite the similarity of events in their lives, March remains a fictional character. A depiction of real life never did preclude use of the imagination for Howells. In the first place, March continues as a journalist all his fictional life (as Howells did not) and in this position became almost an idealized self-portrait. March is like the critic Howells, who preached realism much more rigidly than he practiced it. In the second place, Howells used March in most of the novels (A Chance Acquaintance, The Shadow of a Dream, A Pair of Patient Lovers, and An Open-Eyed Conspiracy) as merely an onlooker. The main action involved others. In the latter use of March can be seen an important aspect of Howells' creative method in that he often included March and his wife, taken almost directly from real life, to give a sense of reality to psychological romance. A case in point is March's appearance as adviser to dream-tormented Faulkner in The Shadow of a Dream, one of Howells' more imaginative works. Herein is revealed Howells' decided kinship to Hawthorne in method: it was sometimes necessary to fasten the idea securely to actuality by including within the framework of romance strategically placed

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 141.

segments of real life.

Much more could be written to document the autobiographical sources of both Hawthorne⁵¹ and Howells,⁵² but all instances point to the same conclusions. Both men were careful observers of the world around them and felt a sacred respect for real life. Neither, however, was interested in actuality for its own sake, but for its kinship with general truth. Hawthorne's method was most often to illustrate and vitalize general truth by reference to and inclusion of actual events and, when he began with history, as in the case of The Blithedale Romance, to generalize conspicuously by means of stylistic devices. Howells, on the other hand, began with the real-life situations and attempted to remain in constant touch by a plainer reportorial style while allowing the complexities of the photographed scene to imply universal meaning.

C. SYMBOLISM

While symbolism and allegory are almost inherent qualities of romantic literature, they are by no means absent from that form of art

⁵¹See Elizabeth L. Chandler, "A Study of the Sources of the Tales and Romances Written by Nathaniel Hawthorne before 1853," Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, VII (July, 1926), 1-64; and Edward H. Davidson, Hawthorne's Last Phase (New Haven, 1949), passim.

⁵²See Carter, pp. 102-111; Gibson, pp. 158-166; Kirk and Kirk, Representative Selections, pp. xxff.; John K. Reeves, "The Way of a Realist: A Study of Howells' Use of the Saratoga Scene," PMLA, LKV (December, 1950), 1035-1052; and James L. Woodress, Howells & Italy (Durham, North Carolina, 1952), passim.

which looks with suspicion upon any process that ventures too far from the solidarity of earth's experiences. A mistaken notion concerning the nature of realism is that it is completely devoid of traditional imagery and that it takes only an uninspiring photograph of its subject. Examples of symbolism are plentiful among the leaders in America's realistic movement: James's Christopher Newman, Twain's Mississippi River, Garland's wheat fields, Crane's open boat in a treacherous sea, Norris's railroad octopus--to name a few. What all these realists--and naturalists, too--sought was a finite experience that would express universal experience or represent general truth. As earlier portions of this chapter have pointed out, Hawthorne and Howells were both vitally concerned with this same process of representing truth. Accordingly, both writers used symbols as a union between the two levels of reality, the finite and the infinite.

What motivation was behind Hawthorne's habitual use of symbolism can only be inconclusively estimated. No doubt Puritan America had a great deal to do with his selection of objects and meanings, as Ivor Winters insisted, but not the totally allegorical view of life, which Winters said failed Hawthorne in his last works.⁵³ Nor is it safe to speculate, as did Feidelson, that Hawthorne was an unsuccessful symbolist, except in The Scarlet Letter, because he feared the implications of extreme "symbolistic" methods and thus retreated into allegory "because it preserved the conventional distinction between thought and things and

⁵³Maule's Curse in In Defense of Reason (New York, 1947), pp. 164-175.

because it depended on a conventional order whose point of arrangement was easily defined."⁵⁴ Hawthorne was both man and artist, who always tried in his fiction to illustrate the one with the method of the other. If his own assertion that his aim was truth can be accepted, then his use of symbolism became a conscious adjunct of life and was neither a helpless acquiescence to the traditional Puritan method nor an effulgence of language "autonomous in the sense that it is quite distinct from the personality of its author and from the world of pure objects, and creative in the sense that it brings into existence its own meanings."⁵⁵

The germ for Hawthorne's symbolism came both from the external world and from the internal world of thought, but by and large Hawthorne's method was to begin with the abstract idea and illustrate it, as Schönbach observed many years ago:

Hawthorne's dichterische arbeit setzt sich immer aus zwei gesonderten processen zusammen. Einmal der feststellung eines ganz abstracten problemes, das ohne anlehnung an reales in der einfachsten form postuliert und dann nach seinen verschiedenen möglichkeiten hin ausgedacht wird. Damit es nun wirklich in die erscheinung treten könne, wird zweitens das aufgespeicherte material an realistischen detailbeobachtungen, wie es in den tagebüchern vorliegt, oder blos im gedächtnisse des dichters haftete, zur einkleidung und umkleidung verwendet. Die abgezogene gestalt der aufgabe ist meistens durch die stofflichen hüllen sichtbar.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago, 1953), p. 15.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 49.

⁵⁶Anton Schönbach, "Beiträge zur Charakteristik Nathaniel Hawthorne's," Englische Studien, VII (1893), 247.

A notable exception among the longer works is The Blithedale Romance, in which Hawthorne drew the universal idea of isolation from a specific and actual situation. Howells, too, used both methods, though he, in the manner befitting a formal realist, more often duplicated Hawthorne's process in Blithedale. Further, symbolism in Howells is not so sustained as in Hawthorne and very often serves as an illustrative device for a specific situation rather than a suggestion of universal application. Yet symbols of a broader nature are present in Howells and are even inherent in such titles as A Modern Instance, Indian Summer, April Hopes, and The World of Chance.

Much has been written about Hawthorne's multifarious use of the scarlet A on Hester Prynne's breast; and once again this, possibly the most renowned emblem in American fiction, should be examined, not for its infinitesimal shades of meaning, but for its representative quality in Hawthorne's creation of symbols. Stewart noted that the woman and her sign of sin, probably based on an actual Colonial method of punishment, were in Hawthorne's mind as early as 1837 when "Endicott and the Red Cross" was published.⁵⁷ In this story the woman stands, along with others, as a concrete and historically accurate example of the Puritan's theocratic vindictiveness; still, there is a hint of the extended personal influence of the woman's badge, for

Sporting with her infamy, the lost and desperate creature had embroidered the fatal token in scarlet cloth, with a golden thread and the nicest art of needlework; so that the capital A

⁵⁷The American Notebooks, pp. xxvi, 299.

might have been thought to mean Admirable, or anything rather than Adulteress. (I, 487)

The extended implications of the symbol in the affairs of the woman no doubt were in Hawthorne's mind when several years later he recorded in his notebook the possibility of a narrative concerning "the life of a 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."⁵⁸ Finally in the completed novel The Scarlet Letter, the A, which in the beginning had been simply a device of identification—hardly a symbol in the imaginative sense, became not only a figure embodying Hester's own isolation, but also a universal symbol of the terrific estranging power of evil in any form. But Hawthorne was not willing to allow the scarlet A to function merely as an abstraction, for he had prefaced to the novel, in "The Custom House," a fictitious but nonetheless realistic account of his discovery of the letter itself along with Jonathan Pue's outline of the narrative. It may be argued that finding the dusty hidden manuscript was the traditional method of the romancer, but in this case Hawthorne's introduction contained the account of his emotional stress during his actual custom house experience and served effectively as a transitional device from the real world to the imaginary. As Hawthorne's method will bear out in other aspects of the composition of The Scarlet Letter and other works, he was careful to begin by attaching his idea to actual objects. And in the absence of the material prototype of the scarlet letter, Hawthorne invented it and apparently confused such an astute recent

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 107.

critic of realism as Everett Carter.⁵⁹

In the process of writing The House of the Seven Gables Hawthorne again moved from the concrete to the abstract, this time, however, without having created the symbol himself in an earlier story. Elizabeth Chandler mentioned the Ingersoll House on Turner Street in Salem, owned by Hawthorne's cousins, as being the physical model for the Pyncheon mansion,⁶⁰ and in his notebook of 1837 Hawthorne wrote a detailed description of the magnificent new home of Robert H. Gardiner, lying uncompleted because of the diminishing family wealth. The scene inspired this observation on Hawthorne's part: "This subject offers hints of copious reflection, in reference to the indulgence of aristocratic pomp among democratic institutions."⁶¹ A few weeks later Hawthorne visited the empty and decaying mansion built by General Henry Knox, near Thomaston, Maine, and wrote:

The house and its vicinity, and the whole tract covered by Knox's patent, may be taken as an illustration of what must be the result of American schemes of aristocracy. It is not forty years, since this house was built, and Knox was in his glory; but now the house is all in decay, while, within a stone's throw of it, is a street of neat, smart, white edifices of one and two stories, occupied chiefly by thriving mechanics.⁶²

⁵⁹"When Hawthorne saw a scrap of material shaped like an 'A' in the Custom House at Salem, he felt it was a 'mystic symbol' from which a 'deep meaning . . . streamed forth,' communicating itself to his sensibility but eluding the analysis of his mind" (pp. 133-134).

⁶⁰Chandler, p. 47.

⁶¹The American Notebooks, p. 8.

⁶²Ibid., p. 23.

It should be noted that when Hawthorne entered a description of either mansion, he immediately thought of its symbolic significance, and his initial attachment to the concrete object disappeared in universal meaning. Later, after he had made his notebook entries from 1844 through 1852 concerning a theme of the paradoxical control of slave over master,⁶³ Hawthorne returned to the concreteness of the mansions themselves for his point of departure in the novel. In The House of the Seven Gables, the Pyncheon house is a realistic replica of the Ingersoll-Gardiner-Knox mansions as well as a symbol of the malevolent influence of wealth from generation to generation.

But the edifice has another symbolic function. The Pyncheon house, Hawthorne wrote in the novel, "has always affected me like a human countenance, bearing the traces not merely of outward storm and sunshine, but expressive, also, of the long lapse of mortal life, and accompanying vicissitudes that have passed within" (III, 17). Through this figure of a human being, which, as Waggoner noted, is constant throughout the novel,⁶⁴ Hawthorne demonstrated his double use of symbols: to give a more complete analysis of an immediate situation (here the changing condition of the family itself) and at the same time to suggest universality. Symbols for Hawthorne did not always remove him from the concrete situation, as The Blithedale Romance shows by the figure of the hot-house flower in Zenobia's hair, which suggests the tragic infertility of the

⁶³Ibid., pp. 106, 107, 130, 256.

⁶⁴Waggoner, pp. 153-155.

magnificent woman's heart. In The Scarlet Letter, to give another example, the shades of light and dark have the primary purpose of illustrating the inner condition of characters or intensifying the emotion of a given situation. While Hawthorne, through cumulative effect, usually established universal meaning by the time he reached the conclusion of a work, his interest in symbols was not totally in their suggestion of abstract truth.

The genesis of Howells' symbols is rather difficult to trace since only one of his numerous notebooks gives much insight into his actual creative process,⁶⁵ and it contains mainly notes for revision and amplification rather than for initiation. It is clear, however, that on several occasions Howells conceived of the meaning of his works in generalized symbols. One entry in the "Indian Summer Notebook" contains a figure for The Rise of Silas Lapham which was never used in the novel but which indicates that Howells thought of Lapham's "rise" basically in abstract terms: "The young trees growing out of the fallen logs in the forest--the new life out of the old. Apply to Lapham's fall."⁶⁶ Thus Lapham's salvaging his life from the rubble of financial and moral failure is not an isolated case, but an illustration of a general principle of all life. At another place in his notebook, Howells jotted this

⁶⁵Called the "Indian Summer Notebook" by Cady (The Road to Realism and The Realist at War, *passim*) and the "Savings Bank" by John K. Reeves ("The Literary Manuscripts of W. D. Howells," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LXII [June, 1958], 275). The manuscript is in the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁶⁶Quoted also by Cady in The Road to Realism, p. 236, though the word "fallen" appears as "falling."

remark for the final working out of the theme for Indian Summer: "Imogene shd [sic] typify the fatuous egotism of youth. She never imagines Mrs. B. in love." This does not suggest that Howells created Imogene as merely an abstraction; yet it does indicate Howells' concern for the typical nature of his characters as well as their individualism. Though Imogene is a real person, she nonetheless stands for something broader which encompasses a great class of nineteenth-century females, as do her romantic sisters who appear over and over in Howells' work: Kitty Ellison, Florida Vervain, Grace Breen, Penelope Lapham, Annie Kilburn, Alice Pasmer, and others.

Symbolism that is decidedly Hawthornian can be found in many of the works dating from the early eighties. As George Arms pointed out in his introduction to Silas Lapham,⁶⁷ the figure of Lapham's Beacon Street house is a fundamental symbol and reflects throughout the novel the changing hopes of the title character. The totally destructive fire, which Lapham himself carelessly kindles, is the harbinger of the painting's final financial collapse. The gutted frame has a human likeness, further showing its affinity with the decaying Lapham:

The windows looked like the eye-sockets of a skull down upon the blackened and trampled snow of the street; the pavement was a sheet of ice, and the water from the engines had frozen, like streams of tears, down the face of the house, and hung in icy tags from the window-sills and copings.⁶⁸

⁶⁷The Rise of Silas Lapham, Rinehart Edition (New York, 1949), p. xvi.

⁶⁸The Rise of Silas Lapham, Modern Library Edition (New York, 1951), p. 280.

In several works Howells described the physical attributes of characters in a way that would indicate their internal natures. One of the most striking uses of descriptive symbolism is in The Shadow of a Dream, about which Cady commented:

Like Hawthorne he found it useful to convey essential parts of his meaning through symbols and the manipulation of atmospheres. The symbols--the sadly rotting old garden at Little Nahant as the symbol for Faulkner's wasting mind, the tide as death, Nevil's study as a black Protestant confessional where evil must overcome good--Howells had often shown his power to employ. The atmospheres, so Hawthornian, a realist had necessarily been chary of using. But now they came effectively to hand. Faulkner, host of the dream and vaster of the shadow, is dark. Night and moonlight are his atmospheres, and his light, when he has it, is thin, misty, and tenuous. Nevil, on whom the shadow falls, glows with life and color. His hair is golden, his eyes shine, his complexion is almost "peachy" like a girl's. Where Faulkner has faded and dimmed through the years, Nevil has "gathered brilliancy." But on his brightness falls the shadow.⁶⁹

The suggestive power of the cold and snow, constantly associated with the desperate and forlorn thief Northwick in The Quality of Mercy, is another instance of Howells' use of symbolism to expose the interior of a character as well as to suggest the broad ethical or moral implications of his state. Egeria Boynton of The Undiscovered Country, who is mortally ill from dwelling in the false shadows of mesmerism and spiritualism, receives, almost miraculously, a renewed vitality once she is able to mingle with objects of nature in the spring. Howells made Egeria's relationship with the natural world much more than just an attractive comparison; it becomes a symbol of the harmony that always exists in a life uninhibited by unnatural isolation. In Annie Kilburn, the gradual

⁶⁹The Realist at War, p. 118.

disappearance of Annie's physical near-sightedness serves to illustrate her own deeper sympathy with the poor of Hatboro' as well as to suggest the only real way for universal human understanding. Howells' pictures of urban life, most graphically displayed in A Modern Instance, A Hazard of New Fortunes, and The World of Chance, are, in their total impressions, generalized metaphors of modern society, where selfishness and greed are rampant.

Because of Howells' casual and unpretentious way of including symbols within a milieu of verisimilitude, the reader quite often passes over them without considering them symbols at all. In Indian Summer, for example, Howells' remarks about the weather⁷⁰ in almost every situation have direct, though unobtrusive, bearing on the progress of Theodore Colville's love life. On the first page of the novel, Howells included a prophecy of Colville's ill success in achieving rejuvenation when he wrote: "It was the late afternoon of a day in January, which had begun bright and warm, but had suffered a change of mood as its hours passed, and now, from a sky dimmed with flying grey clouds, was threatening rain."⁷¹ Throughout the winter, daytime seems uncommonly warm for Colville, but usually a severe chill overtakes him before nightfall. Only when Colville has freed himself from the illusions of his life with the child-like Imogene does summer come in natural and sustained warmth.

⁷⁰Professor George Arms has called attention to the weather symbolism of Indian Summer in his forthcoming introduction to the "Indian Summer Notebook."

⁷¹Indian Summer (Boston, 1885), p. 1.

In this true summer he finds happiness with Mrs. Bowen.

As the preceding examples have shown, Howells was given to symbolism in essentially the same manner as Hawthorne, though neither can Hawthorne nor Howells be called a symbolistic novelist. But, like Hawthorne, Howells did not limit himself to symbols as mere illustrative devices. Even for a realist, a picture of life unrelated to the eternal principle that it exemplified was not enough. The artist could--and in the case of Howells had to--give the reader a view into the interior of his situations through symbolism without necessarily violating probability on the level of the actual. Howells scrupulously kept the real-life situation as his focal point and within the limits of the realistic technique allowed just enough symbolism to broaden his vision to the realm of universal truth beyond. Hawthorne, on the other hand, employed symbolism as the essence of his art while at the same time insisting on the ultimate physical reality of the symbol.

D. THE DRAMATIC FORM

A comparison of form in the novels of Hawthorne and Howells reveals in both the heavy use of dramatic devices. It has been frequently noted that since the two writers expressed concern for inner as well as external truth, they chose the form that best delineated this multiple sense of reality. It is not that Hawthorne and Howells invented a new kind of prose fiction because the old epic and historical modes failed them; they merely revived and modified one that had served effectively from Lyly to Richardson whenever a writer expressed more interest in

character motivation than in cataloguing events.

There is, of course, action in the dramatic novel; but, as Muir explained, the distinction therein is the "strict interior causation" of the action.⁷² Further, "the dramatic novel shows that both appearance and reality are the same, and that character is action, and action character."⁷³ The characters' response to and motivation by events in the dramatic novel are not revealed through dialogue alone, though dialogue that intimates subconscious reaction is an essential ingredient; but the dramatic novel enriches its substance by going inside a character or characters, according to Percy Lubbock, "to show a mind in action, to give a dramatic display of the commotion within a breast."⁷⁴

Having given considerable attention to a faithful representation of the external and internal conflicts that go into character development, Hawthorne and Howells extended their adaptation of drama through the matter of structure, for balanced acts and scenes, as in the drama per se, intensified the effect of characters in juxtaposition within them. Setting also became important, not alone for its pictorial quality, but for its close association with the mental reactions of characters. This relationship of character and setting is not so pronounced in Howells as in Hawthorne, but even in Howells background is artistically controlled to give unity throughout a work in which scenes are formulated around

⁷²Edwin Muir, The Structure of the Novel (London, 1928), p. 45.

⁷³Ibid., p. 47

⁷⁴The Craft of Fiction (London, 1921), p. 152.

individual characters. In the works of both writers, mood is sustained by the frequent reappearance of characters in a setting basic in its suggestiveness to the overall theme.

Although several commentators have taken note of the dramatic elements in Hawthorne's works, no complete study has been made of the formula of the drama in the four major novels. In this brief section, these novels will be examined with the intention, not of identifying every possible dramatic device, but of demonstrating in a general way Hawthorne's use of a form that became, by the end of the nineteenth century, the dominant one through the influence of Howells and his disciples. Just what impelled Hawthorne toward the dramatic form is a moot question; but the answer probably lies in Hawthorne's inclination always to begin his notes for a story, as the notebooks indicate, with a character sketch when he did not begin with an abstraction. Sir Walter Scott was very probably responsible for Hawthorne's use of the dramatic form. In most of his novels, Hawthorne followed Scott's technique by dividing his characters into groups and centering upon each group separately throughout. Hawthorne's plots are frequently developed through the progression of a number of compact dramatic scenes.⁷⁵

Hawthorne may have imitated Scott in the use of the character group, but there is slight resemblance otherwise between the epic sweep of Scott's romances and the compact narrative form of Hawthorne. Spenser,

⁷⁵Arlin Turner, "Hawthorne's Literary Borrowings," PMIA, LI (June, 1936), 558.

whose allegorical method certainly had its influence on Hawthorne,⁷⁶ is another likely source by virtue of the similarity between the groups of people featured through The Faerie Queene and Hawthorne's single-character episodes. There is further similarity between Spenser's luxuriant nine-line vignettes and the colorful backdrops that dominate Hawthorne's scenes. Bunyan, whom Hawthorne obviously followed in thematic and allegorical treatment,⁷⁷ also probably contributed to Hawthorne's structure. Not to be overlooked, too, as a possible influence is Hawthorne's reading of the Elizabethan and classical dramatists, dating from his early youth.⁷⁸

The form and structure of The Scarlet Letter have long been admired for their precision; this external excellence can be attributed in a great measure to Hawthorne's skillful use of the methods of a stage play. As in all the novels, Hawthorne employed few characters, and the principal action of The Scarlet Letter involves only four persons whose relationship with their background produces a unity of effect rare among novels. Taking place entirely in Boston and its immediate environs, the action moves like a tableau from backdrop to backdrop. These sets, as

⁷⁶Randall Stewart, "Hawthorne and The Faerie Queene," Philological Quarterly, XII (April, 1933), 196-206.

⁷⁷See W. Stacy Johnson, "Hawthorne and The Pilgrim's Progress," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, L (April, 1951), 156-166; and Robert Stanton, "Hawthorne, Bunyan, and the American Romances," PMLA, LXXI (March, 1956), 155-165.

⁷⁸For Hawthorne's early reading of Shakespeare, see Mark Van Doren, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Critical Biography (New York, 1949), pp. 10-11. Hawthorne's study of classical literature was pointed out by Stewart in Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography, pp. 16-17.

enumerated by Malcolm Cowley, are the marketplace, the room inside the prison, the governor's hall, the scaffold of the pillory, the seashore, the forest, and again the marketplace.⁷⁹ Although the individual scenes of the novel are well-defined, critics have suggested different groupings for these scenes.⁸⁰

Not only does The House of the Seven Gables contain dramatic structure, but it also extends a theme that was a favorite of the Greek dramatists: the impact of the curse of Thyestes on the house of Atreus.⁸¹ Most of the principal characters are parallel to those in the series of classical tragedies treating of this family-propagated evil. Matthew Maule, who curses the house of Pyncheon, appears in the place of Thyestes;

⁷⁹"Five Acts of The Scarlet Letter" in Twelve Original Essays on Great American Novels, ed. Charles Shapiro (Detroit, 1958), pp. 36-42.

⁸⁰John C. Gerber divided the novel into four parts, making a drama of four acts, with three of the four having their own center of revelation in a dominant character: "Thus the Puritan community, aside from the four main characters, is responsible for the action in the first part (Chapters I-VIII); Chillingworth for that in the second (IX-XII); Hester for that in the third (XIII-XX); and Dimmesdale for that in the fourth (XXI-XXIV)." ("Introduction" to The Scarlet Letter, Modern Library College Edition [New York, copyright 1950], p. xx.) Cowley grouped his five acts and eight scenes around the principal stage sets. But he admitted that several scenes fall outside the dramatic framework since they involve a single character and are expository in nature. (p. 37). Two other commentators divided the novel also into four-act structure, differing only slightly from Gerber's outline: Edward B. Dawson, "Hawthorne's Knowledge and Use of New England History: A Study of Sources," unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1938; and Charles Ryskamp, "The New England Sources of The Scarlet Letter," American Literature, XXI (November, 1959), 261.

⁸¹The parallel to Greek drama was noted briefly by Paul Elmer More ("The Solitude of Nathaniel Hawthorne," Shelbourne Essays, First Series [New York, 1907], pp. 39-40) and by F. O. Matthiessen (American Renaissance [London, 1941], p. 339). But no critic to my knowledge has elaborated this idea.

Atreus, the father of the ill-fated mythological family, becomes Judge Pyncheon. Electra, the scheming daughter, is Hepzibah, and the brother Orestes is Clifford. The docile, unworldly Chrysothemis, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra in Sophocles' Electra, appears as Phoebe. Iphigenia, who was sacrificed at Aulis, is Alice Pyncheon, on whom Matthew Maule casts a life-enerivating spell. Also a reflection of the Greek plays is the willful escape of Hepzibah and Clifford from the evil Pyncheon house, paralleling the flight of Orestes in Aeschylus' Eumenides. But The House of the Seven Gables is not a tragedy; rather it is a "dark comedy," in which tragedy is averted jointly by the will of Clifford and Hepzibah to face life and a kind of deus-ex-machina which takes Judge Pyncheon by means of death. Comic relief is given throughout the darker portions of the drama by the character of Uncle Venner.

Structurally, The House of the Seven Gables is not dramatically compact mainly because of the ending.⁸² Schubert, however, saw a certain dramatic form and divided the book into three groups of seven chapters each, which would correspond to a three-act play:

Part A opens with the historical background; introduces Hepzibah, Holgrave, Uncle Venner, and Ned; brings in Phoebe; gives us a mere glimpse of Jaffray [sic]; and brings in Clifford. Part B opens with Jaffray's appearance and his

⁸²A number of critics have commented adversely on the structure of the novel. Austin Warren felt that the weakness of The House of the Seven Gables "is in its plot and in its narrative method." (Rage for Order: Essays in Criticism [Chicago, 1948], p. 97.) Darrell Abel said that the novel lacks unity and central design. ("Hawthorne's House of Tradition," South Atlantic Quarterly, LII [October, 1953], 561.) Philip Young commented that "the entire structure collapses" at the ending after rather smooth early and middle parts. ("Introduction" to The House of the Seven Gables, Rinehart Edition [New York, 1957], p. xv.)

offer to take care of Clifford; shows the care given Clifford, and his recuperation; includes Holgrave's narrative of the hypnotism of Alice; and concludes with Phoebe's departure. Part C opens with Jaffray (as Part B did) and his demands to see Clifford; narrates the death of Jaffray; describes the flight of Hepzibah and Clifford; pictures the dead Jaffray; brings back Phoebe; winds up the love-story; brings Hepzibah and Clifford back; and rounds off the whole story in conclusion.⁸³

By departing only once in the present-time narrative from the vicinity of the Pyncheon house, this novel observes unity of place more exactly than any of the other four major novels. With the exception of Hepzibah and Clifford's train ride, the seven-gabled mansion, both from the exterior and interior, is the constant stage set and casts its ominous spell over all the action. The cent-shop of Hepzibah is merely a compartment of the larger structure, and the garden is backed by the foreboding darkness of the house.

The stage sets are also strikingly displayed in The Blithedale Romance and were catalogued by Maurice Crane as: "the dinner-table at Blithedale, the view from the hotel window, the woods near Eliot's pulpit, and the gleaming river at midnight."⁸⁴ To these can be added the sick-room of Coverdale and the "play within the play," the scene of Priscilla's mesmeric performance. Although the novel does not divide itself so compactly into four or five acts as The Scarlet Letter, it does feature only four principal characters, whose psychological struggles

⁸³Leland Schubert, Hawthorne the Artist: Fine-Art Devices in Fiction (Chapel Hill, 1944), p. 35.

⁸⁴"The Blithedale Romance' as Theatre," Notes and Queries, N.S., V (February, 1958), 84.

seep out little by little through dialogue; and it contains a palpable crisis (designated as such by Hawthorne) in Chapter XV, where Coverdale and Hollingsworth come to a permanent disagreement.⁸⁵ It is noteworthy, too, that Hawthorne in the preface voiced his intention "to establish a theatre" (V, 321) and that throughout the story the four main characters all appear to be acting a part far removed from their natural place in life. According to Crane, another important dramatic device, which does not appear in any of the other novels, is the first-person commentator (perhaps corresponding roughly to the Greek chorus) in the character of Coverdale, who narrates "a play-by-play view, so that the reader is in a position of a spectator in a theatre. . . . In the dramatic, episodic, stage-like narrative Hawthorne sought a device whereby the reader's awareness would develop at the same time as the narrator's."⁸⁶

In The Marble Faun what is lost in balanced structure is gained in Hawthorne's skillful manipulation of the character group. The spotlight illuminates the principals even more clearly because of the panoramic background: four people isolated in the midst of the great expanse of Rome, swarming with humanity and cluttered by the heirlooms of the ages. Foreshadowing what Howells was to do in A Hazard of New Fortunes when through shifting point of view he dramatized the lives of five or six main characters against the broad backdrop of New York, Hawthorne fastened attention first to the group and then moved along with each

⁸⁵Pointed out by Schubert, p. 36.

⁸⁶Crane, p. 85.

character separately, eventually bringing the four back together. Kenyon, like Coverdale in Blithedale, functions more as an interpreter of events than an active participant, and it is through him that the reader keeps in touch with the problems of the three others. Apparently Hawthorne did not intend to unify by means of a few individual settings, but to risk everything upon the dramatic crisis within the mind of the individual character.

Whatever models provided Hawthorne and Howells with suggestions for form, there exists independently an obvious and significant similarity between the two. It is noteworthy that two writers so intent upon illuminating with faithfulness the inner recesses of the human mind would converge on a single form. Howells, it must be remembered, was much more concerned than Hawthorne about fidelity to life in externals too; therefore the drama, stripped of authorial intervention, offered him much in another way. In a rather playful letter to Mark Twain in 1878, Howells confided that he "would ten times rather write plays than anything else."⁸⁷ Although he seemed to become aware of the utmost possibilities of the dramatic novel when during the middle seventies he discovered Turgenev,⁸⁸ Howells manifested a prior interest in the realistic drama when he first read Goldoni in the early 1860's during his consulship in Venice. According to Woodress, it was "through Goldoni's eyes [that]

⁸⁷Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, ed. Mildred Howells (New York, 1928), I, 255-256.

⁸⁸Howells declared that Turgenev's "fiction is to the last degree dramatic." (My Literary Passions, p. 169.)

Howells first saw the possibilities of prose fiction based on the commonplace events of contemporary life."⁸⁹ The obvious influence of Goldoni can be seen, Woodress felt, in Howells' inclusion of bits of dialogue in Venetian Life, a travel book written just after he began to read Goldoni, and the gradual expansion of the dramatic method from travel books to early novels.⁹⁰ Further evidence of Howells' admiration for pure drama is the fact that during the 1870's he began to write comedies and in all composed thirty-six plays, most of them social comedies and farces.⁹¹

In his creative process, Howells first chose the particular kind of life he wished to depict and proceeded to "sketch out in mind the principal characters, and then plunge into the work."⁹² The unpublished "Indian Summer Notebook," in the few places where Howells recorded initial ideas, bears witness to the similarity of Howells' process to Hawthorne's since, like the older writer, he first grasped the idea and then related it directly to character. Among the entries for The Rise of Silas Lapham, he wrote: "Lapham vulgar but not sordid." The germ for An Imperative Duty was recorded thus:

In Town out of Season.— Might be a story in autobi[o]-graphic form of a young man rich, cultivated, well-born who notices all those handsome negroes we saw last summer, and falls in love with an octoroon.

The first entry for The Son of Royal Langbrith reads as follows:

⁸⁹Woodress, p. 132.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 143.

⁹¹The Realist at War, p. 230.

⁹²The Road to Realism, p. 203.

Son who prevents his mother's second marriage from devotion to his father's memory whom he never saw. Man dies who wanted her. Then he falls in love himself and begins to ask himself questions. Talk with his mother, when his father's true character comes out. "But it is all right."⁹³

The dramatic procedure apparently came naturally to Howells, for a great portion of the recorded revisions for Indian Summer, The Rise of Silas Lapham, and The Minister's Charge have the form of dialogue with very terse expository comments, like stage-directions, interposed. Thus, it can be concluded that the established dramatic method became Howells' own as much from his inner impulse as from conscious emulation of successful predecessors.

The novels of Howells' earliest writing, called by Cady those of the "Experimental Period," exhibit his adherence to dramatic structure as well as his emphasis on character. Their Wedding Journey, of course, lacks unity of place, for it is essentially a travel book. But A Chance Acquaintance, A Foregone Conclusion, Private Theatricals (later renamed Mrs. Farrell), and The Lady of the Aroostook all observe the unities, focus upon not more than four or five characters, and move to a significant climax. The number of characters, however, tends to increase in such novels as A Modern Instance (1882), The Rise of Silas Lapham (1884), and The Minister's Charge (1887); and even though the background is painted on a broader canvas, Howells continued to place his characters in small groups and reveal them a group at a time against recurrent settings. While A Modern Instance moves from Equity, Maine, to Boston and

⁹³Also quoted by Cady in The Realist at War, p. 239.

then to Indiana, much of the novel is taken up by the drama-like dialogue of Bartley and Marcia in their Boston rooms. Both The Rise of Silas Lapham and The Minister's Charge move all over the city of Boston, but confine their views to one group of characters at a time. In the former the scene goes back and forth from Silas' paint factory to his old and prospective homes and then to the Coreys, and in the latter it alternates from the serene household of the Reverend Peck to the public trials of Lemuel Barker. Indian Summer (1885), on the other hand, is much more unified than the other novels of the same period and is reminiscent of the works of the first period in theme as well as structure. Every scene is laid in Florence or on the outskirts, and only three characters occupy the stage for any length of time: Colville, Imogene Graham, and Mrs. Bowen.

One is compelled to give assent to Carter's observation that the works of the middle period (the late eighties and early nineties) are less dramatic, but one cannot agree with his contention that Howells altogether "renounced his allegiance to the dogma of dramatic compactness and unity."⁹⁴ A perceptive reading of the novels themselves will expose the extremities of Carter's conclusion:

And the principal novels of this later period form one large testimonial to his gradual escape from the restrictions of the dramatic technique. A Modern Instance, A Woman's Reason, The Rise of Silas Lapham, The Quality of Mercy, The World of Chance, and The Story of a Play, all written between 1882 and 1898, form a species of continuous novel, an American Human Comedy, in which the end of one work is the beginning of another, characters come and go, meet and separate with the same apparent

⁹⁴Carter, p. 127.

irrelevance, so full of deeper meaning, which Howells was sure was a part of the life process itself.⁹⁵

Carter's list of novels was obviously carefully chosen to support his thesis, for he named only six of the eighteen novels that Howells wrote from 1882 to 1898 and none of the eleven from 1899 to 1920. Also, the inclusion of The Story of a Play was a gross error. During the mid-eighties Howells did momentarily abandon tight structure for a more sprawling form, which has been attributed in part to the influence of Tolstoy. Yet Howells' structure began to loosen with A Modern Instance, written three years before 1885, the year he probably discovered for himself the Russian novelist.⁹⁶ It is true, moreover, that Howells began to carry over characters from one novel to another, but such a practice does not necessarily indicate that he thought of the works as one continuous novel. Each is an independent work and has its own individually developed form.

That Howells did not abandon the dramatic method is borne out by April Hopes (1888), which appeared just before A Hazard of New Fortunes, the most obviously "Tolstoyan" novel. There is, indeed, a flurry of social activity pervading the background of April Hopes and the brief appearance of numerous characters as a consequence. But the novel centers upon two lovers, and it is the tight little scenes involving them that give the novel its dramatic unity. By far the greatest portion of

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 128.

⁹⁶The Realist at War, p. 7; George N. Bennett, William Dean Howells: The Development of a Novelist (Norman, Okla., 1959), pp. 162-163.

the novel is comprised of dialogue between the lovers or between them and their family and friends in which the sole concern is the progress of the vacillating love affair. There is expert use of dramatic contrast in the alternating scenes of the lovers' bliss and those of their quarrels and subsequent dejection. The principal situations are placed against vivid backgrounds, all contributing directly to thematic development: Class Day at Harvard, a Campobello picnic, a dull New England industrial village, and springtime in Washington.⁹⁷

The Shadow of a Dream (1890), which directly followed A Hazard of New Fortunes, is an even stronger case in point. Structurally this is one of Howells' most precise works, for there are three distinct parts, each constructed around one of the three characters directly involved in the circumstances of Douglas Faulkner's terrifying prophetic dream concerning his wife's unfaithfulness. After a short introductory flash-back and a brief conversation on a train, each of the three parts has its own limited and specific setting: the Faulkners' summer home at Little Nahant, Basil March's club in Boston, and the March home. This, too, is one of the several novels in which Basil and Isabel March serve as the chorus, and in this instance they are commentators on a tragedy. Typically, there is little action and a great deal of dialogue, with the Marches getting in their share as they analyze for the audience the mysterious events that have touched their lives.

In his list of novels that supposedly demonstrate Howells'

⁹⁷See Cady's discussion in The Realist at War, p. 59.

repudiation of the dramatic style, Carter concluded with The Story of a Play (1898), a novel that stands actually as a forceful example to the contrary. As in April Hopes, the craftsmanship is the redeeming quality of this novel, for the idea is rather slight, typical perhaps of the comedy of manners. Excepting five or six minor figures who mount the stage from time to time, there are only two leading characters: Brice and Louise Maxwell, one of whom is always the center of revelation. Most of the novel is given over to continuous dialogue between the Maxwells on the progress of Brice's first play, and the central conflict occurs between husband and wife over the extent to which they should have their own love affair exploited as a secondary theme in the play. The scenes of the novel are limited effectively to a few places: the Maxwells' summer cottage and the surrounding shore, their New York apartment, a producer's office, the apartment of Louise's parents, and briefly the theater where the play is in rehearsal.

Another later novel, written the year before The Story of a Play, evinces Howells' extended and mature handling of the dramatic form as an approach to intense psychological analysis. This is The Landlord at Lion's Head (1897), in which he turned into a stage a favorite object of his--the summer hotel, which he had used in Private Theatricals (Mrs. Farrell) and Dr. Breen's Practice. But now the hotel is a microcosm, a remote world into which intrudes the painter Jere Westover who interprets, chorus-like, the changes in the family who run Lion's Head Inn during their initial encounters with civilization. The Leatherstocking (1916), Howells' next-to-last novel, is perhaps his supreme dramatic achievement.

Although the novel contains many crowd scenes, most of the development of plot takes place as Howells carries the spotlight from one small group of people to another in tracing the effect of fanatical religious fervor upon them. Again, as in many of his other works, Howells used a disinterested character as interpreter for the reader--Squire Braile, the free-thinking town lawyer who personally remains aloof from the religious problems of the community.

While many other aspects of the creative process--such as vocabulary, syntax, descriptive and expository order--could be examined in the works of Hawthorne and Howells to show similarity, the general theory of fiction and three procedures of development (the autobiographical approach, the use of symbolism, and dramatic form) demonstrate a significant agreement between the two. The requisite for valid art being truth, Hawthorne and Howells approached truth through superficially contrasting media, the romance and the novel, yet demanded essentially the same elements. They both respected real life and insisted that character and incident reflect it even if, as in Hawthorne's hands, the line between the actual and the marvelous sometimes became nebulous. Since both were interested in people and the world around them and filled notebooks with pertinent observations, the autobiographical approach played naturally into their hands as they began to write. In their quest for truth in general terms as well as in depiction of actual human experience, they both employed symbolism to illuminate the more subtle truth, though Howells restrained himself from ever coming close to allegory, which Hawthorne frequently employed. Finally, the dramatic form allowed them a

tightness and orderliness in plotting and, most important of all, a penetration deep into the minds of characters as they act as the center of revelation in individual scenes or appear in juxtaposition to others.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE AND ETHICS

A. MORALITY AND TRUTH

Evidence has already been given from the prefaces to The House of the Seven Gables and The Blithedale Romance to show that Nathaniel Hawthorne valued truth above all else as the essence of prose fiction. This truth, as one can readily see from an examination of Hawthorne's technique, was not a disinterested representation of real-life situations, but a revelation of the basic principles of existence. Further, perusal of Hawthorne's novels themselves impresses one with the author's intensive effort to distinguish between the "true" and the "false" in human relationships. The short allegory "Feathertop," which on one level may simply suggest the futility of social climbing, contains the distillation of Hawthorne's belief that the truth is signally elusive when it is sought in complex social inter-relations. People make their own illusions, and as long as they persist in their obtuseness, the truth will remain hidden. When society at large has the courage to abandon its false coverings, then perhaps one can come face to face with the basic nature of life and understand its proper direction.

In order to facilitate the discovery of truth buried beneath the confusion of organized society, Hawthorne felt that fiction had to examine the social scene in such a way as to expose the human foibles that prolong the chaos of falsehood. This method Hawthorne termed presenting

a "moral," obviously for lack of a better phrase, since by no means did his message ever possess the finality of the usual systematized code. In the preface to The House of the Seven Gables, he facetiously said that he would include the moral merely because of literary precedent. In this instance the lesson was "that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones" (III, 14).¹ A principal moral of The Blithedale Romance centered in Hollingsworth, who appeared to Hawthorne as "an exemplification of the most awful truth in Bunyan's book of such, --from the very gate of heaven there is a by-way to the pit" (V, 595). In most instances, in short story and novel, Hawthorne provided his reader with an explicit statement of his own view of the rightness or wrongness of the fictional situations that he devised. But can these statements be taken to embody Hawthorne's complete intention, or are they, like allegory, a part of the convention of romance that Hawthorne scrupulously followed in creating his works? To be sure, if a work were true, it had to reveal something universal about life; oftentimes, however, Hawthorne's stated moral is not a revelation of the elemental truth in his work, but is a superficial by-product of the more fundamental theme. As exemplified by the above comment on The House of the Seven Gables, he purposely simplified his "moral," in a typical Hawthornian subterfuge to cover a far broader meaning. He admitted in the same preface that

¹Unless otherwise indicated, citations from Hawthorne in this chapter are to Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. George Parsons Lathrop (Boston, 1883), 15 vols.

When romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation, it is usually through a far more subtle process than the ostensible one. The author has considered it hardly worth his while, therefore, relentlessly to impale the story with its moral as with an iron rod,--or, rather, by sticking a pin through a butterfly,--thus at once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude. (III, 14-15)

That Hawthorne considered his moral to be truth about human character as it emerged through telling action was expressed aptly by Julian Hawthorne:

. . . he will not be a mere painter of external life, of manners, of appearance; he must penetrate the secret of his characters, and know, and demonstrate, either explicitly or implicitly, not so much the how as the wherefore of their actions and conditions. Thus it happens that all his stories have their moral. "Thought," he says, "has always its efficacy, and every striking incident its moral." To be at a loss for a moral would be tantamount to not knowing what he had been writing about; to understand a thing is to moralize it.²

William Dean Howells, also, included morality in his requirements for fiction, for he, like Hawthorne, was concerned with truth. To Howells, truth without morality could not exist:

This truth, which necessarily included the highest morality and the highest artistry--this truth given, the book cannot be wicked and cannot be weak; and without it all graces of style and feats of invention and cunning of construction are so many superfluities of naughtiness.³

Since Howells wrote within the restrictions of formal realism, he did not in the Hawthornian manner gratuitously label the moral in his novels. Such a practice would have been, for him, a violation of this "highest

²"Hawthorne's Philosophy," The Century, N.S. X (May, 1886), 88.

³Clara Marburg Kirk and Rudolf Kirk, eds. Criticism and Fiction in Criticism and Fiction and Other Essays (New York, 1959), p. 49.

artistry." If a novel is truly "a work of art," he said, "it promptly takes itself out of the order of polemics or of ethics, and primarily consents to be nothing if not aesthetical."⁴ But "the novel can teach, and for shame's sake it must teach, but only by painting life truly."⁵

The degree of morality in a work was for Howells in direct correlation with the degree of realism which the work achieved. Thus there comes into focus the prime reason behind Howells' aversion for the extremes of romanticism. Since realism, or a true portrayal of life, was the "highest morality," "romanticistic" literature was usually the highest immorality. In a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, September 17, 1879, Howells wrote: " . . . I should be ashamed and sorry if my work did not unmistakably teach a lenient, generous, and liberal life: that is, I should feel degraded merely to amuse people."⁶ Howells' plea against the falseness of extreme romanticism was impassioned:

But let fiction cease to lie about life; let it portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and the passions in the measure we all know; let it leave off painting dolls and working them by springs and wires; . . . let it forbear to preach pride and revenge, folly and insanity, egotism and prejudice, but frankly own these for what they are, in whatever figures and occasions they appear; let it not put on

⁴Howells, "Novel-Writing and Novel-Reading: An Impersonal Explanation," ed. William M. Gibson, Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LXII (January, 1958), 24.

⁵Ibid., p. 25.

⁶George S. Hellman, ed. "The Letters of Howells to Higginson," Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Bibliophile Society (1929), p. 38. Also quoted by Edwin H. Cady, The Road to Realism (Syracuse, New York, 1956), p. 189.

fine literary airs; let it speak the dialect, the language, that most Americans know--the language of unaffected people everywhere⁷

The lie, the estrangement from truth about life, was the particular foe of the literary philosophy of both Hawthorne and Howells. Although truth in the absolute might be elusive, the greatest wrong the artist could perpetrate was to evade the real issues of life and lapse into fancy. While Hawthorne followed the external liberties of the romance, he constantly focused upon problems that are real to human nature. As Chapter II has pointed out, even the romance, wrote Hawthorne, "sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart" (III, 13). Although Parrington's final estimate of Hawthorne's art is decidedly too limited, his summary of Hawthorne's purpose is worthy of note: "Only in a narrow and very special sense was Hawthorne a romantic. With the romance of love and adventure he was never concerned; what interested him was the romance of ethics--the distortions of the soul under the tyranny of a diseased imagination."⁸ The menace of a "diseased imagination" was well known to both Hawthorne and Howells personally; and through their private wrestlings with its malevolent influence had emerged their literary creed, common in its basic

⁷Criticism and Fiction, p. 51.

⁸Vernon Louis Parrington, The Romantic Revolution in America in Main Currents in American Thought (New York, 1958), II, 444. Henry Seidel Canby also wrote that "while Hawthorne's methods are borrowed from the romantic fashions of the day, I cannot see anything essentially romantic in his mind. Nor are the greatest passages in his best books romantic; if the term has any meaning beyond imaginative excellence." (Classic Americans [New York, 1959], pp. 237-238.)

intention of avoiding extremes that would lie about life.

B. THE IDEAL OF MODERATION

Personal isolation was experienced by Hawthorne during various periods of his life, beginning with a curtailment of his physical activities due to an injury to his foot when he was nine years old.⁹ While a student at Bowdoin College, he became dissatisfied with the many pressing activities which took him away from his already developing literary practice.¹⁰ Although a period of confining apprenticeship is a natural course in the development of most literary artists, Hawthorne's years following his graduation from Bowdoin were unusually solitary ones. He confined himself to his mother's house in Salem and had little association with people outside his family.¹¹ His own awareness of the extreme personal dangers of his conduct from 1825 through 1837 was revealed in a letter to Longfellow in 1837:

. . . I have been carried apart from the main current of life, and find it impossible to get back again. . . . I have secluded myself from society For the last ten years, I have not lived, but only dreamed about living.¹²

In retrospect Hawthorne saw the folly of the years of isolation; for

⁹Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography (New Haven, 1948), p. 4.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 24.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 27-44.

¹²Quoted by Randall Stewart in "Introduction" to The American Notebooks of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New Haven, 1932), p. lxviii.

after he and his wife Sophia moved into the Hawthorne home in Salem, he wrote to Horatio Bridge, October 7, 1845: "Here I am, again established in the old chambers where I wasted so many years of my life."¹³ The secluded years at the Old Manse, where he and Sophia went just after their marriage, were idyllic for Hawthorne as he lived out the long winters alone with his bride save for occasional visits by the Concord literati.¹⁴ There is nothing in documentary form to suggest that Hawthorne's proclivity toward solitude was morbid. On the contrary, as a lover of life, he considered his own isolation unwholesome and saw in his habits a partial reflection of a serious tendency in mankind generally. But his intellectual withdrawal provided him with an unusual understanding of the problems of others, molded his temperament into that of the skeptical observer of established dogmas, and forbade for him extremes in literary form or philosophy of life.

Circumstantial isolation, similar to that which characterized Hawthorne's early years, was also a molding agent in the life of Howells. In early youth Howells had begun to try his hand at writing; and under the stimulation of country newspaper offices, where his father worked as printer and sometimes editor, he turned out a long string of poems, playlets, and prose sketches. His first published work, according to Gibson and Arms, was a poem (beginning "Old Winter, loose thy

¹³Quoted by Mark Van Doren, Nathaniel Hawthorne: An Interpretive Biography (New York, 1949), p. 135.

¹⁴Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne, pp. 62-67.

hold on us"), which was written when he was fifteen.¹⁵ The strain of working in printshops during the day and studying and writing far into the night began to affect Howells' nervous system. One of the particular manifestations of his psychological breakdown was hypochondria, which involved the fear that he would die from hydrophobia when he was sixteen.¹⁶

In a diary written during 1851 and quoted by Howells himself in Years of My Youth, there is a picture of his solitary existence:

The writer does not know any boys except in the printing-office, and these he knows only in a shrinking sort, not venturing to take part, except once, in their wild hilarity, and scarcely knowing their names His chief companionship is with his father, whom he goes long walks and holds long talks with, and it is his father who encourages him in his versifying¹⁷

Howells' semi-fictional account of his life in Martins Ferry and Hamilton, Ohio, A Boy's Town, further reveals the boy's isolation:

Before he left the Boy's Town the world within claimed him more and more. He ceased to be that eager comrade he had once been; sometimes he left his book with a sigh; and he saw much of the outer world like an autumn haze between him and its realities, softening their harsh outlines, and giving them a fairy coloring.¹⁸

According to Cady, Howells' psychosis was aggravated partly by his reading of "one branch of the popular literature, with its fixation,

¹⁵William M. Gibson and George Arms, "A Bibliography of William Dean Howells," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LI (February, 1947), 96.

¹⁶The Road to Realism, pp. 54-56.

¹⁷Years of My Youth (New York, 1916), p. 74.

¹⁸A Boy's Town (New York, 1902), p. 240.

dominated by De Quincey and Poe, on the post-Byronic cult of the scorched heart and the guilt-maddened mind."¹⁹ When in 1852 Howells' father went to Columbus as an official secretary to the Ohio legislature and took the young man with him, Howells' mind was freed from much of its morbidity by the novel activities of the city. But throughout his lifetime he was to shudder at the remembrance of his fear- and guilt-tormented adolescence.²⁰ Howells' violent antipathy for the literature that exploited the sensational and emotional can be traced directly to his own nearly tragic experience with a world of isolation and unreality.

Isolation--intellectual, emotional, or spiritual--was the general attitude that both Hawthorne and Howells abhorred. Whereas skeptical detachment provided an active though disinterested position from which life's various dichotomies might be viewed and possibly reconciled, isolation was an extreme--a deliberate withdrawal into an ego-centric world where truth would be perceived only in distorted subjectivity. Thus it is not inconsistent with their quest for universality that neither of these men would direct his art toward extensive portrayals of the sordid and degenerate, for belaboring any extreme would be a narrowing and distorting of general truth.

Certainly Hawthorne was not averse to showing the degraded side of life, for all four of the major novels are concerned, though not

¹⁹The Road to Realism, p. 59.

²⁰Ibid., p. 23.

preoccupied, with the abasement of character. Adultery is treated of in The Scarlet Letter, suicide in The Blithedale Romance, murder and thievery in The House of the Seven Gables, and murder and implied incest in The Marble Faun. But Hawthorne did not supply extensive details in his cases. Stewart suggested two possible reasons for Hawthorne's reticence, the first being the writer's "lack of experience with the world of evil." But the second is the more plausible: that Hawthorne was always concerned with psychological results rather than actions themselves.²¹ To these must be added a third reason that coincides most nearly with Hawthorne's basic literary theory: that truth loses its meaningfulness if it becomes too involved with unnecessary and exclusive particulars.

Moderation was also the basis of Howells' art. There is no place in this study for a review of the voluminous criticism that has been leveled against Howells because he did not write with the frankness of a twentieth-century naturalist. But it is necessary to make an explanation, though not an apology, for his refusal, like Hawthorne's, to heap up details of the sordid. In even alluding to sexual drives, he was much more reserved than Hawthorne, but this was certainly due in part to Howells' greater consciousness of his readers, a factor Hawthorne virtually ignored and suffered for financially. But even Howells, looked upon by many modern critics as a hopeless prude, suffered sharp rebuke by reviewers of his day upon the first appearance of his mild realism because

²¹"Introduction" to American Notebooks, p. lxiii.

of its relative frankness.²²

A cursory examination of the Howells canon will show, too, that Howells alluded to almost every serious crime that humanity might commit. Although he never portrayed adultery as frankly as Hawthorne did, certainly it is hinted at in several novels. The central situation of The Shadow of a Dream concerns adulterous love, though Howells stopped short of physical consummation. The basic problem of The Lady of the Arcostook is whether Lydia Flood, the only woman on a transatlantic voyage, is chaste or not. No more passionate heroine exists in nineteenth-century fiction than Marcia Gaylord; and the reader, reasoning a posteriori, feels that Marcia would have given herself to Bartley before marriage had he said the word. Rosabel Farrell, of Private Theatricals (Mrs. Farrell), is as indecorous as Hawthorne's Zenobia, though her past is not so questionable. Thievery is a secondary motif in The Minister's Charge and The Rise of Silas Lapham and the main theme of The Quality of Mercy. Alcoholism received treatment in The Lady of the Arcostook, Annie Kilburn, and New Leaf Mills and narcotics addiction in The Son of Royal Langbrith. Howells stopped short of murder, but it is threatened in The Leatherstocking God and New Leaf Mills. Granville Hicks, in masterful fashion, dispensed with the subject of Howells' fastidiousness once and for all:

But there is no need of laboring the argument that he was not a prig--or not merely one. The evidence is in his novels,

²²Everett Carter, Howells and the Age of Realism (Philadelphia, 1954), pp. 146-147.

for he did succeed, again and again, in getting to the heart of moral problems, which a prig could never do.²³

According to Cady, the reason for Howells' abstinence from descriptive details of humanity in the clutches of evil was really an "inability" to face the facts because

life-long psychological difficulties left Howells with a neurotic condition which literally made it impossible for him to know and understand as realities the portions of pain and filth and terror in human living with which a major writer must be at least vicariously intimate.²⁴

While Cady's explanation is significant in establishing a psychological basis for some of Howells' reticence, it does not help to reconcile the apparent contradiction between this reticence and the novelist's conscious effort for realism.

The controversial "smiling aspects of life" section of Criticism and Fiction shows the consistent relationship of Howells' self-imposed limitations to his general literary theory. Howells was in accord with American novelists who treated of the more pleasant side of life since such a view was truthfully American. "It is worth while, even at the risk of being called commonplace, to be true to our well-to-do actualities; the very passions themselves seem to be softened and modified" The broad social inequalities, which offered darker subject matter for European writers, were not as yet present in America, the principal "sin

²³"A Grasping Imagination," Sewanee Review, LIX (Summer, 1951), 515.

²⁴"The Neuroticism of William Dean Howells," PMLA, LXI (March, 1946), 229.

and suffering and shame" here being confined to the individual level.²⁵ Howells was keeping his emphasis heavily on the individual in his social relationships; if individual "sins" did not lead to social repercussions, then they were not fit subject matter for the realist, whose truth was the ethics of society. But it must be noted that Howells, in the midst of affirming the presence of the "smiling aspects of life," added these words: "all this is changing for the worse."²⁶ As this chapter will show later, Howells modified his views about American social peace and prosperity as a consequence of actual social upheavals.²⁷ There appeared, therefore, no inconsistency in Howells' theory: fiction should show life as it generally exists in social relationships, not as it appears in isolated and extreme instances. But when individual evils begin to have their influence on broad social groups, the seeker of truth must then take cognizance. Again and again in his criticism, Howells insisted on the general truth of fiction. In one of his late-life collections of criticism, he admitted that sometimes it is impossible to tell

whether the fiction which gives a vivid impression of reality does truly represent the conditions studied in it. . . . Perhaps the best test in this difficult matter is the quality of the art which created the picture. Is it clear, simple, unaffected? Is it true to human experience generally? If it

²⁵Criticism and Fiction, p. 62.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Carter's discussion of the date and revisions of the "smiling aspects" passage shows clearly that Howells did not intend for the meaning to be absolute (pp. 187-190).

is so, then it cannot well be false to the special human experience it deals with.²⁸

That Howells based his notion of the "smiling aspects" on Hawthorne's prefatory comment in The Marble Faun²⁹ is doubtful even though he did cite it in Criticism and Fiction. But Hawthorne's statement read along with Howells' late pronouncements gives further evidence of the likeness of the social consciousness of the two writers. Indeed, Hawthorne's words were half "whimsical," as Howells called them; but the passage in question shows Hawthorne's feeling that greater universal significance, hence greater truth, could be present in fiction when large groups or classes had been affected by the "picturesque and gloomy wrong" of individuals. The romance, especially, suffered from the "Commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight" because its very method precluded an extensive concern for surface detail of mundane life. Since Hawthorne was, like Howells, ultimately concerned with truth as it emerged from social interaction, he turned to those areas of life which would give him ample material for the romance as well as the needed social conflict. For The Scarlet Letter he used seventeenth-century Boston, where almost every individual sin was inevitably a social one. He utilized a special segment of society in The Blithedale Romance so that he might have for psychological study the close social

²⁸Literature and Life (New York, 1902), p. 278.

²⁹"No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land" (VI, 15).

friction that average American life failed to provide. In the last two completed novels Hawthorne removed his characters from an obvious relationship with society at large, but he still implied the social result of their actions.

C. RELIGION AND MORALITY

The influence of Christianity on the moral principles expounded by Hawthorne and Howells is obvious. But the skeptical position of both men with regard to supernatural revelation did not allow them to accept any system of ethics as divinely appointed and binding in the absolute sense.

Although his ancestors were all staunch Puritans in their formal church relationships, Hawthorne was never a member of any religious organization. He attended services only as an exception, and in his notebook he wrote: "My wife went to church in the forenoon;--but not so her husband. He loves the Sabbath, however, though he has no set way of observing it" ³⁰ The six months he spent at Brook Farm (April-November, 1841) did not make of him a Transcendentalist, and he attacked that philosophy, along with other liberal views, in "The Celestial Railroad." In Italy, Hawthorne found much to admire about the Catholic Church, "which so marvellously adapts itself to every human need" (VI, 392), and he was intrigued by the psychological efficacy of the confessional. But he felt Catholicism to be "not quite so pure as if it came

³⁰American Notebooks, p. 169.

from better cisterns, or from the original fountainhead" (X, 96). It was a powerful temporary purgative for the emotions, but was devoid of lasting moral effect on the mass of people. "If we could only see any good effects in their daily life," he wrote, "We might deem it an excellent thing to be able to find incense and a prayer always ascending, to which every individual may join his own. I really wonder that the Catholics are not better men and women" (X, 355). Hawthorne considered the Church of England "worse than papistry because it was a corruption of it"; and he found the ritual intolerable because of the minimized sermon.³¹

Those scholars who have described Hawthorne as a latter-day Puritan have erroneously interpreted external symbols as Hawthorne's literal acceptance of the tradition from which they were derived. Certainly Hawthorne inherited the seriousness of his forefathers, but his skepticism led him to despise their dogmatism and to ground his treatment of traditional sins in irony. The description of the punishment-bent crowd in The Scarlet Letter illustrates his ironic denunciation of legalism:

. . . there was very much the same solemnity of demeanor on the part of the spectators; as befitted a people amongst whom religion and law are almost identical, and in whose character both were so thoroughly interfused, that the mildest and severest acts of public discipline were alike made venerable and awful. Meagre, indeed, and cold was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for from such bystanders (V, 69-70)

Hawthorne's unique position between the old and the new, the traditional

³¹Randall Stewart, ed. The English Notebooks by Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1941), p. 451.

Puritan orthodoxy and nineteenth-century liberalism, gave him the opportunity for a fresh appraisal of moral problems and withheld him from dogmatic solutions.

As a result [wrote Bewley], there sometimes seems to be a discrepancy between Hawthorne's questions and answers if we ponder them for long; or rather let us say that the answers Hawthorne gives often exist in a carefully maintained margin of doubt.³²

In his study of Hawthorne's religion, Fick suggested that Hawthorne's detachment from organized religion was due to "the objective insufficiency of the various sects with which he was familiar."³³ Hawthorne's skepticism may have been strengthened by the confusion created by the many conflicting theologies that abounded in nineteenth-century New England. But the problem for Hawthorne had never been which church he would choose, but whether any church at all was necessary. As his comments about organized religion show, his greatest concern was moral effectiveness. Why, he felt, is an organization necessary when the moral stimulus for life can be found outside a church, in what he identified in "The Procession of Life" as "the principle of love" (II, 246). Hawthorne's wife pictured the beauty of his freedom from sectarianism:

It is so refreshing to find one person without theories of any kind, without party or sectarian tendency. . . . He does not meddle with Truth & it lays upon him like the blessed sunshine, full and broad. . . . When men nail platforms over the depths of soul, we cannot get farther than the platform.

³²Marius Bewley, The Eccentric Design: Form in the Classic American Novel (New York, 1959), p. 125.

³³Leonard J. Fick, The Light Beyond: A Study of Hawthorne's Theology (Westminster, Maryland, 1955), p. 155.

But to be drawn forever into the lower deeps, seeing only space beyond space, this is the true enchantment.³⁴

Howells, like Hawthorne, was a man without a church. Although he was brought up in an avidly Swedenborgian family, early in his life he ceased to believe in supernatural religion, his reading of Strauss's Life of Jesus marking the turning point of his religious thinking.³⁵ Howells shared Hawthorne's view that morality is the all-important product of religion. Creeds repulsed him, as he declared in a letter to his father in 1872:

In Swedenborg I'm disappointed because I find that he makes a certain belief the condition of entering the kingdom of heaven. I always tho't that it was a good life he insisted upon, and I inferred from such religious training as you gave me that it made no difference what I believed about the trinity, or the divinity of Christ, if only I did right from a love of doing right. . . . At times I'm half minded never to read another word of theology, but to cling blindly to the moral teachings of the gospels.³⁶

When in Italy, Howells perceived, just as Hawthorne had, that the Catholic Church was ineffectual in a permanent moral transformation of its adherents. Relative to the work of Protestant schools in Naples, he noted that the Italian boys "learn for the first time that it is a foolish shame to lie and cheat, and it would scarcely be surprising if some of them were finally persuaded that Honesty is the best Policy--a maxim that few Italians believe."³⁷ Catholicism seemed to him a religion of

³⁴Quoted by Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne, pp. 65-66.

³⁵The Road to Realism, p. 150.

³⁶Mildred Howells, ed. Life in Letters of William Dean Howells (New York, 1928), I, 165-166.

³⁷Italian Journeys (Boston, 1882), p. 138.

convenience, appealing mainly to the poor who had nothing else for solace. "In these costly temples of the eldest Christianity," he wrote, "the poor seem to enter upon their inheritance of the future, for it is they who frequent them most and possess them with the deepest sense of ownership."³⁸

Howells' sharpest criticism of Protestantism as it was known over most of the American frontier came in The Leatherwood God, written between 1904 and 1916.³⁹ Here is a Howells who, near the end of his life, was looking back upon the principal evils that revivalism had perpetrated in the name of good. Certainly this novel cannot be taken as a denunciation of all religion, or even all Protestantism; but in pointing up the atrocities of extreme emotionalism, Howells was sounding a warning to all groups that were resting on the precarious foundation of supernaturalism. Joseph Dylkes, the prophet of Leatherwood Creek, was able to get a hold on people because, as Squire Matthew Braille says, "Somewhere, tucked away in us, is the longing to know whether we'll live again, and the hope that we'll live happy."⁴⁰ But what is significantly absent from the effects of Dylkes' revivals is any moral improvement in the lives of the emotion-starved farmers.

Until he was thirty-five years old, Howells held to a personal

³⁸Venetian Life (Boston, 1887), II, 115.

³⁹Cady, The Realist at War (Syracuse, New York, 1958), p. 264.

⁴⁰The Leatherwood God (New York, 1916), p. 232.

belief in immortality,⁴¹ but being an empiricist and a realist, he was unable in later life to lift himself beyond mere hope. Still he did hope. His magazine articles from 1860 to 1920 show that he vacillated between momentary feelings of faith in supernaturalism and a tenacious trust in empiricism which denied everything that could not be seen.⁴² At any rate, Howells continued to exalt the moral side of Christianity; and it was his hope (though this began to diminish in his later novels) that man might profit from the ethical content of Christ's teachings. It was in Tolstoy, whom he read for the first time in 1885,⁴³ that Howells saw the perfect working of Christianity without the shackles of supernaturalism. He wrote that

Tolstoy's purpose is mainly to make others realize that religion, that Christ, is for this actual world here, and not for some potential world elsewhere. If this is what renders him so hateful to those who postpone the Divine justice to another state of being, they may console themselves with the reflection that his counsel to unselfish labor is almost universally despised. There is so small danger that the kingdom of heaven will come by virtue of his example, that none of all who pray for it need be the least afraid of its coming. In any event his endeavor for a right life cannot be forgotten.⁴⁴

⁴¹George N. Bennett, William Dean Howells: The Development of a Novelist (Norman, Oklahoma, 1959), p. 33.

⁴²Hannah Graham Belcher, "Howells's Opinions on the Religious Conflicts of His Age as Exhibited in Magazine Articles," American Literature, IV (November, 1943), 270.

⁴³Bennett, p. 162; Louis J. Budd, "William Dean Howells' Debt to Tolstoy," American Slavic and East European Review, IX (December, 1950), 294.

⁴⁴"The Philosophy of Tolstoy" in Criticism and Fiction and Other Essays, p. 171.

Any sort of moral legalism, whether it resulted from a supernaturalistic religion or from a self-conscious desire on the part of the individual to be dutiful, was as repellent to Howells as it was to Hawthorne. There was no true morality which was not founded on the unselfish love of one individual for another. In describing the nineteenth-century brand of Puritanism, Howells wrote: "Conduct and manners conform to a dead religious ideal; the wish to be sincere, the wish to be just, the wish to be righteous are before the wish to be kind, merciful, humble."⁴⁵ Dr. Grace Breen, one of Howells' most duty-bound characters, is illustrative of his antipathy: "At the end of the ends she was a Puritan; belated, misdated, if the reader will, and cast upon good works for the consolation which the Puritans formerly found in a creed."⁴⁶

D. THE IMMORALITY OF ISOLATION

The failings of individual men, therefore, were not to Hawthorne and Howells sins in the sense that they were committed against a personal deity or in violation of a religious creed. Man sins against man, and in this action personal ethics become the ethics of society at large. And though the ultimate concern of Hawthorne and Howells was the truth inherent in social relationships, the foundation for the whole harmonious structure of society, and hence the basis for general truth,

⁴⁵Literature and Life, p. 281.

⁴⁶Dr. Breen's Practice (New York, 1891), p. 270.

was personal ethics. The conduct of the individual is the core of society's conduct and is consequently the starting point for meticulous scrutiny. As long as one lives, he is inextricably bound to society, and he must regulate his own conduct with the view to his place in an honorable scheme of society. Hawthorne's "Wakefield" illustrates forcefully society's claim on the individual; for the voluntary exile retains "his original share of human sympathies" and is "still involved in human interests, while he ha[s] lost his reciprocal influence on them" (I, 162). But Wakefield has no right to refuse to bear his responsibilities, and he runs the "fearful risk of losing his place forever" (I, 164). In Howells' A Modern Instance there are two characters who embody the same idea--Bartley Hubbard and Ben Halleck. Both decide to escape their personal responsibilities as a part of society and to divorce themselves from the relationships to whose complexities they have already contributed. Hubbard "loses his place forever" by ignoring the grief he has caused. Halleck runs away for fear he will externalize his inner guilt of loving a married woman, but returns, subdues his futile passion, and accepts the avenue of the ministry to impart to others the lesson he has learned through suffering.

Eustace Atherton, in A Modern Instance, voices the idea of social linkage which permeates Howells as well as Hawthorne:

"We're bound together. No one sins or suffers to himself in a civilized state, --or religious state; it's the same thing. Every link in the chain feels the effect of the violence, more or less intimately. We rise or fall together in Christian society. It's strange that it should be so hard to realize a thing that every experience of life teaches. We keep

on thinking of offenses against the common good as if they were abstractions!"⁴⁷

This image, depicting mankind as bound together in a great chain, appears again and again in Hawthorne's fiction.⁴⁸ Both writers insisted that the unity of man is taught implicitly by the working of nature itself and that the evasion of mutual responsibility is a wrong against the grand scheme of the universe. As the narrator of the late novelette Fennel and Rue, Howells expounded the naturalness of humanity's tendency toward unity:

Continuity is so much the lesson of experience that in the course of a life by no means long it becomes the instinctive expectation. The event that has happened will happen again; it will prolong itself in a series of recurrences by which each one's episode shares in the unending history of all. The sense of this is so pervasive that humanity refuses to accept death itself as final. In the agonized affections, the shattered hopes, of those who remain, the severed life keeps on unbrokenly, and when time and reason prevail, at least as to the life here, the defeated faith appeals for fulfillment to another world, and the belief of immortality holds against the myriad years in which none of the numberless dead have made an indisputable sign in witness of it. The lost limb still reports its sensations to the brain; the fixed habit mechanically attempts its repetition when the conditions render it impossible.⁴⁹

No individual is ever a law unto himself, although the universal moral system has not been codified.

All personal sins in Hawthorne and Howells are exponents of a still greater sin--isolation. Through this generalization the two

⁴⁷A Modern Instance (Boston, 1882), p. 474.

⁴⁸See my article "Hawthorne and the Chain of Being," Modern Language Quarterly, XVIII (December, 1957), 282-294.

⁴⁹Fennel and Rue (New York, 1908), p. 19.

writers united their aesthetic creed and their ethical creed. The same thing that rendered a work of art false—following an extreme—characterized the individual who ventured too far from the common-ground position of all humanity. Isolation, of course, has within its nature egotism and pride, extremes of self-concern that form an impenetrable barrier against conciliation with society so long as they exist. As this chapter has explained earlier in the account of Hawthorne's and Howells' personal bouts with isolation, they were both aware of its soul-destroying possibilities. Julian Hawthorne commented regarding his father's own escape from personal isolation:

And the truth which Hawthorne perceived perhaps more profoundly than any other was that of the brotherhood of man. By inheritance and training he tended toward exclusiveness; but both his heart and his intellect showed him the shallowness of such a scheme of existence.⁵⁰

Thus it is understandable that, as Stewart observed, "the idea of isolation is so pervasive in Hawthorne's work that the consideration of all possible examples would include almost all of his characters."⁵¹ The same could be said of Howells. While isolation is, in the general sense, a mental (or spiritual) condition, it is externalized by palpable sins and precipitates numerous sinful by-products. A random listing of principal characters and their sins from an important work by Hawthorne and from one by Howells will illustrate the great force of

⁵⁰"Hawthorne's Philosophy," p. 89.

⁵¹"Introduction" to American Notebooks, p. lxxi. See also Darrel Abel, "The Theme of Isolation in Hawthorne," The Personalist, XXXII (January, April, 1951), 42-59, 182-190.

isolation in both.

The Scarlet Letter: Hester Prynne, having denied herself the exercise of her natural passion by a union with an older man, becomes an adulteress and then vaults intellectually beyond society's bounds for women. She is isolated physically and intellectually as long as her pride bars her from admitting her sins against society. Arthur Dimmesdale, because of his predilection for solitude and his preference for intellectualism over humanism, is an easy prey for illicit passion. After the union with Hester, his isolation becomes more severe spiritually, and his suffering is mitigated only by confession. Roger Chillingworth is isolated from the ways of the world through scholarship, enters into an unnatural marriage with Hester, and after learning of her unfaithfulness, estranges his soul forever through his demand for revenge on Dimmesdale.

A Modern Instance: Both the main characters, Marcia Gaylord and Bartley Hubbard, are isolated through extreme egotism and pride. Marcia, concerned only with satisfying her passion in getting Bartley, transgresses her own society's established restrictions on the actions of women in courtship. Once she has married Bartley, her jealousy and possessiveness drive him away from her and force her into becoming a miserable outcast from family and friends. Bartley's isolation is also founded on egotism. He is attracted to Marcia partly because of her beauty, but mainly because she feeds his pride with her excessive demonstrations of affection. Other than his self-centered love for Marcia, he cares nothing for other individuals. In his drive toward journalistic

success, he plagiarizes from his friends and exploits every perceptible weakness in his associates. Squire Gaylord, one of the most poignant examples of isolation in Howells, has literally shut himself up in his law office away from the world. He has indirectly contributed to Marcia's tragedy because, through his withdrawal, he has allowed her tempestuous nature to go unchanneled. Ben Halleck, as the result of a boyhood injury, has become isolated from an active part in the affairs of life. He broods upon his failures to enter into active participation in normal human activities and almost destroys his soul by turning his back on humanity. Clara Kingsbury Atherton, representative of the wealthy do-gooders whose philanthropy is only self-indulgence, has to invent ways to be useful to society without diminishing her own fortune. Through the temporizing effect of her marriage to Atherton, she achieves a fuller sympathy for others, though she still views human problems from the comfortable heights of her social position.

Implicit within the fictional theme of the evils of individual isolation is criticism of "romanticistic" philosophy. And a further fusing of the aesthetic and ethical in Hawthorne's and Howells' works is exemplified in this criticism. Both sought to capture the essence of true reality, as did the romantics; but what set them apart from the romantics was their intense desire to expose false conceptions about life and its possibilities. Optimism, one of the principal attitudes of "positive romanticism,"⁵² is signally absent from Hawthorne and

⁵²See Morse Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," PMLA, LXVI (March, 1951), 5-23.

diminishes in the works of Howells as his career drew toward its close in the early twentieth century.

"With authority and perspective," one critic commented, Hawthorne "dissented from the romantic radicalism of his day."⁵³ In the first place, he had absolutely no faith in the perfectibility of man. As Fick pointed out by way of correcting a common misconception about Hawthorne, this elemental imperfection of man is not total depravity, but deprivation, a tendency to evil as "one of the consequences of original sin."⁵⁴ To Hawthorne, it is possible for man to change his evil into good, but not into all good. Man can refine his own nature, as eventually do Hester and Dimmesdale in The Scarlet Letter. Total perfection, however, is left to heaven; and man cannot expect to find it on earth, as "The Birthmark" and "Young Goodman Brown" demonstrate. Both science and reform movements were suspect in Hawthorne's eyes, not when they aimed at gradual improvement, but when they promised earthly perfection.⁵⁵ Even the artist, Hawthorne explained in "The Artist of the Beautiful," is dwelling in fanciful isolation from reality when he plans to create the perfect masterpiece. The pessimism that pervades Hawthorne's works, expressed in theological terms, is due not to his belief that no men

⁵³Henry S. Kariel, "Man Limited: Nathaniel Hawthorne's Classicism," South Atlantic Quarterly, LII (October, 1953), 542.

⁵⁴Fick, p. 98.

⁵⁵See R. B. Heilman, "Hawthorne's 'The Birthmark': Science as Religion," South Atlantic Quarterly, XLVIII (October, 1949), 575-583; and Roy R. Male, Jr., "Toward The Waste Land: The Theme of The Elitist-dale Romance," College English, XVI (February, 1955), 277-283, 295.

will be saved, but to the belief that so few will.

Many critics still see Howells as voicing optimism toward the eventual dominance of the "smiling aspects of life." Lionel Trilling, for example,⁵⁶ attributed Howells' twentieth-century decline in popularity to the novelist's lack of concern with evil, which is a present-day obsession. Carl Van Doren made a typical comment when he wrote: "He clung to the day as Hawthorne to the night. Like Emerson, Howells closed his eyes to evil and its innumerable traces."⁵⁷ But Ludwig Lewisohn, despite his overall deprecation of Howells and his neo-Puritan milieu, saw more under the surface of Howells than most modern commentators have seen. He wrote:

What one is not surprised to find is that at the core of his long and in all outward circumstances happy and fortunate career, there is a note of guilt and gloom, of preoccupation with death and with the disasters of the social order.⁵⁸

Although many of Howells' early novels are optimistic and show faith in the ability of American character eventually to recognize true reality and shake off sentimentalism, there are, even from Howells' early years of fiction writing, a number of examples of human failure. Howells' third novel, A Foregone Conclusion, features the pathetic Don Ippolito, who has foolish dreams of making over his life in America after he has abandoned the despised priesthood. Don Ippolito is barely

⁵⁶"William Dean Howells and the Roots of Modern Taste" in The Opposing Self (New York, 1955), pp. 76-103.

⁵⁷The American Novel, 1789-1939 (New York, 1940), p. 136. Cf. F. O. Matthiessen's comment, quoted in Chapter I, p. 9, n. 19.

⁵⁸The Story of American Literature (New York, 1939), p. 245.

saved--through death-bed repentance! Dr. Boynton, of The Undiscovered Country, barely lives long enough to realize that it is not within man's province to understand completely the nature of the spiritual world. The title characters of Mrs. Farrell and Dr. Breen's Practice are both incurable romantics. Always taking delight in toying with all lives which touch hers, Mrs. Farrell is oblivious of the near-tragic results of her "private theatricals." Grace Breen, though she nearly loses a patient through death because of her inordinate desire to be useful, never learns the true basis of human understanding. A Modern Instance, which closed out Howells' first decade of novel writing in 1882, can be compared only with The Blithedale Romance for so large a number of characters in a single novel devoid of moral equilibrium.

During the late eighties, just after he had become acquainted with Tolstoy's Christian humanism, there is a slightly optimistic upturn in Howells' themes--especially those that deal with broad areas of society. But in the midst of the period of general faith, there appeared The Shadow of a Dream, which is as dark a pronouncement of man's fatal susceptibility to fancy and unreality as Howells ever wrote and which is perhaps as close as he came to real tragedy prior to his last decade. Although he continued until his death to intersperse slight but entertaining comedies of manners among the more serious works, his tendency from A Hazard of New Fortunes (1889) on was toward a gradual darkening of theme, culminating in the bitter irony of New Leaf Mills and the

grotesqueness of The Leatherstocking. Some critics⁵⁹ have seen the novels after the late eighties as lacking the artistic accomplishment of the earlier ones, but the graver late novels present a more perceptive study of the undercurrents of the social order and delve further into the souls of the characters in order to extricate the individual evil that has tainted society at large.⁶⁰

Can it be said, then, that Howells was a pessimistic writer? An answer cannot be given without equivocation, for a survey of Howells' works shows an early optimism but a gradually-increasing doubt as to man's ever coming of age. When only the fictional family circle was involved in matters of courtship, marriage, and summer vacation, Howells showed the "smiling aspects of life" and implied the general amiability of human character. But when he broadened his vision to look into the fundamental problems of human existence, he saw narrowness and even perversity which he could not ignore. American character was attractive in many instances because it had not undergone the baptism of fire. As Bennett observed, Howells was decidedly not optimistic "about individuals

⁵⁹For example, Robert P. Falk, who wrote: "Howells's aggressive championing of humanitarian causes after 1886 coincided with a decline in the artistic level of his own fiction" ("The Rise of Realism, 1871-1891" in Transitions in American Literary History [Durham, North Carolina, 1953], pp. 381-382.)

⁶⁰See Lloyd Morris's discussion of Howells' later works, in which he concludes that "the best work of his old age equaled in charm, and exceeded in power, that which first won him fame." ("Conscience in the Parlor: William Dean Howells," The American Scholar, XVIII [Autumn, 1949], 407-416.)

and individual relationships."⁶¹ The individual, obviously, was afflicted by evil; and unless this evil could be mitigated by improved human perception, it would remain unchecked and might reach terrifying proportions. "Howells did not believe in innate depravity," Bennett wrote further, "but neither did he underestimate human frailties and shortcomings."⁶² The union of Howells' thought with Hawthorne's shows itself to be especially strong with regard to their concept of evil, its causes and cures.

While both Hawthorne and Howells were pessimistic about the complete perfectibility of human character, they differed from the Calvinists in that they believed man must bear a responsibility in the cause and cure of his own sins. Sin being grounded in wilful isolation, it follows that one strays from righteousness under his own volition and that his withdrawal affects others. The sinner is not beyond the possibility of redeeming himself until he has finally turned his back forever on social responsibility. In The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne had Roger Chillingworth make an explicit statement that a series of wrongdoing is initiated by the first willing enactment of sin. Chillingworth says to Hester: "'We have wronged each other Mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relationship with my decay'" (V, 97). Howells' Silas Lapham expresses the same principle when he analyzes, in the presence of the Reverend Mr.

⁶¹Bennett, p. 210.

⁶²Ibid., p. 211.

Sewell, the cause of his personal difficulties: "'Sometimes . . . I get to thinking it all over, and it seems to me I done wrong about Rogers in the first place; that the whole trouble came from that. It was just like starting a row of bricks.'"⁶³

E. SYMPATHY OR COMPLICITY

How could this avalanche of sin be arrested since Hawthorne and Howells, as it has been noted, had no faith in religious or moral legislation? A greater social consciousness was certainly the answer, but this was not to be a purely emotional and sentimental corrective. Nor could intellect alone direct one into the proper way. There had to be a remedy that would destroy the breeding place of sin in the dichotomous disposition of man. This remedy must reconcile the discordant elements in the nature of the individual: the tendency to cold intellectualism on the one hand and irrational sentimentalism on the other. In their advocacy of this solution Hawthorne and Howells again exhibit their avoidance of extremes and their great propensity for compromise.

Hawthorne's "The Gentle Boy" illustrates the median position that Hawthorne proffered as a guide for righteousness. In the story there are two extremes: the hard-hearted, intellectual attitude of the Puritans and the emotional, fanatical nature of the Quakers and of Catharine, who has to abandon her own child because of her insatiable

⁶³The Rise of Silas Lapham, Modern Library Edition (New York, 1951), p. 323.

longing to test her faith in fire. The compromise position acceptable to Hawthorne is represented by the character Dorothy, whose heart is opened to Ilbrahim and whose intellect refuses the notion of the intolerant Puritans that the boy is tainted because he is the son of Quakers. From the allegorical standpoint Hawthorne called Dorothy "rational piety" (I, 104), and as such she has special significance in personifying Hawthorne's union of heart and intellect in the establishment of a sound morality.⁶⁴ Matthiessen's statement regarding the balance between reality and imagination in Hawthorne's art is also pertinent in this instance: "Such was the equilibrium which Hawthorne strove for in his life, and which, when disregarded by his characters, brought about the tragic situations that were the burden of his art."⁶⁵

The heart-head equilibrium is also demonstrated in Howells' novels as being imperative to sound personal conduct. The Reverend Mr. Sewell, of The Minister's Charge, blames his own imbalance for the troubles of Lemuel Barker. Sewell has encouraged Barker's poetic efforts because of "my goodness of heart, which I didn't take the precaution of mixing with goodness of head before I used it."⁶⁶ A Howells character who reveals a balance similar to that of Dorothy in "The

⁶⁴The failure to achieve this balance Hawthorne termed the "Unpardonable Sin." See American Notebooks, p. 106.

⁶⁵F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (London, 1941), p. 257. See further Matthiessen's discussion of "Hawthorne's Psychology," pp. 337-351; and Donald A. Ringe, "Hawthorne's Psychology of Head and Heart," PMLA, LXV (March, 1950), 120-132.

⁶⁶The Minister's Charge (Boston, 1887), p. 33.

Gentle Boy" is Dr. Edward Olney in An Imperative Duty. Olney is both a man of science and of the finest cultural sensibilities. When he first learns that attractive Rhoda Aldgate is the daughter of an octoroon, his emotional revulsion obscures for him all of the girl's good qualities. Olney has earlier discoursed abstractly on social equality of the races; but when Mrs. Meredith tells him of Rhoda's background, he "recoiled from the words, in a turmoil of emotion for which there is no term but disgust."⁶⁷ After tempering the negative feeling with common sense, Olney is able to allow an unaffected love for the girl to fill his heart. And it is he who convinces her, with perceptive reasoning, that her romantic plan to go south to find her mother's people would be needlessly sacrificing herself without necessarily benefiting her dark relatives. He said:

"Yes, you would have some such duty toward them, perhaps, if you had voluntarily chosen your part with them--if you had ever consented to be of their kind. Then it would be base and cowardly to desert them I doubt if that sort of specific devotion would do much good. The way to elevate them is to elevate us, to begin with. It will be an easy matter to deal with these simple-hearted folks after we've got into the right way ourselves."⁶⁸

An unbalanced, egocentric attitude toward reality underlies the failure of many characters to achieve a satisfactory relationship with society. In the relationship of just two people--in marriage, for example--there is an inherent mandate for the same balance between intellect and emotion that would achieve harmony in broader social

⁶⁷An Imperative Duty (New York, 1891), p. 44.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 443.

interaction. The necessity for a betrothed couple to come to grips with reality is the central situation in Hawthorne's "The Maypole of Merry Mount" and Howells' April Hopes, two narratives which employ dissimilar methods but which exploit the same fundamental idea.

In "The Maypole of Merry Mount," Hawthorne depicted the life-and-death struggle of "jollity and gloom," and caught between the riotous paganism of the Merry Mounters and the dismal sobriety of the Puritans are two young people emotionally attracted to each other. They plan their marriage in accord with the foolishness of Merry Mount, where "when Thought and Wisdom came, even these unwelcome guests were led astray by the crowd of vanities which they should have put to flight" (I, 75). But true devotion and understanding have changed the attitude of the lovers:

No sooner had their hearts glowed with real passion than they were sensible of something vague and unsubstantial in their former pleasures, and felt a dreary presentiment of inevitable change. From the moment that they truly loved, they had subjected themselves to earth's doom of care and sorrow, and troubled joy, and had no more a home at Merry Mount.
(Ibid.)

They realize that life is full of cares and that sentiment alone will not cause them to disappear. As reality overtakes them in the form of the entrance of the Puritans, "never had their youthful beauty seemed so pure and high as when its glow was chastened by adversity" (I, 82). Thus the unhappy ending is really happy, for a proper marriage could never have endured in the delusion of the couple's former lives.

On the other hand, the apparently happy ending of April Hopes is really an ominous sign that the future of the deluded newlyweds will

inevitably be unhappy. Howells' young people, Dan Maverick and Alice Pasmer, live, like the Merry Mounters, in a romantic dream-world. Dan is constantly buoyed to ecstatic heights by his emotional reaction to Alice's beauty and youthful charm, and Alice alternates between fits of jealousy and melodramatic resolutions to give up Dan because she is not worthy of him. In giving her reason for breaking their engagement after Dan has shown harmless courtesies to two women, Alice says: "I wished . . . to show you that I loved you for something above yourself and myself--far above either--"⁶⁹ After their second engagement is broken because of Alice's flair for histrionics and illusions of herself as a self-sacrificing female, the two are finally married. The dubious outcome of this insubstantial union is pointed up by the conversation of two wedding guests:

"Poor fellow!" said Mrs. Brinkley.
 "Why, Mrs. Brinkley, do you still feel that way?" asked Miss Cotton, with a certain distress. "It seems to me that if ever two young people had the promise of happiness, they have. Just see what their love has done for them already!"
 "And you still think that in these cases love can do everything?"⁷⁰

Their incompatibility to each other and with the world, which they must face with monotonous regularity, is implicit in Howells' final ironic words:

If he had been different she would not have asked him to be frank and open; if she had been different, he might have

⁶⁹April Hopes (New York, 1887), p. 340.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 483.

been frank and open. This was the beginning of their married life.⁷¹

Such lack of perception on the part of Alice and Dan, in contrast to the compromise of the lovers of Merry Mount, is an important phase of the tragic isolation that afflicts the characters of Hawthorne and Howells. But a blending of common sense and a natural largeness of heart is the solution prescribed by both writers. With this reconciliation of discordant elements within the individual, there comes, in natural succession, the reconciliation of the individual and other people in his environment. The resultant positive relationship is sympathy,⁷² or, as it is called in the novels of Howells, complicity.⁷³

The absence of common sense on the part of many of Hawthorne's characters renders the true good unrecognizable. Oftentimes, also, what they, in their pure intellectualism, think is best for themselves and for society is all wrong, for it is based on their own self-gratification. As an example, Hawthorne showed that for Hester Prynne the intellectual freedom of her isolated cottage becomes nothing but another sin as she dreams of radical modifications in woman's social status. She deceives herself that hers is the truly humane approach. But she is only smarting from her own society-approved punishment. Once she

⁷¹Ibid., p. 484.

⁷²One of the few scholars to give deserving technical analysis to this important phase of Hawthorne's thought is Roy R. Male in "Hawthorne and the Concept of Sympathy," PMLA, LXVIII (March, 1953), 138-149.

⁷³A systematic tracing of the development of this concept can be found in Arnold B. Fox, "Howells' Doctrine of Complicity," Modern Language Quarterly, XIII (March, 1952), 56-60.

has softened her heart with the recognition that no one can escape social entanglements, she knows that society can best be served, and perhaps improved gradually, by complying with its precepts at present and by sharing and thus lessening the sorrows and perplexities of others. Holgrave, in The House of the Seven Gables, likewise finds peace within himself and with his environment when he ceases to speculate on the relationships of men with the cold eye of the social scientist. And he stays Maule's curse forever when his pure love for Phoebe tempers the prejudice he has inherited toward the Pyncheon family. In The Marble Faun, Miriam and Donatello acquire a full sympathy for the social order when they allow common sense to modify their romantic notion that they can be a law unto themselves. One does extreme violence to Hawthorne's entire system of social morality when he mistakes a character's legitimate complaint against the social order for the author's approval of individual withdrawal when immediate reform is not in the offing.⁷⁴

Whereas a few of Hawthorne's characters are able to restore harmony within themselves and achieve a sympathetic relationship with their fellows, there are many who fail. A list of Hawthorne's tragic failures would include figures from nearly all his works. In the major novels

⁷⁴Just as some critics interpreted Hawthorne as a neo-Puritan, others considered him a rampant rebel against antiquated moral and social systems. An example of the latter is Lloyd Morris, who wrote that "The Scarlet Letter enunciated Nathaniel's intellectual radicalism with a directness and detachment which he was never again to equal. . . . it was an inexorably realistic study of the world as it is, in which Nathaniel had justified the self-reliant individual, and expressed his contempt for the society which hedges that individual about with conventions devoid of spiritual validity." (The Rebellious Puritan [London, 1928], p. 230.)

there are Roger Chillingworth, Zenobia, and Hollingsworth; in the tales there are Ethan Brand, Goodman Brown, Dr. Rappaccini, and Aylmer--to name a few of the most obvious examples. Hawthorne's pessimism is forcefully in evidence when one begins to make a comparative list of those characters who are in a state of grace and those who are outside.

Howells' doctrine of complicity was based also on the individual's finding himself first and then working out a harmonious relationship with society. Unalloyed rationalism and extreme romanticism are both foes of complicity. Even in the early social comedies there is a foreshadowing of Howells' serious concern with the balance of attitude that would be the heart of his later novels. In his first real novel, A Chance Acquaintance, Howells drew Miles Arbuton as an example of a man who would allow a too-rational attitude toward social position to overrule his tender feelings for Kitty Ellison. And he is then rejected by this girl whom he has subconsciously marked as his social inferior and is left to return to his isolated, unfeeling world of "Proper Boston." With The Rise of Silas Lapham Howells began to develop further his view of the dire consequences of one individual's responsibility to another by showing how Lapham's imprudence with Rogers is the first cause of all the grief in the novel. Notwithstanding the lack of maliciousness in Lapham's crude nature, he is still shown to be responsible because he is directed too much by individualistic feeling. Lapham's sin has been one of egotism coupled with ignorance of proper conduct.

Howells' notebook jottings for The Minister's Charge give a dramatized definition of complicity:

Barker from thinking how S. depresses & J. elevates him, dimly conceives of the notion of elevating others (Complicity.) In this way he is to escape from all that's sordid in his own life.⁷⁵

And in this novel there came the first detailed exposition of the doctrine. The minister of an upper-class Boston church, the Reverend Mr. David Sewell, casually praises the verse-making of a country boy, Lemuel Barker. On the basis of this encouragement, Barker comes to the big city in the hope of making, through literary work, enough money to improve life for his impoverished mother and sister. Confronted by Barker in the city, the Reverend Mr. Sewell has to confess to the boy that his compliments were not to imply that Lemuel is a good poet, but to give him encouragement. Destitute, the inexperienced country boy goes from one harrowing big-city experience to another and is even jailed for a theft he does not commit. Lemuel becomes involved with a crude tubercular young girl and comes near ruining his life when he almost marries her out of pity. Finally Sewell recognizes that he has always taken a condescending attitude toward Lemuel even though he has thought he was interested in his life. He delivers a magnificent sermon on "Complicity," the lesson of which he wishes he himself had learned earlier. The essence of this discourse forms also the central idea of Howells' ethics:

. . . no one for good or for evil, for sorrow or joy, for sickness or health, stood apart from his fellows, but each was bound to the highest and the lowest by ties that centered in the hand of God. No man . . . sinned or suffered to himself alone; his error and his pain darkened and afflicted men who never heard of his name. If a community was corrupt, if an age was immoral,

⁷⁵"Indian Summer Notebook." Manuscript in Houghton Library.

it was not because of the vicious, but the virtuous who fancied themselves indifferent spectators.⁷⁶

Although complicity is again the thesis in Annie Kilburn, it is by no means successfully applied by the characters in the novel. Herein can be seen Howells' early pessimism concerning the final individual acceptance of the philosophy. Egotism, or spiritual near-sightedness (personified most piquantly by the title character), is shown to be the eternal foe of complete concord between human hearts. In spite of her obsession to do good among the poor of Hatboro', Annie is always the aristocrat in her sensibilities and never shares the feelings of the factory workers until one of the children whom she has personally cared for dies. The Reverend Mr. Peck, the one person who finally gets through to Annie that she can accomplish no good without sharing experiences with the poor, neglects his own child because of his humanitarian enthusiasm. Mr. Gerrish, a self-made businessman, makes splendid public donations to organized charity, but mistreats his own employees and is a fanatical advocate of laissez-faire economics. Mr. Putney, the lawyer, is perceptive of the nature of society's ills, but he is so ill himself from alcoholism that his talk and action are both ineffectual. Dr. Morrell, whom Annie marries, is perhaps the only one who exemplifies the successful working of complicity. He is a dedicated physician, does his work unostentatiously, and achieves a true unity of feeling between himself and his patients.

In A Hazard of New Fortunes tragedy enters the family of Jacob

⁷⁶The Minister's Charge (Boston, 1887), p. 458.

Dryfoos because of the old man's failure to recognize the principle of complicity. In his all-too-successful efforts to make money for his family, Dryfoos actually destroys them by bringing them into a life for which they are ill suited. The most disastrous result of his economic rise is the death of his son Conrad, whom Dryfoos has alienated by failing to understand his humanitarian sympathies. Howells' fullest explicit statement of complicity is found in The Quality of Mercy. Here, too, tragedy follows upon an elderly businessman's failure to regard the future consequences to himself and to his daughters when he embezzles \$50,000. But in this novel Howells placed the greater blame on society at large for providing an environment in which an embezzler might be bred. Brice Maxwell, Howells' spokesman, exposes the problem in a newspaper editorial:

He declared that no good citizen could wish a defaulter to escape the penalty of his offense against society; but it behooved society to consider how far it was itself responsible, which it might well do without ignoring the responsibility of the criminal.⁷⁷

Howells did not excuse the individual for his sins, for he was constantly aware of the real and far-reaching results of one sin in the creation of innumerable others. But Howells felt, as did Hawthorne, that society must learn that it protects itself when it eliminates its own evil influence, for the results of evil will turn right back upon the original sinners. Although the doctrine of complicity was much more obviously stated in the novels of the late eighties and the early nineties,

⁷⁷The Quality of Mercy (New York, 1892), p. 161.

Howells continued in all his serious later works to imply the reciprocal responsibility of society and the individual. The failure of his characters from Annie Kilburn onward to live by this principle indicates that Howells was fully convinced that the "smiling aspects of life" were "changing for the worse." Certain public events of the late eighties and the nineties called his attention to broad social forces whose influence on individual character was lessening the chance for the individual to achieve moral equilibrium.

As has been noted, Hawthorne and Howells were ultimately concerned with moral truth as it exists on the larger social scale; and the careful examination of individual character was only a step toward the synthesis of a broad social morality. Since sympathy, or complicity, is reciprocal, corporate society naturally has a tremendous influence on the individual. The structure of society, therefore, must be such that it fosters the proper conduct of its many members. Thus the morality of Hawthorne and Howells reached out into the areas of economics and politics. The two writers believed that economic inequalities, especially, are the foe of true human understanding; and only an equalitarian society, based on sound political principles, is the way toward eliminating this barrier. About the broader social evils these two writers had much to say, but a discussion of this phase of their moral concern will be reserved for the next chapter.

Notwithstanding the great influence of Tolstoy's Christian humanism on Howells' morality, the doctrine of complicity was latent in his mind, as his earliest novels reveal, long before he gave it a

conspicuous label. The agreement of this concept with Hawthorne's idea of sympathy is amply demonstrated by a comparison of the two writers. It is quite understandable how two men who underwent similar youthful experiences and who were confronted by like social tensions when they reached maturity would come to a common conclusion as to the proper deportment of man. The agreement of Howells with Hawthorne that prose fiction should represent the "highest morality" if it is to reveal the truth about life appears to have led to further accordance on the means of exemplifying that morality and truth.

CHAPTER IV

THE ETHICS OF SOCIETY

A. DEMOCRATIC ORIGINS

Small-town middle-class life of the days before the American industrial revolution nourished the youthful personalities of Hawthorne and Howells and inculcated social ideals that were to remain with them throughout life. Howells' boyhood was three decades later than Hawthorne's; but since the frontier had moved westward, he felt many of the same social influences that molded Hawthorne. Both writers grew to maturity under the influence of a way of life based upon a close-knit family group and integrated by the common interests and problems of the farm or small-town business. This early environment dictated to a great extent the direction that the later social criticism of Hawthorne and Howells would take. Although both young men were more retiring and inactive than the typical youth of like economic and social circumstances, their intellectual awareness of their environment led to a lifelong emotional approval of its basic democratic elements. They were active enough, however, to feel the vibrant energy of the creative individualism which marked the American character of that day. Hawthorne encountered it in the office of his uncles' stagecoach line and on the Salem wharves; Howells met it thirty years later in newspaper offices of Ohio, an area vitalized by the restless activity that had just played itself out in the East.

Hawthorne's boyhood was spent in the small but busy port town of Salem, Massachusetts, though the widowed Mrs. Hawthorne and her children lived intermittently in Raymond, Maine, in a modest country house provided by her brothers.¹ The Hawthornes (or Hathorne, as the name was originally spelled) had all been relatively prosperous and quite prominent in the early affairs of the Massachusetts colony,² but after the death of her sea-captain husband at the age of twenty-six, Nathaniel's mother was left penniless.³ Mrs. Hawthorne's family, the Mannings, who were prosperous but not rich farmers and businessmen, supplied the needs of her and her children. It was Robert Manning who paid Nathaniel's way through Bowdoin College; and the boy was earlier employed for a few hours each day in the Manning brothers' stage office in Salem.⁴

Genial family life was the heart of Hawthorne's youthful existence, and the comforts of this relationship in his youth no doubt prepared him for the happy domesticity of his own marriage. He lacked a father; the Manning brothers--especially Robert--were there to fill the gap, though Nathaniel's immediate guidance was in the hands of women: his mother, sisters, and maiden aunts. Through his relationship to the Mannings and to their affairs, Hawthorne learned the sacred meaning of family independence, social as well as economic. On the other hand, he

¹Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography (New Haven, 1948), p. 5.

²Mark Van Doren, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1949), pp. 4-7.

³Ibid., p. 8.

⁴Newton Arvin, Hawthorne (Boston, 1929), pp. 13-15.

understood, by observing the Maine farmers and trappers and the Salem small businessmen, the mutual benefits of friendly and voluntary co-operation.⁵ Although Hawthorne had a comfortable youth, he by no means lived luxuriously; and not until the years of the Liverpool consulate did he banish the specter of poverty that constantly clouded his life. He learned early that wealth was not prerequisite for contentment and that development of the finer sensibilities was not dependent upon one's economic status. His lifelong willing acquiescence to moderate circumstances can, of course, be attributed in part to his natural love of literature, which showed itself in his early boyhood and gave aim to his life from that time forward.⁶

At Bowdoin College Hawthorne established a lifelong relationship with the Democratic Party when he formed close friendships there with a number of young men from prominent Jacksonian Democratic families, including Franklin Pierce, future President of the United States.⁷ Even though the Democrats at this time were powerful in Massachusetts, they were not the party of "respectable" Salem. Of this upperclass life Hawthorne had never been a part,⁸ though his ancestors had been prominent in the theocratic government of old Salem. But it was his feeling for

⁵A detailed account of Hawthorne's Raymond and Salem background can be found in Robert Cantwell, Nathaniel Hawthorne: The American Years (New York, 1948), pp. 35-54.

⁶For Hawthorne's early literary inclinations, see Stewart, pp. 4-5, 8-11.

⁷Stewart, pp. 19-20.

⁸Van Doren, p. 29.

elemental things and for ordinary people, not a mere accident of circumstances, that kept him a Democrat. That Hawthorne concurred with the Democrats' early strident anti-intellectualism is doubtful, for he had inherited aristocratic refinement notwithstanding his lack of money or position.⁹ Although not of great wealth, the party members with whom he was first associated were men of gentility, and after his literary success he became friends with many of the prominent New England literati and intellectual luminaries. He did, however, hold throughout his life a personal admiration for Andrew Jackson.¹⁰ The Democrats to Hawthorne represented a responsible and benevolent individualism. As a Democrat, he could be a liberal or a conservative as he chose. With the Democrats he was able to exercise politically his love for the ordinary (as he did artistically in his early Salem sketches) and maintain a middle-ground attitude toward the issues which divided men into extremist factions. In short, Hawthorne found affinity with whatever encouraged the independent but sympathetic state of the human heart.¹¹

For his allegiance to the Democratic Party, and especially for his campaign biography of Franklin Pierce, Hawthorne was awarded, in 1853, after several disappointments, the consulate at Liverpool.¹² While in England, he had ample opportunity to compare the new world with

⁹See Austin Warren, "Introduction" to Nathaniel Hawthorne: Representative Selections (New York, 1934), p. 1.

¹⁰Van Doren, p. 98. Also see Warren, p. xlix.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Stewart, p. 140.

the old, and what he saw supported his belief in the superiority of the new democracy. Hawthorne's avid Americanism was in line with that of a subsidiary element of the Democratic Party called "Young America," a group of writers who had as their aim propagandizing for the democratic way of life. Although Hawthorne was never a formal member of the group, he had sold stories to their principal organ, the Democratic Review, and he concurred in spirit with their purposes and ideals.¹³ Yet he was never a political theorist per se, and he was suspicious of professional politicians, whose "hearts wither away, and die out of their bodies."¹⁴ On the whole Hawthorne was most taken with the spirit of compromise of the Northern Democrats, a spirit which can be felt in his basic social philosophy.

Howells' early environment was in many ways like Hawthorne's. Only the external circumstances were changed. The American frontier of Ohio was the setting of Howells' youth. While the Hawthornes and the Howellses were of the same social level, William Dean Howells never enjoyed the economic security that Hawthorne had through the Mannings. Poverty was a reality rather than a threat in the Howells family, though they were never actually in dire want, primarily because of the ceaseless energy of William Cooper Howells, William Dean's father. Failure

¹³Lawrence S. Hall, Hawthorne: Critic of Society (New Haven, 1944), pp. 104-105. For Hawthorne's patronage by the critics of the Democratic Review, see John Stafford, The Literary Criticism of "Young America" (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1952), passim. A discussion of the basic tenets of the "Young America" group can be found in Perry Miller, The Raven and the Whale (New York, 1956).

¹⁴Quoted by Warren, p. xlvi.

meant nothing to the Howellses except a new challenge. Before William Dean was nineteen, the family had lived in six different towns and the father had held six different jobs.¹⁵ Only when the elder Howells turned to full-time newspaper publishing and editing in Hamilton, Ohio, did the family begin to enjoy a small degree of financial stability.¹⁶ Still the father's hopping from one newspaper job to another continued.

The unity and sufficiency of family life was constantly in evidence around the youthful Howells. In Martins Ferry, where William Dean was born, all the Howellses and many of the Deans (Mrs. Howells' family) lived within a stone's throw of one another. In Martins Ferry William Cooper Howells had begun carpentry and house painting through the instigation of the Deans, and later he was to join his own brothers in a cooperative milling business.¹⁷ William Cooper was able to make his editing and publishing moderately profitable because his sons were enlisted as helpers. Just as the Howellses and the Deans possessed a great sense of human fellowship, their love of freedom and independence was tremendous. In Years of My Youth, Howells recollected the freedom of spirit that characterized the Deans. Mrs. Howells' brothers had lived for a time in a slave state and considered slavery acceptable. But when an abolitionist was refused a place to speak at Martins Ferry,

¹⁵Robert L. Hough, The Quiet Rebel (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1959), p. 6.

¹⁶Edwin H. Cady, The Road to Realism (Syracuse, New York, 1956), pp. 13-14.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 10, 34.

the Deans invited him, despite the hostility of the neighbors, to hold his meeting at their mother's house.¹⁸ Howells' father doggedly followed both a political party and religion (the Whig and Swedenborgianism) which were in the minority in most of his places of residence.¹⁹ Always an independent thinker, the elder Howells stood almost alone in Hamilton when he repudiated Zachary Taylor and the Whigs because of their antagonism to the Free Soilers.²⁰ After moving to Jefferson as editor of the Sentinel, William Cooper became a member of the newly-formed Republican Party and a full-fledged abolitionist.²¹ Being very close to his father, who had always guided his studies and encouraged his early creative efforts,²² William Dean Howells understandably accepted the principles of the Republicans. He, like Hawthorne, wrote a campaign biography for a future President--Abraham Lincoln--and consequently was awarded a consulate--in Venice.²³

Howells' environment during his boyhood years tended to mold his character in refinement as well as sympathy toward elemental human values. Through guidance received in a self-cultivated though unmoneyed family, he developed a highly sensitive and even polished personality;

¹⁸Years of My Youth (New York, 1916), p. 15.

¹⁹The Road to Realism, pp. 14-16.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 27-28.

²¹Ibid., pp. 42-43.

²²About his father Howells wrote: "If my mother was the heart, he was the soul of our family life." (Years of My Youth, p. 97.)

²³The Road to Realism, p. 90.

and by actual experience with deprivation and also with the happy results of friendly cooperation, he acquired a lasting faith in living democracy.²⁴ Howells, also like Hawthorne, moved among the intellectual aristocracy of New England; but whereas his position as novelist and editor (and, too, the husband of the daughter of a prominent and influential family) opened the doors of "Proper Boston" to him, he never really became a part of that world. To be sure, he personally sought a comfortable life (so did Hawthorne, though he was not so successful in attaining it as Howells), but his sympathies always lay with the people who were fighting the same battles that he and his family had fought back in Ohio.²⁵ Hawthorne and Howells exemplify the uniquely American character of the genteel democrat,²⁶ in which two extremes converged in the making of a temperate social and political philosophy.

On the surface it would appear that Hawthorne and Howells were at opposite political poles. Formally they were, but in general belief they were not. Hawthorne's espousal of the Democrats came as a reaction against aristocratic Federalism, and Howells' membership in the Republican Party was a repudiation of what he thought was the inhumane position

²⁴See Walter Fuller Taylor, The Economic Novel in America (Chapel Hill, 1942), pp. 214-222; and Henry B. Schwartz, "The Americanism of William Dean Howells," Methodist Review, CI (March, 1918), 226-232.

²⁵For Howells' relationship to "Proper Boston," see The Road to Realism, pp. 222-223; also Cady, The Gentleman in America (Syracuse, New York, 1949), pp. 187-190.

²⁶Howells is characterized as "The Genteel Radical" by Bernard Smith in his article in The Saturday Review of Literature, XI (August 11, 1934), 41-42.

of the Northern as well as the Southern Democrats in prolonging slavery and a caste system. As it will be shown, Hawthorne did not turn his back on democracy or equalitarianism by remaining loyal to the compromise party. In preferring the conservative policies of the Democrats to those of the Northern extremists, Hawthorne did not necessarily give approval to continuing slavery. As Matthiessen commented regarding Hawthorne's attitude toward the status quo, "The characteristic Hawthorne twist to this position is that he could affirm it, and yet possess the detachment to perceive the validity of its opposite."²⁷ And whereas Howells aligned himself with a group that agitated for immediate reform of human inequities in the South, he was far removed in his own life and thinking from an uncompromising view of human relations. Although he became a socialist by political definition, he was more violent on paper than in personal action. As Cady observed, "The nation's leading man of letters was at once a critical socialist, a practical success, and a constructive social idealist."²⁸ Also, when one would properly evaluate Howells' social views, the socialistic phase and the resultant "economic" novels must not be divorced from the total Howells, especially from the output of his last twenty years. He gradually came to doubt the effectiveness of extreme organized reform which did not recondition the individual heart. This was, of course, Hawthorne's lifelong position--that the rearranging of externals accomplishes nothing.

²⁷F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (London, 1941), p. 317.

²⁸The Realist at War (Syracuse, New York, 1958), p. 197.

Although the fiction of Hawthorne and Howells was flavored with the essence of politics, their broad socio-political concern was not just the fictionizing of some party line. Their social aim cannot be divorced from their artistic creed, and their artistic dedication to the ascertainment of proper and orderly human relationships--the truth as it is known on the everyday, practical level--gave them a non-political motive for an examination of society at large. But everything in their experience and in their aims as artists culminated in social fiction. Herein they relived many of their own experiences and dramatized some of their particular political beliefs in an effort to arrive at a workable humanistic philosophy. Throughout their works social problems are activated by the same force which was fundamental in the American life of their day--the discrepancy between individualism and collectivism, including all the varied forms of the two philosophies. The ultimate socio-economic problem in the fiction of Hawthorne and Howells is how to release the tension between the personal craving to be individualistic and self-sufficient and the everlasting need for cooperation, unity, and the security of traditional institutions.

B. THE CURSE OF MATERIALISM

As Chapter III has demonstrated, individual ills in Hawthorne and Howells are inevitably social ills. But many of these individual ills go so far back in history that their origin is obscure and they seem to be founded in the very nature of society itself. "We who are born into the world's artificial system," Hawthorne wrote in "The New Adam and

Eve," "can never adequately know how little in our present state and circumstances is natural, and how much is merely the interpolation of the perverted mind and heart of man" (II, 279).²⁹ "'It's the whole social body that's sick,'" declares a Howells character in The Quality of Mercy³⁰--so sick that no one person can be blamed for its ills, nor can the genesis of these ills be properly determined. Among the specific maladies which society has engendered and continues to nourish is the desire for and maintenance of material wealth, perhaps the most pernicious form of individualism. This, with its numerous subsidiary evils, appears as the primary agent of broad social discord in Hawthorne and Howells.

In Hawthorne's "The Procession of Life" the false classification first mentioned is that of wealth:

In one part of the procession we see men of landed estate or moneyed capital gravely keeping each other company, for the preposterous reason that they chance to have a similar standing in the tax-gatherer's book. (II, 235)

According to Howells, the principal unity that society seemed to have--especially in the post-bellum American prosperity--was that of material acquisition. The common, elementally human interests of those old days of his boyhood had been displaced by that "selfish cult of business which centers each of us in his own affairs and kills even our curiosity

²⁹Unless otherwise indicated, citations from Hawthorne in this chapter are to Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. George Parsons Lathrop (Boston, 1883), 15 vols.

³⁰The Quality of Mercy (New York, 1892), p. 166.

about others."³¹ In A Traveler from Altruria the banker candidly declares: "'We are purely a commercial people; money is absolutely to the fore; and business, which is the means of getting the most money, is the American ideal.'"³² The dissonant result of social intercourse that is prompted only by wealth was fully exploited by Howells in several novels. It is treated rather satirically in The Rise of Silas Lapham when the benign but crude paint king embarrasses everyone by his drunken monologue at the Bromfield Coreys' dinner and when the naïveté of the Lapham girls shows itself in ludicrous contrast to Tom Corey's savoir-faire. But in A Hazard of New Fortunes the Misses Dryfoos are pathetic as they wait, anxious and bewildered, for acceptance within the new world which their father has bought. When they finally get their first chance to enter society at Mrs. Horn's musicale, they are boorish and raucous. But, as Basil March observes,

"Those girls had no more doubt of their right to be there than if they had been duchesses . . . they weren't afraid, or the least embarrassed; they were perfectly natural--like born aristocrats Money prizes and honors itself, and if there is anything it hasn't got, it believes it can buy it."³³

The diversified crew in quest of the "Great Carbuncle" in Hawthorne's tale exemplifies the lack of sympathy and real unity among individuals when their only common purpose is the search for material possession. "They had come thither, not as friends nor partners in the

³¹Impressions and Experiences (New York, 1909), p. 32.

³²A Traveler from Altruria (New York, 1894), pp. 214-215.

³³A Hazard of New Fortunes (New York, 1952), p. 305.

enterprise, but each, save one youthful pair, impelled by his own selfish and solitary longing for this wondrous gem" (I, 173). The cynic, the poet, the Seeker, the alchemist, the merchant, and the nobleman achieve no positive end in their quest, nothing but ultimate personal disaster. Only the married couple, who have sought the enormous gem for each other, find a degree of satisfaction. But they recognize that even their efforts have been selfish, and the husband resolves that "never again will we desire more light than all the world may share with us" (I, 189).

Similarly, the effort toward social unity based only upon financial status is shown to be futile in Howells' Annie Kilburn. The "Social-Union" has an agonizing death after a very short life primarily because of its inherent nature: it does not truly reach the underprivileged. But a secondary reason for its failure is implicit within the character of its organizers; they have nothing in common except money and the higher social standing in Hatboro' that their money has made possible. There is the project leader, Mrs. Munger, whose leathern accessories of dress mark her as the epitome of moral and spiritual toughness. She is representative of South Hatboro', the place of the summer homes of rich city-dwellers, whose affinity with the old Hatboro' folk is only economic. There are the Gerrishes, who are old Hatboro' and who have made their way up through Mr. Gerrish's harsh management of a dry-goods store. Mrs. Nora Wilmington, once a factory worker but now the wife of the owner, is also a member of the group. Still dominated by the peevishness of her old station, she openly displays her contempt for

the husband who has bought her and revels in her slightest social triumph over the South Hatboro' summer people, especially the Northwick family. There is also Annie Kilburn, thirty-one and unmarried, a woman of the finest sensibilities. But she is so obsessed with the notion of her duty to do good that she cannot distinguish between worthy and unworthy causes. Howells implied that no righteous goal can be achieved by the amalgamation of such basically conflicting personalities despite the similarity of external means. The group find it difficult to keep their eye on the true goal:

They all talked to [Annie] of the Social Union, and it seemed to be agreed that it was fully in train, though what was really in train was the entertainment to be given at Mrs. Munger's for the benefit of the Union; the Union always dropped out of the talk as soon as the theatricals were mentioned.³⁴

That money, not vocation or culture, is the main barrier between New England summer boarders and the permanent farm residents is voiced by Reuben Camp in A Traveler from Altruria:

"If you were out west, and the owner of one of those big twenty thousand acre farms called on you with his wife, would you act toward them as you would toward our natives? You wouldn't! You would all be rich people together. . . ."³⁵

Even in the West the equality of Howells' boyhood had disappeared, as Mrs. Burton, in The Coast of Bohemia, reluctantly adds to her tribute to Western democratic ways. Her husband gives the reason: the encroachment of man upon nature. "'When they cut off the woods,'" he says,

³⁴Annie Kilburn (New York, 1889), p. 105.

³⁵A Traveler from Altruria, p. 168.

"the venison and the equality disappeared; they always do when the woods are cut off."³⁶

In The House of the Seven Gables, which is not only Hawthorne's fullest statement of democracy as the highest working of social ethics but also a shrewd caution against exuberant modernity, materialism is shown to be the leading menace to true equalitarianism. And the source of the Pyncheon wealth—the exploitation and even destruction of things natural—is also highlighted in Howells' "economic" novels. The wealth of nature benefits all, everyone shares equally in its resources; but when the greedy individual demands more than his rightful share, the entire social as well as natural order is confounded. Social and political systems that result from and protect exclusiveness are evil and must be checked. On the other hand, any remedial device that is a perversion of nature is as great a wrong as the travesty it seeks to correct, and there is no justification for the substitution of one evil for another.

By the time Hawthorne was in his early forties, America had changed, and it was changing more all the time. New England was becoming industrialized, and village life stepped up its gait in time with the increased commercial activity. A new political party had arisen—the Whigs—which not only embraced the New World aristocrats of the old Federalist Party but also included recently made plutocrats, the manufacturers and financiers. Thus two elements to which Hawthorne was

³⁶The Coast of Bohemia (New York, 1893), p. 29.

decidedly antipathetic were joining powerful hands some fifteen years before the Civil War. Hawthorne, who had been awarded the surveyorship in the Salem custom house because of his membership in the Democratic Party, soon felt the heavy Whig hand when he was dismissed from his post in 1848. The instigator of the action against Hawthorne was the Reverend Charles W. Upham, a powerful and crafty local Whig politician, who accused Hawthorne of administrative discrimination. Upham had a reputation for duplicity; although he later softened his charges, he made them stick enough to effect Hawthorne's dismissal.³⁷ Men of Upham's nature, Hawthorne realized, were not just now emerging in America; he had met them in the pages of Puritan history. But they had no place in the new, the democratic America. But as he lived on through the fifties and into the sixties, Hawthorne knew that the old Puritan tyrants had not died; they merely assumed the new garb of the businessman-politician. They were ready-made to reap the bounty in the new industrial economy. Upham was the specific prototype of Judge Pyncheon,³⁸ but Judge Pyncheon was the portrait of countless men who lived during Hawthorne's latter years and during the late nineteenth century.

The entire Pyncheon family are carry-overs of the early Puritan social and political order, which itself was a representative of European feudalistic order. The Pyncheons are incongruous in America, where nature has bountifully provided enough for all and in her fecundity has

³⁷Cantwell, pp. 419-427.

³⁸See Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife in Works, XIV, 438. Also see Stewart, p. 89.

suggested the elemental urge of all life to grow unrestricted. Into this freedom intrude the Pyncheons with their desire to extort an unequal share. Colonel Pyncheon usurps the land which Matthew Maule has held by natural right, the land blessed by "a natural spring of soft and pleasant water," the place which Maule has "hewn out of the primeval forest, to be his garden-ground and homestead" (III, 19). Nature itself rebels against Colonel Pyncheon's enormous crime, for the lovely spring loses completely "the deliciousness of its pristine quality" and the water becomes "hard and brackish" (III, 22-23). The imposing mansion that rises on the site of Maule's humble dwelling is literally a house of pride, announcing to successive generations the authority of the Pyncheons.

The acquisition of the Pyncheons' wealth and, if one assumes the Pyncheons to be typical, the gaining of all wealth are at the expense of others. All is not necessarily well for the acquirer, however, for his soul becomes morally degraded as his external circumstances are exalted. Corruption breeds corruption, and the efforts to enlarge a fortune often turn tragedy and shame upon the gross materialist. Because of his frenzied desire to find the title to some Eastern land, Gervayse Pyncheon sees his daughter Alice die as a result of the younger Matthew Maule's hypnotic power. The latter-day Pyncheons, Clifford and Hepzibah, are reduced to the level of Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon's chattels. In his heated quest for more wealth, Jaffrey has destroyed the will naming Clifford as heir to the Pyncheon fortune, and he threatens Clifford with life confinement if he refuses to disclose the details of still more

hidden Pyncheon wealth. The element of self-destruction in the original act of the usurper of a natural right is evident in the very beginning of the novel where Hawthorne suggests the curse of the Maules' upon the Pyncheons: each succeeding Pyncheon who carries on the moral and social travesty dies from a hemorrhage similar to the one that took the original Colonel.

The same fundamental evil that enmeshes the Pyncheons, though not with the same devastating consequences, supports the near-tragedy in Howells' The Rise of Silas Lapham. Lapham's chief motivation is money; but contrary to the Pyncheons, he has made a rapid financial rise and has not been away from the natural simplicity and goodness of his old life so long that he forgets the meaning of integrity.

Like the Pyncheons, Lapham has turned the bounty of nature into an object to be bought and sold. In ironic repayment for the material that has been placed at his disposal, Lapham callously slaps his manufactured paint on the face of nature. "'[T]here wa'n't a board-fence, nor a bridge-girder, nor a dead wall, nor a barn, nor a face of rock in that whole region that didn't have 'Lapham's Mineral Paint--Specimen' on it in the three colors we begun by making.'³⁹ He is completely insensitive to the original form and purpose of the land: "'And I never saw anything so very sacred about a big rock along a river or in a pasture, that it wouldn't do to put mineral paint on it in three

³⁹The Rise of Silas Lapham, Modern Library Edition (New York, 1951), p. 13.

colors."⁴⁰

According to Cady, "Silas is a businessman Faust";⁴¹ indeed, he sells his soul for wealth, and he also glories in the power and privilege he has over other men. He will not allow loyalties to check his advance. He forces Rogers out of the paint company because he "was loaded up with a partner that didn't know anything, and couldn't do anything, and [he] unloaded; that's all."⁴² But Silas offers himself in expiation for his sins when, although desperately needing capital to stay in business, he refuses to allow Rogers to sell a devalued piece of milling property at an unfair price. In his acceptance of the disaster of financial insolvency, Lapham is released from the throes of pride, which has been manifested in his relations with others since his phenomenal rise. The culmination of his pride is seen in his new Back Bay house, just as the seven-gabled mansion shows the pride of the Pyncheons. The Pyncheon house remains through successive generations, but the moral decay of the family is evident within its moldering rooms. Lapham's house, too, is ruined within; but it is purged by fire while Lapham's soul is cleansed of its sin and he returns now to live upon the Vermont land that he has exploited.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 14.

⁴¹The Road to Realism, p. 235. The Faust theme has been traced out in Hawthorne by William B. Stein, Hawthorne's Faust (Gainesville, Fla., 1953). Although the image is not so pervasive in Howells, there are a number of significant examples: Dr. Boynton, Bartley Hubbard, Jacob Dryfoos, J. Milton Northwick, Jeff Durgin, Royal Langbrith, and Joseph Dylks.

⁴²The Rise of Silas Lapham, p. 42.

The same unrighteous use of nature is made by Jacob Dryfoos in A Hazard of New Fortunes. Again, as in Silas Lapham, a farm is not utilized for the rightful subsistence of its owner and his family, but is exploited as a means of enriching its owner far beyond his needs. The money is used to make more money, and the humble Westerner Dryfoos is turned into an arrogant capitalist. The dearer his money becomes, the more he holds in contempt individuals or systems which would challenge his right to be a millionaire. He has no qualms about destroying strike-breakers and would suppress all labor unions. Dryfoos cannot go back to his farm, for, unlike Silas Lapham, he has sold it. And when he sells it, he commits himself irretrievably to the materialistic course to the end that he alienates his own son, who must be sacrificed before Dryfoos recognizes the extremes to which he has gone.

C. CAPITALISTIC CORRUPTION

By the time Howells came to write A Hazard of New Fortunes in 1889, the spirit of material acquisition which had troubled Hawthorne in the fifties and which Howells had seen gathering renewed force after the Civil War had enveloped all America. And at that time unlimited economic power was resting in the hands of a few powerful industrialists. The laboring class were little more than slaves, for in many instances the successful operations of management were dependent upon procurement of the cheapest possible labor. As a consequence, there occurred a great number of strikes and riots, including in 1886 the famous

Haymarket riots at the McCormick factory in Chicago.⁴³ During the late eighties and early nineties Howells was doing his most progressive social and political thinking.⁴⁴ The system of capitalism became, for a time, Howells' prime target. And although the steps he advocated to alleviate capitalistic oppression were socialistic,⁴⁵ they were not at all new in principle. The basic ideas appearing in his fiction during the "economic" period he had espoused all along; the seriousness of actual social upheavals merely authorized a harsher dictum against society at large.

Thus Dryfoos is no more to blame for his action than are his times and their whole philosophy of economics. Fulkerson explains to

⁴³For a recounting of Howells' personal interest and intervention in the Haymarket controversy, see Everett Carter, Howells and the Age of Realism (Philadelphia, 1954), pp. 180-185; and Cady, The Realist at War, pp. 69-80.

⁴⁴Howells did not use only fiction as an outlet for his views on the increasing social and economic evils in America. In the late seventies, while still editor of the Atlantic, he began to solicit articles presenting the pros and cons of the capitalist-labor controversy. Later, in the eighties and nineties, mostly in Harper's, he employed his own pen more frequently on behalf of social and economic equality. See Hough, pp. 20-81, and Olov W. Fryckstedt, In Quest of America: A Study of Howells' Early Development as a Novelist (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), pp. 192-202.

⁴⁵Jacob Getzels found that "Howells' economic theories and proposed reform bear striking resemblances to Marxist Socialism," though Howells is not thought to have had first-hand knowledge of Karl Marx. ("William Dean Howells and Socialism," Science and Society, II [Summer, 1938], 376-386.) The critical consensus is that Howells' lifelong mild socialism was strengthened by Tolstoy's ethics and by Laurence Gronlund's economic works. See Conrad Wright, "The Sources of Mr. Howells's Socialism," Science and Society, II (Fall, 1938), 514-517; George Arms, "Further Inquiry into Howells's Socialism," Science and Society, III (Spring, 1939), 245-248; and Arms, "The Literary Background of Howells's Social Criticism," American Literature, XIV (November, 1942), 260-276.

Basil March that for a long while Dryfoos held out against the gas people and even wrote articles to the newspaper against capitulation. Still, "'Dryfoos couldn't keep the boom out of his own family even. . . . So when a fellow came along one day and offered old Dryfoos a cool hundred thousand for his farm, it was all up with Dryfoos."⁴⁶ With his farmer's hands now idle for the first time in his life, he goes into land development business, using the eighty acres he has retained, and then from speculation to speculation "'till he'd scraped together three or four hundred thousand dollars."⁴⁷ Dryfoos has quadrupled his original capital "out of every gambler's chance in speculation, and all a schemer's thrift from the error and need of others."⁴⁸ He continues to defy nature, for by his advancement he has deprived others of the reasonable living that is theirs by natural right. This deprivation of others is the heart of Howells' criticism of the capitalistic system, which is also Hawthorne's. Dryfoos and his like who emerge again and again in Howells' "economic" novels are in principle Judge Pyncheons of the Gilded Age.

Throughout all the "economic" novels Howells' case against the capitalistic system is a repetition of that formed by the culmination of events in A Hazard of New Fortunes. Spawned by what is called a democracy, capitalism, Howells felt, is actually anti-democratic because

⁴⁶A Hazard of New Fortunes, p. 91.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 93.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 211.

it elevates some while it degrades others. His personal indignation is voiced by Basil March as he reflects upon the tragedies that economic chance has caused:

"But what I object to is this economic chance world in which we live, and which we men seem to have created. . . . At my time of life--at every time of life--a man ought to feel that if he will keep on doing his duty he shall not suffer in himself or in those who are dear to him, except through natural causes. But no man can feel this as things are now; and so we go on, pushing and pulling, climbing and crawling, thrusting aside and trampling underfoot; lying, cheating, stealing; and when we get to the end, covered with blood and dirt and sin and shame, and look back over the way we've come to a palace of our own, or the poor-house, which is about the only possession we can claim in common with our brother-men, I don't think the retrospect can be pleasing."⁴⁹

That the fight for happiness and success under the existing social and economic system is universally degrading is expressed by Matt Hilary in The Quality of Mercy: "'That hardens people, and brutalizes them, but somehow we mostly admire them and applaud them for their success against odds. If we had a true civilization a man wouldn't have to fight for the chance to do the thing he is fittest for, that is, to be himself.'"⁵⁰ In The World of Chance, Percy Ray, upon his arrival in New York, overhears the despondent talk of two former businessmen who have now been relegated to poverty by circumstances beyond their control. One wishes he were dead; the other says that if it were not for his family, he would commit suicide. Both are victims of the capitalistic system.

Hawthorne had earlier attacked this same aspect of capitalism in

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 485-486.

⁵⁰The Quality of Mercy, p. 334.

The House of the Seven Gables, written before the post-bellum wave of speculation swept over the already unstable world of finance. "In this republican country," he wrote, "amid the fluctuating waves of our social life, somebody is always at the drowning-point" (III, 55). He had also humorously treated business success as chance in "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure," in which the difference between wealthy John Brown and poverty-stricken Peter is that "Brown never reckoned upon luck, yet always had it; while Peter made luck the main condition of his projects, and always missed it" (I, 429).

Judge Pyncheon, of course, is Hawthorne's arch-capitalist. Although his devious methods are personal and not part of any particular organized business, they are nonetheless the ways of all the money-mad. The fact, too, that land is the basis of riches and that it can change hands according to the appearance or disappearance of a scrap of paper suggests the insecurity of those dependent upon commerce. Hawthorne's denunciation of the economic system that so ruthlessly degrades the unlucky is unmistakable. The Pyncheons have all employed the same devices and have gained wealth at the expense of others: first the Maules and then the members of their own family. Through Jaffrey's power, Clifford and Hepzibah have not only been deprived of their rightful portion of the estate but have also been so debased by circumstances that their lives are devoid of pleasure or purpose. As Holgrave observes, "'Miss Hepzibah, by secluding herself from society, has lost all true relation with it, and is, in fact, dead . . . Clifford is another dead and long-buried person'" (III, 257-258). When Clifford's circumstances are

improved (also by chance--Jaffrey's death), he is by then too impoverished in spirit to become well adjusted to life. "After such wrong as he had suffered, there is no reparation," Hawthorne wrote (III, 371). When the capitalistic system is at work, there is degradation at both ends of the economic and social scale.⁵¹

Two of the "three worthies" in "Ethan Brand" are, as Leo Marx pointed out,⁵² victims of a new industrial age. The fire image, dominant in the story, is suggestive of technology and its powers of destruction. Time has passed the stage agent by; through no fault of his own the mode of transportation from which he made a living has been supplanted by another. (Hawthorne saw this same change take place in the business of the Manning brothers.) Now the ex-agent is a wanderer, a displaced person, given to brandy and to loose talk. Because of alcoholism, Lawyer Giles has stepped down from intellectual activity to that of a laborer and has run afoul of the evils of industry. With his foot having been chopped off by an ax and his hand ripped away by a steam engine, he is a living symbol of the ruthlessness of the new era. Perhaps Ethan Brand too, in tending the lime kiln, has been in the beginning a victim of technological corruption, the springboard to the unpardonable sin. Another lamentable figure, whose independence and

⁵¹Social degradation Hawthorne saw as the result not only of the capitalistic system but also of the traditional caste system, which he became acquainted with in England. There he also witnessed for the first time the deprivation of big-city slum dwellers and recorded many of his impressions in his notebooks. (See Hall, pp. 127-136.)

⁵²"The Machine in the Garden," New England Quarterly, XXIX (March, 1956), 35.

personal efficiency are obsolete in an industrial age, is pictured in "The Old Apple Dealer." The old man and the steam engine "are each other's antipodes; the latter's the type of all that go ahead, and the old man the representative of that melancholy class who, by some sad witchcraft, are doomed never to share in the world's exulting progress" (II, 502).

Howells' examples of those who have been victimized by technological change and economic chance are numerous. Silas Lapham's financial back is finally broken because some West Virginia people, with natural gas at their disposal, have been able to produce paint more cheaply than Lapham can. And Rogers--would he have been such a scoundrel without the temptations to speculate that modern business affords? Ralph Putney, the lawyer in Annie Kilburn and The Quality of Mercy and a replica of Hawthorne's lawyer Giles, is representative of the old New England intellectualism that can never hope to exist comfortably in the barbarous age of cutthroat business. Although he is a lawyer and takes no direct hand in business, he cannot keep pace psychologically; he is able to make honest evaluations of the moral decay of his times; but he drinks to keep his own anachronistic existence from being too painful. The Reverend Mr. Peck is a victim in another way. About to begin his journey to Lowell where he will work in the factories in order to be close to the workers, he is struck down by a locomotive, the arch symbol of material progress. In A Traveler from Altruria some of the numerous tramps who pass through the New England village are described as men who have been reduced to poverty through a national financial panic, a

part of the chance of business.

Hawthorne described in Judge Pyncheon the discrepancy between the external and internal character of the businessman, a contrast which Howells also used as one of his most effective denouncements of the unwholesome influence of wealth on all society. Such a one, said Hawthorne, has massed, along with his wealth, estates, and public honors, a great number of good deeds performed deliberately in the public eye. Outside he is a gorgeous palace, but within a "pool of stagnant water, foul with many impurities, and, perhaps, tinged with blood,--that secret abomination, above which, possibly, he may say his prayers, without remembering it,--[such] is this man's miserable soul!" (III, 274) Externally Judge Pyncheon has all that the public could desire in a righteous man;

The purity of his judicial character, while on the bench; the faithfulness of his public service in subsequent capacities; his devotedness to his party, and the rigid consistency with which he had adhered to its principles, or, at all events, kept pace with its organized movements; his remarkable zeal as president of a Bible society; his unimpeachable integrity as treasurer of a widow's and orphan's fund; his benefits to horticulture, by producing two much-esteemed varieties of the pear, and to agriculture, through the agency of the famous Pyncheon bull; the cleanliness of his moral deportment, for a great many years past; the severity with which he had frowned upon, and finally cast off, an expensive and dissipated son, delaying forgiveness until within the final quarter of an hour of the young man's life; his prayers at morning and eventide, and graces at mealtime; his efforts in furtherance of the temperance cause (III, 275)

Judge Pyncheon has fooled himself along with society, and not even serious illness or death would cause him to see the true man. Only "loss of property and reputation" would give him cause for introspective analysis.

When Bartley Hubbard writes up Silas Lapham for the "Solid Men"

series, he exploits only the external and meritorious side of Lapham. This is just what the public wants to believe about its businessmen. Lapham has been wounded in the service of his country in the Civil War and wears the title "Colonel" to let no one forget. "Colonel Lapham is a regular attendant at the Rev. Dr. Langworthy's church. He subscribes liberally to the Associated Charities, and no good object or worthy public enterprise fails to receive his support."⁵³ Lapham takes great pride in his public benevolence. As he leaves the Coreys after dinner, he assures the Rev. Mr. Sewell that he has more money than he knows what to do with and that the minister should come to him when in a tight place with his parish work. Lapham is not predominantly evil, as Howells took pains to show; but it is clear that Lapham substitutes his own public display of goodness and moral responsibility for a true moral earnestness. His rise as the paint king, from which have come his means and opportunities for the outward parade of goodness, has not been without moral compromise. He has been unfair with Rogers; money or public approval cannot erradicate the reality of this evil.

In subsequent novels Howells drew more hideous, more Pyncheon-like pictures of the inner moral decay of his businessmen. In Annie Kilburn William B. Gerrish is one of the most outwardly successful and morally upright men in Hatboro'. He has a flourishing drygoods store, gives to all the worthy charities, is a deacon in the Congregational Church, and gives his support to the "Social-Union." He is a staunch

⁵³The Rise of Silas Lapham, p. 19.

supporter of the theoretical Gospel—that perverted form of Christianity which encourages form and hope for heaven in place of inner reformation. Gerrish reveals his own corrupt soul when he explains how he runs his business. He has been successful because he has always suppressed any move on the part of his employees to better themselves. Once when a porter became insubordinate after being refused a raise, Gerrish fired him. Now that he is a drunkard and cannot support his family, Gerrish is certain that his own action was justified. His economic independence is his religion; and when the Rev. Mr. Peck suggests that American economics deter social equality, a factor inherent in real Christianity, Gerrish has had enough. He attempts to have the minister removed because he does not dwell enough on "the promises of Christ."

A subtle extension of the whited-sepulchre businessman was made by Howells in his depiction of J. Milton Northwick in The Quality of Mercy. Northwick is not oppressive; he is merely spiritually sterile. And in one sense he is more reprehensible than Judge Pyncheon or William Gerrish, for he lacks their personal courage. His crime is deceit, and in his position as treasurer of the Ponkwasset Mills, he quietly steals over a period of years thousands of dollars from the company. He has taken the money in order to speculate in stocks, but he has not been able to "win" enough to replace his secret borrowings. Refusing to face the shame of being found out, Northwick flees to Canada with enough money to start over and repay his debts. But the absence of inner strength proves his undoing. Since he has done nothing really constructive during the time he has had the security of money and position,

he is unable to hold to a positive course now that his security has been removed.

In the eyes of the world Northwick is the epitome of righteousness and gentlemanly cultivation. He has always kept the fact carefully hidden that it was his wife's dowry that gave him his start in the business world. It was her frugality coupled with his penchant for making money turn into more money that gave him the means to maintain a home in Boston and also one in South Hatboro'. Although his acquaintance with literature is superficial, he has always been able, without higher education, to give the impression of college training. And the carefully selected vast library which he housed at South Hatboro' adds to the illusion. Father Etienne, the Canadian priest who attempts to get at the heart of Northwick's trouble, perceives the shallowness of the embezzler's life:

It took the young priest somewhat longer than it would have taken a man of Northwick's own language and nation to perceive that his gentlemanly decorum and grave repose of manner masked a complete ignorance of the things that interest cultivated people, and that he was merely and purely a business man, a figment of commercial civilization, with only the crudest tastes and ambitions outside of the narrow circle of money-making.⁵⁴

Judge Pyncheon's malaise lives again in the industrialist whose spirit clouds the lives of the principal characters in The Son of Royal Langbrith. In Royal Langbrith Howells created perhaps his most degenerate character, even more despicable to the reader because he is known

⁵⁴The Quality of Mercy, p. 262.

only after death and through the effect his deeds have on others. Outwardly Langbrith is another paragon of good citizenship; he was respected as a clever businessman, and his liberality in charitable causes was the highest. He even built the town a library. So revered is his memory that when a tablet honoring him is presented by his son to the grateful townspeople, they conduct a glowing testimonial service. Langbrith's brother, who has been blackmailed into carrying on the paper mills after Royal's death, finally unloads the truth in one great avalanche upon Royal's astonished son:

"Royal was such a gentleman that he cooked it up with the devil how to fool the whole town, and make 'em believe he was a saint upon earth. That library buildin'! He gave it out of the profits of the first year after he choused Hawberk And when you took it into your fool head to put up that tablet to him in the front of the library, he had things so solid that all hell couldn't bust 'em up."⁵⁵

The true character of Royal Langbrith is known to only a few people--all of whom he has ruined. In the first place his commercial success came through dishonesty: he cheated his partner Hawberk out of a valuable patent and got away with it because he knew of Hawberk's marital infidelity. Because of emotional stress, Hawberk's physical strength declined, and Dr. Anther, who prescribed laudanum as a sedative, has the horrifying experience of seeing his patient become an addict and an example of life in death. Dr. Anther is in Langbrith's posthumous power in another way. He is in love with Langbrith's widow, who, despite the personal abuse she suffered from her husband, refuses

⁵⁵The Son of Royal Langbrith (New York, 1904), p. 328.

to remarry because she does not wish to shake her son's faith in his father's memory. "Except for their son, she would have been willing that he should be known to the world as he was known to her and to Anther. But with reference to the dead man's son, it still seemed to her that the truth would be defamation."⁵⁶ Royal Langbrith's evil spirit pervades all. Just as the portrait of old Colonel Pyncheon seems alive as it hangs within the House of the Seven Gables, Langbrith's portrait keeps watch to see that the truth remains suppressed. "It always seems as if it were listening," Mrs. Langbrith says of the portrait. To James Langbrith, the son, the library portrait ironically suggests the Puritan sternness of character as portrayed by Hawthorne:

" . . . I read into it all I had read out of Hawthorne about the Puritan type. I put the grim old chaps out of The Scarlet Letter and The House of the Seven Gables and the Twice-Told Tales into it, and interpreted my father by them."⁵⁷

In this novel Howells did not belabor the link between the business world and man's character as he had done in the earlier "economic" novels, though he implied that a commercialized and materialistic society has set the proper stage for Langbrith's deceptions. Langbrith, Howells made it clear, is a product of the age of acquisition.

Here was a man, not of the immediate moment, but of that hour of the later eighteen-sixties which created the immediate moment; the hour of the Republic's supreme consciousness, when all the American forces, redeemed from their employment in the waste of war, were given to enterprises which have since enriched us, and, under the direction of such captains of industry as Langbrith's father,

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 66.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 25-26.

have pressed forward to the commercial conquest of the world.⁵⁸

Rather than pointing his finger at a single system, Howells indicated the guilt of all individuals who would allow evil such as Langbrith's to go unchallenged. "Up to a certain point in every evil predicament," Howells wrote, "men are the victims of it, and after that, if they continue in it they are its agents, though as little its masters as before."⁵⁹ This is the Hawthornian thesis, the same that underlies Hawthorne's tacit denunciation of the Pyncheon family's living in subservience to the original Colonel's evil. Howells, it should be noted, did not sanction an irresponsible revelation of Langbrith's character after the secret has played out its evil. The individual must disentangle himself from evil, but he must not be the means of chastening another human personality. When James Langbrith, in his profound disappointment, cannot rest until he has shown the true Royal Langbrith to the world, the Reverend Mr. Enderby cautions him about interfering with the working of providence: "'Yes, you must keep this secret locked in your heart, until such time as the Infinite Mercy, which is the Infinite Justice, shall choose to free you of it.'"⁶⁰

One of the most poignant effects of the American system of economics, as seen by both Hawthorne and Howells, is the enervating power of the life of social exclusiveness, made possible by money. Persons

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 196.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 334.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 353.

who have inherited wealth or who have been conditioned by a life of guarded gentility are completely unable to face the everyday indignities of the common world, especially when these involve earning a living. Miss Hepzibah in The House of the Seven Gables and Helen Harkness in A Woman's Reason are similar cases.

Hepzibah Pyncheon, to be sure, is not moneyed; but she lives with all the social exclusiveness that the Pyncheon wealth, if she had it, would have made hers without the present illusion. She is "A lady—who had fed herself from childhood with the shadowy food of aristocratic reminiscences, and whose religion it was that a lady's hand soils itself irretrievably by doing aught for bread . . ." (III, 55). Now after living for sixty years on "her pedestal of imaginary rank," she has to face the world of commerce and earn her own living or starve. And so she re-opens a cent-shop that was first established by an earlier Pyncheon in time of financial crisis. She has already decided for herself her unfitness for being a seamstress or a teacher for primary children. And she enters into her new business with trepidation and reticence, dreading intercourse with the world.

Confronting her first customer is almost an impossible chore for Miss Hepzibah. To Holgrave she confesses her ineptness for her task: "But I was born a lady, and have always lived one; no matter in what narrowness of means, always a lady!" (III, 63) She feels tainted by the first copper that falls into her hand. When she is not treated by her customers with the respect she believes due one of her station, she is indignant; yet she cannot bear to receive expressions of sympathy

from any who enter the shop. By and by she experiences a novel emotion: she actually looks with bitterness at those of "the idle aristocracy," of which she has lately presumed herself. But Holgrave assures her that she will be better for "lending . . . strength . . . to the united struggle of mankind" (*ibid.*). Although Hepzibah's basic nature remains unchanged because of her many years of seclusion, she does acquire a new zest for living. "The healthiest glow that Hepzibah had known for years had come now in the dreaded crisis . . ." (III, 71).

Twenty-three-year-old Helen Harkness suddenly finds herself, like Miss Hepzibah, compelled to make her own living or starve. When her father dies insolvent, she is left with only the interest on five thousand dollars to support her, and later she has to part with this capital because it was obtained for her fraudulently by the auctioneer who handled the sale of the Harkness home. Helen is neither psychologically nor practically equipped to face the world, "for her life, like that of other American girls of prosperous parentage, had been almost as much set apart from the hard realities of bread-winning as the life of a princess" ⁶¹ She has a fair knowledge of French and German, moderate skill in music, and a respectable proficiency in painting; but she has been merely a dilettante and can do nothing with professional competence.

Her first vocational venture is decorating pottery. Although this activity is deemed a proper pastime for a lady, it proves a strain

⁶¹A Woman's Reason (Boston, 1883), pp. 7-8.

upon Helen's sensibilities when she engages in it with a commercial purpose. She is careful to hide all evidence of her work from her fellows in the rooming house in which circumstances have forced her to live. She carefully conceals the wrapping paper which has covered her materials and even makes sure that the string is hidden. After breaking one of the first vases, she wraps the fragments carefully in paper, goes out at night, and discards them in a street some distance away so that they will not be traced back to her. After mustering courage to take her finished work to a shop, she is chagrined when the dealers do not take her seriously because of her former social position. Once she finds a dealer who takes a professional attitude toward her and her work, she is further vexed.

For, what puzzled and surprised Helen most of all was that when she had taken the humblest mien, and approached those shop-people on their own level, as it were, without pretension and without pride, they should have shown no sense of the sacrifice she had made, but should have trampled upon her all the same.⁶²

Like Miss Hepzibah, she is both anxious to succeed and afraid that she will. But when her vases are finally sold, she is horror-struck because of her personal disdain for the purchaser and tries to get them back. When she fails, she refuses to spend the money.

But Helen must do something to earn a living. She tries copying photographs, then writing literary reviews for Saturday Afternoon, both with no success. Clara Kingsbury, whom Helen has known socially, sets her up at designing fashionable hats for Clara's socialite friends.

⁶²Ibid., p. 191.

Soon the novelty wears off, and Helen's customers vanish. Finally Helen humbles herself to move in with the former housekeeper of her father's and to make hats for poor women and working girls. Marriage is the only way out for Helen; and when Robert Fenton, whom she has spurned earlier, returns from a sea-voyage, she finds that their separation has given her a new basis for love. Apparently her experiences in the world have taught her little, for her persistence in finding a vocation has been due more to native pride than to humble acceptance of her position.

She remains limited in her opinions and motives by the accidents of tradition and circumstances that shape us all; at the end she is neither more nor less than a lady, as she was at the beginning. She has acquired no ideals of woman's work or woman's destiny; she is glad to have solved in the old way the problems that once beset her; and in all that has happened she feels as if she had escaped, rather than achieved.⁶³

A Howells character who resembles Miss Hepzibah more from the standpoint of physiognomy is Adeline Northwick in The Quality of Mercy. Middle-aged and dyspeptic, Adeline is a pitiful example of a basically simple and unrefined person whose father's money provides nothing but an aloof respectability. She lacks the taste and energy to take aesthetic and social advantage of her position; instead she becomes withdrawn, especially after her mother's death, and is contented to defer to her younger and beautiful sister, Suzette, in mingling socially with the outside world. It is her father, however, who stands to Adeline as the rock of respectability and invulnerability; and when his crime is discovered, Adeline is the last to admit his guilt. Suzette is proud too,

⁶³Ibid., p. 466.

yet she is a strong enough individualist to fortify herself to face life without the old security and insists on relinquishing the family property to pay their debts. But Adeline's pride is of another kind, based in ignorance and weakness; she refuses to give over the property because it is legally theirs. When the broken Northwick returns for a clandestine visit with his daughters, Adeline hurries him away again, fearful that he will be caught and tried like a common criminal. And once her father is dead, there is nothing left but death for Adeline, for every symbol of her security has been dashed away.

D. SOCIAL EXCLUSIVENESS AND PRIDE

Thus the inbreeding of pride that comes with wealth and the social exclusiveness that wealth encourages result in what Hawthorne and Howells felt might lead to the unpardonable sin--persistent isolation. As Chapter III demonstrated, the most grievous sin that man can commit is to lose his sympathy for the rest of humanity. The individual is the sinner, of course; but again, as with all sins committed against the common good, society is greatly to blame. A society that is so constituted as to make obeisance to the symbols of wealth must be modified by more democratic attitudes. First of all, traditionalism must be superseded by a fresh approach to the things that build character and thus command respect from the mass of men. While the graspers and schemers are a decided menace to the democratic system, those who have set the tradition for glorifying the social advantages of wealth are offenders of equal magnitude. This is not to say that Hawthorne and Howells

considered the genteel life as an offense against society, but their criticism of the gentility that breeds in social inequality is extensive.

Pride in family dynasty was a particular foe of Hawthorne's. Stewart noted that "Passages in the notebooks dealing with the decay of families that were once flourishing recur with the repetition of an obsession."⁶⁴ One of the objects which "will take fire like a handful of shavings" in the great fire described in "Earth's Holocaust" is "all the rubbish of the herald's office," including coats of arms and other signs of high social rank (II, 431). Taking the Pyncheons as an apt illustration, Holgrave, in The House of the Seven Gables rails against the pride taken in family continuity, though at the time Holgrave is rather proud of his descent from the Maules:

"To plant a family! This idea is at the bottom of most of the wrong and mischief which men do. The truth is, that, once in every half-century, at longest, a family should be merged into the great, obscure mass of humanity, and forget all about its ancestors." (III, 222)

In The Scarlet Letter Hawthorne hinted that Hester Prynne's pride, which prompts her to scorn the mores of her environment, is rooted in a tradition of family exclusiveness. Hester's "lady-like" appearance is suggestive of "the feminine gentility of those days" (V, 74). As she stands on the scaffold, she pictures in her mind her old home, "with a poverty-stricken aspect, but retaining a half-obliterated shield of arms over the portal, in token of antique gentility" (V, 79). "Lady Eleanore's Mantle" shows symbolically the tragedy that can engulf the

⁶⁴Randall Stewart, "Introduction" to The American Notebooks of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New Haven, 1932), p. lxxviii.

individual who possesses an overweening pride in traditional rank and social station. "The curse of heaven hath stricken me," cries the once-beautiful smallpox victim, "because I would not call man my brother, nor woman sister. I wrapped myself in PRIDE as in a MANTLE" (I, 325).

Hawthorne's abortive works of the late fifties and early sixties all grapple with the problem of Old-World social tradition as opposed to the democratic independence of the new. The heroes all have an innate longing to trace their lineage to the Old World, but at the same time they seem cognizant of the decadence resulting from traditionalism. In The Ancestral Footstep there is a typical Hawthornian moral concerning the turmoil resulting from the claims and counter-claims on an English estate:

The moral, if any moral were to be gathered from these petty and wretched circumstances, was, "Let the past alone: do not seek to renew it; press on to higher and better things,--at all events, to other things; and be assured that the right way can never be that which leads you back to the identical shapes that you long ago left behind. Onward, onward, onward!" (XI, 488-489)

Although Redcliffe, in Doctor Grimshawe's Secret, goes to England to investigate the possibility of his being heir to an estate, all along he defends the superiority of the new and independent vitality in America. When the Warden gives his opinion that it is better to be the beginner of a family line than merely an heir of an already-famous ancestor, Redcliffe cannot disagree. His patriotism is much stronger now that he has left America. He feels that English institutions cannot remain as they are, but must give way to the democratizing that has come about in America:

" . . . I have a feeling of coming change among all that you look upon as so permanent, so everlasting; and though your thoughts dwell on things as they are and have been, there is a deep destruction somewhere in this country, that is inevitably impelling it in the path of my own." (XIII, 199)

The bloody footprint which figures in both The Ancestral Footstep and Doctor Grimshawe's Secret and which was an idea of Hawthorne's as early as 1842⁶⁵ suggests a more sinister aspect of traditionalism: its history is written in the blood of martyrs. Another example of the evils of tradition is Italy, which Hawthorne described in The Italian Notebooks and The Marble Faun. In the latter, his last completed novel, he suggested that "All towns should be made capable of purification by fire, or of decay, within each half century" (VI, 346). And Kenyon praises to Donatello the newness of America: "'You should go with me to my native country. . . . In that fortunate land, each generation has its own sins and sorrows to bear. Here it seems as if all the weary and dreary Past were piled on the back of the Present'" (VI, 347).

Hawthorne's failure to bring four of his last works to a satisfactory conclusion may have resulted from several factors;⁶⁶ but one reason appears specially valid with relation to the subject of the works: Hawthorne's personal struggle with the problem of past versus present or traditional social standards versus individual independence was a torturous experience. Waggoner detected that during Hawthorne's last years "A very deep-seated ambivalence of feeling becomes apparent.

⁶⁵American Notebooks, p. 99.

⁶⁶See Edward H. Davidson, Hawthorne's Last Phase (New Haven, 1949), pp. 150-153.

Everything is Janus-faced, nothing is clear, nothing gives any real satisfaction."⁶⁷ Particularly is this true with regard to Hawthorne's attitude toward the security of established tradition. He desired deep roots, but he was skeptical of their ability to supply one with the needed spiritual nourishment. As another critic noted, "The increasing indecision of the American claimant [in the uncompleted novels] reflects Hawthorne's own state of mind."⁶⁸

Yet this indecision on the part of Hawthorne should not be surprising to students of Hawthorne's life and work. The tone of his most successful pieces is ambivalent. The astounding situation here is that in the Anglo-American romances Hawthorne apparently felt the need to be decisive, and the consequence was a series of works that would not achieve coherence. In England Hawthorne's patriotism had flared up, almost belligerently. In his English Notebooks, as Stewart saw, Hawthorne seldom lost an opportunity to include a comparison of America and England in which America was vastly superior. On the other hand, there are times when he expressed, sincerely and without condescension, the great worth of English institutions and manners.⁶⁹ Although Hawthorne championed the freedom of America, he was a man who admired order and decorum, and there is no doubt that certain characteristics of

⁶⁷Hyatt H. Waggoner, Hawthorne: A Critical Study (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 232.

⁶⁸Christof Wegelin, "Europe in Hawthorne's Fiction," ELH: A Journal of English Literary History, XIV (September, 1947), 240.

⁶⁹Randall Stewart, "Introduction" to The English Notebooks by Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1941), p. xxvii.

English life were appealing to the conservative side of his personality. He was deeply aware of the inadequacies in both the American and English ways of life: in America individualism was in danger of going to the extreme; in England and Europe the caste system was equally dangerous. Thus he found himself again in his customary role of skeptic, unwilling to commit himself to either side; but this time it was more painful than before. He must be true to America, but how could he without compromise? In a sense, then, there was victory in his artistic failure: he had not allowed himself to be mastered by emotion. His social criticism in the last works is more significant, therefore, because of his honesty in the avoidance of a prejudiced conclusion.

Treatment of the relation of the established aristocracy⁷⁰ to society is found in several Howells novels. Like Hawthorne, Howells was caught in later life between two sympathies and two social classes without "belonging" to either. By and large, the democratic spirit prevailed in Howells' thinking; but as an artist, Howells was attracted by an environment of refinement such as that which surrounded the older, established moneyed families in America. What he found distasteful, however, was the social snobbery which seemed almost a natural consequence

⁷⁰Howells did not know nor did he treat fictionally "the emperors of finance," the multi-millionaires who arose in America after the 1880's. His rich are of two classes: the older, independently wealthy Boston patricians and the post-bellum plutocrats, whose fortunes are just in the making. (A. Schade Van Westrum, "Mr. Howells and American Aristocracies," The Bookman, XXV [March, 1907], 67-73.) The plutocrats (Lapham, Dryfoos, Northwick, Langbrith) will be, under the American system, the aristocrats (Bromfield Corey, Halleck, Clara Kingsbury, Margaret Vance) of the next generation.

of money and its advantages. The uselessness of the lives of the older aristocracy, even the sham that characterized many of them, came in for a great deal of criticism. One of the most serious consequences of an established aristocracy that Howells saw, as did Hawthorne, was the malevolent example their lives set for others whose fortunes were in the making. In the industrial expansion following the Civil War when many became rich overnight, the newly-made money became merely the means of buying a place in high society. Bromfield Corey, in a capricious lament, gives his son an accurate commentary on the current situation: "'But the suddenly rich are on a level with any of us nowadays. Money buys position at once.'" ⁷¹

A Chance Acquaintance, Howells' first fully-developed novel, is founded in plot upon the contrast between the snobbery of "Proper Boston," as exemplified by Miles Arbuton, and the simplicity and wholesomeness of the Middle West, as portrayed by Kitty Ellison. ⁷² Although A Chance Acquaintance is primarily a social comedy with the emphasis on the comedy, the novel draws probably the best indictment Howells ever made against the emptiness and decadence of the moneyed aristocracy. While Arbuton's Boston is not universal, Howells made it clear that there is enough of it to be dangerous. In the first place it reflects the Old World and seems completely out of harmony with the New:

⁷¹The Rise of Silas Lapham, p. 56.

⁷²Many of the beliefs and traditions of Kitty and her family are similar to those which had been a part of Howells' own life in its formative Ohio years. See Fryckstedt, pp. 125-128.

This new Boston with which Mr. Arbuton inspired her was a Boston of mysterious prejudices and lofty reservations; a Boston of high and difficult tastes, that found its social ideal in the Old World, and that shrank from contact with the reality of this; a Boston as alien as Europe to her simple experiences, and that seemed to be proud only of the things that were unlike other American things; a Boston that would rather perish by fire and sword than be suspected of vulgarity; a critical, fastidious, and reluctant Boston, dissatisfied with the rest of the hemisphere, and gelidly self-satisfied⁷³

Arbuton cannot appreciate American scenery because he finds it inferior in comparison with that of Europe. Not only does he prefer landscapes that suggest tradition and antiquity; he also inclines toward manners that have their origin in the past. He frankly advocates the caste system and looks down on tradesmen and the lower classes, which in conversation he differentiates from the good people and the respectable families. Arbuton has a superficial genteel charm which almost captures Kitty Ellison's heart, though all along she realizes that her ideals are far from his. Throughout their Canadian courtship he has taken the condescending attitude toward Kitty and "could not imagine she should feel any doubt in accepting him."⁷⁴ But finally it is Arbuton who is shown to be the barbarian while Kitty is the one with the true gentility; her grounds for rejecting him (he "forgets" to introduce her to two women from Boston) are merely substantiating proof of the disparity between them.

Whereas Howells pictured the vehemently priggish side of the

⁷³A Chance Acquaintance (Boston, 1884), pp. 152-153.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 201.

moneyed aristocracy in A Chance Acquaintance, he showed in A Modern Instance and The Rise of Silas Lapham the ineffectual and even decadent condition of their lives. In both novels the upper-class characters exert negative influences over those who are on their way up in the social world. Bartley and Marcia Hubbard, in the former novel, keep their eyes longingly on the advantages of the class above them; and when the two find their own personal problem mounting, neither the Hallecks nor the Athertons are able to offer any spiritual strength. They themselves only exist; they do not live in the positive sense of contributing any real benefit to society. In A Modern Instance, Ben Halleck personifies the pitiable but weak state of the decaying gentility. Although Ben is completely civilized and is of a sympathetic nature, he is a cripple and barred from taking his place in the world as a healthy man.

The Coreys, in The Rise of Silas Lapham, show an aimlessness in life similar to that of the fading Hallecks. To the Laphams the Coreys represent everything that they have ever desired in the world. The Laphams have pride in the resourcefulness that has made possible their financial success; their admiration for the established aristocracy is conspicuous. Once settled in Boston, the Laphams desire respectability above all else; thus Lapham builds his Back Bay house, and Mrs. Lapham encourages Irene's supposed romance with Tom. Silas even keeps under cover his aid to the not-too-respectable wife and daughter of a war buddy who saved his life.

Despite the neutral position of the Coreys with relation to the spiritual development of a democratic society, Bromfield Corey is a

rather attractive character, and certainly the son Tom is sympathetically drawn. Bromfield Corey, it should be noted, is also an intelligent critic of the arts, and this aspect of his character Howells no doubt admired. Corey is a representative of "Proper Boston" combined with intellectual Boston, the latter being always closely associated with Howells himself. Still Howells showed Corey as merely a dilettante where his personal artistic participation is concerned; he has studied painting all his life, but it has come to naught. Corey is conscious of his own isolation in an age that is booming with individualism; he reluctantly sees his son go into the paint business, but he does not forbid him to do so. Howells' criticism of Bromfield Corey and his kind seems not to be that they have money, but that they have allowed their money to sterilize them. Corey has lost the ingenuity that made his own father a successful trader and merchant. His wife notes that he charmed her into marriage, and now "he had kept on saying the charming things and he had not done much else."⁷⁵ The implication is that the same degeneration would envelope Lapham's descendants, too, if Lapham continues to make possessions and position the object of his money-making. Bromfield Corey is genteel, charming, and attractive; but in Howells' view, a man must possess more than these attributes to command a respected place in society.

In The Minister's Charge Howells moved toward showing the wealthy class in a position of responsibility, but even here those who have

⁷⁵The Rise of Silas Lapham, p. 84.

lived in social exclusiveness all their lives find themselves pathetically incapable of understanding those below them. The Reverend Mr. Sewell composes his sermon on "complicity" as a self-confession of his own shortcomings, and the discourse has an outward emotional effect upon Sewell's audience. The thesis of the sermon could not benefit Lemuel Barker now, however. Throughout the novel Barker has obviously been morally superior to the "Proper Bostonians" who cannot reach the young man's problems, and the reader is left to wonder whether Sewell's sermon has any measure of success in lastingly transforming his parishioners. Howells apparently had misgivings about the eventual conversion of the aristocrats at large, for in the novels following The Minister's Charge he continued to show them in their pitiful impotence. They are either adamant in their loyalty to position and aristocratic manners, as are Suzette Northwick in The Quality of Mercy and Mrs. Horn in A Hazard of New Fortunes, or they make a fiasco of trying to reach those below them, as does the title character in Annie Kilburn. Margaret Vance, in A Hazard of New Fortunes, evades the whole issue by joining a religious sisterhood.

The influences of "good" society received Howells' most sober treatment in The Landlord at Lion's Head, a late novel (first published in 1897) and designated by most critics as one of the finest of Howells' works. Herein he revived the setting of several of his earlier social comedies--the New England summer hotel--but there is no comedy. Rather there is tragedy: the final spiritual degeneration of Thomas Jefferson Durgin through the example that the world of "good" society gives him.

Although Jeff's story has been interpreted as "a tragedy of sheer incapacity for good,"⁷⁶ the catalyst of the tragedy is society itself, which encourages Jeff's apparently innate desire for power. An undisciplined New England country youth with none of the spiritual awareness of the old Puritans, he is the apogee of individualism, ripe for exploitation in a world that has made such individualism its god. When young Jeff first encounters the outside world through the clientele of the summer hotel at Lion's Head, he is sharply awakened to the knowledge that "good" society is exclusive and even savage in its self-preservation. His illusion that the son of the landlady is accepted as a social equal by the guests is shattered when one of the ladies on a picnic serves Jeff's plate first so that he can go eat with the horses. Submitting to his mother's ambition for him, Jeff enrolls at Harvard; and when he finds himself looked down upon as a "jay," he determines to crash Boston society and has a warm but meaningless affair with wealthy and dissolute Bessie Lynde. Both Bessie and her alcoholic brother, though of the elite, are coarse and vicious--a fatal example for the youth who gazes longingly on their position.

To the consternation of his mother, Jeff desires to run the hotel at Lion's Head and spurns the other opportunities that his Harvard education would admit. And he does become a successful landlord. He has learned his lesson in the morality of economics from the Boston aristocracy. "Prosperity and adversity, they've got nothing to do with

⁷⁶Delmar Gross Cooke, William Dean Howells: A Study (New York, 1920), p. 250.

conduct," he avows. "'If you're a strong man, you get there, and if you're a weak man, all the righteousness in the universe won't help you.'" ⁷⁷ Money is the sign of success and power; its source does not matter. And as landlord of the new Lion's Head Inn, Jeff has money, authority, and social position.

The Landlord at Lion's Head is not an attack so much on the American economic system as on the decadence that had settled on upper-class society following the industrial expansion of the seventies and eighties. If Howells was concerned with reform here, it was reform of the tastes and sensibilities of society. A "civilization" that has lost self-respect is rather hopeless. This novel shows, much better than the "economic" novels, how the ideal of success destroys society as well as the individual who follows it. As Jere Westover, Jeff's unheeded spiritual adviser solemnly comments, there is no end in sight, for corruption must follow corruption: "'The dreadful thing is that others must share in [Jeff's] harvest.'" ⁷⁸ The problem in this novel is reminiscent of the problems of earlier Howells novels, particularly The Rise of Silas Lapham, but the conclusion is reversed. There is no moral triumph.

An interesting and unique modification of the moneyed aristocrat was made by Howells in the drawing of Eben Hilary, the board chairman in The Quality of Mercy. Hilary comes close to exemplifying the truly

⁷⁷The Landlord at Lion's Head (New York, 1911), p. 309.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 399.

magnanimous gentleman that Howells was in his own life. Hilary, a democratic aristocrat as Howells was himself, went "counter to the most respectable feeling of business in Boston, when he came out as an abolitionist." He honors his son "for what he called his balderdash about industrial slavery."⁷⁹ Eventually moved by his son's protestations against punishing Northwick, he plans to drop charges if the embezzled money can be replaced. And he accepts his daughter's romance with Brice Maxwell, a progressive newspaperman. Although Hilary is admirable in his magnanimity, he is still a businessman and a proponent of a system that Howells attacked through the corrupt Northwick. Yet Hilary's attractiveness gives evidence that while Howells was in the midst of the period of his most rabid agitation for economic reform, he could acknowledge the strength of individual will, an important phase of his thought that comes back in full force in the later novels.

E. REFORM AND UTOPIANISM

Several possible solutions to the problem of social inequities were considered fictionally by Hawthorne and Howells, and those which were deliberate and formalized were rejected by both authors for similar reasons. Both men lived in an age seething with reform movements and a humanitarian impulse--an age which Parrington dated from Channing's first anti-war sermon, preached in 1812.⁸⁰ Being democratic in spirit,

⁷⁹The Quality of Mercy, p. 45.

⁸⁰Vernon Lewis Parrington, The Romantic Revolution in America in Main Currents in American Thought (New York, 1958), II, 342.

neither could turn his back on any plausible method for curing society's ills. But, as Chapter III has shown, the conduct of the individual was to Hawthorne and Howells the key to the conduct of society. Superimposing a theoretical system upon society as a whole might still not reform individual hearts. And this shortcoming was, in the final analysis, the basis for their skepticism of organized reform, philanthropy, or Utopianism.

Part of Hawthorne's and Howells' misgiving is evinced by their critical appraisal of the character of reformers and philanthropists. In the fiction of both authors individual reformers are shown to be impractical, devoid of emotional balance, and even lacking in common courtesy and decency with regard to anyone who does not have immediate bearing upon their reform projects. In Hawthorne's "The Celestial Railroad," philanthropists are among the residents of Vanity Fair, and in "The Procession of Life" there is a thumb-nail sketch depicting the personal narrowness of reformers:

When a good man has long devoted himself to a particular kind of beneficence--to one species of reform--he is apt to become narrowed into the limits of the path wherein he treads, and to fancy that there is no other good to be done on earth but that selfsame good to which he has put his hand, and the very mode that best suits his own conceptions. All else is worthless. His scheme must be wrought out by the united strength of the whole world's stock of love, or the world is no longer worthy of a position in the universe. (II, 246-247)

Holgrave, the twenty-two-year-old American Gil Blas in The House of the Seven Gables, is typical of Hawthorne's view of reformers. He is immature and consequently too impetuous. In his zeal to make over everything at once, he fails to recognize the worthy achievements of

the past. Although Hawthorne praises Holgrave's sincerity and concurs with him that "better centuries are coming," he stamps his philosophy mainly as "crude, wild, and misty" (III, 217). Any person prone to speculation is dangerous to himself, for "there is no temptation so great as the opportunity of acquiring empire over the human spirit . . ." (III, 253). The reformer may destroy his own soul by putting himself in the place of God, to rule over the lives of men.

Older and more designing than Holgrave is Hollingsworth in The Blithedale Romance. Apparently his only interest in the cooperative colony of Blithedale is the possibility of his using it as a foundation of his institution "for the reformation of criminals through an appeal to their higher instincts" (V, 361). Not only does the narrator Coverdale brand Hollingsworth's scheme "impracticable"; he also notes that the would-be philanthropist has become a bond-slave of his theory so much that he has lost all warmth for other things and people. As Coverdale wishes to tell Priscilla, " . . . Hollingsworth's heart is on fire with his own purpose, but icy for all human affection . . ." (V, 434). Hollingsworth seemingly courts the friendship of Coverdale and the love of Zenobia only to convert them to his scheme. The philanthropist has become a colossal bore and an insufferable egotist.

Sad, indeed, [thinks Coverdale,] but by no means unusual: he had taught his benevolence to pour its warm tide exclusively through one channel; so that there was nothing to spare for other great manifestations of love to man, nor scarcely for the nutriment of individual attachments, unless they could minister, in some way, to the terrible egotism which he mistook for an angel of God. (V, 382)

Although Hollingsworth (and to a certain extent Holgrave) as a

human being is caricature, the portrait is, as Warren noted,⁸¹ just another instance of Hawthorne's aversion to lack of balance in any of life's situations. A person distorts his entire personality by a single radical view. Stearns rightly observed that

as a true artist, he was possessed of a strong dislike for everything eccentric and abnormal; he wished for symmetry in all things, and above all in human actions; and those restless, unbalanced spirits, who attached themselves to the transcendental movement and the anti-slavery cause, were particularly objectionable to him.⁸²

In his depiction of reformers and philanthropists, Howells also pointed up the lack of balance in their lives--the monomania which made them quite often insensible to the love of those closest to them and unconcerned with their own mental and physical health. Such a one is the Reverend Julius W. Peck in Annie Kilburn, who, when he is first met by the title character, sets her to "thinking of Hollingsworth, in The Blithedale Romance, the only philanthropist whom she had really ever known."⁸³ Since Peck, in giving undivided attention to his own ministerial duties, is forgetful of the welfare of his own small daughter, he immediately substantiates Annie's view, gleaned from her acquaintance with Hawthorne, that philanthropists "are always ready to sacrifice the happiness and comfort of any one to the general good."⁸⁴ Whereas Annie

⁸¹Warren, p. xliv.

⁸²Frank Preston Stearns, The Life and Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne (Boston, copyright 1906), p. 195.

⁸³Annie Kilburn, p. 67.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 67-68.

may be prejudiced against Peck because he has pointed out the fallacy of the "Social-Union," the disinterested Dr. Morrell, from observation of the minister's activities, reaches a similar conclusion: "'If a man's heart is open to the whole world, to all men, it's shut sometimes against the individual, even the nearest and dearest.'"⁸⁵ Although Peck does accomplish his purpose in awakening in the community an awareness of social inequities, his own life is a negative example. Instead of remaining in Hatboro' to guide his parishioners in developing the good that he has initiated, he runs off on another scheme: to take a job in the Lowell mills so that he may better minister to the workers. When Peck is killed by a train, the reader is relieved that Howells spared the minister from further personal nullification of the good he has accomplished.

The unbalanced personality of the reformer was depicted more harshly in The World of Chance. Bennett commented that by the time this novel was written (1892), "The passion of Howells' awakening to economic injustice had been expended."⁸⁶ Thus in The World of Chance, the last of the "economic" novels, Howells was swinging back to his original emphasis upon the weight of the individual in solving social and economic problems. The economic world is still one of "chance," but extremists have proved their insufficiency to better that world. It is significant that David Hughes, a sympathetically drawn character and

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 258.

⁸⁶George N. Bennett, William Dean Howells: The Development of a Novelist (Norman, Okla., 1959), p. 203.

the only one who really comes alive in the novel, advocates legislation as the way toward reform--a gradual process, which indicates that Howells had laid by his short-lived revolutionary notions in favor of compromise.

At first Ansel Denton, the son-in-law of Hughes, appears as a sincere, altruistic man caught in the dilemma of selling an invention and putting many men out of work or destroying it and seeing his family continue in destitution. But as he dwells upon his problem, his already strained mind turns completely morbid. Formerly a Shaker, he still believes that he has an inner voice, which now tells him that he must offer some sacrifice for perpetuating evil in the form of his invention. Through his lack of foresight, he has caused the death of his infant twins by exposure to scarlet fever, and now the "voice" cries more loudly for a sacrifice. When he is prevented from offering his sister-in-law, he destroys himself by drinking acid. These maniacal actions have obscured any force that Denton's humanitarianism might have had, and they offer perfect justification for David Hughes' earlier words: "Yes, there is a special obligation upon the friends of social reform to a life of common-sense."⁸⁷

If one is to judge by the number of novels in which women philanthropists appear, Howells felt philanthropy to be more widespread among the female sex. Perhaps he felt, as Hawthorne wrote in The Blithedale Romance, that "prophets, reformers, and philanthropists [are]

⁸⁷The World of Chance (New York, 1893), p. 246.

likely to make at least two proselytes among the women to one among the men" (V, 397). All of Howells' feminine philanthropists, however, are essentially the same woman. They are single, rich, and idle and have a craving to be of some positive use in the world. And their schemes are impractical to the level of the ludicrous. Sybil Vane, in The Minister's Charge, distributes flowers to the poor and to those in prison to try to prevent crime through beauty; Clara Kingsbury, in A Modern Instance, is an organizer of the "Indigent Children's Surf-Bathing Society," for which she sponsors lavish social entertainment; Annie Kilburn, anxious to contribute to the edification of her home town, first gives the statue of a winged victory for the town square and then becomes involved in the unrealistic "Social-Union." But the philanthropy of women, Howells intimated, is merely a form of the frustrated maternal instinct; all his women philanthropists eventually "adopt" something or someone. Sibyl Vane, by offering to be a "sister" to Lemuel Barker, tries to save him from the world; Miss Kingsbury comes to the rescue of financially desperate Helen Harkness in A Woman's Reason and takes in the forlorn Marcia in A Modern Instance; Annie Kilburn adopts Idella, the Reverend Mr. Peck's neglected child; and Margaret Vance, in A Hazard of New Fortunes, makes it a moral obligation on her part to get the Misses Dryfoos accepted in society.

Both Hawthorne and Howells had personal experience with cooperative, Utopian enterprises, which profoundly influenced their skeptical attitude toward the ideal commonwealth as a means of solving social problems. Hawthorne's experience came later in life (he was thirty-seven

when he joined the Brook Farm community) than did Howells' (he was thirteen at the time of the Eureka Mills experiment). But the impact on the older man was no greater than that on the younger, for both were affected strongly enough to write novels about their particular experience. Howells also centered his first autobiographical effort, My Year in a Log Cabin, on his life during the unfortunate cooperative experiment.

Hawthorne's motives for joining the Brook Farm community have been minutely examined by his biographers, but there is little agreement regarding his actual sympathy with the experimental colony. Stewart stated emphatically that Hawthorne had no "sympathy with the guiding spirits of Brook Farm and their ideology," and that his only reason for joining was "the hope that membership in Ripley's community would provide the means of supporting a wife."⁸⁸ According to Hall, Hawthorne entered the community because of his personal social maladjustment, this being the "impulse to realize as a democrat the refinements and grace of the aristocracy."⁸⁹ That Hawthorne was dissatisfied with his own situation in life there can be no doubt, for he had found it impossible to develop his literary talent under the heavy demands of earning a living. But dissatisfaction with his own lot was not all. Cantwell, notwithstanding his over-active imagination with regard to Hawthorne, perhaps best estimated Hawthorne's reasons for going along with Brook Farm:

⁸⁸Stewart, p. 59.

⁸⁹Hall, p. 4.

Hawthorne wanted a place for himself and Sophia to live, but he was also enough of an idealist to be affected at least moderately by the Salem talk of trying to work out a perfect pattern for society at large.⁹⁰ Though Hawthorne may have entered with misgivings about complete success, he still believed that men in a democracy ought to have the opportunity to work out a cooperative mode of living that also suited their individual personalities.

Howells' experience with cooperative enterprise came in 1850, when William Cooper Howells and his brothers formed the plan for turning an old grist mill into a paper mill and sharing the profits. Here again was the often tried American scheme of cooperative individualism, one which intended, however, to avoid the mistakes of earlier experiments such as New Harmony and Brook Farm. It was to be based upon the natural unit of society--the family. But even the family could stand just so much. After a hard, isolated winter in an inadequate log cabin, William Cooper Howells, his own incapacity painfully evident in his failure to get the paper mill going, moved his family to Columbus to return to journalism.⁹¹

Hawthorne satirically celebrated his sojourn at Brook Farm in The Blithedale Romance, a novel whose underlying bitterness is dressed in the finest Hawthornian innuendo and irony. Blithedale, like Brook Farm, is not set up as a pure communistic society; thus the novel should not

⁹⁰Cantwell, pp. 320-321. Cf. George Parsons Lathrop, A Study of Hawthorne (Boston, 1876), p. 186.

⁹¹The Road to Realism, pp. 34-37.

necessarily be viewed as Hawthorne's disapproval--or even consideration--of socialistic government. It is a place where supposedly congenial minds work together at farming in order to have individually more time to devote to their scholarly or artistic endeavors. The incompatibility of scholarship and farming, wrote Hawthorne, is a basic fallacy in the Blithedale operation, for "The yeoman and the scholar . . . are two distinct individuals and can never be melted or welded into one substance" (V, 394). Even this incompatibility might have been overcome if the colonists had been willing, or able, to give themselves to the enterprise. But the principal characters all insist on retaining their own isolated individuality and thereby doom any hope of real cooperation. Coverdale, the narrator, discovers for himself a hermitage, which "symbolized my individuality, and aided me in keeping it inviolate" (V, 432). Hollingsworth, as this chapter has noted earlier, never attempts to throw himself into the cause; instead he bides his time until through guile he can convert Blithedale to his own ends. Zenobia denounces him bitterly:

"Self, self, self! You have embodied yourself in a project. You are a better masquerader than the witches and gypsies yonder; for your disguise is a self-deception. See whither it has brought you! First, you aimed a death-blow, and a treacherous one, at this scheme of a purer and higher life, which so many noble spirits had wrought out." (V, 567)

But Zenobia herself has not subordinated her individuality to the general motives of the colony. She wears an individualizing costume and expounds continually upon her pet hobby of women's rights. When Coverdale meets her in town, he is surprised by the transformation in her appearance, which prompts his inquiry:

"Can it be, Zenobia, that you ever really numbered yourself with our little band of earnest, thoughtful, philanthropic laborers?"

"Those ideas have their time and place," she answered, coldly. "But I fancy it must be a very circumscribed mind that can find room for no other." (V, 506)

Another insidious agent which Hawthorne had already treated in The House of the Seven Gables and which also intrudes upon Blithedale is materialism. As explained by Male in showing the novel as anticipatory to The Waste Land, most of the characters, before their entrance into Blithedale, have been thoroughly corrupted by the desire for money or fame or both.⁹² Ironically, whereas the colony has been organized to give exclusive attention to the life of the spirit, it must, in order to survive, compete commercially with the world by selling its farm products. Silas Foster, the colony's "tutor in the art of husbandry," is hired "at a fair stipend." The upshot of the Blithedale experiment reveals that isolation from the world, even for the most worthy of intellectual and spiritual endeavors, is contrary to the scheme of things; if individual transformation comes, it must be as a part of all life, not secluded from it.

Howells used Brook Farm--and Blithedale, too--as a point of departure for his criticism of Utopian colonies in The World of Chance. In this novel, Mr. Kane, on whom Percy Ray supposes Hawthorne might have based Coverdale, is a disillusioned transcendentalist. The elderly David Hughes, however, is the principal authority on the failings of

⁹²Roy R. Male, "Toward The Waste Land: The Theme of The Blithedale Romance," College English, XVI (February, 1958), 277-283, 295.

Utopias, for he has actually been a Brook Farm colonist. Now he spends his declining days talking to anyone within earshot about his latest plan for social reform. As Kane explains to Ray, "'At sixty-nine he has discovered that his efforts to oblige his fellow-beings ever since he was twenty have been misdirected.'"⁹³ Now he feels that universal reform can be effected only through political means, at some time when all men are educated to their obligation to vote.⁹⁴ Hughes is in favor of monopoly--a monopoly controlled by all men, in which there will be true socialism.

Any Utopian colony is a failure, says Hughes, because it is isolated.

"If I had back the years that I have wasted in a perfectly futile effort to deal with the problem of the race at a distance where I couldn't touch it, I would have nothing to do with eremitism in any of its forms, either collectively as we have had it in our various communistic experiments, or individually on the terms which Tolstoi apparently advises."⁹⁵

Although Hughes admits his debt to Tolstoy's spirituality, he cannot endorse his withdrawal from the world. "'We shall never redeem the world by eschewing it. Society is not to be saved by self-outlawry. The body politic is to be healed politically.'"⁹⁶ Since Utopian colonies are ostensibly established as a remedy for materialism, they have

⁹³The World of Chance (New York, 1893), p. 87.

⁹⁴This is the same mild method advocated by Howells through the character of Mr. Homos in A Traveler from Altruria, a work which is deceptively revolutionary in theme.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 90.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 91.

paradoxically failed when they have succeeded. They have become merely a gigantic ego still in competition with the world:

"They have failed all the more lamentably when they have succeeded financially, because that sort of success comes from competition with the world outside. A community is an aggrandized individual; it is the extension of the egoistic motive to a large family, which looks out for its own good against other families, just as a small family does."⁹⁷

Owen Powell, whom Howells modeled after his father, and his family learn in New Leaf Mills⁹⁸ also that Utopianism is utterly dependent upon the world and that the possibilities for self-sustenance are small indeed. Since none of the other Powell brothers ever come to New Leaf Mills to complete the family operation that has been planned, the implication is that in such enterprises someone is required to make more than his share of sacrifice. Thus there is no real cooperation.

For a while Owen, a sincere Swedenborgian optimist, bears up, trusting that spring will brighten the prospects for transforming the old grist mill into the proposed cooperative paper mill. He patiently bears the abuse of Overdale, the petulant and alcoholic mill operator, who fears for his job under the new administration and the only life he knows. Powell seeks to encourage his care-worn wife by starting their new house, but it is never finished. When brother Felix, who is always "coming in the spring," dies of tuberculosis, Owen is forced to abandon the project.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 121.

⁹⁸As in The Blithedale Romance, the irony of the novel is inherent in the name given to the Utopian colony.

He did not relinquish the ideal of a true state of things which he and his brothers had hoped to realize at New Leaf Mills, but he was inclined to regard the communistic form as defective. The communities of Robert Owen had everywhere failed as signally as that of New Leaf Mills But he argued, not so strenuously as he used to argue things, but as formally, that if some such conception of society could possess the entire State, a higher type of civilization would undoubtedly eventuate.⁹⁹

Collectivism, as seen by Hawthorne and Howells, does not, therefore, eliminate the individualism which often exerts itself in society and threatens the good of the whole. Neither can the materialistic inclinations and needs of individuals be eliminated by herding people into a communal colony. Personality differences, diversities of temperaments molded by all kinds of environments, can not be made compatible by suddenly changing the circumstances. Hawthorne and Howells both believed in social progress, but not in revolution. And the ultimate achievement of that progress is not to be the result of rearranging the superficial structure of society, but of converting the hearts, and hence the personalities, of the individuals within society.

F. INDIVIDUAL MATURITY AND SOCIAL EQUALITY

One of Hawthorne's major themes is the tragedy of an individual devoid of social consciousness suddenly being thrust into a complex social situation. This is perhaps best illustrated in The Marble Faun, in which Donatello, a half-wild creature living in primitive innocence, attempts to protect his beloved Miriam in the only way his instincts

⁹⁹New Leaf Mills (New York, 1913), p. 154.

direct--by violence. Whereas Donatello's crime of murder is the beginning of his education, it is not complete until he has enough change of heart and mind to accept willingly the justice meted by nature and, of course, society. After Donatello, through meditation, becomes penitent and resolves to accept the necessary penalty, he is a changed and now acceptable social being:

His aspect unconsciously assumed a dignity, which, elevating his former beauty, accorded with the change that had long been taking place in his interior self. He was a man, revolving grave and deep thoughts in his breast. (VI, 370)

In his characteristic way of presenting a more commonplace situation than Hawthorne customarily did, Howells showed in several instances the utter impossibility of an uninitiated person's acting with propriety in even the simplest of social situations. The examples of Silas Lapham and the daughters of Jacob Dryfoos have already been mentioned in this chapter. An example of another kind is found in Annie Kilburn, in which Annie's housekeeper Mrs. Bolton, suddenly made aware of her social rights by the furor surrounding the Rev. Mr. Peck, is shown to lack the sense even to be courteous. As Annie enters through the yard, Mrs. Bolton calls a message out the window to her instead of bringing it into the parlor. "Annie fired in resentment of the uncouthness. It was Mrs. Bolton's business to come into the parlor and give her the note, with a respectful statement of the facts. But she did not tell her so; it would have been useless."¹⁰⁰

Fundamentally The Vacation of the Kelwyns draws a similar

¹⁰⁰Annie Kilburn, p. 113.

conclusion: there can be no successful understanding between different social classes until the lower learns some semblance of decorum. The usually simple act of having the cook prepare the kind of food desired by the family she serves becomes for the Kelwyns the supreme moral problem of their lives. When the Kelwyns rent a New England farm house from a Shaker family for the summer, they feel that they are being liberal in letting Mr. and Mrs. Kite stay on as servants. They are willing to pay board to the Kites and they allow them to take the profits from whatever is raised on the farm. But as soon as they eat Mrs. Kite's first meal, the Kelwyns are on the defensive. The Kites seem to have antipathy for summer folk, and they are proud and independent.

Mrs. Kelwyn will not take over the kitchen for fear of offending Mrs. Kite. "I might as well ask you to go out and show him about his farm-work," she tells her husband.¹⁰¹ It is not the Kites' being unable to please them which vexes the Kelwyns; it is that the Kites do not seem to want to. When the Kelwyns finally decide to replace Mr. and Mrs. Kite with another couple, Kite is belligerent and threatens suit. And the problem becomes more complex morally, too. "Whether we turn ourselves out or them out," Mrs. Kelwyn says, "we disgrace them in their neighbors' eyes."¹⁰² Finally the Kelwyns themselves leave--with regret. They are glad that they have not allowed themselves to hurt the Kites publicly, but what troubles them is their "private portion of the public

¹⁰¹The Vacation of the Kelwyns (New York, 1920), p. 40.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 212.

debt which we all somehow owe to the incapable, the inadequate, the-- the--shiftless."¹⁰³

Although Hawthorne presented the problem of sin in his fiction through a variety of symbols, the end result of expiation of sin is the restoration of the individual to a harmonious place among his fellow beings. This action, stripped of symbolism, is, as Hall concluded, the "coming to terms with a democratic society."¹⁰⁴ Male noted that both Hawthorne and Melville were dissatisfied with the easy optimism of transcendentalism because it eliminated the necessity of the purification of the individual heart "by the fire of tragic experience."¹⁰⁵ Such is a rather grandiose phrase to apply to Howells, but it is important to note that both Hawthorne and Howells considered experience necessary in effecting the heart-change. Howells, however, as has been frequently noted, dealt with this experience in less abstract terms. Yet even in Howells it is oftentimes an extremely torturous one. The culmination of this experience, as seen by both Hawthorne and Howells, is the subordination of self. When all men have learned to blend themselves with society as a whole, then and only then can a true equalitarianism exist.

This subordination of self has as its positive counterpart the emergence of love, which Hawthorne and Howells symbolized through the

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 257.

¹⁰⁴Hall, p. 160.

¹⁰⁵Roy R. Male, Hawthorne's Tragic Vision (Austin, Texas, 1957), p. 32.

love of man and woman. This is shown most clearly in the novels of both writers which deal most pointedly with social and economic themes.

Young people are successful, despite the conflicts among their elders, in closing social and economic fissures.

The radical Holgrave, in The House of the Seven Gables, confides to Phoebe: "'Moonlight, and the sentiment in man's heart responsive to it, are the greatest of renovators and reformers. And all other reform and renovation, I suppose, will prove to be no better than moonshine!'" (III, 255) Although Holgrave's change into a "conservative" may seem inconsistent in the light of his blatantly liberal character, Hawthorne has shown all along Holgrave's consciousness of the innate power of love in resolving social conflicts and merely puts another of the reformer's many beliefs into practice. Through the love of Holgrave and Phoebe the houses of Maule and Pyncheon are united. "This long drama of wrong and retribution," of conflict between patrician and plebeian, is concluded under "Love's web of sorcery" (III, 375-377).

Howells wrought the same conciliation with the marriage of Tom Corey and Penelope Lapham. Despite all the failures of the Laphams and the Coreys to enter into any sort of comfortable relationship on the social plane, the young people unite the families in such a way that in the future there will be no more distinction between the moneyed aristocrat and the self-made Vermont farmer. There will be, as in the case of Holgrave and Phoebe, a new race in America. One of the tragedies in A Hazard of New Fortunes is the prevention of the union of Conrad Dryfoos and Margaret Vance because of the death of Conrad. Yet Conrad's

death, which ironically is an indirect result of the young man's realization of Margaret's love for him, does help to create more sympathy among those who have been economic enemies. The reuniting of the families of Langbrith and Hawberk, in The Son of Royal Langbrith, is accomplished through the love of young James Langbrith and Hope Hawberk. No mere social apology nor economic recompense could repair the economic, social, and physical ruin which Royal Langbrith heaped upon Hawberk. There must be something deeper, something that will restore the past destruction through future creation. The Reverend Mr. Enderby observes that, in spite of the past, "'Hope and James Langbrith are not unhappy. They are radiantly happy, and more wisely happy for tasting the sorrow which has not passed down to their generation.'"¹⁰⁶

By ordering such a solution to social problems, Hawthorne and Howells further followed their personal tendencies toward compromise, which has been noted in other areas of their thought in preceding chapters. In the compromise they were not simply advocating bourgeois tastes and habit. Indeed, in their eyes, the middle class should be the dominant class, though in the social millenium it would be the only class.¹⁰⁷

As a consequence of their general position with relation to

¹⁰⁶The Son of Royal Langbrith, p. 369.

¹⁰⁷In their solution to social and economic problems, Hawthorne and Howells anticipated political writer T. V. Smith, who advanced the theory of a moral and enlightened middle class which would reach out and absorb the upper and lower classes. ("Americanism," Chapter VI of The Promise of American Politics [Chicago, 1936], pp. 207-297.)

social compromise, Hawthorne and Howells have become targets of recent critics who have accused them of advocating mediocrity. They have been seen as proponents of conformity and, as such, enemies of true enlightenment. One commentator wrote of Hawthorne that "the most consistent note in those stories which affirm Hawthorne's faith in balance is the sweet desirability of material happiness."¹⁰⁸ Another made a similar diagnosis of Howells:

The reality he saw was the reality of the "commonplace." Quite accurately he recognized that civilization in the United States had been shaped primarily by the homely if materialistic values of the bourgeoisie. Those values he himself accepted as the highest good: an idealization of the domesticated female as long as she retained character and sparkle, a faith in the self-made man of business as long as he maintained his moral integrity, a fascination with the details of ordinary life in the social circles of the comfortable and respectable middle class.¹⁰⁹

That Hawthorne and Howells were averse to a very far removal from the middle-ground of human relations is true and has been the burden of this chapter. But their aim was not in a leveling of sensibilities and ideals. As has been shown, they were outspoken critics of merely a unification of interests by means of similar materialistic advantages. Rather, their ideal was a fusing of the best qualities of the lower and the upper classes. Both men wished to see in combination the democratic spirit they had known in their youth and the cultivation they had admired

¹⁰⁸Chester E. Eisinger, "Hawthorne as Champion of the Middle Way," New England Quarterly, XXVII (March, 1954), 31.

¹⁰⁹Robert E. Spiller, "Father of Modern American Realism," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIII (September 2, 1950), 10.

and in part acquired in their manhood. Their ideal man was the genteel democrat.

CHAPTER V

THE FUNCTION OF WOMAN IN SOCIETY

Since Hawthorne and Howells accepted as a part of fiction writing the mandate to unravel truth from the entanglements of social convention, they consequently examined many kinds of human relationships. They were concerned, overall, with the relationships of individuals in a democratic society; and they observed closely the alignment of American social classes and denounced false, improvised distinctions. One of the relationships which drew their attention was that between the sexes. They were not concerned merely with the traditional love-interest of fiction; rather they endeavored through a study of feminine psychology to discover the natural and just relationship of women to men and to society in general. And in their conclusions as to the role of women in society Hawthorne and Howells again maintained the delicate balance between extreme viewpoints that was their aesthetic and ethical ideal.

In youth Hawthorne and Howells had been associated primarily with women who performed traditional duties in the home; both young men witnessed in their mothers an example of courageous self-denial in response to the hardships of none-too-prosperous families.¹ Each married a woman who apotheosized in the eyes of her husband the devoted wife and mother.

¹Mark Van Doren, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Critical Biography (New York, 1949), pp. 7-8; Edwin H. Cady, The Road to Realism (Syracuse, New York, 1956), pp. 43-44.

In their wives, however, Hawthorne and Howells found much more: both Sophia Peabody and Elinor Mead were women of considerable intellect and artistic cultivation. Sophia Peabody came from a family prominent in Salem intellectual life. Through her sisters, Elizabeth and Mary, she became sympathetic toward the social and educational reform movements of the day; Sophia herself was at one time a Transcendentalist. She was well read in the classics and highly talented in art.² Elinor Mead's family were moderately wealthy and were cultivated in the tradition of the New England "Brahmins." Progressive ideas, too, were not unknown in Elinor's family since one of her uncles was a leading member of the Putney and Oneida communities. Elinor, herself intellectual, was an especially good student of art.³

A. THE EQUALITY OF WOMAN AND MAN

Hawthorne and Howells enjoyed happy marriages and experienced satisfying feminine companionship in the domestic as well as intellectual areas of life. Sophia Peabody and Elinor Mead were companionable wives and good mothers while at the same time preserving their individuality through intellectual accomplishments which did not conflict with their essential places in the family. As one might expect, the two writers, in their fictional summation of the ideal woman, relied heavily

²Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography (New Haven, 1948), pp. 49-50, 65.

³The Road to Realism, pp. 75-77, 98-102.

on the outlines which their own wives provided. They depicted her as equal to man, but different. The man is always the stronger, physically and intellectually, and is the leader; but the woman is by no means a lifeless doll or a household slave. She is psychologically more emotional and sympathetic, but she is often strong in the times of moral crisis. Through her fundamentally more conservative nature, she complements, and often modifies, the impetuosity of the man.

Mutual dependence of husband and wife was exemplified by Hawthorne in "The Maypole of Merry Mount" when the newly married couple, being snatched from their amoral dream-world by the realities and responsibilities of life, "went heavenward, supporting each other along the difficult path which it was their lot to tread, and never wasted one regretful thought on the vanities of Merry Mount" (I, 84).⁴ In more practical terms Howells depicted the same principle of burden-sharing in The Rise of Silas Lapham. Throughout the initial development of Lapham's paint, Mrs. Lapham has worked side-by-side with her husband. "I used to tell her," Lapham proudly asserts to Bartley Hubbard, "it wa'n't the seventy-five per cent. of purr-ox-eyed of iron in the ore that made that paint go; it was the seventy-five per cent. of purr-ox-eyed of iron in her."⁵ She has been with Lapham through all his disappointments, and he gladly gives her part of the credit for his

⁴Unless otherwise indicated, citations from Hawthorne in this chapter are to Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. George Parsons Lathrop (Boston, 1883), 15 vols.

⁵The Rise of Silas Lapham, Modern Library Edition (New York, 1951), p. 13.

success: "'No hang back about her. I tell you she was a woman!'" When Hubbard comments that most men marry that kind of woman, Lapham disagrees and laments that "'Most of us marry silly little girls grown up to look like women.'⁶

Both The Scarlet Letter and The Marble Faun point up the co-dependence of the sexes in resolving moral dilemmas. In these works the woman is shown to be equal to the man in guilt. No love can be pure nor can it offer even emotional satisfaction when it rests upon disparate moral responsibility. After Dimmesdale, at the climax of The Scarlet Letter, has confessed his secret sin, the impenitent Hester asks what is to her a rhetorical question concerning the possibility of their future happiness in another world. But Dimmesdale answers: "'It may be that, when we forgot our God,--when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul,--it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion'" (V, 304). Kenyon, in The Marble Faun, advises Miriam that she should not hope to reap happiness with Donatello, for she must share equally his penance for the murder he has committed for her:

" . . . your bond is twined with such black threads that you must never look upon it as identical with the ties that unite other loving souls. It is for mutual support; it is for one another's final good; it is for effort, for sacrifice, but not for earthly happiness. If such be your motive . . . it were better to relinquish each other's hands at this sad moment. There would be no holy sanction on your wedded life." (VI, 369)

⁶Ibid.

Through The Shadow of a Dream--a short novel which in many ways is more equivocal than the two works of Hawthorne above--Howells showed that there can be no earthly happiness for man and woman when even a possibility exists that their union is deceitful or that there is guilt in either soul. Even though Douglas Faulkner may have been insane in dreaming that Hermia and James Nevil have always been in love, he may have had reasonable provocation for the germ of his hallucination. How does he know, Nevil wonders, that he has not sought the friendship of the Faulkners and lived in their home "except that [he] loved her, and longed to be near her?"⁷ He believes further that "'you can't account for everything on the ground of madness! Somewhere, some time, there must be responsibility for wrong."⁸ Despite their legal right to marry, Hermia and Nevil know that their union will be morally reprehensible as long as there is the shadow of a doubt about the past. Since they cannot be certain about their feelings for each other during Faulkner's lifetime, they must share the guilt even of that uncertainty.

"Our very indignation [Nevil says] at the treason imputed to us by Faulkner made us examine our hearts, and question each other. We could not tell when our love began, and that mystery of origin which love partakes of with eternity, and which makes it seem so divine a thing, became a witness against us. We said that if we could not make sure that no thought we had ever had of each other in his lifetime was false to him, then we were guilty of all, and we must part."⁹

The lovers in The Day of Their Wedding make a similar decision and

⁷The Shadow of a Dream (New York, 1890), p. 203.

⁸Ibid., p. 205.

⁹Ibid., pp. 208-209.

return to the Shaker colony because, as Lorenzo tells Althea, "'If you can't feel that it's right for you to live in the earthly order, I know it can't be right for me either.'"¹⁰ Although Howells did not indicate his sympathy with the religious motive, he did imply that as long as one partner harbors feelings of guilt about leaving the colony, neither can be happy.

On the other hand, a lack of balance in the man-woman relationship is pathetic, particularly when the woman is called upon to assume moral and spiritual strength for both herself and the man. Hollingsworth's degradation, at the conclusion of The Blithedale Romance, has reached its nadir because "the powerfully built man showed a self-distrustful weakness, and a childlike or childish tendency to press close, and closer still, to the side of the slender woman whose arm was within his" (V, 594). Priscilla's feminine qualities have also been perverted since she is not the partner but "the guardian of her companion." In The World of Chance Priscilla-like Peace Hughes is the only one who can calm the crazed philanthropist, Ansel Denton. While Ansel's wife mocks him, Peace sympathizes and consoles. In characteristic Howellsian irony, the weakness of the girl's role is suggested by the play upon her name. To the question that "'There can't be anything shorter than Peace, can there?'" Percy Ray quickly replies: "'Truce.'"¹¹ The woman who offers too much "peace"--too much sympathy--is compromising her

¹⁰The Day of Their Wedding (New York, 1896), pp. 155-156.

¹¹The World of Chance (New York, 1893), p. 113.

relative position as a partner and is susceptible to abuse by the dependent male. And Ansel finally demands the sacrifice of Peace because of the inner "voice," with which he drowns out his own weakness.

The grounds, then, for the union of man and woman in marriage were to Hawthorne and Howells equality. But this equality is spiritual and moral, indeed not physical or even psychological. The woman has certain exclusive attributes which she must supply to her husband in return for his own contributions. In a study of the heroine of The Scarlet Letter one critic noted that to Hawthorne "the distinctive feminine virtues are those characteristic of ideal wifehood and motherhood: instinctive purity and passionate devotion."¹² The same would apply to Howells; these virtues were seen by Hawthorne and Howells as natural, and they intimated that a woman responded to her place in life instinctively. The untutored woman in "The New Adam and Eve" is drawn magnetically to complete the feminine tasks that have been left by the doom-swept women of earth. "Eve ransacks a work-basket and instinctively thrusts the rosy tip of her finger into a thimble." She "feels almost conscious of the skill to finish" some embroidery that lies nearby. When she notices a broom behind the door, Eve "has a dim idea that it is an instrument proper for her hand" (II, 291). In The Scarlet Letter, Hester Prynne, notwithstanding her advanced views on woman's place, is naturally a good seamstress and her work is much in demand. Her native calling as a woman is still evident through her feeding the

¹²Darrel Abel, "Hawthorne's Hester," College English, XIII (March, 1952), 307.

hungry and nursing the sick. In the relationship of Basil and Isabel March, who "became a screen for the Howells family,"¹³ Howells demonstrated through several works the particular contributions made by man and woman in marriage. Basil is aware of the exclusive role his wife plays; he respects her for it, and he wisely refrains from intruding into her realm. In A Hazard of New Fortunes he notes the priority which domestic thoughts always have in Isabel's admirable feminine mind:

March knew his wife to be a woman of good mind and in perfect sympathy with him, but he understood the limitations of her perspective; and if he was not too wise, he was too experienced to intrude upon it any affairs of his till her own were reduced to the right order and proportion. It would have been folly to talk to her of Falkerson's conjecturable uncandor while she was in doubt whether her cook would like the kitchen, or her two servants would consent to room together; and till it was decided what school Tom should go to, and whether Bella should have lessons at home or not he was aware that with her mind distracted by more immediate interests he could not get from her that judgment, that reasoned divination, which he relied upon so much.¹⁴

B. IDEALISM AND SELF-SACRIFICE: VIRTUES PERVERTED

Two feminine characteristics with which woman can supplement man are idealism and self-sacrifice. In moderation, Hawthorne and Howells showed, these can be virtues; but when dominant in the personality, they can lead woman into emotional chaos. Not only does woman abrogate her own virtues, but she also brings woe to those who are associated

¹³Clara M. Kirk, "Reality and Actuality in the March Family Narratives of W. D. Howells," PMLA, LXXIV (March, 1959), 137.

¹⁴A Hazard of New Fortunes (New York, 1952), p. 105.

with her. In denouncing these extremes, Hawthorne and Howells were delivering an attack on one phase of the romanticism of their day.

Feminine idealism in the works of Hawthorne and Howells is usually associated with romantic love. The woman seeks to fulfill an emotional ideal; and when it fails her, she is unable to admit a valid basis for union with man. This imbalance between heart and head sometimes leads woman into the wrong relationship; at other times it causes her to scorn the one in which she would be most secure and happy. Hester Prynne is Hawthorne's supreme creation of the woman who has confused emotion and love; the basis of her union with Dimmesdale is evinced by the unrestrained nature of their child, Pearl.¹⁵ Even after suffering severely for her crime of adultery, Hester, in the forest meeting with her lover, once again permits passion to overshadow the futility of renewing their old relationship when she suggests flight. At Dimmesdale's death Hester is still not cognizant of the insubstantiality of their union. Likewise, Alice Pasmer in Howells' April Hopes, though a refined and proper nineteenth-century debutante, is driven by the same basic fallacy that confuses Hester. She believes that for love to be authentic and for it to conclude in a happy marriage, it must glow continuously at a fever-hot pitch. Howells' own comment is sufficient to prove his mistrust of emotionalism as the sign of love:

It is the rule that Americans marry for love, and the very rare exception that they marry for anything else; and if our

¹⁵See Darrel Abel, "Hawthorne's Pearl: Symbol and Character," ELH: A Journal of English Literary History, XVIII (March, 1951), 50-66.

divorce courts are so busy in spite of this fact, it is perhaps because the Americans also wmarry for love, or perhaps because love is not so sufficient in matters of the heart as has been represented in the literature of people who have not been able to give it so fair a trial.¹⁶

Marcia Gaylord (A Modern Instance) is Howel s' nineteenth-century, middle-class re-creation of Hawthorne's Hester. Guided exclusively by emotion and passion, Marcia turns her life into a shambles by marrying the wrong man. Her classical, dark beauty, like that of Hawthorne's dark heroines, is suggestive of the burning passion within. It is her beauty and her freedom in showing affection that draws Bartley Hubbard to her.¹⁷ Her initiative in pursuing Bartley is a breach of the conventions of courtship, which she never lives down: "She was proud, and she would be jealous; but, with all her pride and her distance, she had let him see that she liked him; and with not a word on his part that any one could hold him to."¹⁸ Bartley taunts her with this when, later in their marriage, she erupts in one of her many fits of jealousy:

"You would have me, before we were married; you were tolerably shameless in getting me; when your jealous temper made you throw me away, you couldn't live till you got me back again; you ran after me. Wel , I suppose you've learnt wisdom, now. At least you won't try that game again. But what will you do?"¹⁹

¹⁶April Hopes (New York, 1891), p. 63.

¹⁷It has been observed that in Howells' novels, excepting April Hopes, a "certain sign that a love affair will not lead to a happy marriage is the pre-marital kiss which the suitor forces or entreats from the pursued." (Kenneth Eble, "Howel s' Kisses," American Quarterly, IX [Winter, 1957], 441.)

¹⁸A Modern Instance (Boston, 1882), p. 22.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 391.

After her marriage begins to disintegrate, Marcia realizes that she has lacked proper restraint in her feelings and actions, as she tells Mrs. Halleck:

" . . . I think my worst trouble is that I've been left too free in everything. One mustn't be left too free. I've never had any one to control me, and now I can't control myself at the very times when I need to do it the most"20

Although the egotistical and unscrupulous Bartley is not without blame in the demise of his and Marcia's marriage, her own inability to be anything but a play-wife is equally responsible.²¹ She fails to develop any measure of the domestic practicality which characterizes the well-adjusted wife: "Her economies were frantic child's play,--methodless, inexperienced, fitful; and they were apt to be followed by remorse in which she abetted [Bartley] in some wanton excess."²² Instead of helping Bartley to face reality, Marcia over-encourages him and justifies his instability and rashness. When she perceives that her young dream of him is not the real Bartley, she cannot bear to forego the dream; and accusing herself of being a negative influence on him, she resolves to show greater faith and have more forbearance. But her resolution ends with another jealous tantrum. Bartley leaves once and for

²⁰Ibid., p. 287.

²¹William Wasserstrom viewed the failure of Marcia (as well as other maladjusted Howells women) to exercise the usual feminine virtues as the consequence of a too-close relationship with her father. Several Howells novels, he said, "are preoccupied with girls who are ill-prepared for life and love because their fathers have trained them to be excessively filial." (Heiress of All the Ages: Sex and Sentiment in the Genteel Tradition [Minneapolis, 1959], p. 85.)

²²A Modern Instance, p. 207.

all, and her passion, Howells implied, is channeled into a lifetime of self-accusation.

Another form of idealism is hero-worship, a tendency to which women who have known too little of the world are susceptible. It is evident in Hawthorne's Priscilla, who, though she has passively accepted the guidance of the evil Westervelt, has been sheltered from the normal impulses of life. Coverdale is fearful of the rapidity with which a man of Hollingsworth's flamboyance could enthrall her:

If I had any duty whatever, in reference to Hollingsworth, it was to endeavor to save Priscilla from that kind of personal worship which her sex is generally prone to lavish upon saints and heroes. It often requires but one smile out of the hero's eyes into the girl's or woman's heart, to transform this devotion, from a sentiment of the highest approval and confidence, into passionate love. (V, 401)

Jane Gillespie, in Howells' The Leatherwood God, is prime for emotional exploitation by the self-made prophet, Joseph Dylks. Intelligent and proper in a rustic way, but starved for an object worthy of her romantic adoration, Jane becomes one of the itinerant preacher's staunch supporters. The more her family (who have known Dylks from old times) beseech her to abandon her idol, the more avidly she defends him. "If you touched him, your hands would be withered,"²³ Jane proclaims. She loses faith in Dylks when she is brought a lock of hair torn from his head, but she starts keeping company with the young man who has dared touch the head of her idol. "' . . . She's got to be bewitched by somebody; [says her aunt] if it ain't one it's another; it was him then, and

²³The Leatherwood God (New York, 1916), p. 134.

it's Jim, now. . . . she's got to have somebody that she can feel the power of.²⁴

The obsession with self-sacrifice is closely akin to idealism and is another form of feminine emotionalism. In moderation, this feeling was approved by Hawthorne and Howells, for it could be a great virtue in woman when expressed in the natural love and protection of family. But in excess, it is a perversion of a noble instinct and causes woman to neglect the natural objects of her devotion. Such a woman is Catharine in Hawthorne's "The Gentle Boy." Hawthorne did not censure Catharine for being religious, but for allowing her "unbridled fanaticism" to supplant the intrinsic sympathy she should have as a woman and a mother. "She was naturally a woman of mighty passions," wrote Hawthorne (I, 100), and her passions have found an immoderate outlet in Quakerism. Unmindful of the heavenly blessing in motherhood, she persists in her unladylike exhibitions so far as to scream abusive language at the governor as he passes her prison window. Her "inner voice" directs the fate of her child:

"Leave thy child, Catharine, for his place is here, and go hence, for I have other work for thee. Break the bonds of natural affection, martyr thy love, and know that in all these things eternal wisdom hath its ends." (I, 106)

After the edict of Charles II has quelled persecution of the Quakers, Catharine returns to her child; but he is dying, not a victim so much of heartless Puritan oppression as of Catharine's own perverted womanhood.

²⁴Ibid., p. 207.

Among Howells' women the fervor for self-sacrifice takes many forms. In the title characters of Dr. Breen's Practice and Annie Kilburn it is an insatiable longing to do something for humanity. Both women are driven by a vague notion of duty rather than a true feeling of warmth for those who might profit from a woman's unique ministrations.²⁵ Although Grace Breen and Annie Kilburn both have their projects interrupted by marriage, it is apparent that neither woman undergoes any essential change. The reader can have only sympathy for the patient husbands.

Self-sacrifice with regard to matters of the heart was satirized by Howells in Indian Summer, in which the reader is introduced to one of Howells' numerous young ladies who has been adversely influenced by "romanticistic" literature.²⁶ Imogene Graham feels that she is in love with Theodore Colville, a charming man but twice her age, because she desires to recompense him for a love lost when he was younger. To Colville the misguided romantic innocently confesses the basis for her attachment:

"All that I ask is to be with you, and try to make you forget what's been sad in your life, and try to be of use to you in whatever you are doing, and I should be prouder and gladder

²⁵Cf. Howells' analysis of the haziness of purpose of another of his self-sacrificing women: "One of Parthenope Brook's ideals was a regard for others which she did not attempt to realize in an altruistic devotion to need of any kind, so much as in the divination of comfortable people's rights and the resolution to square them with her duties." (The Vacation of the Kelwyns [New York, 1920], p. 55.)

²⁶See Chapter II, p. 26, n. 20.

of that than anything that people call happiness."²⁷

Colville, however, is an astute and pragmatic observer of life; and although he is hypnotized by the attentions of such a charming girl, he is eventually jolted back to reality. He saves Imogene's life from ruin by not holding her to their engagement. Ironically, Mrs. Bowen, Imogene's duenna, falls into the same error as Imogene does earlier, though all along she has been able to see through the girl's (and Colville's) confused emotions. It is her duty, Mrs. Bowen believes, to refuse to marry Colville now that he has confessed his love for her, because she has secretly cared for him while he was engaged to another. But the beseeching of her young child breaks down Mrs. Bowen's flimsy wall of duty, which if maintained, would have made not one life miserable, but three lives.

One of Howells' most blatant spokesmen against the false ideal of self-sacrifice is the Reverend David Sewell. In The Minister's Charge he foresees tragedy if Lemuel Barker marries Statira Dudley because the girl expects him to. Although it is the man here who almost makes the fatal mistake through devotion to duty, Sewell's remarks have a general application:

"The trouble comes from that crazy and mischievous principle of false self-sacrifice that I'm always crying out against. If a man has ceased to love the woman he has promised to marry--or vice versa--the best possible thing they can do, the only righteous thing, is not to marry."²⁸

²⁷Indian Summer (Boston, 1885), p. 239.

²⁸The Minister's Charge (Boston, 1887), p. 310.

The Reverend Mr. Sewell gets a similar problem in The Rise of Silas Lapham when Lapham and his wife come to him for advice. Their daughter Penelope has refused to see Tom Corey because she has thought that he was in love with her sister, Irene. Although she loves Tom, Penelope believes she must give him up to make reparation for the wrong inadvertently done her sister. Sewell cries that "'we are all blinded, we are all weakened by a false ideal of self-sacrifice'" and makes a typical Howellsian accusation that "'it comes from the novels that befool and debauch almost every intelligence in some degree.'"²⁹

C. FEMINISM: REFORM AND PHILANTHROPY

Although Hawthorne and Howells decried the excessive exercise of the feminine virtues of devotion and self-sacrifice, they looked with even greater horror on women who were devoid of these or who subordinated them. Women who covet the world of men, only to exercise intellectual and personal liberalism, never reap happiness even though they may secure a degree of success, because this world is incompatible with woman's basic nature. In one respect, however, the desire of woman to force the issue of her equality with man in a man's world is another manifestation of her emotional instability. In the organized movement for women's rights, which got under way during the middle part of the nineteenth century, the temper of the feminist reformers reached the

²⁹The Rise of Silas Lapham, p. 214.

point of hysteria.³⁰ In the very act of agitating for their rights, women were demonstrating their ineptness for exercising these rights. Both Hawthorne and Howells devoted considerable attention in their fictional works to the question of women's place in the areas of life usually thought of as the exclusive domain of men. Despite the general negative view of the two authors, they showed not a little sympathy for their feminist characters; as always, their concern was with truth and the truth lay with nature.

Hawthorne's critique of the liberated woman is centered principally in his treatment of two characters, Hester Prynne in The Scarlet Letter and Zenobia in The Blithedale Romance. As one critic noted, in both these women "feminism is the product of abnormal adjustment."³¹ Hester and Zenobia are both passionate creatures; and when their emotion is denied legitimate channels, it becomes the force behind their plunge into intellectual speculation. Stifled by a loveless marriage to aged Roger Chillingworth, Hester seeks an emotional outlet through illicit union with Dimmesdale. But this affair is frustrated by the untimely birth of her child and her consequential Puritan punishment as an adulteress. Then, wrote Hawthorne, "her life had turned, in a great measure, from passion and feeling, to thought" (V, 198-199). Although she seems quietly to submit to her ostracism, she rebels internally, and

³⁰See Fred Lewis Pattee, The Feminine Fifties (New York, 1940), passim, particularly, Chapter VIII, pp. 92-109.

³¹Neal Frank Doubleday, "Hawthorne's Hester and Feminism," PMLA, LIV (September, 1939), 828.

her unusual mind begins to fashion a new world--one in which she would not have to suffer as a woman:

As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. (V, 200)

Zenobia's radical thinking, too, is the result of frustration. Coverdale surmises that the beautiful feminist has had experience in love:

"Zenobia is a wife; Zenobia has lived and loved! There is no folded petal, no latent dewdrop, in this perfectly developed rose!" (V, 373)

She herself admits, when she is rejected by Hollingsworth, that she possesses "A miserable, bruised, and battered heart, spoilt long before he met me" (V, 574). Thus her emotion has taken another form:

" . . . when her passionate womanhood, as was inevitable, had discovered its mistake, here had ensued the character of eccentricity and defiance which distinguished the more public portion of her life" (V, 437). Now, like Hester, she envisions a society in which woman will no longer be subject to man's abuse:

She made no scruple of oversetting all human institutions, and scattering them as with a breeze from her fan. A female reformer, in her attacks upon society, has an instinctive sense of where the life lies, and is inclined to aim directly at that spot. Especially the relation between the sexes is naturally among the earliest to attract her notice. (V, 369-370)

Hester and Zenobia, wrote Philip Rahv, are variations of Hawthorne's "Dark Lady of Salem," who is "possibly the most resplendent

and erotically forceful woman in American history."³² Indeed, the compelling vitality and luster of Hester and Zenobia indicate that their creation was a labor of love. Hawthorne was obviously charmed by the passion of woman, but he condoned this passion only within lawful bounds.³³ It is also evident that Hawthorne was sympathetic with these women as they suffer from both the abuse of society and the turmoil within their own psyche. But to say that The Scarlet Letter "represents his furthest advance in affirming the rights of the individual"³⁴ is to ignore Hawthorne's overall philosophy of individualism--that it must not overreach the bounds of common sympathy.³⁵ Hester and Zenobia, it is true, are victims of misfortune in the beginning; but society is ultimately the loser. These two abandon their respect for order, as their emotional outbursts show. Their very extremism is corroboration that they are psychologically unsuited for the liberty which they pursue.

In spite of their frantic agitation for woman's recognition as man's equal, Hester and Zenobia are still women. They need and want love; and, of course, it has been unlawful love (vaguely hinted in the

³²"The Dark Lady of Salem" in Image and Idea (Norfolk, Conn., 1957), p. 33.

³³See Morton Cronin's discussion of Hawthorne's attraction-repulsion in "Hawthorne on Romantic Love and the Status of Women," PMLA, LXIX (March, 1954), 89-98.

³⁴Rahv, p. 41.

³⁵Abel judiciously concluded that "Hester typifies romantic individualism, and in her story Hawthorne endeavored to exhibit the inadequacy of such a philosophy." ("Hawthorne's Hester," p. 303.)

case of Zenobia) that has predicated their further rebellion. For all of Hester's profligacy, she guards the identity of Pearl's father and shows the utmost tenderness for Dimmesdale as he sinks disgraced and dying. Zenobia's suicide is the result of her thwarted love for Hollingsworth; despite her exhibition of being superior to normal feminine emotions and drives, it is her pride as a woman that suffers from Hollingsworth's rejection. Now she sentimentally lays the blame for her mistake on her woman's nature: " . . . I am a woman, with every fault, it may be, that a woman ever had," she cries (V, 566). But fate has been unkind to her, she rationalizes, and has taken advantage of her weakness. She could be "all that a woman can be" if she only received "a little kinder smile of Him who sent me hither, and one true heart to encourage and direct me . . ." (*ibid.*).

As fictional characters, Hester and Zenobia merited Howells' high esteem. Howells admired Hester's beauty and vitality; and although he was sympathetic with her suffering, he deplored her moral confusion.³⁶ Zenobia he considered a more timely figure, who "in her phase of tragedy . . . stands as impressively for the nineteenth century as Hester Prynne for the seventeenth in hers."³⁷ And several nineteenth-century fictional women created by Howells attest to the later writer's attraction to Hawthorne's "dark ladies"³⁸ and also his deep concern

³⁶Heroines of Fiction (New York, 1901), I, 161-174.

³⁷Ibid., p. 179.

³⁸Frederic I. Carpenter generalized that "In the mid-nineteenth century golden hair became an attribute of the pure and innocent maiden;

with the feminist problem, which continued to be a public issue throughout his lifetime.

The title character of Mrs. Farrell, the closest Howells came to a true femme fatale, exhibits several striking similarities to Hester Prynne. The daughter of a woman who married a rugged ship's captain against the will of her family, Rosabel Farrell has had little guidance in her life. After her mother's death she was placed in a convent; and after reaching the age to enter the world, she married the elderly owner of her father's ship. Now at twenty-four she is a widow. She speaks freely of her marriage: "I didn't love him; no, I never pretended to; he was too old."³⁹ Like Hester and Zenobia, Rosabel Farrell is dark and statuesque. Her appearance suggests to one of her male companions an oriental priestess, "who had the dark still eyes, the loose overshadowing hair, the dusky bloom of Mrs. Farrell"⁴⁰

Although Mrs. Farrell does not make an issue of the feminist

while dark hair suggested the woman of passion and experience." ("Puritans Preferred Blondes; the Heroines of Melville and Hawthorne," New England Quarterly, IX [June, 1936], 253.) R. P. Boas found the "dark lady" to be representative of Romantic temperament. See "The Romantic Lady" in Romanticism in America, ed. George Boas (Baltimore, 1940), pp. 63-88. Howells, writing of Miriam, noted this distinction among Hawthorne's heroines: "Physically, she is of like make with Hester Prynne, as well as Zenobia, and of the type which represented passion in Hawthorne's imagination" (Heroines of Fiction, I, 184.) In endowing his own fictional women with passion and/or unusual daring, Howells often made use of the same color association. Note Rosabel Farrell, Marcia Gaylord, Penelope Lapham, Christine Dryfoos, and Rhoda Aldgate.

³⁹Mrs. Farrell (New York, 1921), p. 131.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 50.

cause, her actions are daring, if not particularly passionate. As Gilbert, one of the two men attracted to her, observes almost immediately after meeting Rosabel, "'She isn't meant for the domesticities.'"⁴¹ She seems to want to meet men on equal ground without allowing the entrance of romance, as she remarks to Easton, her other admirer: "'... why is it that there isn't some common ground for men and women to meet on, and be helpful to each other? Must they always be either lovers or enemies?'"⁴² But, like Zenobia, she chooses to make full use of her sex where it is advantageous; she is not so anxious to win a lover as to gain attention and power. After breaking up the friendship of her two admirers, Gilbert and Easton, she pleads moral blamelessness through the license accorded feminine folly. In Mrs. Farrell Howells stopped short of the deep moral problems involved in The Scarlet Letter and The Blithedale Romance, but the dangerous possibilities of Mrs. Farrell's calculated female play-acting are apparent. Rosabel Farrell exhibits basically the same wasted femininity as Hester and Zenobia.

Dr. Breen's Practice is the only novel in which Howells gave protracted attention to the matter of the professional woman, though he did touch on the problem incidentally in Miss Bellard's Inspiration. Unlike Rosabel Farrell, Grace Breen does not aspire to be a super-woman; actually her purpose is to martyr her own femininity through performance of duty, an obsession of many a Howells female character. Encouraged by

⁴¹Ibid., p. 78.

⁴²Ibid., p. 96.

her widowed, neurotic mother, Grace studies medicine to fulfill her personal social responsibility, not to prove anything in the abstract about woman:

She would not entertain the vanity that she was serving what is called the cause of woman, and she would not assume any duties or responsibilities toward it. She thought men were as good as women . . . and it was in no representative or exemplary character that she had chosen her course. At the same time that she held these sane [sic] opinions, she believed that she had put away the hopes with the pleasures that might once have taken her as a young girl.⁴³

Because of an unfortunate love affair, Grace feels that she has failed "where other women's hopes are." Thus, early in the novel, Howells strongly hinted that the young physician's rebellion against her own womanhood has been caused by emotional imbalance.

That Grace is still a woman with a woman's emotions is pathetically evident when she cannot handle her first case alone and another physician will not consult with her supposedly because of a difference in methodology. Aware that her inadequacies are those of woman, she gives up the case. Later when the other doctor suggests merging their service to mankind through marriage, Grace realizes that duty cannot take the place of love, as she tells her mother: "I refused him because I didn't love him. If I had loved him that would have been the only reason I needed to marry him. But all the duty in the world wouldn't be enough without it."⁴⁴ Still, duty can be combined with love; and although she has failed in a man's world because she is a

⁴³Dr. Breen's Practice (Boston, 1891), p. 15.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 234.

woman after all, she is able to fulfill her ambition in part when she accepts the aid of man. Walter Libby, Grace's husband, provides the strength she has always needed; now she goes about ministering to the factory children without her position being challenged. But the reader feels that Libby has been cheated, for Grace's frustration has not abated.

Frustrated female impulses underlie the philanthropic activities of Sibyl Vane (The Minister's Charge) and Clara Kingsbury (in several novels but most prominently A Modern Instance). Physically they are "super women" from the mold of Hawthorne's Hester and Zenobia. In the case of the latter an imposing physical appearance is emblematic of her great aspirations for the raising of women:

Her hand, though very soft, was larger than most women would like to have, or than they could afford to have, though not a whit too large in proportion with the spacious plan of Zenobia's entire development. . . . She was, indeed, an admirable figure of a woman, just on the hither verge of her richest maturity, with a combination of features which it is safe to call remarkably beautiful, even if some fastidious persons might pronounce them a little deficient in softness and delicacy. (V, 337-338)

Sibyl Vane⁴⁵ is likewise a "tall girl" and drifts about "like an apparition." She has the same coloring as Hester and Zenobia: "heavy black eyebrows with beautiful blue eyes under them, full of intensity unrelieved by humour."⁴⁶ Clara Kingsbury, though blonde, is of the same

⁴⁵Of similar name is the frail and mysterious Sibyl Dacy in Hawthorne's Septimius Felton. Although blonde rather than dark, she does carry on a personal campaign against the injustice done to woman.

⁴⁶The Minister's Charge, p. 138.

statuesque appearance:

Miss Kingsbury was herself rather large,—sometimes, she thought, rather too large: certainly too large if she had not had such perfect command of every inch of herself. . . . Her features were massive rather than fine⁴⁷

Obviously lacking amatory interests and discontented with the idleness of women among the upper class, these women gain an emotional outlet in doing good for the unfortunates. They do not push any general movement for women's rights, but as individuals they strive for superiority. Although Sibyl's aunt has misgivings about the efficacy of the girl's ventures to "do good with flowers in the homes of virtuous poverty, as well as the hospitals and prisons," she feels that "it may do Sibyl some good" and "afford her varied energies a little scope."⁴⁸ Clara Kingsbury's scheme is the Indigent Children's Surf-Bathing Society, for which she sponsors entertainments to be attended by the socially elite. Clara misses no chance to employ her womanly efficiency to do good (in A Woman's Reason she sets the distraught Helen Harkness up in the millinery business), and her enthusiasm quite often overrides decorum, as one of her critics complains:

"Clara Kingsbury can say and do, from the best heart in the world, more offensive things in ten minutes than malice could invent in a week. . . . Really, I wonder that, in a city full of nervous and exasperated people like Boston, Clara Kingsbury has been suffered to live."⁴⁹

⁴⁷A Modern Instance, p. 214.

⁴⁸The Minister's Charge, pp. 29-30.

⁴⁹A Modern Instance, p. 215.

When Marcia Hubbard is deserted by her husband, Clara turns her attention from the Surf-Bathing Society to the young deserted wife.

In dealing with the practical, and sometimes infinitely more serious, problems of everyday life, both Sibyl and Clara manifest their psychological weakness. Although they have made a show of womanly strength and independence, in unguarded moments they reveal their need for support. Sibyl attempts to win the affection, as a "sister," of Lemuel Barker, who is her aunt's handyman, and becomes resentful when she learns that he has been seeing Statira Dudley. "Mankind" has been her subject, but when a man rejects her advances, she is hurt, not as an unsuccessful philanthropist, but as woman. Similarly, Clara can manage the lives of others, but she cannot control her own, as Eustace Atherton, her lawyer, demonstrates when he makes a report of her financial assets. Clara haughtily discharges him as her lawyer, but later accepts him as her husband. Although she "whimsically" laments "that there seemed to be no great things she could do for him,"⁵⁰ her life is now more tranquil than ever before, in the kind of security only a strong husband can give.

In their fictional treatment of the public activities of woman, neither Hawthorne nor Howells denied the right of woman to enter the professions or the areas of life usually relegated to men. Zenobia was not criticized for her novel-writing, but for her emotional hobby-riding, and Hawthorne did not appear to disapprove of Hilda and Miriam as

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 468.

artists in The Marble Faun.⁵¹ In Miss Bellard's Inspiration Howells did not object to a woman in the teaching profession, only to her attitude of superiority in dealing with the problems of marriage. He treated female artists with tolerance in A Hazard of New Fortunes and The Coast of Bohemia. At all times Hawthorne and Howells were concerned with woman filling her natural place in society; she could be intellectual, she could be professional, but she must not lose the unique combination of strength and sympathy which they felt was inherent in woman. And, of course, woman was made for man; the wise woman acquiesced to this destiny and in return received man's utmost admiration. Lillias Bellard, because of her impossible idealism, almost loses the man who could make her happy, but eventually recognizes her true intellectual and emotional place with relation to man: "I . . . before morning I had a perfect inspiration. My inspiration was that where I was so helpless to reason it out for myself, I ought to leave it altogether to him, and that is why we are going to be married in the spring."⁵² Hollingsworth, in a more rhetorical way in The Elithedale Romance, enumerates the blessings which man receives from the woman who is willing to occupy her natural place:

⁵¹Hawthorne in an early Salem Sketch of Anne Hutchinson bemoaned the upsurge of women writers, "the ink-stained Amazons [who] will expel their rivals by actual pressure, and petticoats wave triumphantly over all the field" (XII, 218). But this was not Hawthorne's continued feeling, though he did later exemplify in fiction the statement that "woman, when she feels the impulse of genius like a command of Heaven within her, should be aware that she is relinquishing a part of the loveliness of her sex . . ." (XII, 218-219).

⁵²Miss Bellard's Inspiration (New York, 1905), p. 223.

"She is the most admirable handiwork of God, in her true place and character. Her place is at man's side. Her office, that of the sympathizer; the unreserved, unquestioning believer; the recognition, withheld in every other manner, but given, in pity, through woman's heart, lest man should utterly lose faith in himself Man is a wretch without woman; but woman is a monster . . . without man as her acknowledged principal!" (V, 459)

D. INNOCENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

Although man might be woman's ultimate destiny, woman, according to Hawthorne and Howells, still had a right to her independent thoughts and activities. In Chapter IV it has been pointed out that Hawthorne and Howells disdained any social system which denied the rights of individuals; but at the same time they eschewed the rampant individualism which disrupted overall social harmony. Thus, with regard to woman, individualism was admirable, as long as it made use of woman's best qualities and as long as emotional and moral balance was maintained. And just as Hawthorne and Howells considered America superior in encouraging independence for all individuals, they felt that the youthful American woman exemplified the best that this country could offer as evidence of its democratic strength. Although the American girl might have been restricted in worldly experiences, her democratic training had given her enough faith in the worthiness of humanity to make her superior to situations which tend to degrade the individual morally. At times the American girl's innocence might cause a near brush with tragedy, but generally it afforded her a better perspective of true reality—life devoid of the social and moral distinctions that a more

"experienced" world maintained.

1. Hawthorne's American Girl Abroad: Hilda

Hawthorne's English Notebooks and late Anglo-American romances contain a number of passages in which the author asserted the superiority of the American girl over the European and especially the English. In comparing the American and English middle classes, he noted that "there is almost always something ladylike and delicate about an American woman; but in these [English women], though they seemed not disreputable, there was a coarseness, a freedom, an--I don't know what--that was purely English."⁵³ In The Ancestral Footstep Alice wonders about the belief that American women "are a far more delicate and fragile race than Englishwomen; pale, feeble hot-house plants, unfit for the wear and tear of life . . ." (XI, 503). But Middleton goes all out in defending the women of his native country:

" . . . the world has not seen such women as make up, I had almost said the mass of womanhood in my own country; slight in aspect, slender in frame, as you suggest, but yet capable of bringing forth stalwart men; they themselves being of inexhaustible courage, patience, energy; soft and tender, deep of heart, but high of purpose. Gentle, refined, but bold in every good cause." (XI, 504)

Further he cites the greater freedom given woman in America and tells Alice that she may "form a more just idea of what women become . . . in a country where the rules of conventionalism are somewhat relaxed . . ." (ibid.). When in Doctor Grimshawe's Secret Redcliffe questions Elsie

⁵³Randall Stewart, ed., The English Notebooks by Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1941), p. 6.

about her origin, he lauds the qualities of the American girl: "'Are you one of our own New England maidens, with her freedom, and her know-how, and her force, beyond anything that these demure and decorous [English] damsels can know?'" (XIII, 280).

The secondary plot of The Marble Faun examines the relative strength and weakness of the young American woman in the person of Hilda, the New England girl who matures through experience, but who retains her basically American virtues. Hawthorne spent nearly eight years in Europe; from 1853 to 1857 he was the American consul in Liverpool, England, and in 1858 and 1859 he was on an extended visit in Italy.⁵⁴ During his sojourn in Europe, Hawthorne had made the acquaintance of several American girls who probably lent some of their characteristics to his portrayal of Hilda. In England there was Delia Bacon, an American authoress whom Hawthorne befriended to the point of financing the publication of her book on Shakespeare.⁵⁵ In Italy there were two young sculptresses who interested him: Maria Louise Lander of Salem and Harriet Hosmer of Watertown, Massachusetts.⁵⁶ In the closeness of his own family circle Hawthorne became acquainted with another American girl abroad, Ada Shepherd, a brilliant twenty-one-year-old graduate of Antioch College, who was the efficient governess of the Hawthorne children.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography, pp. 148-213.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 168.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 192.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 172, 183, 191.

In Hilda, Hawthorne created a character who illustrates not only the effects of evil upon the complacent innocence of a young girl, but the conflict between the New England mind and the Continental. Hilda's untried virtue and her narrow concept of the relativity of sin Hawthorne clearly condemned, but he commended her independence, her intelligence, and her moral perseverance. In the final analysis, Hilda's character suggests Hawthorne's approval of her basic American qualities and disapproval of a society that would pervert them.

Hilda is a young artist at work in Rome, but rather than a painter of originals, she is a copyist, just as in her private life she is twice removed from real human experience. She is recognized by her fellow artists not only for her great talent but also for her physical beauty. Hawthorne described her as

pretty at all times, in our native New England style, with her light-brown ringlets, her delicately tinged, but healthful cheek, her sensitive, intelligent, yet most feminine and kindly face. But every few moments, this pretty and girlish face grew beautiful and striking, as some inward thought and feeling brightened, rose to the surface, and then, as it were, passed out of sight again; so that, taking into view this constantly recurring change, it really seemed as if Hilda were only visible by the sunshine of her soul. (VI, 81)

Befitting her inner purity, Hilda's attire is usually white and her dwelling a Roman tower where, though not a Catholic, she tends a lamp that burns before an image of the Virgin and feeds a flock of doves that fly to her window. "You breathe sweet air," her friend Miriam tells her, "'above all the evil scents of Rome; and even so, in your maidenly elevation, you dwell above our vanities and passions, our moral dust and mud . . .'" (VI, 70-71). In Rome Hilda enjoys complete

independence: she has freedom from the usual social inhibitions because of her work as a female artist and freedom from the corruption and immorality of the city because of her own purity of heart and life. She lives in the world, but she is not of the world. In her relationship with whatever is evil and base in Rome, she appears, said Hawthorne, "as if invisible, and not only so, but blind. She was altogether unconscious of anything wicked that went along the same pathway, but without jostling or impeding her, any more than gross substance hinders the wanderings of a spirit" (VI, 441).

Likewise Hilda is a romanticist. She is enchanted by the resemblance Donatello shows to the Faun of Praxitiles, and she explains to Miriam the difference that Donatello's living among men has made in his countenance. She tells Kenyon that she "'never quite believed, till now, that fauns existed anywhere but in poetry'" (VI, 126). Her disdain for the somber equals her delight in the aery and fanciful, as her reaction to the Roman catacombs indicates. Notwithstanding her romantic point of view, she bars the passion of romantic love from her heart. She will not share with Kenyon her sorrow because she has "fancied he sought to be something more" than just a friend (VI, 246). Even with so much tenderness in her nature, Hilda is restrained by her innate modesty, a legacy from the Puritans, from exchanging "those pale delights" of friendship for the emotion of love.

Because of her lack of experience with the world, Hilda is plunged into despair and gloom when she accidentally witnesses Donatello's "murder" of the monk who has come from the past to torment

Miriam. With her discovery of sin, she instinctively recoils from the world even more. Having lived apart, she cannot feel sympathy for those who, harassed by external circumstances, break the shell of her narrow, idealistic moral concept. She withdraws from her friend Miriam, who needs sympathy and aid, because she has seen Miriam's eyes urge Donatello to his crime. In her fitful despondency, Hilda yearns to break from her solitary existence and share her secret, for she herself begins to feel the weight of guilt even though she has been only a witness to murder. Eventually she is drawn to the Catholic confessional as the only means of unburdening her heart in the communication of her secret to another human being.

Hilda's old radiance returns when she emerges from the confessional, but she is no longer a child, dwelling in idealistic innocence. She tells Kenyon that during the morning she has become a new creature. She has been educated by her experience. Even before the confession to the priest, her intelligence, untested by grave human problems, has begun to grow into true wisdom, for as Hawthorne wrote: "Hilda's despondency, nevertheless, while it dulled her perceptions in one respect, had deepened them in another; she saw beauty less vividly, but felt truth, or the lack of it, more profoundly" (VI, 386). Finally, she must think herself out of her failure to understand "how two things so totally unlike can be mistaken for another" or "how two mortal foes, as Right and Wrong surely are, can work together in the same deed" (VI, 437). She is reminded of the real friendship that existed between her and Miriam, and she becomes aware of her failure to live up to Miriam's love and

trust. Remembering the packet which Miriam has intrusted to her to deliver, Hilda, now unconcerned with the question of Miriam's guilt or innocence, leaves her tower to discharge her obligation to her friend. When she returns, she is finally prepared to respond to Kenyon's expressions of love.

The "transformation" in The Marble Faun is as much Hilda's as it is Donatello's. Hilda, however, does not become Europeanized; neither does she change her basic beliefs. But there is some quality within this "daughter of the Puritans" that, when subjected to experience, reveals her natural superiority. Hilda's virtue persists, but it has added to itself the ennobling quality of sympathy.

On March 24, 1860, there appeared in the Ohio State Journal an anonymous laudatory review of The Marble Faun, attributed by Gibson and Arms to William Dean Howells.⁵⁸ The reviewer called The Marble Faun "the most darkly sad, the most subtly mysterious . . . of all this author's romances" and he commented that

In no other atmosphere than that of Rome is such a work possible, and there the scene is laid--in that city, where life, constantly confronted with eternal Art, seems so cruelly brief and little, and where old Nature is ineffably sad with the secrets and sorrows of her dead children, the Generations.⁵⁹

Later, however, Howells placed this work at the bottom of the list of

⁵⁸William M. Gibson and George Arms, "A Bibliography of William Dean Howells," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LI (April, 1947), 213.

⁵⁹"Hawthorne's Marble Faun," Ohio State Journal, XXIII (March 24, 1860), 2.

Hawthorne's romances, for he did not feel that the foreign setting and the complex social machinery were compatible with a theme that could have been presented better against the author's usual American background.⁶⁰ In the Ohio State Journal review, Hilda was described as "marbly pure and tranquil as a saint, preciously carved out of stone,"⁶¹ but in Howells' later Heroines of Fiction, she was presented as representing "the implacable morality of ignorant purity."⁶² In the latter study Howells wrote further:

Did Hawthorne here, I wonder, mean to let us see something ugly in the angelic Hilda's effort for self-protection and her ruthless self-pity for her own involuntary privy to Miriam's guilt? . . . at the bottom . . . is a dislike for that cold spirit of Hilda and a sense of something selfish in her relation to the whole affair.⁶³

2. Howells' Variations of Hilda

Despite Howells' avowed contempt for certain aspects of Hilda's character, the heroines of several of his novels exhibit an unmistakable similarity to Hilda. Howells, like Hawthorne, believed the American character to be superior—especially the female, whom he depicted in the manner of Hawthorne. In Harper's for October, 1905, Howells devoted an essay to the commendation of feminine virtues, and the qualities he extolled were those of the American girl—the athlete, the actress, the

⁶⁰"James's Hawthorne," The Atlantic Monthly, XLV (February, 1880), 284.

⁶¹"Hawthorne's Marble Faun."

⁶²Heroines of Fiction, I, 183.

⁶³Ibid., p. 188.

professional woman--who asserted an independence completely lacking in contemporary European women.⁶⁴ He voiced his objection to "the dependent, helpless, thin-slippered, languishing type of the obsolete heroines of romance."⁶⁵

Also like Hawthorne, Howells had had first-hand acquaintance with the American girl abroad, for he was the American consul in Venice from 1861 to 1865.⁶⁶ From his own wife, Elinor Mead of Brattleboro, Vermont, whom he married in Paris in 1862, he had ample opportunity to observe the reactions of the New England girl on her first visit to Europe.⁶⁷ From Elinor's sister Mary, who visited the Howells in Venice in 1864 and in 1865, Howells derived some of the characteristics of one of his American girls.⁶⁸ Notwithstanding the individuality that Howells may have given his heroines by taking their peculiar characteristics and the incidents of the narratives from his own experience, his American girl abroad is Hilda.⁶⁹ Indeed Howells minimized her shortcomings and

⁶⁴"Editor's Easy Chair," Harper's Monthly, CXI (October, 1905), 794-797.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 797.

⁶⁶The Road to Realism, pp. 92-112.

⁶⁷James L. Woodress, Jr., Howells & Italy (Durham, 1952), pp. 22-23.

⁶⁸Editorial comment by Mildred Howells in Life in Letters of William Dean Howells (Garden City, N. Y., 1928), I, 75.

⁶⁹In pointing out Henry James's influence on Howells' international novels, Fryckstedt wrote that James's "Traveling Companions" (published in 1870) "contrasts for the first time the American concept of morality with that of Europe." (In Quest of America: A Study of Howells' Early Development as a Novelist [Cambridge, Mass., 1958],

made her natural superiority more palpable, but she is basically Hilda.

Although Howells' first attempt at long prose fiction, Their Wedding Journey, does not merit classification with the subsequent novels for artistry of form or characterization, it is important for its anticipation of later, more finely developed themes and characters. Isabel March, the wife who is no longer a girl and who takes a belated wedding journey to Canada, is the precursor of the heroines of the novels in which Howells defined the American girl on alien ground as a distinctive character type and presented a problem to test her fiber. A Bostonian whose romantic nature finds the commonplace and the somber disconcerting, Isabel often reflects Hilda's idealism in her narrow and isolated world.⁷⁰

Howells' first distinctively forged American girl in strange surroundings, Kitty Ellison in A Chance Acquaintance, often acts with the same naivete that is apparent in Hilda. But like most of Howells' American girls, Kitty has her supreme test in the social realm, not the

p. 147.) Fryckstedt ignored The Marble Faun as the pioneer study as well as its place as a possible suggestion for Howells. But regarding specifically the theme of the American girl abroad, Cornelia P. Kelly noted thirty years ago that "It was Howells . . . who started James in active pursuit of the American girl, and who, in Florida Vervain, suggested that she became, as James half surmises, most interesting when she left her native land for Europe." (The Early Development of Henry James, University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, XV [1930], 270.)

⁷⁰This, of course, is the young Isabel March, who grows to maturity in subsequent novels. For example, Howells wrote in A Hazard of New Fortunes that Mr. and Mrs. March "liked to play with the romantic, from the safe vantage ground of their real practicality, and to divine the poetry of the commonplace" (p. 23).

moral. Kitty is not a New Englander, but an inexperienced western New Yorker who has

a certain self-reliance mingling with an innocent trust of others In part it was a natural gift, and partly it came from mere ignorance of the world; it was the unsnubbed fearlessness of a heart which did not suspect a social difference in others, or imagine itself misprized for anything but a fault.⁷¹

Kitty possesses both physical beauty and intelligence, qualities which attract Mr. Arbuton, the fastidious Bostonian, as Howells explained:

. . . he respected what he thought the good sense running through her transports; he wondered at the culture she had somewhere, somehow got Moreover, he approved of some personal attributes of hers: a low, gentle voice, tender, long-lashed eyes; a trick of drooping shoulders, and of idle hands fallen into the lap, one in the other's palm; a serene repose of face; a light and eager laugh.⁷²

While on vacation in Quebec, Kitty occupies a room greatly suggesting Hilda's secluded tower: it is at the rear of the house, and it looks down into the walled garden of the placid Ursuline convent. Kitty flees into the isolation of this room when she is faced by the problem of Mr. Arbuton's proposal. Perhaps Howells desired the reader to make no mistake in Kitty's affinity to Hilda, for he had her exclaim at the sight of white doves flying about a high window where a young girl sits and sews: "'Why, it's Hilda in her tower, of course! And this is just the kind of street for such a girl to look down into.'"⁷³

⁷¹A Chance Acquaintance (Boston, 1884), pp. 65-66.

⁷²Ibid., p. 156.

⁷³Ibid., p. 163.

Although Kitty is basically intelligent, her romantic viewpoint often predominates. In her relation with Mr. Arbuton, Kitty is unable to reconcile his cosmopolitan and rather aloof politeness with his true affection for her. At first she likes his suavity, but then when she decides that his actions are all priggish, she cannot recognize his protecting her from an attacking dog as an act of self-sacrifice. Her resolution against accepting Mr. Arbuton's proposal because of the disparity between their backgrounds is realistically sound, but her lack of experience and her romanticism catch up with her and subdue her into submitting to his repeated entreaties. Only when he fails to introduce her to his two Boston acquaintances does she receive the painful, but necessary, final education out of her delusion.

In the social duel between Kitty and Arbuton, Kitty emerges clearly the victor. In the episode of their parting, Howells wrote: "And in truth he felt as if the young girl whom he had been meaning to lift to a higher level than her own at his side had somehow suddenly grown beyond him."⁷⁴ The margin of victory lies in Kitty's intelligence and candidness, which eventually outweigh her disadvantage of inexperience.

In A Foregone Conclusion Howells again pitted the inexperience of the American girl against the strange ways of a foreign environment, this time Venice. The girl, beautiful, blonde seventeen-year-old Florida Vervain from Rhode Island, is much closer to Hilda than is

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 262.

Kitty Ellison, though one must agree with Woodress that Kitty and Florida are "at least first cousins."⁷⁵ Florida's strength is tested on two fronts, the social and the moral, but it is the moral that Howells here emphasized when Florida's youthful remoteness from life's darker side shields her from the obvious suspicion that her priest-tutor would violate his sacred office for her hand in marriage. Among Howells' American girls abroad, Florida has the most limited perception, a possible reason being that she is also Howells' youngest among these particular heroines.

One of Florida Vervain's problems is her great beauty, along with a "passionate nature" and a child-like sympathy which three of her male tutors have misinterpreted as being encouragement to their amorous desires. But Florida is innocent, so innocent that even after her marriage to Ferris, her husband

had never ceased to wonder at what he called the unfathomable innocence of his wife, and he liked to go over all the points of their former life in Venice, and bring home to himself the utter simplicity of her girlish ideas, motives, and designs, which both confounded and delighted him.⁷⁶

Florida's innocence, which is apparently the result of her youth as well as her inexperience, leads her to be repelled by the actions of Ferris even from their first meeting. She is highly sensitive and displays her sensitivity through a quick temper, especially when she feels that her independence is being threatened. Whereas she misinterprets

⁷⁵Woodress, p. 155.

⁷⁶A Foregone Conclusion (Boston, 1875), p. 262.

Ferris's somewhat urbane early efforts to be friendly, she naively fails to see anything in the actions of her tutor, the priest Don Ippolito, that would suggest he is falling in love with her. She imprudently consents to go with Don Ippolito to his house to view his inventions; and when Ferris attempts to explain that Florida and her mother's "frank hospitality" to the priest may be risking censure from the Venetians, many of whom distrust priests, Florida answers: "'we shall not be troubled. We don't care for Venetian tongues.'"77

Once Florida has heard Don Ippolito's confession of skepticism, her native innocence is blasted and in her child-like reaction she mentally labels all priests as hypocrites. While viewing the Corpus Christi parade, she comments to Ferris: "'I never could have dreamed of a priest's disbelieving; but now I can't dream of anything else. It seems to me that none of these priests or monks can believe anything. Their faces look false and sly and bad--all of them!'"78 Yet Florida feels sympathetically towards Don Ippolito because she understands that the circumstances of his life have offered him no alternative to the despised priesthood. Again by her frankness she ensnares herself: because of her innocent suggestion that the priest abandon his frock and go to America, he believes that she has indicated her love for him. She realizes her mistake almost too late, only when Don Ippolito expresses the hope that she will be his wife. "'But who, who will ever forgive

77 Ibid., p. 93.

78 Ibid., p. 167.

me,' she cried, 'for my blindness! Oh, you must believe that I never thought, I never dreamt—'⁷⁹ The priest now perceives that Florida has acted a "truth too high and fine" for him to discern "save through such agony." He does not blame her, for he knows that all along she has had compassion for his soul.

When the results of Florida's frankness and naïveté have come to fruition, what has seemingly been an inadequacy in her nature has become the true curative for Don Ippolito's soul-sickness. On his deathbed, the priest confides to Ferris:

" . . . when I first owned to her the falsehood in which I lived, she besought me to try if I might find consolation in the holy life to which I had been devoted. When you see her, dear friend, will you not tell her that I came to understand that this comfort, this refuge, awaited me in the cell of the Carmelite? . . . Tell her that but for her pity and fear for me, I believe that I must have died in my sins."⁸⁰

Ferris, who believes that Florida has led the priest on, utters a reply, the irony of which, at the moment, is beyond his own grasp: "'I'm afraid that the same deceit has tricked us both."⁸¹

In the story of Florida Vervain, Howells created a moral situation not at all unlike the one surrounding Hilda in The Marble Faun. Both Florida and Hilda are shocked out of their idealistic complacency by their discovery that wickedness exists in the world. Neither undergoes any alteration of her fundamental nature. But in his thoroughly

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 213.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 237.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 239.

sympathetic treatment of Florida, Howells, the adherent of realism, turned his conclusion more towards the romantic than did Hawthorne: Florida personifies the time-honored theme of the good intention, no matter how naive, overcoming evil, whereas Hilda represents the mature recognition of the presence of evil and the acquisition of social responsibility even by one who manages to keep herself free from contamination.

In The Lady of the Aroostook Howells drew the most pointed conflict between the New England girl and European customs. Lydia Flood is the darkly beautiful, nineteen-year-old country school teacher whose virtuous frankness sees her safely across the Atlantic as the only female passenger aboard a small merchant ship bound for Italy. Though her narrow morality fails a severe test, her beauty and intelligence win for her the love of a Bostonian man-of-the-world.

Lydia's natural strength of character is proclaimed at the very first of the novel by Mr. Goodlow, the minister: "Lydia is no fool. I have observed in her a dignity, a sort of authority, very remarkable in one of her years."⁸² The minister further sets the tone of the book by asserting the superiority of the American girl to the contemporary European:

"I was conversing last summer with that Mrs. Bland who boarded at Mrs. Barker's, and she told me that girls in Europe are brought up with no habits of self-reliance whatever, and that young ladies are never seen on the streets alone in France and

⁸²The Lady of the Aroostook (Boston, 1878), p. 48.

Italy."⁸³

And the minister adds, of course, that Lydia is the most self-reliant girl he has ever seen.

Lydia's self-reliance truly is asserted on shipboard where she is the only female among the three other passengers and the crew. "She did not seem to find herself strangely placed," wrote Howells, "and her presence characterized all that was said and done with a charming innocence."⁸⁴ This "charming innocence" is the real foundation of her self-reliance and the reason for her success among the male passengers. After being introduced to Lydia, Staniford remarks to his friend: "'Dunham, this girl is plainly one of those cases of supernatural innocence, on the part of herself and her friends, which, as you suggested wouldn't occur among any other people in the world but ours.'⁸⁵ Thus, feeling respect for her innocence and her basic goodness and intelligence, the two men decide to keep from her the fact that in polite society a girl would not allow herself the solitary company of the opposite sex.

In keeping with his determination not to offend Lydia, Staniford begins to extend her every courtesy, including nightly tours of the ship, during which he always conducts himself as the perfect gentleman; and he feels himself gradually falling in love with her. Throughout

⁸³Ibid., p. 49.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 108.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 56.

her shipboard association with Staniford, Lydia exhibits her naïveté. After the ship has docked for the day at Messina, Staniford explains to Lydia that he went riding with a lady because she asked him. Lydia is astounded. Staniford, wrote Howells, "perceived her moral recoil both from himself and from a woman who could be so unseemly. . . . What would she do with these ideals of hers in that depraved Old World,--so long past trouble for its sins as to have got a sort of sweet innocence in them,--where her fact would be utterly irreconcilable with her ideals, and equally incomprehensible?"⁸⁶ Earlier, when Staniford notices Lydia's perplexed look after he casually mentions that they will probably not see each other in Venice, he is near telling her "that in the wicked Old World towards which they were sailing young people could not meet save in the sight and hearing of their elders, and that a confidential analysis of character would be impossible between them there."⁸⁷

Howells bared Lydia's moral rigidity in her reaction to another passenger Hicks, who is an alcoholic. Before she perceives his frailty, Lydia accepts the hospitality of Hicks just as she does that of Staniford; but after he returns from Gibraltar intoxicated, she is wounded almost beyond repair. She isolates herself in her cabin and shows suspicion of everyone. Once Hicks leaves the ship, Lydia gradually resumes her former friendly relationship with the others. But she cannot

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 216.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 128.

be charitable to Hicks at all; she even refuses to sit in the deck chair that he has left.

The second manifestation of Lydia's absolute and narrow morality comes when she has been for several days at her aunt's house in Venice. From the beginning, Lydia is confused by European customs, especially the idea that it is scandalous for a young girl to go out alone--even to church. About Lydia's lack of responsiveness to her new environment, her uncle comments: "'She's here as if she'd been dropped down from her village.'"⁸⁸ But what really appalls Lydia most is the moral hardness of Venice. She is astounded that her aunt would go to visit a woman who is known to have a lover. She cannot believe that there is no Sunday evening church service, and she absolutely refuses to go to the theater on Sunday.

Although in The Lady of the Aroostook Howells pointed up the inadequacies of the ultra-moralistic nature of the heroine, he did not disapprove of her basic virtue. Howells' theme comes into clear focus towards the conclusion of the novel when Lydia begins to feel that people have thought, and will think, evil of her because they themselves are evil. Indeed Howells allowed Lydia to become aware that evil exists in the world, for she says: "'Since I came here, I've been learning things that I didn't know before. They have changed the whole world to me, and it can never be the same again.'"⁸⁹ Even so, the fact that

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 269.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 312.

the worldly-wise Staniford comes to her, having been won by her virtuous frankness and independence--qualities not found in European women, attests to Howells' placing the label of superiority on Lydia's American character.

Another American girl who runs counter to European social customs but who loses is Lily Mayhew in the short novel, A Fearful Responsibility. This story is concerned totally with the conflict between American and European society, and, as Woodress wrote, "One is . . . tempted to see the influence of Daisy Miller, for Miss Mayhew, deficient in Miss Blood's unbending New England rectitude, becomes involved in a social indiscretion through the innocence of her unsophisticated American heart."⁹⁰ Here Howells launched an all-out attack against the outmoded social conventions that would withhold happiness from a young girl when her experience has not taught her to observe them. A Fearful Responsibility differs from his other "American girl" novels only in the absence of a supreme moral crisis: Howells allowed the heroine to suffer and to be completely at the mercy of society. But Lily Mayhew's acquiescence to what she thinks is right suggests that she does have moral fiber not different from that of her prototypes, Florida Vervain and Lydia Blood, as well as Hilda.

Lily, like her fictional cousins, is beautiful; she has a "piquant face . . . beautiful eyes and abundant hair, and [a] trim, straight figure."⁹¹ Completely oblivious of the social ruling that

⁹⁰Woodress, p. 169.

⁹¹A Fearful Responsibility (Boston, 1881), p. 39.

would forbid her to converse with a strange man on the train, she, on the way from Genoa, meets an Austrian officer, Ehrhardt, and captures his heart. As Mrs. Elmore observes, "'it was all in the simplicity of her heart.'"⁹² Although Ehrhardt's intentions are honorable, Lily is willing to bow her knee to convention as upheld by the scholarly, retiring Elmore, in whose home she is visiting. In her early resolution not to become entangled in an unfortunate love affair, Lily demonstrates a side of her character that is not so evident in her prototypes: a minimized romanticism. She says that she does not want to allow her feelings to carry her away and then be sorry, for she has seen too many abortive love affairs in America during the Civil War. Further, Lily casts off the offers of a young Englishman and shows only slight interest in Hoskins, the American consul.

Lily has a soul-companion in Mrs. Elmore, who is not far beyond girlhood herself. The latter is more the romanticist, and while she does not actively promote the affair between Lily and Ehrhardt, she reproves her husband severely for his dismissal of the Austrian suitor. She feels that the officer's directness is in his favor because he is merely following what he thinks are American conventions. After the Spanish ball at which Lily experiences social triumph, Mrs. Elmore says: "'Oh, if an American girl is left to manage for herself she can always manage!'"⁹³

⁹²Ibid., p. 35.

⁹³Ibid., p. 132.

The poignancy of Lily's situation comes most strongly in the words of Elmore, as he utters self-condemnation for his treatment of Ehrhardt: "' . . . I was meanly scared for my wretched little decorums, for my responsibility to her friends, and I gave him no chance.'"⁹⁴ Lily's giving up the officer, Elmore says, "'has spoiled her life, and it was my work.'"⁹⁵ Lily, who returns to America and does live down her unfortunate experience by eventually marrying, continued Howells' adaptation of the basic American qualities found in Hilda; but, as a sacrifice upon the altar of social decorum, she signifies Howells' tendency to become increasingly more concerned with the strictures which society places upon natural human relationships.

Indian Summer also treats the American girl abroad, but herein Howells subordinated both moral and social problems to the devastating effects of sentimentality. In this novel Imogene Graham shows little of the severe morality and suppressed emotion of Hilda and earlier Howells heroines, but she does share with Hilda and most of the other American girls of Howells a child-like idealism that nearly leads her into the mistake of her life. As explained earlier in this chapter, Imogene is an "extremely lovely" young visitor to Florence who is attracted to a forty-one-year-old bachelor. Imogene's mistake in her love affair can be attributed in part to her independence, which Howells obliquely suggested can go too far. Characterizing herself as "impulsive," she cares little for the social restraints of Europe, as she demonstrates

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 159.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 161.

at a masked ball when she is delighted by the thought of having lost her chaperons--an occurrence that horrifies her escort. Whereas Howells had previously lauded the exuberance of the American girl in the midst of staid convention, he drew the line in Indian Summer and posted a stern warning of the tragedy that awaits the young lady whose virtues are turned into vices by naive idealism and too little guidance.

Through Imogene Graham, Howells again emphasized the need for balance, or, as one critic remarked about Howells' general prescription for moral order, the "sensible combination of the natural and the formed which takes into account the values and possible dangers of both."⁹⁶

The late novel Ragged Lady (1899) may not stand high on the list of Howells' artistic accomplishments, but it does have a lingering charm because of its principal female character--another American girl who is initiated into the complexities of Continental life. This is sixteen-year-old Clementina Claxon, as close to a true child of nature as any Howells character. She is a New England mountain sprite, a possessor of almost unearthly beauty:

She had blue eyes, and a smiling mouth, a straight nose, and a pretty chin whose firm jut accented a certain wistfulness of her lips. She had hair of a dull, dark yellow, which sent out from its thick mass light prongs, or tendrils, curving inward again till they delicately touched it. Her tanned face was not very different in color from her hair, and neither were her bare feet, which showed well above her ankles in the calico skirt she wore.⁹⁷

⁹⁶Max Westbrook, "The Critical Implications of Howells' Realism," Texas Studies in English, XXVI (1957), 72.

⁹⁷Ragged Lady (New York, 1899), p. 3.

Notwithstanding her primitive background, Clementina is not rustic in mind or manners. "'She's got moa sense than guls twice as old,'" affirms the landlord of the inn where Clementina is employed part time.⁹⁸ She performs all household chores proficiently and is just as dexterous on the dance floor. She is equal to all delicate social situations, especially those which might compromise her position with relation to men, as the inn clerk notes: "'Well, it's something as if she'd been trained to it, so that she knows just the right thing to do, every time, and yet I guess it's nature.'"⁹⁹

When wealthy and widowed Mrs. Lander "adopts" Clementina as her companion for a European trip, the girl sees that worldly affairs are quite different from those in her New England cabin. Unaccustomed to social distinctions, she learns one of her first lessons about class as she observes the "impossible gulf between mistress and maid."¹⁰⁰ Clementina's naturalness exudes at all times, and she is a sensation because of her unaffected dancing in a charity entertainment on ship-board. But those who are wise in the ways of a young lady's social conduct reprimand her for her audacity and accuse her of having danced an encore only for the gratitude of admiring males. None of the luxuries lavished upon her by Mrs. Lander in Florence make her ashamed of her impoverished past or proud of her present superfluity. After observing

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 21.

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 46-47.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 121.

the girl's reactions, one of the Florentine socialites concludes that Clementina is "not so much ignorant as innocent."¹⁰¹ The girl is instinctively loyal to Mrs. Lander in the face of the ceaseless efforts of Miss Milray and her Bohemian friends to spirit her away from that "dreadful old tabby." Although she is made wiser by experience, Clementina does not lose her basic nature:

The knowledge of good and evil in things that had all seemed indifferently good to her once, had crept upon her, and she distinguished in her actions. . . . She put on the world, but she wore it simply and in most matters unconsciously.¹⁰²

Despite the attention of several young men, and even two proposals, she is still the same, as Baron Belsky says:

"If you think that the world has spoiled her, that she will be different from what she was in her home among your mountains, let me reassure you. In her you will find the miracle of a woman whom no flattery can turn the head."¹⁰³

Clementina is so simple and honest in her lack of a positive religious belief that she will not marry Frank Gregory, even though she seems to love him, because he wishes her to join him as a missionary, not for his sake, but for God's. At the death of her benefactress, Mrs. Lander, Clementina will not touch any of the cash the lady has left to her because there is not enough of the estate left to go around among Mrs. Lander's relatives. When her betrothed, George Hinkle, is permanently injured in a railroad accident, Clementina hurries home from

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 206.

Europe to marry him. After Kinkle dies, Clementina again meets Frank Gregory, who has now become a free-thinking clergyman, and marries him. In accepting Gregory after six years, she exhibits again her simple wisdom: "'Women don't seem to belong very much to themselves in this wo'ld, do they?'"¹⁰⁴

In Clementina Claxon, Howells fashioned a near-perfect woman--too much so to be realistic; thus Ragged Lady is merely an idealized portrait, not a drama from real life.¹⁰⁵ Clementina is untested by any moral crisis even close to the severity of Hilda's in The Marble Faun. But the reader surmises that her natural goodness would carry her through in the usual way. This, of course, is Howells' point. She would not react as does Hilda; she would master every crisis as simply as she evades the lure of Miss Milray's social bait because she is closer to nature than Hilda and hence innately more astute.

If Clementina Claxon can be regarded as Howells' ideal woman, her character more firmly establishes Howells' requirement of naturalness in personal behavior.¹⁰⁶ This requirement would also indicate an

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 349.

¹⁰⁵Critics generally have evaded the problems of meaning in Ragged Lady by only alluding to the work. Although Oscar Firkins gave considerable attention to the novel, he frankly declared that "'Ragged Lady' is the one novel of Mr. Howells to the purport of which I am unable to find a satisfactory clue." (William Dean Howells: A Study [Cambridge, Mass., 1924], p. 195.)

¹⁰⁶Howells, in The Landlord at Lion's Head, illustrated the victory of the man or woman with "natural" virtue over the corrupting agencies of modern materialistic society. For a discussion of Jere Westover and Cynthia Whitwell as examples, see Edwin H. Cady, The Gentleman in America (Syracuse, New York, 1949), p. 192.

even closer affinity between Howells and Hawthorne, who constantly urged nature as the model for human conduct.¹⁰⁷ This, of course, was not nature as it appears in the violent wind- and rainstorm or in the cloudlessness of a mild spring day; these are extreme manifestations of nature, but not her prevalent moods. Nature is the average, the common; it is a balance between two extremes. And the common sense of man, which is likewise nature, directs the maintenance of balance. As discussed in foregoing chapters, social discord in Hawthorne and Howells is due to the absence of equilibrium; and nowhere is this human failure more deplored than in certain of their studies of women. Certainly these two writers showed that man is just as prone to imbalance as woman; but the delicacy of woman's psychological composition makes her reaction to certain emotional stimuli more conspicuously indecorous. The natural outlet for woman's native emotion, Hawthorne and Howells maintained in finality, is union with man.

¹⁰⁷In "Hawthorne and the Pathetic Fallacy" Edward Davidson demonstrated that in Hawthorne's fiction nature is always man's teacher, either by direct analogy or subtle implication. (The Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LIV [October, 1955], 486-497.)

CHAPTER VI

THE WORLD AND THE SPIRIT

One of the basic problems treated by Hawthorne and Howells is the maintenance of balance between the material and spiritual tendencies of man. Paramount in the two writers' criticism of the social order is their condemnation of forces which would enhance material interests and de-emphasize the exercise of man's spiritual faculties. As discussed in Chapter IV, the moneyed aristocrats in Hawthorne and Howells are, by and large, extreme materialists, and their "spirituality" centers itself in the function of religion or art as one symbol of social respectability or financial prowess. Hawthorne's ill-fated ideal commonwealth in The Blithedale Romance has as its noble purpose an environment conducive to scholarly pursuits without the distractions of commerce. In Howells' Altruria, as described in A Traveler from Altruria and Through the Eye of the Needle, working hours are so arranged that the citizens may have sufficient time for daily intellectual exercise. In Hawthorne's and Howells' Utopias there is a theoretical balance between working for a living and cultivating the mind and spirit; but in actual American life of the nineteenth century, which supplied most of the substance for the fiction of these authors, they detected an alarming one-sidedness. The extremists were not only those with pecuniary motives but also those who entertained, through science, religion, or art, exclusive, though pure, thoughts of the metaphysical realm. To Hawthorne and Howells the real was neither the material

world nor the ineffable domain of the mind and soul alone, but a blending of the two, in which both sides of man's nature are allowed participation.

A. RELIGION AND THE SUPERNATURAL

The skepticism of Hawthorne and Howells with regard to revealed religion, which has been noted in Chapter III, did not preclude the two writers' consideration of the mysteries of spiritual existence. Nor did their agnosticism preclude a sympathetic portrayal of the sincere believer in immortality. Their foe was, as usual, the fanatic—the extremist who neglected the positive benefits of the earthly order in his quest for understanding in the area of the supernatural.

Hawthorne's antipathy for individuals who are preoccupied with extra-physical existence is evinced by his depiction of Catharine, the Quakeress in "The Gentle Boy," who "violated the duties of the present life and the future, by fixing her attention wholly on the latter" (I, 104).¹ Stewart, in his exposition of Hawthorne's mistrust of Transcendentalism, called attention to "The Hall of Fantasy," in which Hawthorne exulted in the beauties and comforts of the earthly life.² After listing some of the charms of external nature and human companionship, he

¹Unless otherwise indicated, citations from Hawthorne in this chapter are to Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. George Parsons Lathrop (Boston, 1883), 15 vols.

²Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography (New Haven, 1948), pp. 72-73.

voiced this sentiment: "I fear that no other world can show us anything just like this" (II, 209). That Hawthorne, in his journals and private conversations, was conspicuously non-committal on spiritual questions was emphasized by Van Doren. Hawthorne himself exhibited none of Herman Melville's reasoning "of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken"³

Also pointed out in Chapter III was Howells' indifference to the disposition of the human personality in an after-life; although the idea of the finality of death was distasteful to him because of his strong belief in the unconquerable human spirit,⁴ he was contented to give his personal attention to problems on the level of the known. Theological speculation repulsed him.⁵ He approved of Tolstoy's idea that self-surrender in this life is ample foretaste of the life to come.⁶ When Howells' Mr. Homos, in A Traveler from Altruria, affirms for his American audience the Altrurians' belief in immortality, the manufacturer, who has played around with spiritualism since he lost his son in a railroad accident, asks whether anyone has communicated with the world beyond. "'We do not need any such testimony,'" Mr. Homos

³Mark Van Doren, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Critical Biography (New York, 1949), pp. 214-215.

⁴Hannah Graham Belcher, "Howells's Opinions on the Religious Conflicts of His Age as Exhibited in Magazine Articles," American Literature, XV (November, 1943), 265.

⁵See Chapter III, p. 85.

⁶See "The Philosophy of Tolstoy" in Criticism and Fiction and Other Essays, ed. Clara M. Kirk and Rudolf Kirk (New York, 1959), pp. 176-177.

answers, "'Our life here makes us sure of the life there.'" ⁷ Those who are unable or unwilling to respond positively to the challenges of the world or who harbor a dissatisfaction with their earthly lot are most prone to the pitiful and illusionary efforts to look into the unknown. Such a one is the simple tubercular brother of Jeff Durgin in The Landlord at Lion's Head, who has implicit trust in the authority of his planchette. Jere Westover, an exponent of modern religious humanism, perceives that in rural New England ignorant superstition is about all that is left of the old religion and that "faith in the soul and life everlasting was as quick as ever in the hills, whatever grotesque or unwonted form it wore."⁸

The disservice that obsession with the cryptic abode of the soul does to normal life on earth comprises the theme of Howells' The Undiscovered Country. Tragic is the self-deception that drives Dr. Boynton to neglect his medical practice and fall into financial insolvency: he is convinced that his daughter, whom he has dominated through mesmerism (hypnotism) since her late childhood, has the ability to communicate with the world of the dead. Not a professional medium, Dr. Boynton disdains the tricks of charlatans and pushes his metaphysical explorations only as a means to gain what he thinks is true spiritual understanding. He believes that by proving the existence of the other world, he will be rendering invaluable aid to Christianity:

⁷A Traveler from Altruria (New York, 1894), p. 303.

⁸The Landlord at Lion's Head (New York, 1911), p. 84.

"I ask you to consider but for a moment the vast consequences to flow from such a development. . . . we know, by our converse with spirits, that we shall live hereafter,--that another world lies beyond this, in which we shall abide forever. But you . . . have little conception of the doubt and darkness in which the whole Christian world is now involved. In and out of the church it is honey-combed with skepticism. Priests in the pulpit and before the altar proclaim a creed which they hope it will be good for their hearers to believe, and the people envy the faith that can confidently preach that creed; but neither priests nor people believe."⁹

But in his preoccupation with proving the spirits, Dr. Boynton has obscured the real way to spirituality. Human values are negligible in comparison with his higher aims. Apologizing for his tardiness in keeping an appointment, he tells that he stopped to aid a child who was run over in the street, for he "remembered that [he] was a physician, and forgot the larger in the lesser duty"¹⁰

Dr. Boynton's own isolation from real life is not so lamentable as that of his daughter, Egeria. As the result of her father's domination, her natural development as a woman has been thwarted--just as Priscilla, in Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance, has been virtually de-humanized by the powers of the hypnotist Westervelt. Much of Priscilla is reflected in Egeria. Priscilla's face is "of a wan, almost sickly hue, betokening habitual seclusion from the sun and free atmosphere" (V, 350); Egeria's countenance is "serious" and is marked by "a pallid quiet." There is an "unnatural alertness of [Egeria's] blue eyes, which glanced quickly, like those of a child too early obliged

⁹The Undiscovered Country (Boston, 1880), p. 235.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 90-91.

to suspect and avert"¹¹ Both girls, because of hardship and isolation during their early years, have developed extraordinary mental insight, which their fathers mistake for supernatural power. Although Howells in The Undiscovered Country was more occupied with the deceit of spiritualism than Hawthorne in The Blithedale Romance, both writers, through their heroines, demonstrated the evils of hypnotism as it deprives a human personality of its rightful and natural development.

Both Priscilla and Egeria respond to the healing powers of nature. They find their way into communal settlements during a snowstorm: Priscilla comes to Blithedale to seek Zenobia, and Egeria stumbles with her father into a Shaker colony. The snow, an apt parallel to the absence of natural warmth in their lives, subsides into the rebirth of spring. Now Priscilla's vitality resembles that of an animal, long pent-up and suddenly released into its normal habitat. It is hard, Zenobia says, "'to keep her from scrambling up the trees, like a squirrel. She has never known what it is to live in the free air, and so it intoxicates her as if she were sipping wine'" (V, 386-387). In her new-found health she goes about "running and skipping, with spirits as light as the breeze of the May morning . . ." (V, 387). At times, however, Priscilla seems to hear voices calling from afar, and her disposition instantly reverts to its former comatose nature. "These sudden transformations," wrote Hawthorne, "only to be accounted for by an extreme nervous susceptibility, always continued to characterize the girl,

¹¹Ibid., p. 4.

though with diminished frequency as her health progressively grew more robust" (V, 388).

All the Shakers who attend Egeria in her illness notice that as the girl begins to recover, she turns to the natural world with a "passion." "She asked for the wild flowers, and day by day demanded if it were not yet time for the anemones, the columbines, the dog-tooth violets."¹² When Egeria is finally well enough to move about the woods and gardens, "she looked like some sylvan creature, a part of the young terrestrial life that shone and sang and bloomed around her; while flashes of light and color momentarily repaired the waste that sickness had made in her beauty."¹³ One of the Shaker girls comments that Egeria "keeps on with the birds and squirrels when the heat drives us off, and if it comes on to rain it runs off her as if she was a chipmuck or a robin"¹⁴ The closer Egeria is to the natural world, the dearer life becomes and the more abhorrent are her father's plans for further spiritualistic experiments. In the lives of both Priscilla and Egeria, corporal existence, through joyous contact with nature, establishes its superiority to the questionable release of the mind, through hypnotism or spiritualism, into the dark caverns of the unrevealed life.

Whereas Egeria reflects Priscilla, Dr. Boynton appropriates characteristics of both Hawthorne's old Moodie (The Blithedale Romance)

¹²Ibid., p. 187.

¹³Ibid., p. 191.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 205.

and Dr. Rappaccini ("Rappaccini's Daughter"). Like Moodie, or Faunteroy, he lives in poverty with his frail and necromantic daughter; like Rappaccini he exploits the girl himself for his own gain and destroys her independent will. One of Dr. Boynton's acquaintances, after analyzing the relationship of the old man and his daughter, quips that "'It was worthy of Hawthorne."¹⁵ Dr. Boynton himself, sick and near the end of life, confesses his inhumanity: "'I seized upon a simple, loving nature, good and sweet in its earthliness, and sacred in it, and alienated it from all its possible happiness to the uses of my ambition. I have played the vampire!"¹⁶ This statement brings to mind Professor Baglioni's observation on Dr. Rappaccini and Beatrice: "'Her father . . . was not restrained by natural affection from offering up his child in this horrible manner as the victim of his insane zeal for science . . .'" (II, 137). Although Dr. Boynton's experiments have supposedly been for noble ends, his evil methods, which comprehend desecrating the temple of God--the individual personality, are as heinous as the methods of two other Hawthorne characters: Alymer, who destroys his beautiful wife in "The Birthmark" through achievement of scientific perfection, and the title character of "Ethan Brand," who has robbed at least four persons of spiritual integrity by means of his psychological studies. The result of Dr. Boynton's experiments comes dangerously close to that which follows the younger Matthew Maule's hypnotism of

¹⁵Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 318-319.

Alice Pyncheon in The House of the Seven Gables--death of the subject.

The culmination of Dr. Boynton's searchings, however, is not disastrous, since the broken physician lives long enough to receive another kind of revelation, which, though on the earth-bound level of common sense, gives a more accurate picture of God and spirituality than all the metaphysical speculations. The disappearance of Egeria's supposed psychic powers through her physical restoration convinces him that "her gift, rare and wonderful as it was, was the perishable efflorescence of a nervous morbidity."¹⁷ As he goes into physical decline, Dr. Boynton is calmer and can see clearly that hope of the spiritual world is all that men have on earth and that if any glimpse of the after-life is possible, it comes only through living the good life here. Any system that is so concerned with the beyond that it neglects the ethical application of spiritual truth is a worse kind of materialism than the suspension of all belief in immortality. Spiritualism is, Dr. Boynton says,

"a grosser materialism than that which denies; a materialism that asserts and affirms, and appeals for proof to purely physical phenomena. All other systems of belief, all other revelations of the unseen world, have supplied a rule of life, have been given for our use here."¹⁸

Dr. Boynton's final "revelation" is the heart of Howells' views--and Hawthorne's too--of man's proper attitude toward the spiritual world. One must not cease hoping and striving upward, but he must not expect

¹⁷Ibid., p. 317.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 366-367.

to reach the infinite while a part of the finite. He must also recognize the opportunities of earthly existence as a positive good. These same ideas were carried further by Hawthorne and Howells in their works treating of the Shakers, a religious group which attempted, through withdrawal into colonies and by prohibiting normal and traditional human relationships and endeavors, to establish the "angelic" life on earth.

It was recently pointed out that although Hawthorne at one time in his life felt a mild attraction to the Shaker sect, he "came ultimately to feel that the Shakers' attainment of security at the expense of involvement was a distorting escape from what was morally curative in the struggle for human fulfillment."¹⁹ Howells, who had also observed and written of the creditable side of Shakerism,²⁰ was also averse to the group's basic premise because it denied access to real and ordinary life, which is man's divinely-appointed approach to truth. Physical love, which Hawthorne and Howells both used symbolically as the conciliating force in a belligerent world, was theoretically denied by the Shakers.

In "The Canterbury Pilgrims" Hawthorne suggested that the Shaker colony is fit only for the desperate and those already bereft of incentive for life. The three principal personages on their way to refuge are an unsuccessful poet, a ruined merchant, and an indigent farmer.

¹⁹ Seymour L. Gross, "Hawthorne and the Shakers," American Literature, XXIX (January, 1958), 457.

²⁰ See "A Shaker Village," The Atlantic Monthly, XXVII (June, 1876), 699-710.

"They sought a home where all former ties of nature or society would be sundered, and all old distinctions levelled, and a cold and passionless security substituted for mortal hope and fear, as in that other refuge of the world's weary outcasts, the grave" (III, 530). These are similar in spiritlessness to the "recruits" which Hawthorne described as joining the colony at Blithedale: "They were mostly individuals who had gone through such an experience as to disgust them with ordinary pursuits . . ." (V, 389-390). One of Howells' rustic characters in The Vacation of the Kelwyns observes that "'They say them Shakers believe they're livin' the angelic life, as they call it, right here and now And some of 'em look ready to go, if they ain't there already.'"²¹ Most of the colonists, as presented in Howells' novels, are too old to desire any other life, as one of the Shaker women sadly admits in The Undiscovered Country: "'We have better luck with those who are gathered in after middle life. The young folks--we are apt to lose them'"²²

The Shakers' loss of a young couple was treated fictionally by both Hawthorne and Howells. And love is the impetus behind their departure since the Shakers do not allow marriage. Although Hawthorne's "The Canterbury Pilgrims," on cursory reading, may seem merely a celebration of romantic love, it has, according to Waggoner's analysis,²³ a more subtle implication--one that is fundamental in Hawthorne's fiction:

²¹The Vacation of the Kelwyns (New York, 1920), p. 226.

²²The Undiscovered Country, p. 167.

²³Hyatt H. Waggoner, Hawthorne: A Critical Study (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), pp. 74-75.

Self-exiles from society are all victims of pride and isolation, for they have lost their willingness to give themselves to life and to accept their lot among common humanity. The youngsters, hearing the morbid tales from those trying to escape life, are strengthened rather than discouraged. Whether they succeed in deepening their love into a lasting thing is irrelevant at first; but it is immensely important that they have the chance to try. Heavenly love cannot follow without the initial existence of the earthly. Contrariwise, the fleeing couple in Howells' The Day of Their Wedding return to their colony without fulfillment. The irresolution is principally on the part of the girl, Althea, who cannot subordinate her feeling of guilt for deceiving the elders and running away. (This emotion is felt also by Hawthorne's Shakeress when she first reaches the edge of the hill going down into the world.) But Althea's greatest stumbling block is the nature of love itself; she cannot understand that Lorenzo was first attracted to her physically and then began to admire her in other ways. Although he explains that "'It's the body that contains the soul, and the body is outside of the soul, and it comes first, and it has a right to, as long as it's outside the soul,'"²⁴ Althea is unconvinced. When their simple wedding ceremony is over, she is perplexed because she has no telling feeling of change. Thus she re-dresses in her Shaker garb to go back. Still wondering whether there is some sign that she has missed, she begs Lorenzo to tell her that their marriage is morally right; but he admits

²⁴The Day of Their Wedding (New York, 1896), p. 139.

that he cannot and sadly follows her back to the colony. He realizes that her extravagant visions of the "angelic" life will never be modified into the realism of accepting the earthly as good.

In their treatment of the Shakers, Hawthorne and Howells, as they had done in their consideration of spiritualism, showed that any purpose behind spiritual attainment is invalid unless it embodies physical betterment. The humanitarian aspect of Shakerism they rendered truthfully and approvingly, for both made a point of depicting the Shakers' goodness in ministering to the wayfaring and destitute. But even in attempting the "angelic" life on earth, the Shakers were presuming upon the authority of God. And by depriving humanity of its natural function of procreation (the loss of which Hawthorne symbolized through the poignant Martha in "The Shaker Bridal"), they were denying the most significant manifestation of God's very existence.

B. THE NECESSITY FOR SPIRITUAL ACUMEN

Although Hawthorne and Howells were vociferous in their denunciation of mesmerism and its devastating effect on the subjugated mind, they were both still fascinated by the mysteries of the human subconscious. In accordance with their ethical precepts, the two writers were careful to minimize their probings into psychic functions just for the sake of objective experimentation. But the lure of the inscrutable was powerful, and in several instances both gave as much attention to the working of mental phenomena as to the consequential ethical

problems.²⁵ But it is true, as Cooke wrote, that Howells' "interest lay in the effects induced in the minds of investigators of supernatural phenomena, not so much in the phenomena themselves."²⁶ Analysis of human reactions was Hawthorne's chief purpose for introducing the supernatural in many of his works.²⁷ But both writers regarded the subconscious itself as a possible guide into the true nature of things.²⁸

And the vision of evil, that inexplicable inner consciousness of human frailty which forms the substance of so much of Hawthorne's fiction, was also noted by Howells, though it appears in his works as a wisp of fog hovering about rather than an all-enveloping cloud. In Chapter IV it has been shown that the chaos in society, according to Hawthorne and Howells, stems from duplicity on the part of the citizenry or, in more fundamental terms, the confusion of appearance and reality. Coming to an understanding of this ambiguity is essential in one's

²⁵ In the case of Hawthorne, note especially Dimmesdale's reactions to Chillingworth in The Scarlet Letter as well as the short stories, "The Prophetic Pictures," "Fancy's Show Box," and "The Haunted Mind." Howells delved into the psychic in two volumes, Questionable Shapes and Between the Dark and the Daylight. For Howells' interest in psychical research, see Cady, The Realist at War (Syracuse, New York, 1958), pp. 242-243.

²⁶ Delmar Gross Cooke, William Dean Howells: A Critical Study (New York, 1922), p. 184.

²⁷ See Prosser Hall Frye, "Hawthorne's Supernaturalism" in Literary Reviews and Criticisms (New York, 1908), pp. 114-129.

²⁸ Howells commented thus on Hawthorne's interest in spiritualism: "He deeply felt, as any man of common sense must feel, that material things are not the only realities; that they are perhaps the least real among realities." ("The Personality of Hawthorne," The North American Review, CLXXVII [December, 1903], 879.)

spiritual edification, and it is as much a self-awareness as it is a cognizance of the frailties of others. A fragmentary vision, incomplete because of its self-exclusion or disproportionate self-blame, produces isolation. But through the complete spiritual experience--and only through it, one acquires a disposition of sympathy or complicity.²⁹

"Young Goodman Brown" stands as Hawthorne's synthesis of man's subconscious realization of the presence of evil in all. Instead of acquiring compassion for mankind in its pitiful fallen state, Goodman Brown feels nothing but extreme revulsion. After seeing in a vision or dream (Hawthorne is not clear about the exact mental process) that all the supposedly good townspeople and even his "pure" wife, Faith, are actually the devil's disciples, Brown becomes a misanthrope for the remainder of his miserable life. "A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become from the night of that fearful dream. . . . his dying hour was gloom" (II, 106).

Ben Halleck, in Howells' A Modern Instance, comes perilously close to Brown's disposition, for he has felt the brunt of evil in many ways. He has been crippled by a boorish schoolmate; this infirmity, coupled with an introspective nature, has made him a veritable outcast from the normal intercourse of life. Although he is moderately wealthy as well as intellectual, he can maintain no permanent interests. And when he finds the one woman who could give his life real purpose and direction, she is hopelessly in love with and married to a rascal. Thus

²⁹See Chapter III, pp. 99-111.

Halleck's vision of life is akin to Goodman Brown's. He feels that character, or goodness, is

"a superstition, a wretched fetish. Once a year wouldn't be too often to seize upon sinners whose blameless life has placed them above suspicion, and turn them inside out before the community, so as to show people how the smoke of the Pit had been quietly blackening their interior."³⁰

Unlike Brown, Halleck is acutely aware of his own evil (continuing to love a married woman). A noble emotion has become the foundation for his baseness:

" . . . the Devil always takes a man on the very highest plane. He knows all about our principles and self-respect, and what they're made of. How the noblest and purest attributes of our nature, with which we trap each other so easily, must amuse him! Pity, rectitude, moral indignation, a blameless life,--he knows they're all instruments for him."³¹

Because "there's nothing for [him] but to run," he goes to South America where his sin will seem less immediate. Although he returns to Boston determined to fight for his beloved if he can prove her husband dead, "he was," as Eustace Atherton comments, "better than his word."³² At the close of the novel, Halleck is still tormented by guilt, but he is not misanthropic. Somewhere along the way he has achieved a complete vision of the kinship of all men through their suffering the torments of sin. Thus, as he turns to the ministry, he has much in his own experience which may benefit others: "He had known the terrors of the law,

³⁰A Modern Instance (Boston, 1882), p. 409.

³¹Ibid., p. 413.

³²Ibid., p. 472.

and he preached them to his people; he had known the Divine mercy, and he also preached that."³³

Although he finds the world enmeshed in evil, Ben Halleck does what he can to ward off the awful consequences. He does not set out by elevating himself; he is humbled by his revelation. Along the same line, Hawthorne time after time depicted self-righteousness as the distorting element in man's attempted vision of true reality. As Waggoner pointed out in his illuminating discussion of "Rappaccini's Daughter," the tragedy in this story results from the selfishness of Giovanni.³⁴ As the young man begins to feel that Beatrice is saturated with evil, his passion for her turns to near-hate. Regard for his own safety has obscured the good which is within the girl's soul and which manifests itself through her love. Unable to discern the real Beatrice from the apparent, Giovanni gives her poison to drink; although she could have been saved by Giovanni's self-denying love, he selfishly allows her to die.

Whereas Giovanni is akin to Goodman Brown in the limitation of his vision, Beatrice has affinity with Ben Halleck in her willingness to die that another may live. In this capacity of the sacrificial lamb, Beatrice is a unique character in Hawthorne, in whose works most personages are shown in their tragic egotism. Howells, on the other hand, used this figure quite frequently, usually in the form of a male

³³Ibid., p. 510.

³⁴Waggoner, pp. 110-111.

character associated symbolically with the Christ. Ben Halleck and the Reverend Julius Peck, the self-abasing reformer in Annie Kilburn, are in this tradition. Howells' Christ-figure is more completely developed in Conrad Dryfoos, who appears in A Hazard of New Fortunes.

Conrad's life, like Halleck's, is one of frustration; he is tossed about by circumstances and surrounded by evil. His ambition to be a minister is blocked by his father. Conrad spends his working hours perfunctorily in a publishing house and his off-duty time ministering to the poor in a church mission. But Conrad has not been entirely blameless in relation to the money-craze that has stricken his family, for, as Fulkerson says, Conrad was at one time just as enthusiastic about the gas boom as the rest of the family. He has learned, however, the degrading nature of materialism and now subscribes to socialistic views, which turn his father into an open enemy. Although he is on the side of the working man, he sees strikes as the wrong way to further a righteous cause. And when a riot occurs in the course of a streetcar strike, Conrad sacrifices himself in an attempt to be a peacemaker. Despite the varied forces of evil which have been pressing upon him, he does not consider mankind hopeless--at least while a glimmer of love remains. Conrad's inner vision, even in the aftermath of complete rejection by his father, achieves perfection by means of love and faith almost magically transmitted through a look and the touch of a woman's hand. Basil March, in explaining to his wife that through love the mystery of death may be resolved, acclaims Conrad's action as the highest spiritual experience. March says:

" . . . it was his business to suffer there for the sins of others. Isabel, we can't throw aside that old doctrine of the Atonement yet. The life of Christ, it wasn't only in healing the sick and going about to do good; it was suffering for the sins of others. That's as great a mystery as the mystery of death. . . . If we love mankind, pity them, we even wish to suffer for them."³⁵

Howells' only book-length treatment of the tragic and unmitigated vision of evil is The Shadow of a Dream. This work takes for its thesis Hawthorne's pronouncement in "The Birthmark" that "The mind is in a sad state when Sleep, the all-involving, cannot confine her spectres within the dim region of her sway, but suffers them to break forth, affrighting this actual life with secrets that perchance belong to a deeper one" (II, 51). Perhaps the most thoroughly Hawthornian of all Howells' works,³⁶ this novel shows the effects of the vision not only upon its recipient but also upon others whose lives it involves. The question of the validity of such premonitions is probed by Howells, too; and while the answer is never fully revealed, the implication is that the lack of real love and trust on the part of all involved has distorted spiritual vision.

Douglas Faulkner's vision is similar to Goodman Brown's: his wife is evil. He dreams recurrently that she is in love with his best friend, James Nevil, and that they are waiting for him to die so that they can marry. Although Faulkner will not reveal the dream's omen, Basil March tries by reason to nullify whatever the dream portends:

³⁵A Hazard of New Fortunes (New York, 1952), p. 503.

³⁶See Chapter II, p. 49.

to be influenced by it would be to "return to the bondage of the superstition that cursed the childhood of the race, that blackened every joy of its youth and spread a veil of innocent blood between it and the skies."³⁷ Still Faulkner persists in his belief that his subconscious has grasped a fact hidden from ordinary intelligence. As he is dying, he pushes his wife away in final obedience to the dream.

As Faulkner's morbid mind foresaw, his wife, Hermia, and James Nevil become engaged two years later. But enticed by a torn page from Faulkner's old notebook which makes her suspect that the dream concerned her in some way, Hermia presses the family physician for the content of the dream. Broken by her late husband's lack of faith and confused by analyzing her own feelings in retrospect, she feels compelled to relate the dream to Nevil and to allow him to chart their future course. They decide to part; and although Basil March tries to reason with Nevil as he earlier tried with Faulkner, Nevil is adamant. "'We could not tell,'" he says, "'when our love began, and that mystery of origin which love partakes of with eternity, and which makes it seem so divine a thing, became a witness against us.'"³⁸ The current passion that Hermia has for Nevil is tremendous, at any rate, as March perceives as the lovers part:

She locked her arms around his neck, and wildly kissed him again and again, with sobs such as break from the ruin of life and love; with gasps like dying, and with a fond,

³⁷The Shadow of a Dream (New York, 1890), p. 57.

³⁸Ibid., p. 208.

passionate moaning broken by the sound of those fierce,
swift kisses.³⁹

Whether or not Faulkner's dream has had real-life foundation, over which the characters in the novel make much ado, appears to be of less importance than the veiled circumstances which have led to the degeneration of love--Faulkner's and Hermia's. Nowhere is Faulkner shown to be a particularly attractive or admirable character. He is physically ill, to be sure. But his own excessive self-concern has turned hatefully upon Hermia and Nevil. There is insufficient sympathy on his part to meliorate his harsh vision. If Hermia and Nevil felt anything in their hearts, it harms no one until Faulkner's mind opens the occasion; and their future love could have been saved by compassion from Faulkner.

For penetration into the true nature of things, Hawthorne and Howells advocated a recognition of the earthly order, with all its appearance of evil. But to this must be added faith and love, which are totally absent from the hearts of Hawthorne's Goodman Brown and Giovanni and Howells' Douglas Faulkner. The Elithedale Romance, in Fogle's estimation, presents this same problem of appearance versus reality in preponderantly negative terms, except for the character Priscilla, who is "a symbol of faith, which pierces intuitively to spiritual truth."⁴⁰ In achieving a full and complete vision through faith and love, one is

³⁹Ibid., p. 195.

⁴⁰Richard Harter Fogle, Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark (Norman, Okla., 1952), p. 160.

capable of living the good, self-denying life (as in the case of Priscilla and also Howells' Ben Halleck and Conrad Dryfoos); for, after all, the chief end of spiritual vision was, according to Hawthorne and Howells, its earthly application.⁴¹

C. THE SPIRITUALITY OF ART

A principal agency recognized by Hawthorne and Howells as affording spiritual insight was art. Through the various forms of creative expression, particularly painting and literature, man can penetrate the external physical surface of life and look beyond into the realm of the ideal. The artist was shown as having a finely developed sensitivity to things hidden from ordinary men, and this power was admired by both writers.

The unusual insight of the artist forms the problem of Hawthorne's "The Prophetic Pictures." According to one character, the painter has fantastic powers:

"They say that he paints not merely a man's features, but his mind and heart. He catches the secret sentiments and passions, and throws them upon the canvas, like sunshine--or perhaps, in the portraits of dark-souled men, like a gleam of infernal fire." (I, 193)

In The Landlord at Lion's Head Jeff Durgin's mother expresses a similar

⁴¹Tolstoy, again, might be cited as part of Howells' inspiration for this concept of spiritual vision. In his discussion of My Religion Howells wrote: "To him the dream of the Christ-life on earth, the heavenly vision which again and again has visited generous souls, comes once more" ("Editor's Study," Harper's Monthly, LXXII [April, 1886], 809.)

concept of the artist's ability to grasp the soul when she refers to a strange-looking painting of two dead children as "a spirit picture."

"It's the way they appear in the spirit life," she says.⁴² That the talent artist is a sound interpreter of character is Howells' implication in The Son of Royal Langbrith. The portrait of the hypocritical late industrialist reflects the subject's moral grossness, much to the concern of the deluded son. "He had a very strong character," James Langbrith comments, "but that painting conveys the notion of hardness rather than strength."⁴³

Throughout their works both Hawthorne and Howells revealed the pathetic incompleteness of the lives of those who can see no further than the surface of things. In "A Select Party" Hawthorne deplored especially the mind that is bound continually to the earth and to material substance. Lack of imagination has dimmed the people's acceptance of the ultimate reality of the beautiful mansion in the air:

Had they been worthy to pass within its portal, they would have recognized the truth, that the dominions which the spirit conquers for itself, among unrealities become a thousand times more real than the earth whereon they stamp their feet, saying, "This is solid and substantial; this may be called a fact." (II, 71)

Because he is imaginatively sterile, the critic in "Main Street" can see nothing but gaudily-colored cardboard in the showman's historical exhibition. His greatest error is that he will not try to respond to

⁴²The Landlord at Lion's Head, p. 15.

⁴³The Son of Royal Langbrith (New York, 1903), p. 56.

the changing light which renders the figures more real. "'Pshaw,' replies the critic; 'I want no other light and shade. I have already told you that it is my business to see things just as they are'" (III, 448). The Wandering Jew in "A Virtuoso's Collection" is a lamentable example of the individual who can find no pleasure in the life of the spirit. His senses have been bound to the earth, the only reality he knows, so long that he desires nothing else. "'Give me what I can see, and touch, and understand, and I ask for no more,'" he cries. The old Jew is past regeneration, the narrator perceives, for "'the soul is dead within him'" (II, 559).

Several Howells characters--Silas Lapham, Bartley Hubbard, J. Milton Northwick, Jeff Durgin, and others--exemplify the meaningless existence of the spiritually impoverished; they recognize no values other than those which can be assayed by the senses. Considerable attention was given by Howells to the problem of human spiritual vacuity in The Undiscovered Country through the character Ford, who stands in juxtaposition to Dr. Boynton, the preoccupied spiritualist. Engaged in scientific studies as a basis for his journalistic reports, Ford openly scorns spiritualism as well as any other suggestion of an extra-physical plane. His negation has isolated him from warm human relationships. He has a "brooding look" and "taciturn and evasive habits" and seldom ventures into society.⁴⁴ Brashly he challenges old Dr. Boynton to a public contest between supernaturalistic and naturalistic forces,

⁴⁴The Undiscovered Country, pp. 37-38.

though he withdraws his proposal at the wish of Boynton's daughter, Egeria. While Howells did not champion the cause of Shakerism or spiritualism, both of which are treated in this novel, he did suggest through the modification of Ford's character, the ennobling power of the visionary life. In the Shaker colony Ford is affected by the sympathy that the seekers of the "angelic" life dispense upon all; and although he cannot admit the idea of immortality into his philosophy, he is touched by Dr. Boynton's longing to escape the inhibitions of physical existence. Through Egeria, Ford also discovers the self-transcending power of love. Both Boynton and Ford recognize the folly of their past; they have been extremists--at opposite poles. When Dr. Boynton apologizes for involving Ford in his problems, Ford answers that his sojourn at the Shaker colony has given him "the best days of [his] life,--the happiest."⁴⁵

Yet Hawthorne and Howells felt that a serious danger confronts the visionary--the spiritualist, the religious ascetic, and especially the artist. At the conclusion to "The Hall of Fantasy" Hawthorne came out in favor of limited flights into the realm of the ideal: "Let us be content, therefore, with merely an occasional visit, for the sake of spiritualizing the grossness of this actual life, and prefiguring to ourselves a state in which the Idea shall be all in all" (II, 211). Hawthorne's forlorn poet in "The Shaker Bridal" turns his back on life completely to enter the Shaker village, his actions and words suggesting

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 372.

the absence of reality in his whole life and work. While he has lived in the world, his yearning has been more for personal fame than for assurance of the truth behind his "ethereal essence of poetry." The characters which Howells obviously approved in his novels, such as Basil and Isabel March, are those who are able to achieve a proper balance between idealism and an acceptance of earthly actuality. Howells' struggling novelist--Percy B. Ray in The World of Chance--attempts in his first work to strike a happy medium (with dubious success, however) between the realistic novel of manners and the psychological romance, or, as Howells wrote, "a little between the style of Thackeray and the style of Hawthorne"⁴⁶ Likewise, Howells' playwright, Brice Maxwell, eschews romantic theatrical effects and is faithfully concerned with "causing the life that he had known to speak from the stage,"⁴⁷ though imparting general truth and rendering the ideal perceptible are his final motive.

Indescribable satisfaction, Hawthorne and Howells agreed, comes to the artist through the process of creation, though he must constantly sidestep the pitfall of allowing the method of reaching the ideal to be its own end. The vision itself, after all, contains the ennobling power. Owen Warland, Hawthorne's "Artist of the Beautiful," errs by

⁴⁶The World of Chance (New York, 1893), p. 19.

⁴⁷The Story of a Play (New York, 1898), p. 217.

thinking he can give permanent physical form to the imagination.⁴⁸ But in experiencing the destruction of his marvelous mechanical butterfly, he gains a greater appreciation of its image: "When the artist rose high enough to achieve the beautiful, the symbol by which he made it perceptible to mortal senses became of little value in his eyes while his spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of the reality" (II, 535-536). A situation with similar undertones was presented by Howells in The Vacation of the Kelwys. Herein Elihu Emerence has achieved the vision of the beautiful by experimenting throughout life, not afraid to bypass what are normally called useful occupations. Although Parthenope Brooke is attracted to him, she tries to avoid romantic involvement because she cannot convince herself of the utility of his way of life. His passion is for the act of creating. "If I didn't love the art of the theatre," he tells Parthenope, "I'am [sic] afraid I shouldn't care for what we call the "good" it can do."⁴⁹ But Emerence can be happy whether he completes a project or not. In the absence of a finished creative product, he has the beauty of his own soul as evidence of his glimpse of the ideal. At last Parthenope stumbles upon the "use" of his visionary existence: his own goodness. This is all the convincing she needs of his acceptability, as Howells wrote:

What his charm was she could not have said, unless it was

⁴⁸Fogle viewed the entire story as a treatment of the "conflict between understanding and imagination" (p. 74).

⁴⁹The Vacation of the Kelwys, p. 171.

his goodness. It must be that, for now, when she was so blest in him, she did not feel any more or any less than she felt at the very beginning that he was good. There was rest in that, there was peace.⁵⁰

By virtue of his unusual insight, the artist should be the most sympathetic of men toward humanity. But involvement in the artistic process, Hawthorne and Howells noted, frequently results in a cold, inquisitive attitude toward life. Other men are often the unsuspecting victims of artistic curiosity. As one writer commented about Hawthorne's treatment of this phase of the problem of the artist,

It concerns the dichotomy of the act of artistic creation, which Hawthorne seems to have felt is man's most spiritual achievement, and of that "dark necessity," which, he feared, impels the artist by virtue of his very artistry towards the unpardonable sin, the violation of the human heart.⁵¹

Hawthorne's works are replete with examples of artists who have allowed their search for truth to be unsympathetic rather than merely disinterested; and Hawthorne himself could understand the inquisitive urge, as he wrote in "Sights from a Steeple": "The most desirable mode of existence might be that of a spiritualized Paul Pry, hovering invisible round man and woman, witnessing their deeds, searching into their hearts . . . " (I, 220). Such a process can completely de-humanize the artist, just as the heart of Ethan Brand is turned to stone by his psychological research. And in The House of the Seven Gables Hawthorne

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 248.

⁵¹Mary E. Dichmann, "Hawthorne's 'Prophetic Pictures,'" American Literature, XII (May, 1951), 188.

wrote: "To a disposition like Holgrave's, at once speculative and active, there is no temptation so great as the opportunity of acquiring empire over the human spirit . . . " (III, 253). In that novel of lost souls, The Blithedale Romance, there is no one more lost than the poet, Miles Coverdale. He has left off imbibing the beauties of human nature--which should be the object of a poet--and has turned himself into a prober of the hidden and unattractive aspects of humanity. Of himself he says: "That cold tendency, between instinct and intellect, which made me pry with a speculative interest into people's passions and impulses, appeared to have gone far towards unhumanizing my heart" (V, 495). His psychological adventures into the hearts of men have sapped his creative energy, and he ruefully admits the truth of Hollingsworth's words that he is a man without a purpose. In all probability Coverdale represents, as Roy R. Male thought, "what Hawthorne feared he might have become had he not given himself in love and marriage."⁵²

The de-humanized artist was treated by Howells in A Hazard of New Fortunes through Angus Beaton, who resembles Coverdale in several respects. Principally he lacks real purpose in life; he has some talent, but he spreads it thin over painting, sculpture, and art criticism. When he is asked to become head of the Art Department of Every Other Week, he admits that he has little sympathy with his fellow man:

"What you want is some man who can have patience with

⁵²Hawthorne's Tragic Vision (Austin, Texas, 1957), p. 151.

mediocrity putting on the style of genius, and with genius turning mediocrity on his hands. I haven't any luck with men; I don't get on with them; I'm not popular."⁵³

Because of his ingrained habit of studying people instead of liking them, Beaton cannot be sincere and give his affection unreservedly to any one woman. He is attracted to Christine Dryfoos by her unfathomable passion and to Margaret Vance through her bewildering combination of society girl and sister of mercy. Alma Leighton, whom Beaton tries to love because he seems to feel it is the thing to do, censures his attitude ("I think you've no business to go about studying people, as you do. It's abominable," she says.⁵⁴) and ultimately rejects him. Beaton is aware of the malaise of his own soul: "He only knew that his will was somehow sick; that it spent itself in caprices, and brought him no happiness from the fulfillment of the most vehement wish."⁵⁵ But he refuses to take the blame for his condition and consigns it completely to fate; thus he persists in his tragic self-delusion that the artist, because of his hyper-sensitivity, need not concern himself about normal social responsibility.

The isolation of the artist from society, which Hawthorne and Howells lamented, could not be attributed altogether to the artistic temperament, but to an unhappy combination of the artistic temperament

⁵³A Hazard of New Fortunes, p. 133.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 262.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 440.

and the negative attitude of society at large toward artistic endeavor. The artist has a natural proclivity toward solitude and introspection; but society, through its rejection of him as not meeting its practical standards, forces him further into isolation.

While Hawthorne took to task the artist who exploits mankind, he was equally censorious of society which looks askance at art. In "The Custom House" introduction to The Scarlet Letter, he took satirical note of the disdainful attitude that his pragmatic Puritan forebears would probably have had toward him as an artist.⁵⁶ The narrator in "The Hall of Fantasy" says of the artist-society estrangement: "'An author is received in general society pretty much as we honest citizens are in the Hall of Fantasy. We gaze at him as if he had no business among us, and question whether he is fit for any of our pursuits'" (II, 200). And if society recognizes an artist at all, he is expected to put his creation to practical use and gain from it materially, as Hawthorne noted in "Drowne's Wooden Image," when Copley cannot fathom Drowne's refusal to sell his carving: "'A Yankee, and throw away the chance of making his fortune! He has gone mad; and thence has come this gleam of genius" (II, 357). The knowledge on the part of the artist that the world holds him in quiet contempt stifles his creativity, as Warland complains to the clockmaker in "The Artist of the Beautiful":

⁵⁶ Hawthorne was acutely sensitive about the disrespect that the writer of fiction was traditionally given in America. See Austin Warren's discussion in "Introduction" to Nathaniel Hawthorne: Representative Selections (New York, 1934), pp. lxi-lxiii.

"You are my evil spirit . . . --you and the hard, coarse world! The leaden thoughts and the despondency that you fling upon me are my clogs, else I should long ago have achieved the task that I was created for." (II, 515)

Howells also blamed society for much of the isolation of the artist. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century the public still assigned the author a place apart from ordinary men, as Howells showed in the case of one of his fictional novelists, Philip Verrian:

[His novel] intimated a romantic personality in the author, and the world still likes to imagine romantic things of authors. It likes especially to imagine them of novelists, now that there are no longer poets; and when it began to like Verrian's serial, it began to write him all sorts of letters, directly, in care of the editor, and indirectly to the editor, ~~whom~~ they asked about Verrian more than about his story.⁵⁷

In The Coast of Bohemia Howells gave satirical treatment to the artist's efforts to live up to society's romantic concept of what an artist should be. Discontented with her prosaic upper-class life, Charmain Maybough tries to escape through art study; and since she is shrewd enough to recognize her own mediocrity, she assumes the pose of an artist. She is as Bohemian as she knows how to be: she lives in contrived disarrangement in the attic of the family home, though the maid has orders from Charmain's mother to give the bric-a-brac a daily dusting. She serves tidbits of chocolate and cheese to her visitors and would smoke cigars if she could avoid nausea. Charmain's actions are ludicrous, but they stem from the very serious misapprehension that society has of the artist's purpose and life. And the trouble with

⁵⁷Fennel and Rue (New York, 1908), pp. 1-2.

Angus Beaton (A Hazard of New Fortunes), according to Cady, is that "the romantic tradition of the artist has confirmed him in every variety of personal, social, financial, emotional, and professional irresponsibility."⁵⁸

One of the greatest abuses that Hawthorne and Howells felt society perpetrated against the artist was economic. This was considered more directly in fiction by Howells than by Hawthorne. The latter did, however, lament in "The Custom House" the emasculation which working for a living had temporarily laid upon his creativity. And, of course, his fictional artists (Holgrave, Coverdale, Warland, and others) do not earn their bread through art. The three artists in The Marble Faun live in Europe in colonies of their own and appear to be on a temporary holiday from everyday life. While Hawthorne felt that the artist should have a more secure place in society because of his unique contributions, he was himself willing to accept all he could financially from his consulship in Liverpool, in place of his due subsistence from the nation's book-buyers.⁵⁹ Howells, in the beginning of his career, was forced to work as a sub-editor on a magazine, and most of his lifetime he continued his magazine work partly because of the vocational insecurity of the arts.⁶⁰ In The World of Chance Howells gave his most extended

⁵⁸The Realist at War, p. 105.

⁵⁹See Lawrence S. Hall, Hawthorne: Critic of Society (New Haven, 1944), pp. 45-67.

⁶⁰The Road to Realism (Syracuse, New York, 1956), p. 117; The Realist at War, pp. 2-3.

attention in fiction to the problem of the insecurity of the artist as he depicted the success and then sudden failure of Percy B. Ray's novel. The disposition of creative literature, as one editor tells Ray, is "luck, pure and simple, and mostly bad luck."⁶¹ Howells devoted a long essay to the economic status of the writer and avowed strongly that the artist, like any other laborer, is worthy of his hire. But he regretfully noted that "to the vast multitude of our fellow-working-men we artists are the shadows of names, or not even shadows."⁶² Thus artists must continue to create for the old spiritual satisfaction which has always been theirs and trust that they may touch enough minds to make their effort pay:

The best that you can do is to write the book that it gives you the most pleasure to write, to put as much heart and soul as you have about you into it, and then hope as hard as you can to reach the heart and soul of the greatest multitude of your fellow-men. That, and that alone, is good business for a man of letters.⁶³

The great difficulty of Hawthorne's artistic life, it has been suggested, was "that his art aligned itself with the side his American conscience could not support,"⁶⁴ that the isolated artist could not exist morally in a democratic society. Such is true--to a degree. But

⁶¹The World of Chance, p. 71.

⁶²"The Man of Letters as a Man of Business," Literature and Life (New York, 1902), p. 34.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 20-21.

⁶⁴Marius Bewley, The Complex Fate: Hawthorne, Henry James and Some Other American Writers (London, 1952), p. 58. Also see Henry G. Fairbanks, "Hawthorne amid the Alien Corn," College English, XVII (February, 1956), 266.

he did not necessarily think that the democratic artist should limit himself to "popular" or folk literature; nor did he cease writing when he could not bring himself to produce this "democratic" literature.⁶⁵ What Hawthorne did feel was that real life is precious, that the true democrat cannot avoid it, but that the artist is the person specially equipped to bring the visionary and real life into harmony. The writer in "The Devil in Manuscript" rightly burns his pieces because he has completely lost touch with real life; but the destruction of Owen Warland's butterfly is tragic, not for Warland since he has seen the vision, but for his friends because they reject the only contact with the ideal which they would probably ever have. Hawthorne and Howells both believed that the artist and society can mutually aid one another, but that both are deprived when they remain estranged. In The Coast of Bohemia Howells touched upon the obligation of the artist to bring the world into touch with the beautiful, but not to compromise his own vision just for the sake of popular appeal. The artist Walter Ludlow says:

" . . . it seems to me that the worst effect of an artist's life is to wrap him up in himself, and separate him from his kind. Even if he goes in for what they call popular subjects, he takes from the many and gives to the few; he ought to give something back to the crowd—he ought to give everything back. But the terrible question is whether they'll have it"⁶⁶

The problem of the artist, though complicated somewhat by

⁶⁵Expounded by Rudolph Von Abele, The Death of the Artist: A Study of Hawthorne's Disintegration (The Hague, 1955), pp. 8-11.

⁶⁶The Coast of Bohemia (New York, 1893), p. 155.

democracy, was essentially the same to Hawthorne and Howells as that involving any person who feels the opposing attraction of the physical and the spiritual. It was a problem which both knew intimately from their own experience; and their experience, as Chapter III has explained, taught them the disastrous results of extremes. They advocated a balance between love of real life and the sublime vision of the spiritual; but refusing in their fiction to be guilty of the flaw of excessive idealism, they had to admit that the balance is very rarely achieved.

CONCLUSION

When Howells first met Hawthorne at the Wayside in 1860, the latter wrote on a calling card to be presented as Howells' introduction to Emerson: "I find this young man worthy."¹ If Hawthorne had lived to read even Howells' earliest novels, he probably would have repeated his original statement with added emphasis. It was Howells who, through his own creative works and his influence on other writers, carried on Hawthorne's views and promulgated an American tradition in fiction. Howells admired Hawthorne and agreed with most of the older writer's general aims. Van Wyck Brooks observed that "Hawthorne, whom [Howells] adored as an artist, said what Howells felt: he longed to see an America that was free from the shadow of Europe."² Howells wrote that Hawthorne, during their interview in 1860, voiced curiosity about the West and "said he would like to see some part of the country on which the shadow (or, if I must be precise, the damned shadow) of Europe had not fallen."³ In his review of Julian Hawthorne's Hawthorne and His Circle, Howells expressed his concurrence with Hawthorne's American views: "What strikes me first and last in him is how entirely American he always was."⁴

¹Howells, Literary Friends and Acquaintance (New York, 1901), p. 55.

²New England: Indian Summer, 1865-1915 (New York, 1940), p. 3.

³Literary Friends and Acquaintance, p. 53.

⁴"The Personality of Hawthorne," North American Review, CLXXVII (December, 1903), 880.

Both Hawthorne and Howells sought to create an indigenous American literature which would render truthfully the American experience. Just as they embraced the idea of democracy, they accepted the responsibility of the artist to take cognizance of the many conflicting tendencies in the American democratic experiment in order to separate the "true" from the "false." Their aim was to portray the ideal; but they did not set up a theoretical system that gave excessive emphasis to any human tendency. Imbalance was a condition which could destroy a democracy and also so distort the vision of the democratic artist that he would lose sight of real life, his mandate for subject matter.

In order to bring actuality in touch with the ideal, Hawthorne perfected a new kind of romance, a literary form that was as truly American as its themes. While the romance allowed factual latitude in its depiction of actual events, in Hawthorne's hands it always remained faithful to general truth. Through the romance, therefore, Hawthorne interpreted human action in relation to the universal and eternal principles of existence. He was able to penetrate the intellectual and material confusion of a democratic society in transition with the brilliant light of his artistry and to expose the incongruities in human relationships which precipitate the confusion. Howells, also, recognized the importance of revealing life as it is for the purpose of uncovering human action in violation of universal principles of order. Although he stated his preference for the form of the realistic novel, all his works contain elements of the Hawthornian romance and many of them are predominantly in the vein of romance. In no instance was

Howells interested in actuality for its own sake, but for its comparison and contrast to reality. The artistic kinship of Hawthorne and Howells lies fundamentally in their rigid adherence to the truth of nature.

Temperamentally Hawthorne and Howells were very much alike. As young men both experienced a rather solitary life, which impressed upon them the malaise that might quickly overtake one given to excessive introspection and to isolation from his fellow men. As a result of self-analysis, they developed an especially acute social consciousness; and most of the basic problems in their fiction involve man's failure to come to satisfactory terms with his environment. Isolation is contrary to nature and to a truly equalitarian society. The antithesis of isolation was expressed by Hawthorne as sympathy and by Howells as complicity; both terms embody a single concept of social unity.

Although the two writers considered the individual responsible for his own ills because of his refusal or inability to follow the balance of nature, they felt that society at large deserves censure for its continued tyranny over the individual. Laissez-faire capitalism, operating under the banner of freedom, is actually undemocratic because it fosters the same inequities as the older European system of inherited wealth and social position. Any system which enhances materialism and social exclusiveness was anathema in their eyes. They felt that social and governmental reform is necessary, but revolutionists have proved themselves signally incapable of carrying out responsible programs. Utopianism is ineffective, too, because it perpetrates its own crimes against the individual. Thus Hawthorne and Howells were confronted by

a problem which, for the most part, had to be solved on the individual level. But the solution could not be effected by one man alone; it had to be a universal acceptance initiated on the individual level, of the co-dependence of all men. The individual heart must be purified by love and then must respond to other hearts in the same refined state. Love, which is a law of nature, can unify society; and this unity will not be merely a universal superimposition of bourgeois standards and tastes, but a general raising of individual sensibilities.

Each man or woman, whatever his individualistic tendencies, must respond to the balance that is taught by nature if he is to take his proper place in the democratic order, which to Hawthorne and Howells was also the moral order. The two writers noted that woman, in particular, is often prone to flout her natural place with relation to man and to assume a position incompatible with her own psychological make-up. One of life's greatest tragedies, they felt, is the emotional imbalance of woman. Moving within her rightful sphere and having accepted her ultimate destiny as a faithful wife and mother, woman is nature's most admirable creature. Even so, woman should not become man's slave, for she is his complement and her role is individualistic within its bounds. The American woman, a product of democratic society, is at her best the highest example of virtuous individualism.

Nowhere is Hawthorne's and Howells' desire for balance more in evidence than in their consideration of man's spiritual life. Although materialism is the strongest foe of moral development, an excessive concern for the spiritual realm is a violation of nature. The material

world is man's natural environment, and he must regard it as a reflection of the ideal. Anyone, whether religionist or artist, who gives his major attention to what lies beyond the physical is neglecting his only approach to spirituality: his earthly existence. Man should love real life enough to have sympathy with its frailties and imperfections; and this resultant sympathy will be sufficient foretaste of the spiritual life to come.

Hawthorne and Howells both loved life enough to be sorely troubled by the failure of man to avail himself of the opportunities for its improvement. Although they had no misapprehensions about the eventual perfection of earthly existence, they did feel that the American democratic experiment offered the greatest possibilities. It was necessary, however, to resolve many of the existing dichotomies and achieve a unity among the diversified interests. It was the calling of the writer to help reconcile these contradictions through his perceptive analysis of real-life human relationships. Hawthorne's acceptance of this calling was admired and emulated by Howells, who passed on to many of his followers the same American tradition.



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