

ROME IN HAWTHORNE'S FRENCH AND ITALIAN NOTEBOOKS
AND IN THE MARBLE FAUN

Regina M. Przybycien

- UFOP -

In comparing Hawthorne's The Marble Faun with his French and Italian Notebooks, I have two purposes in mind: the first is to look at the author's impressions of Rome (its scenery, its art, and its religion) as he presents them in the Notebooks and incorporates them in the novel; the second purpose is to evaluate Hawthorne's effectiveness in using the Roman background for his story in The Marble Faun.

When Hawthorne goes to Italy in 1858, he is fifty-four years old. His most significant works are all written and his views on art and morality are deeply set. Therefore, it is with his New England Puritan background that he is going to judge the works of art and the Roman character. On the other hand, sharing with his contemporaries an admiration for the classical tradition, Hawthorne is specially fascinated by the prospect of visiting that cradle of the classical culture that is Rome. His Notebooks indicate that he arrives in Italy full of anticipation to unfold the mysteries of the Roman past. During his whole stay in Italy (one and a half year), he tries to recapture that past in the ruins and decadence of modern Rome, a very difficult task, as he soon finds out, because the present usually appalls him. In fact, much of the Roman glamour disappears as soon as Hawthorne arrives at the city. In the Notebooks he describes the dirty and dangerous streets, the shabby and cold houses, the strange

mixture of ancient art and the most prosaic contemporary activities in the Roman scene:

The first observation which a stranger is led to make, in the neighborhood of Roman ruins, is that the inhabitants seem to be strangely addicted to the washing of clothes; for all the precincts of Trajan's Forum, and of the Roman Forum, and wherever else an iron railing affords opportunity to hang them, were whitened with sheets, and other linen and cotton, drying in the sun.¹

Another aspect of Rome which shocks Hawthorne's Puritan mind is the dishonesty of its people, specially of the people occupying official positions, like the custom-house officers, who seem to consider a matter of course that the tourists should give them bribes.

Disillusioned with his experiences, Hawthorne concludes his first notes about Rome with a melancholy tone: "And this is sunny Italy and genial Rome."²

These discouraging first impressions are heightening during his whole stay in Italy due to frequent sicknesses in his family — his own and specially his daughter's, who gets the Roman fever and almost dies of it. The mixture of fascination for the past and distaste for the present pervades the descriptions of Rome in the Notebooks, and the same mixed feelings are transferred to the characters in The Marble Faun.

During his whole stay in Italy, Hawthorne never ceases to be a tourist. Pilgrimages to historical places, art galleries, and churches constitute his daily routine. Being unable to speak the language, he never really gets to know the Italians, and therefore, is not interested in their lives. Several times

in the Notebooks and in the novel he mentions with a certain impatience the annoying crowds of beggars who infest the Roman streets everywhere; however, he does not try to explain their existence, but regards them with the eyes of his New England puritanism for which beggary is a sin. Likewise, he constantly refers to the presence of French soldiers in Rome without mentioning the political and social problems which are shaking Italy during these troublesome years of the war for unification. Hawthorne remains an outsider, and the only people with whom he relates are the American and English artists who live in Rome. From the world of these artists he picks up the material for his scenery and characterization in the novel.

Hawthorne's feelings about art are also mixed. He dutifully visits every museum, every palace and art gallery, and every church he thinks represent that old Rome he tries to recapture. His views, however, are very provincial. He soon discovers he has no taste for the artists of the Renaissance. Michelangelo, Raphael, Rubens, and the other masters fail to move him. He prefers the works of the contemporary American artists who live in Rome to those of the old Italian school. He calls the pictures of the Renaissance "grim masterpieces," and in a passage that Mrs. Hawthorne deleted from the Notebooks when she published them, he adds, "There is something forced, if not feigned, in our tastes for pictures of the old Italian school."²

Similarly, he finds the Roman ruins ugly as compared to the English: "Whatever beauty there may be in a Roman ruin is the remnant of what was beautiful originally; whereas an English ruin is more beautiful often in its decay than even it was in its primal strength."³

A picture of the Renaissance which does exert a special

fascination to Hawthorne is Guido Reni's "Beatrice Cenci". Although it has never been proved that the portrait is of Beatrice, it attracted many people in the nineteenth-century who, unquestionably, had heard the story of the Cenci's incest. Hawthorne obviously knew the story, as he indicates in his Notebooks. As Robert L. White suggests, he probably learned it from Shelley's verse drama The Cenci.⁴ Hawthorne recognizes that the attraction of the picture lies in its legend:

I wish, however, it were possible for some spectator, of deep sensibility, to see the picture without knowing anything of its subject or history; for, no doubt, we bring all our knowledge of the Cenci tragedy to the interpretation of it.⁵

The idea of Beatrice's corrupting innocence so fascinates Hawthorne that he decides to use it as an underlying theme in his portrayal of Miriam in The Marble Faun. He makes Hilda describe Beatrice in the novel as "a fallen angel, fallen, and yet sinless."⁶

But it is the classical sculpture which catches Hawthorne's attention more than any other work of art because it relates him to that antiquity he vainly tries to capture in Rome. Visiting the Capitol, he lingers in front of the busts of the old Romans thinking that "These stone people have stood face to face with Caesar, and all the other emperors, ... and have been to them like their reflections in a mirror."⁷ In the Capitol he also sees Praxiteles' statue of the marble faun which inspires him to write the romance. His entry in the notebook that day reads:

It seems to me that a story, with all sorts of fun and pathos in it, might be contrived on the idea of their [the fauns'] species having become intermingled with the human race; a family with the faun blood in them having prolonged itself from the classic era till our own days.⁸

This becomes the embryonic plot of The Marble Faun. The human faun is the character Donatello.

One of the things which deeply impresses Hawthorne in Rome is Catholicism. Certain aspects of the Catholic devotion, specially individual prayers and confession, appeal to him. Commenting on the way the Italians pray, he writes: "Unlike the worshippers in our own churches, each individual here seems to do his own individual acts of devotion, and I cannot but think it better so than to make an effort for united prayer as we do."⁹ In The Marble Faun he makes Hilda, a New England Puritan girl, seek the comfort of the confessional for her troubled soul. That Hawthorne was deeply impressed by the rituals and the icons of the Catholic Church we have enough evidence in the numerous passages that he dedicates to them in the Notebooks, and in the long discussions his characters have about them in The Marble Faun. Furthermore, even though Hawthorne himself is too old to be influenced by Roman Catholicism more than to a general curiosity concerning its external forms, it does have an impact on his family: his youngest daughter Rose becomes a Catholic nun. Later in her life, she works with the victims of cancer in the slums of New York City and starts an organization which becomes a religious order - the Servants of Relief of Incurable Cancer, a Dominican Third Order.¹⁰

On the other hand, some of Hawthorne's reactions to the

Catholic Church are typical of someone with his Puritan background. His narrative is pervaded with an extreme dislike for the clergy and specially for monks. He describes these as dirty and sensuous. The light way in which the Italians take their religion also appalls him. He comments on the strange mixture of business, sport and religion in the Roman scene, and on the way people kneel down and pray "between two fits of merriment, or between two sins."

Like Rome itself, Catholicism seems to Hawthorne full of contradictions, and he feels attracted and repulsed by it. He thinks the Catholics have rituals which help them relieve the burden of sin, while the Protestants have to bear that burden alone. Nevertheless, Catholicism as an institution partakes of the corruption of Rome — like the city, it had its moments of glory which are now gone forever.

It remains for us to analyze how Hawthorne utilizes the Roman background in the design of The Marble Faun. Like most of his previous works, this romance deals with a recurrent theme in Hawthorne: the Fall of man and its consequences. If we have any doubts about the author's intentions in creating the story, we have only to quote one of Miriam's sentences in the novel: "The story of the Fall of Man! Is it not repeated in our romance of Mount Beni?" (p. 434) In fact it is, and with suggestions that Hawthorne never dared have before.

In his preface, Hawthorne tries to explain why he chose Italy as the scene of the romance:

Italy as the site of his Romance, was chiefly valuable to him [the author] as affording a sort of poetic fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon, as they are, and must needs be, in America. (p. 3)

Hence, freedom from actualities was one of his reasons for conceiving the story in Rome. The main reason, however, is closely related to the theme. Hawthorne not only repeats his favorite theme in The Marble Faun but makes an association between it and the history of Rome. In his creation of Donatello, the author conceives a legend by which this character's ancestry has a kinship with the fauns of antiquity. Donatello, therefore, has a double nature: he is Man and Faun. The characteristics of the faun are innocence, absence of pain, and a total unawareness of evil, characteristics which identify him with the primeval man, or Adam. Thus, Hawthorne associates the classical era with the Golden Age. The man in Donatello, who arises after he commits murder and becomes aware of his sin, is the postlapsarian man of the Christian era, a man with a conscience and an ability to determine his own destiny. In Roman mythology, the fauns were deities who followed Dionysus, the god of wine. Thus, symbolically, the story of The Marble Faun is the story of the struggle of the pagan god Dionysus with the god of Christianity. In the supreme moment when Donatello kills a man and becomes conscious of his sin, the pagan god is dead, and the new man is born.

The idea of the awakening of a conscience in its struggle with evil seems particularly fascinating to Hawthorne, and in this romance, it acquires a new dimension which he did not dare pursue in his previous works.

In the beginning of the story, Donatello, who physically resembles the faun of Praxiteles, is a man without a conscience. He acts as impulsively and as innocently as a child and is unaware of evil or suffering. All things related to him remind us of Arcadia: the castle of his ancestors in the campagna, his ability to communicate with the animal world,

the wine produced in Monte Beni, which has a divine flavor and is called "Sunshine." The author insists on the associations between Donatello and the faun even to the point of making Kenyon, the American artist in the romance, exclaim about the Monte Beni wine: "This is surely the wine of the Golden Age, such as Bacchus himself first taught mankind to press from the choicest of his grapes." (p. 224) It is when he kills Miriam's model that Donatello changes. His act is like the Fall of Man from primeval innocence to knowledge. The author reinforces the similarity through Miriam's words: "Yes, Donatello, you speak the truth!" said she. "My heart consented to what you did. We two slew yonder wretch. The deed knots us together for time and eternity, like the coil of a serpent!" (p. 174) Thus, Donatello acquires the consciousness of evil, and the pagan god in him is dead. By this great metaphor of the death of the faun, Hawthorne intends to introduce a new, more daring conception of the Fall: he suggests that sin and pain are somehow necessary for man to become complete. Instead of a curse, the Fall becomes a blessing to mankind. This suggestion he puts into Miriam's words when she talks with Kenyon about Donatello's transformation:

Is he not beautiful? ... So changed, yet still, in a deeper sense, so much the same! He has travelled in a circle, as all things heavenly and earthly do, and now comes back to his original self, with an inestimable treasure of improvement won from an experience of pain ... Was the crime — in which he and I were wedded — was it a blessing in that strange disguise? Was it a means of education, bringing a simple and imperfect nature to a point of feeling and intelligence, which it could have reached under no other discipline?" (p. 434)

Miriam's questions seem to be Hawthorne's questions as well. His attempt to reformulate the story of the Fall and the concept of sin is, no doubt, a daring thesis, and he knows it. Because he knows it, he does not dare pursue the subject too far. It is Kenyon who has the last word in the discussion with Miriam, and he unquestionably reflects the author's own doubts and fears: "You stir up deep and perilous matter, Miriam," replied Kenyon. "I dare not follow you into the unfathomable abysses, whither you are tending." (p. 434)

Nonetheless, the question of good and evil is no longer so clearly cut out as in Hawthorne's early works. Somehow, there is a reconciliation between the characters and this mixture of good and evil which is everywhere present in Rome. The acquisition of knowledge and experience is no longer totally destructive as it was in "Young Goodman Brown." Yet, these rather un-puritan theories are very contradictory in the book, and the writer's proposition remains unresolved.

Hawthorne's inability to deal with his theme is one of the problems of The Marble Faun. Is Donatello's metamorphosis from innocent faun to conscious human being through a murder good or bad, moral or immoral? The novel does not say, probably because the author does not know.

In addition, the idea of relating classical Rome to the Garden of Eden and modern Rome to Christianity and symbolically incorporating both in Donatello seems too ambitious a project for Hawthorne to handle effectively. Donatello's murder, we are told, includes him in the brotherhood of sinners who, for centuries, have corrupted and stained the streets of Rome. His acquired humanity makes him partake of the legacy of human sin. It is Miriam, again, who gives us a vision of this heritage: "It is a terrible thought, that an individual wrong-doing melts into the great mass of human crime, and

makes us — who dreamed only of our little separate sin — makes us guilty of the whole." (p. 177) Thus, Donatello's crime is linked with all the crimes of old and modern Rome.

Like Donatello, Rome has a double nature. It contains an innocent, prelapsarian past, related to Arcadia, where fauns and nymphs played in the woods and Bacchus made his wine from divine grapes. But it also contains a present corrupted by the sins of many generations and heavy with the burden of many deaths. A reflection of Hawthorne's puritanism in the Roman scene he describes is his association of corruption and moral decay with sickness and physical decay. Thus, Rome is an unwholesome city, cold in the winter and plagued by malaria in the summer. In the story, modern Rome is a diseased city as compared to its glorious past; for example, after Miriam and Donatello dance in the woods like a nymph and a faun, they are suddenly thrown into Rome's present reality:

Just an instant before, it was Arcadia, and the Golden Age. The spell being broken, it was now only that old tract of pleasure-ground, close by the people's gate of Rome; a tract where the crimes and calamities of ages, the many battles, blood recklessly poured out, and deaths of myriads, have corrupted all the soil, creating an influence that makes the air deadly to human lungs. (p. 90)

This association of the present with moral and physical decay constitutes a problem in relation to the theme. If the Roman scene is to be taken symbolically (and we are told it is), how can we conciliate the theme of the fortunate Fall and Donatello's moral growth with this grim description of modern

Rome? If modern Rome is the "better civilization of Christianity" in which man acquires a moral conscience that he did not possess in Arcadia, then it should have something more than the heavy burden of past and present sins. Hawthorne's ineffectiveness in relating Rome to his theme is due to several causes, of which I think three are the most important.

First, he leaves the question of the fortunate Fall unresolved. He does suggest that the Fall was necessary and that primeval innocence is an unenviable form of innocence. Yet, since this assumption brings all sorts of philosophical and theological implications which Hawthorne cannot cope with, he leaves further speculations to the reader and ends the question with Kenyon's remark: "Mortal man has no right to tread on the ground where you now set your feet!" (p. 435)

The second problem of the novel is that it is difficult to associate the Roman background with the theme because the author's feelings toward Rome are contradictory. We saw, in the beginning of this paper, some of the causes for such feelings: personal problems, sickness, disillusionment with the much anticipated visit to the Roman ruins and art treasures. At the same time, the thought that so many generations came and passed through that site is overwhelming, specially for an American who frequently complains of the lack of history and tradition in the American soil, which has just "a common place prosperity." Hawthorne justifies his use of the Roman landscape in the preface of the book, where he writes that "Romance and poetry, like ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers need Ruin to make them grow." (p. 3) But because he feels repulsion for these ruins, because they are ugly, old, and broken instead of splendid as he envisioned them in his dream, he has all kinds of mixed feelings about them, and he projects these feelings into his characters. It seems

that Hawthorne has a fierce battle with Rome, and that we do not know who wins the battle.

The third problem in The Marble Faun has often been pointed out by several critics. It is the incredible amount of details which Hawthorne puts into the romance, most of them taken directly from his Notebooks. Harry Arader mentions that more than three hundred passages of various lengths have been directly copied from the Notebooks. He calls the story "a kind of eclectic pastiche of their [the Notebooks'] material."¹¹ Another critic, Pérez Gallego, argues that the writer regarded his romance as a kind of museum where every beautiful piece has its place.¹² Both critics, of course, are right in their evaluation. The excessive details, the long descriptions of the Roman scenes, ruins, art galleries, churches, and museums not only are tiresome, but they considerably weaken the story. Among so many details, the story of Donatello is just another additional fact, and The Marble Faun becomes what it has been taken for since its publication: a sort of travelogue of Rome, much to Hawthorne's indignation because he considered it his best book. However, the main reason why the book is a failure is the transposition of the dichotomy of good and evil to a Roman background. While the distinctive line between good and evil is clearly and visibly cut in a New England village, it becomes quite another matter in the thousands of years of Roman history. Therefore, while Hawthorne was effective in dealing with this dichotomy in his homeland, he fails to convey it in Rome. As a result, his characters lack a perspective and an identity. Each one in turn conveys the author's thoughts exactly as he recorded them in the Notebooks. The romance becomes a dialogue between the author and the reader, the author trying to justify his reasons for thinking the way he does.

In the last analysis, Hawthorne's Roman experience does not change him much. As an American in quest for identity in the old Continent, he regards everything with his puritan morality. Although he makes an effort to understand all the mixtures of the Roman scene, his simple existence of an American Adam prevents him from appreciating the contradictions of that much older civilization in Italy. He tries hard to grasp the meaning of those contradictions, but the experience is too painful, so he decides to return to America before his years in exile could unsettle him. He recognizes the danger of becoming an expatriate, which makes a man lose his identity.

NOTES

- ¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1883), p. 84.
- ² *ibid*, p. 56.
- ³ *ibid*, p. 61.
- ⁴ Robert L. White, "Rappaccini's Daughter", The Cenci and the Cenci Legend," Studi Americani, 14, (1968), 63-86.
- ⁵ Notebooks, p. 90.
- ⁶ Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, ed. William Charvat et al. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), p. 66. All other references to this book have their page numbers given in the body of the text.
- ⁷ Notebooks, p. 155.
- ⁸ *ibid*, pp. 172-73.
- ⁹ *ibid*, p. 95.
- ¹⁰ Harry Arader, American Novelists in Italy: Hawthorne, Howells, James and Crawford, Diss. (Ann Harbor: University Microfilms, 1953), p. 36.
- ¹¹ *ibid*, p. 739.
- ¹² Cándido Pérez Gállego, "Los Prólogos de Nathaniel Hawthorne a sus novelas." Revista de Literatura, 29 (1966), p. 119.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Charvat, William, gen. ed. The Centenary Editions of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Vol. IV: The Marble Faun: or, The Romance of Monte Beni. Ed. Roy H. Pearce et al. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968.
- Lathrop, George Parsons, introd. The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Vol. X: Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1883.
- Arvin, Newton, ed. The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1929.
- Arader, Harry F., American Novelists in Italy: Hawthorne, Howells, James and Crawford. Diss. Ann Harbor: University of Michigan Microfilms (1953).
- Cameron, Kenneth W., ed. Hawthorne Among his Contemporaries. Hartford: Trinity College, 1968.
- Asselineau, Roger. "Hawthorne Abroad." Les Langues Modernes, 59, (1965), 156-63.
- Blackstock, Walter. "Hawthorne's Cool, Switched-on Media of Communication in The Marble Faun." Language Quarterly, 7, No. 3-4 (1969), pp. 41-42.
- Capellán, Gonzales A. "Hawthorne como protagonista de sus obras." Folología Moderna, 35-36 (1969), 287-95.
- Cifelli, Edward. "Hawthorne and the Italian." Studi Americani, 14, (1968), 87-96.

- McCarthy, Harold T. "Hawthorne's Dialogue with Rome: The Marble Faun." Studi Americani, 14, (1968), 97-112.
- Moss, Sidney P. "The Symbolism of the Italian Background in The Marble Faun." Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 23, (1968), 332-36.
- Pérez Gallégo, Cándido. "Los Prólogos de Nathaniel Hawthorne a sus novelas." Revista de Literatura, 29 (1966), 111-19.
- Voight, Gilbert P. "Hawthorne and the Roman Catholic Church." New England Quarterly, 19, (1946), 394-98.
- White, Robert L. "Papaccini's Daughter, The Cenci and the Cenci Legend." Studi Americani, 14, (1968), 63-86.
- Zauli, Camilla N. "La Fortuna di Hawthorne in Italia: Nota bibliografica." Studi Americani, 6, (1960), 183-201.