

# The Experience of the Sublime and the Terrors of Transgression in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Marble Faun*

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**Abstract** The paper attempts to discuss Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Marble Faun* (1860) with respect to the Gothic tradition and its influence. It considers the way how particular Gothic elements (persecution, fear of death and evil forces, a confused identity, the secrets of the past, the setting of the Roman Catholic South) are modified and shaped into new connections and contexts: The specific role of American Puritan experience is discussed together with the Romantic emphasis on the healing power of imagination. The feeling of the sublime is related to the central theme of transgression, which is dealt with against the background of Hawthorne's mythological tales ("The Paradise of Children") as well as P.B. Shelley's Gothic tragedy *The Cenci* (1819).

**Keywords** Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, The Sublime, The English Gothic Novel, Transgression, Puritan Religion, The Fall, Transformation

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"We are not endowed with real life [...] till the heart be touched."<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

Hawthorne's work, in its revaluation of earlier features of Romanticism,<sup>2</sup> includes the author's original response to both English and American versions of the Gothic tradition. In accordance with the atmosphere of the first English Gothic tales, Hawthorne's stories turn our attention to the uncertainty of the human position in the incomprehensible world permeated with hostile and destructive forces. The transitoriness of the human order, of individual peace and happiness is linked to the central Gothic theme of transgression, which is discussed by Fred Botting as a significant element of the sublime.<sup>3</sup> This theme allows

Hawthorne to develop his life-long interest in the moral conflicts and in the experience of guilt.

The traditional Gothic employment of "the sins of the fathers"<sup>4</sup> and the disturbing returns of the past (e.g. Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* or Ann Radcliffe's *Sicilian Romance*) is enriched (and psychologically deepened) by Nathaniel Hawthorne's concern with the issues of American Puritanism: in particular, with Puritan anxiety concerning human imperfection, with the inclination to severe moral judgements and with the gloomy concept of sin as a result of the devil's presence and a sign of damnation.

In this respect, Hawthorne's effort to cope with the Puritan heritage connects his work closely with the American Gothic tradition. As in the work of Charles Brockden Brown,<sup>5</sup> the American experience of Puritanism is mirrored in the author's engagement with "the relation of the individual to social and religious forms of order"<sup>6</sup> as well as in the internalisation of the moral conflict between good and evil. In American Gothic fiction, the imminent, lethal danger threatening the hero (or the heroine) is not represented by the supernatural terrors or villainous interference in the dark Gothic castles. It may suddenly arise in the immeasurable depths of the soul, in the labyrinthine recesses of the human heart and mind.<sup>7</sup>

In Hawthorne's last completed romance, *The Marble Faun* (1860), the author's concern with human imperfection

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"terror, in its sublime manifestations, is associated with subjective elevation, with the pleasures of imaginatively transcending or overcoming fear and thereby renewing and heightening a sense of self and social value: threatened with dissolution, the self, like the social limits which define it, reconstitutes its identity against the otherness and loss presented in the moment of terror" (p.9).

4 Ibid., p.49.

5 Cf. the study *Romantismus a Romantismy* (Romanticism and Romanticisms) by Martin Procházka and Zdeněk Hrbata (Prague: Karolinum, 2005), in particular, the discussion of C.B. Brown as a follower of the English writer William Godwin and his influential novel *Caleb Williams* (pp.146-151). The references to Puritan religion in Brown's *Wieland* or *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist* reflect the author's original development of Godwin's themes of persecution and social injustice.

6 Botting, Fred, *Gothic*, p.115.

7 Cf. the words of Miriam in *The Marble Faun: Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, ed. Millicent Bell, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 1983, p.1088, or Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales*. "The Minotaur" (Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *Tanglewood Tales*, Lexington: Seven Treasures Publications, 2009, p.24.

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1 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, "Hawthorne in the Boston Custom-House," *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 1868, Vol. 45, No. 268, p.194.

2 Procházka, Martin, *Lectures of American Literature*, Prague: Karolinum, 2002, p.85.

3 Botting, Fred, *Gothic*, London, New York: Routledge, 2004, pp.1-13. As Botting points out in the passage drawing on the theme of transgression,

is connected with the Biblical theme of the Fall, which is depicted as a “psychological event,” a loss of inner harmony, a tragic conflict between passions and reason.<sup>8</sup> The fear of unknown uncontrollable forces as the main source of the sublime<sup>9</sup> is related less to the surrounding world than to disturbing mental and unconscious energies. The insistence on innocence results in a split of the personality, in the pain of the divided self, which hides a powerful potential of destruction.

The stories of Hawthorne’s heroes may be read against the background of Arnold van Gennep’s theory, as variations on the three phases of the rites of passage:<sup>10</sup> the preliminal phase, consisting in the hero’s separation from his former life; the liminal phase, i.e. the hero’s transition to a new psychological and social state of being; and the postliminal phase, i.e. the hero’s re-introduction to the social order. It is in the central, liminal phase that the sublime encounter with the life-threatening forces takes place and a specific influence of the Gothic novel can be discerned (the motifs of fear and terror, temptation, persecution, sin and crime).

In accordance with the meaning of ancient rituals, the test of transition and the crucial goal of the liminal passage are connected with the achievement of a life-saving knowledge, the knowledge of oneself. As Richard Shusterman puts it in his interpretation of Burke’s sublime, “understanding our passions has indispensable practical value for regulating them.”<sup>11</sup> This knowledge, however, can only be reached through experience. In the words of Edmund Burke, it is not enough to know our passions in general, “we should pursue them through all their variety of operations, and pierce into the inmost and what might appear inaccessible parts of our nature.”<sup>12</sup> It is the experience of the sublime that drives the individual closer to these “inaccessible parts.” It is in this search that the ability to accept and control one’s nature can be acquired and the reunion of the internal and external selves may become possible.

Variations on this theme (and its moral aspects, concerning interpersonal relationships) permeate through the whole work of Nathaniel Hawthorne. What is emphasized in all these texts is the difficulty of the passage to a deeper self-awareness and understanding of reality, which becomes another important source of the sublime.<sup>13</sup>

Hawthorne’s interest in the theme of experience as a necessary step to life’s real fulfilment makes him pay considerable attention to the mythological story of Pandora and Epimetheus. These characters (children in Hawthorne) are treated as mythological prototypes of Adam and Eve and

their ‘fall’ reflects the ambiguity of the human encounter with ‘sin’ as a cause of “earthly Troubles.”<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, a moralising interpretation of Pandora’s deed is offered: “you may see by this how a wrong act of any one mortal is a calamity to the whole world.”<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, this act turns the timeless paradise of eternal childhood (“so easy a life” that there was “absolutely nothing to do”<sup>16</sup>) into the world of reality. Like the young married couple from Hawthorne’s story “The May-Pole of Merry Mount,” whose recognition of “something vague and unsubstantial in their former pleasures”<sup>17</sup> helps them accept the sombre world of Puritans, Pandora and Epimetheus feel the importance of “inevitable change.”<sup>18</sup>

Time, “as a result of original sin,”<sup>19</sup> is not a means of destruction but a path to renewal through experience and knowledge, and through the acceptance of individual responsibility. This view is supported by the reference to the children’s growing up, and especially by the personified image of hope, which becomes the central motif of the story. Following the feelings of terror, pain and danger (the monsters from Quicksilver’s box), it heals the injuries caused by them. In other words, it opens space for the sublime delight by initiating “the passage from intense pain to the relief of its removal.”<sup>20</sup> This passage to “ever-renewing life”<sup>21</sup> is closely connected with the experience of time (“again, and again, and again [...] you shall see the glimmer of my wings”<sup>22</sup>), implying the notion of eternity (“an infinite bliss hereafter”<sup>23</sup>) as the “supreme purpose of human existence.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, the repeated encounters with difficulty may finally lead to the renewal and rediscovery of individual identity.

## 2. The Marble Faun

In Hawthorne’s works, the experience of weakness and the propensity to wrongdoing is repeatedly contrasted to a

14 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *A Wonder Book*, “The Paradise of Children,” p.124.

15 *Ibid.*, p.124. Cf. the following words from *The Marble Faun*: “Every crime destroys more Edens than our own!” (Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Marble Faun*, in *Hawthorne.Collected Novels*, ed. Millicent Bell, New York: Ohio State University Press, 1983, p.1028).

16 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *A Wonder Book*, “The Paradise of Children,” p.115.

17 These words from “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” (*Nathaniel Hawthorne. Selected Tales and Sketches*, p.176) are quoted and discussed by Martin Procházka in his study “‘The Sombre Spirit of Our Forefathers’: Colonial History and Myth in Hawthorne’s Tales and Sketches,” *Philologica Pragensia* (Prague: Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and Arts) 30, 1987, p.14.

18 *Ibid.*, p.14.

19 Cf. Procházka, Martin, “‘The Sombre Spirit of Our Forefathers’: Colonial History and Myth in Hawthorne’s Tales and Sketches,” *Philologica Pragensia*, p.15.

20 Shusterman, Richard, “Somaesthetics and Burke’s Sublime,” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, p.330.

21 Weston, Jessie L., *From Ritual to Romance*, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997, p.8.

22 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *A Wonder Book*, “The Paradise of Children,” p.129.

23 *Ibid.*, p.130.

24 Procházka, Martin, “‘The Sombre Spirit of Our Forefathers’: Colonial History and Myth in Hawthorne’s Tales and Sketches,” *Philologica Pragensia*, p.15.

8 Cf. D.B. Morris’s *Religious Sublime*, the chapter on John Dennis: Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972, p.51.

9 Cf. Hrbata, Zdeněk, Procházka, Martin, *Romantismus a Romantismy*, p.121.

10 Gennep, Arnold, van, *The Rites of Passage*, London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965.

11 Shusterman, Richard, “Somaesthetics and Burke’s Sublime,” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Oct. 2005, Vol. 45, Issue 4, p.328.

12 Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p.48.

13 Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p.71.

constant struggle for the achievement or renewal of spiritual power. The individual transformation that springs from the experience of transgression becomes the crucial theme of *The Marble Faun*.<sup>25</sup> In the story of all main protagonists, love as an ethical demand and the feeling of responsibility for the life of the other is awakened through a disturbing liminal experience, which is linked to the Gothic sublime as well as to the tension between the Puritan and Roman Catholic experience of Christianity.

It can be said that rebirth cannot be reached without an inescapable encounter with evil forces. The Gothic influence permeates through the mysterious atmosphere of the setting, Roman Catholic Italy and the city of Rome with its "guilty sites," haunted by the crimes of "departed ages" as by "the dark tide of human evil."<sup>26</sup> Like Circe's enchanted palace, it entices its visitors into the "narrow and tortuous passages"<sup>27</sup> towards the darkest corners of human as well as individual history. In this respect, Rome functions as a liminal space and a contrasting image to the space of New England, the home of Hilda and Kenyon.

At the same time, Rome is a constant reminder of the power of imagination, and visual arts in particular, which (like the tapestry of Hawthorne's Circe) can mirror the external as well as internal reality. Three of the four main characters are artists and, moreover, the plot of the novel unfolds in accordance with a tension between contradictory messages of two works of art: the marble statue of the Faun by Praxiteles, evoking the ancient myth of "eternal youth," innocence and "man's affinity with Nature,"<sup>28</sup> and the portrait of Beatrice Cenci by Guido, "the very saddest picture ever painted,"<sup>29</sup> expressing the tragic notion of experience leading to destruction.

As in Gothic tales, the haunting presence of these images is repeatedly suggested by their reflection in the faces of the Italian protagonists, Donatello<sup>30</sup> and Miriam, as well as in their stories. In this respect, Donatello and Miriam represent two different worlds, whose separation leads to the life-threatening loss of unity and the growing feeling of uncertainty. Accordingly, *The Marble Faun* may be read as a literary attempt to span the gap between the ideal world of myth and "a deprived condition of mankind's existence,"<sup>31</sup> an attempt to reconcile the conflict between the desire for innocence and the inevitable clash with the weakness and fallibility of human nature. The difficulty of this reconciliation is reflected in the employment of the sublime marking the development of Miriam's and Donatello's

relationship.

Both characters are ambiguous. Donatello is frequently compared to a child, being a man of a "simple," "joyous" nature and "unsophisticated heart," "full of animal life," who perceives the surrounding world through instincts and impulses. He is irresistibly attracted to Miriam, he can find in her "the dark element"<sup>32</sup> his nature seems to lack. This hidden, suppressed force (i.e. his propensity to sin) is woken up at the moments of encounter with the most sinister side of Miriam's personality (and of her family past), with the disturbing man/shadow from catacombs and Miriam's model. His presence can turn the "gentle creature" into a "fierce brute,"<sup>33</sup> it releases the "fierce energy" that finally leads Donatello to a crime but also "kindles him into a man."<sup>34</sup> This energy, anger mixed with compassion (or, the connection of animal and spiritual forces), links Donatello, in a way, to Hawthorne's mythological heroes (Theseus, for example) and their effort to relieve their pain by "relieving that of others,"<sup>35</sup> to destroy the villain for the sake of "innocent persons" rescue.<sup>36</sup> Another level of meaning may be found in the parallel between the nature of Donatello, untouched by experience (love for Miriam), and the indifference of a marble statue.

The spectral presence of Miriam's persecutor (whose first appearance among the heroes of the novel is connected with a subterranean labyrinth) evokes an image of a monster from Hawthorne's mythological tales, or a notion of a demoniac spirit from "Young Goodman Brown." He is compared to a mythological satyr, and his association with a Roman Catholic monastery underlines the Gothic element, putting him among the disturbing figures of the Gothic tyrants. The unspecified nature of this character allows the reader to find in him traces of all evil permeating through the novel. He may remind the reader of the perverted nature of Count Cenci as well as of the self-righteous character of Pope Clement VIII.<sup>37</sup> Through intertextual allusions (e.g. the motif of poison emerging in the heroine's life<sup>38</sup>), Miriam's model can also turn our attention to "Rappaccini's Daughter" (another Hawthorne's variation on Beatrice Cenci's story); to the figure of the father as well as to Giovanni's cold accusing attitude.

The 'faun' and the model symbolise, in fact, a split of the heroine's self: a 'nymph' (which is another notable parallel in the novel) and a Romantic incarnation of Beatrice Cenci. Her yearning for the world "before sin, sorrow, or morality" is constantly distorted by the burden of "troublesome recollections"<sup>39</sup> and the more she insists on her innocence,

25 In America, *The Marble Faun* was published in 1860. In the early part of the year, the work was published also in England, under the title *Transformation*, which emphasized its central theme.

26 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Marble Faun*, in *Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, ed. Millicent Bell, New York: Ohio State University Press, 1983, p.1197.

27 *Ibid.*, p.871.

28 *Ibid.*, pp.864, 861.

29 *Ibid.*, p.905.

30 According to Hawthorne, Donatello's "wonderful resemblance to the Faun of Praxiteles forms the key-note" of the narrative. In *Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, p.869.

31 Cf. Procházka, Martin, "The Sombre Spirit of Our Forefathers': Colonial History and Myth in Hawthorne's Tales and Sketches," *Philologica Pragensia*, p.15.

32 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Marble Faun*, in *Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, p.918.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 867.

34 *Ibid.*, p.996.

35 Cf. the note 48 and the discussion of the sublime in the previous chapter.

36 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Marble Faun*, in *Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, p.994.

37 These historical figures are never mentioned in the novel. Their evil influence, however, is suggested indirectly in Miriam's and Hilda's discussion of Guido's painting. They represent examples of oppression and manipulation, reminding us of Hawthorne's mythological tyrants.

38 In *The Marble Faun*, this motif appears in the chapter "On the Edge of a Precipice," (*Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, p.994).

39 *Ibid.*, p.863.

the more she is horrified by the model. Paradoxically, Donatello's transformation as a result of their mutual participation in a crime helps her to accept her dark side and achieve inner integrity. (In this respect, it is Giovanni's inability of transformation that destroys the heroine in "Rappaccini's daughter."<sup>40</sup>)

As for the theme of transgression, the text of Hawthorne's novel evokes a number of reminiscences of P.B. Shelley's verse drama *The Cenci* (1819), inspired by Guido's portrait of Beatrice. Like Shelley, Hawthorne draws on the notion of a terrible secret inspiring paralysing horror. In this atmosphere, "sublime feelings are provoked [...] but cannot be realised" because of "a panicked, frantic state" of mind.<sup>41</sup> Hawthorne's Miriam is overwhelmed with the feeling of "some *unspeakable evil*" that "impeded her breath, and benumbed her natural promptitude of thought."<sup>42</sup> Shelley's Beatrice repeatedly refers to "formless horror" and "sufferings which have no tongue;" "of all words [...] there is none to tell my misery."<sup>43</sup> This oppressing presence of the inexpressible, preceding the scene of crime, distorts all boundaries and "transforms" the character of both heroines: the identity of the victim is confused with that of the villain ("what name, what place, what memory shall be mine?"<sup>44</sup>). In Shelley, the murder of the count is anticipated by Beatrice's "look which told before she spoke it, he must die."<sup>45</sup> In Hawthorne, Donatello claims: "I did what your eyes bade me do, when I asked them with mine."<sup>46</sup> The symbolic motif of marble suggesting the absence of compassion is emphasised in Hawthorne's novel as well as in Shelley's verses. In *The Cenci*, the pope's "cold" judgement makes other characters compare him to "a marble form."<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, while Shelley's tragedy concentrates on the helplessness of the individual crushed by the hostile and perverted world, Hawthorne's novel suggests the possibility of renewal, springing from the individual's moral awareness, self-knowledge and the ability of self-improvement. In Hawthorne, Shelley's symbolic use of the Gothic, aimed at the intensification of emotions and tragic aspects of life, is developed towards a psychological employment of the Romantic and mythological traditions, with the emphasis on the questions how the experience of transgression affects the hero's mind and soul, his/her feelings and particular

behaviour (the feeling of guilt with its destructive as well as reviving potential, fear of sin, repentance, rejection, isolation, condemnation, compassion, reconciliation).

The central theme of *The Marble Faun*, the 'fall of man' through sin, echoes the ideas implied in the "Paradise of Children" by involving different attitudes to the experience of sin: the view of orthodox religion and the view of imagination. At the same time, a number of references are made to the difference between the Puritan concept (sin as a path to damnation) and the more encouraging Roman Catholic religious experience ("He /Donatello/ has travelled in a circle [...] and now comes back to his original self, with an inestimable treasure of improvement won from an experience of pain."<sup>48</sup>)

According to the Puritan view, which points out the polarity of good and evil (or God and Devil) and is repeatedly articulated by Hilda, "the sins of generations past have created an atmosphere of sin for those that follow;" the atmosphere in which any guilt "tortures" the minds of innocent people.<sup>49</sup> The desire for the individual separation from evil (and pain) results in the rejection of interpersonal relationships, reflected in Hilda's separation from Miriam (which partly echoes, in fact, the behaviour of Young Goodman Brown), and also in Kenyon's unwillingness to share Miriam's secret. From this point of view, Beatrice Cenci's deed is condemned as an "inexpiable crime," impelling her to "forever vanish away into nothingness."<sup>50</sup> In other words, innocence carries out a death sentence, it becomes "a sharp steel sword"<sup>51</sup> of a judgement deprived of emotions.

In this respect, an innocent person "needs a sin" to be "softened" <sup>52</sup> (Hilda) or "educated" to "feeling and intelligence" <sup>53</sup> (Donatello). The experience of sin may introduce a person into his true reality. After the scene of crime, Donatello becomes concerned with time and with his family history, and his identity of a faun turns into that of the Count of Monte Beni. The acceptance of the reality of sin involves a spiritual power, which is mostly associated with Miriam. It helps her to subdue the discussed feeling of horror and face the dead persecutor's "look of accusation."<sup>54</sup> However, the difficulty of reaching harmony through the recognition of one's capacity for both evil and good is reflected in the feeling of alienation, leading to the temporal separation of Miriam and Donatello, as well as of Hilda and Kenyon.

A possibility of revival through the encounter with one's dark side or with hidden evil is suggested by the motif of a Roman Catholic confession. As Hugo McPherson notices in his concern with Hawthorne's employment of religion, *The Marble Faun* deals with the spiritual role of the Roman

40 Cf. Martin Procházka's interpretation of the story in *Lectures of American Literature*, p.90.

41 Shusterman, Richard, "Somaesthetics and Burke's Sublime," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, p.341.

42 *Ibid.*, p.995; my italics.

43 Shelley, P.B., *The Cenci*, Act III., Scene I., pp. 3-4. In <http://www.bartleby.com/18/4/31/html>.

44 *Ibid.*, p.3. In *The Marble Faun*, Miriam's real name, origin and past are never completely revealed to the reader. In the conclusion, however, her position in the society is restored

45 *Ibid.*, p.9. Cf. also the words of Shelley's Beatrice, "death alone can make us free; his death or ours" (*The Cenci*, Act III., Scene I.) and Miriam's dialogue with her persecutor: "I foresee the end [...] It will be death! 'Your own death, Miriam – or mine?'" (*Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, p.933).

46 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Marble Faun*, in *Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, p.997. Cf. Hilda's later recollection of "a look" that "revealed" all Miriam's "heart" (p.1026).

47 Shelley, P.B., *The Cenci*, Act V., Scene IV., p.1. In <http://www.bartleby.com/18/4/31/html>.

48 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Marble Faun*, in *Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, p.1215.

49 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Marble Faun*, in *Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, p.1028.

50 *Ibid.*, p.906. Cf. the motif of unpardonable sin in the story *Ethan Brand*.

51 *Ibid.*, p.906.

52 *Ibid.*, p.1025.

53 *Ibid.*, p.1215.

54 *Ibid.*, p.1011.

Catholic Church in "ritualising and institutionalising the facts of human imperfection and goodness."<sup>55</sup> For the Puritan Hilda, the confession becomes a way to overcome the destructive effects of 'the unspeakable.' The experience of transformation through sharing the reality of human 'fallenness' with a Catholic priest is described in the rites-of-passage context, with the emphasis on the final feeling of tranquillity. At the end of the confession, Hilda's emotions are compared to the peace of "the dead" and to the relief of "a new mother."<sup>56</sup> In accordance with the rites-of-passage structure, this experience ends Hilda's isolation. Her dialogue with the priest is followed by her reunion with Kenyon, their participation in Roman carnival, their reconciliation with Italian friends and their final return to New England.

The motif of the Roman carnival offers a different example of renewal, echoing the pagan tradition. It points out the power of a new life in a celebration of spring and the joys of sensible being. With the emphasis on physical, sensuous images, Hawthorne incites the ecstatic atmosphere of Bacchanalia, following the traditional elements of the Greek Dionysian revel. The ritual dances echo, in fact, Miriam's and Donatello's merry dance in a sunny park on the edge of a dark forest,<sup>57</sup> which precedes their encounter with the villain, their initiation into evil and their knowledge of their sensible limitations. For Hilda and Kenyon, on the contrary, the merry mood approximates wedding celebrations.

In the confusing masquerade of the carnival, and in response to ancient mysterious rites, Kenyon experiences symbolic death, which is followed by the appearance of his beloved Hilda. Accordingly, Hilda's search for integrity (and reunion with Kenyon) results in her passage through the "gloomy old palace of the Cencis," the passage that is linked to the time and space of the carnival. Moreover, the motif of the carnival is connected with Miriam's 'confession' (the revealing of her "paternal house," i.e. of her family identity, as well as of her part in evil deeds) and 'absolution' in the awakening of Kenyon's sympathy ("you were innocent"<sup>58</sup>).

Kenyon's deeper understanding of Miriam and Donatello, and his acknowledgement of Miriam's guiltlessness (echoing Shelley's verses concerning Beatrice), is anticipated by Hilda's imaginative interpretation of Guido's portrait, according to which the portrayed woman is "fallen, and yet sinless."<sup>59</sup> Hilda's first encounter with sin is initiated by her work of a copyist and by the sublime power of art: "If

Guido had not wrought through me, my pains would have been thrown away."<sup>60</sup> To use Kantian terms, through copying an impressive 'copy' of Beatrice Cenci's face, Hilda (in her art) comes closer to the 'original image' of the tragic heroine and her nature.<sup>61</sup> It is this experience of the sublime that allows such recognition and leads Hilda to compassion.

As both Kant and Hawthorne suggest, the "original image" as an ideal "cannot not manifest its perfection in this world," escapes the sphere of "possible experience" and belongs to the world of ideas,<sup>62</sup> where (in accordance with the moral law) evil and hatred can be finally overcome. In "a Land of Picture," "another portrait of Beatrice Cenci" can be seen: the portrait which is "painted in heavenly colours," exchanging the "forlorn mystery" for "radiant joy."<sup>63</sup> In other words, the feeling of hopelessness, which follows the Puritan notion of an unforgivable sin, is replaced by the liberating experience of imaginative transition: the transition from death and despair towards the expression of the heroine's true nature, towards love, and life. An idea of Kantian "divine being"<sup>64</sup> is implied in this "heavenly" portrait, which remains a personification of what the particular human being can/could become. The effort to approach this ideal despite the similar absence of the "sufficient conditions"<sup>65</sup> is echoed in the story of Miriam. On the one hand, Miriam identifies with the "particular emotions"<sup>66</sup> of sadness expressed by Guido's portrait, on the other hand, she constantly struggles to free herself from evil influences and to find harmony in love.

For Miriam, the hope of the spiritual transformation is symbolized by the motif of "benediction," associated with the bronze statue of a Pope<sup>67</sup> and linked to the fulfilment of Miriam's life in her reunion with Donatello. Through the mediation of art, condemnation may turn into the confirmation of both characters' being and the conflict between innocence and experience can be reconciled. Accordingly, the midnight hour of terror and crime (and the heroes' identification with the world's evil<sup>68</sup>) is replaced by the moment of "high noon" and the image of light. The chapter refers to the statue of Julius the Third in Perugia; the powerful effect of the scene, however, is not derived from the historical identity of the Pope but from the symbolic gesture of acceptance and encouragement. Through the mediation of a suggestive work of art, an ideal/original image of the father figure is implied to substitute the absence of paternal protection in Miriam's (and Beatrice's) life. Moreover, the bronze figure represents the central Roman Catholic idea, the

55 McPherson, Hugo, *Hawthorne as Myth-Maker*, p. 160. Cf. also the emphasis on redemption in the Roman Catholic church as dealt with in Vlastimil Kročil's *Passio Christi*: a discussion of transgression and guilt as a passage to death but also to rebirth through the experience of mercy in Christ's sacrifice. In: *Passio Christi*, Brno: L.Marek, 2010, pp.74-80, 168.

56 McPherson, Hugo, *Hawthorne as Myth-Maker*, p.1149.

57 The space of the forest as a crucial source of the Gothic imagination and the sublime atmosphere in Hawthorne and other American 19th-century authors is analysed by Michal Peprník in his study *Topos lesa v americké literatuře* (Topos of the Forest in American Literature), Brno: Host, 2005.

58 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Marble Faun*, in *Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, p.1211. Kenyon's repeated reassurance is, in fact, a variation on Marzio's proclamation of Beatrice Cenci's innocence (*The Cenci*, Act V., Scene II., p.109).

59 *Ibid.*, p.906.

60 *Ibid.*, p.908.

61 Crowther, Paul, *The Kantian Sublime. From Morality to Art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, p.158.

62 Firestone, Chris L., *Kant and Theology at the Boundaries of Reason*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009, p.31.

63 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Marble Faun*, in *Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, p.1230.

64 Firestone, Chris L., *Kant and Theology at the Boundaries of Reason*, pp. 30-31.

65 *Ibid.*, p.30.

66 Cf. Paul Crowther's *Kantian Sublime*, p.158.

67 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Marble Faun*, in *Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, pp.1116-1122.

68 Cf. the following Hawthorne's words: "an individual wrong-doing melts into the great mass of human crime, and makes us [...] guilty of the whole," (*Hawthorne. Collected Novels*, p.1000).

idea of redemption and forgiveness, which creates a sharp contrast to the historical reality of the Pope (Clement VIII) from Beatrice Cenci's story.

In this respect, Hawthorne's emphasis on the role of art may remind us also of John Dennis's idea of poetry: it can restore the decay that happened to human nature by the Fall,<sup>69</sup> reconciling the ambiguity of human inclinations. In Kantian terms, imagination is able to "re-model experience" (by producing images that can surpass nature), to reach "completeness of which nature affords no parallel," to embody "the attainment of a maximum."<sup>70</sup> As Paul Crowther sums up, art can transform the world by "engaging our cognitive and affective powers in a complex and deepened way."<sup>71</sup>

From this point of view, the title image of the marble faun represents the ideal, natural and spontaneous being that can exist only in the world of imagination. In the real world, all protagonists (and Donatello in particular), are stretched between "nature and the divine," being "pulled by powerful forces in opposite directions."<sup>72</sup> In accordance with Kant's theory, it is through the sublime experience that nature (and human nature, passions and longings) can be defeated by reason. It is the experience of transgression that inspires the desire for the transcendence of nature through the moral law. In Hawthorne's novel (as well as in Kant's philosophy), the harmony between natural impulses and the moral dimension of individual existence remains the fundamental goal of human being. It is articulated especially by the character of Miriam, reminding us of Hester's (*The Scarlet Letter*) or Proserpina's (*Tanglewood Tales*) courage to accept the challenges of the strenuous but vital transitional rites, despite the constant possibility of a failure.

As Jessie L. Weston points out in her study *From Ritual to Romance*, the quest for the restoration of life requires the hero's ability to ask a question concerning the source of rebirth.<sup>73</sup> In *The Marble Faun*, Miriam's and Kenyon's contemplation of the experience of sin as a possible path towards "a higher happiness" and "a purer state" of being<sup>74</sup> has the reviving function of such a question, as it completes their passage to the rediscovery (and acceptance) of individual identity. The question of the "fortunate fall" as an opportunity for the "growth of the soul"<sup>75</sup> in the personal development of Donatello, but also of Hilda, Miriam and Kenyon is discussed by a number of scholars, including also Marjorie J. Elder or R.W.B. Lewis,<sup>76</sup> for example.

69 Norris, D.B. *The Religious Sublime*, p.52.

70 Crowther, Paul, *The Kantian Sublime. From Morality to Art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, p.157.

71 Ibid., p.158.

72 Slocumbe, Will, *Nihilism and the Sublime Postmodern. The (Hi)Story of a Difficult Relationship from Romanticism to Postmodernism*, Routledge, New York & London, 2006, p.40.

73 Weston, Jessie, L., *From Ritual to Romance*, "The Task of the Hero," pp.12-22. In particular, the question concerns the nature of the Grail.

74 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Marble Faun*, in *Hawthorne.Colleced Novels*, pp.1215, 1236. Cf. the motif of hope in "The Paradise of Children" from *Wonder Book*.

75 Elder, Marjorie J., *Nathaniel Hawthorne. Transcendental Symbolist*, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1969, p.168.

76 In his study *The American Adam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), Lewis concentrates on the literary heroes embodying Adam's innocence / unawareness and vulnerability. The Adamic theme is analysed

Nevertheless, the conclusion of the novel is disturbingly ambiguous. While Kenyon's and Hilda's marriage and their return to New England partly echo the tale about Cadmus and Harmonia, the story of Donatello and Miriam remains open, implying Gothic images of remorse and loneliness. This tension, however, corresponds with the different purpose of both couples' initiation: While Hilda and Kenyon learn to accept the everyday, physical reality, Miriam and Donatello, like Hester and Dimmesdale, move towards a deeper spiritual dimension of "sacrifice."<sup>77</sup> Thus the ending of the story may be interpreted as a postliminal return to the social and religious order. Moreover, the rationality of Hilda and Kenyon is softened by the recognition of passion in their mutual relationship, while Donatello and Miriam try to alleviate their emotional disturbances by accepting rational decisions. In this respect Hawthorne's romance further emphasises the importance of experience: the experience of one's weakness that, unlike the original innocence and in accordance with Kantian feeling of the sublime, "endows" human nature with the "principle of virtue."<sup>78</sup>

In conclusion, *The Marble Faun* develops and deepens a specific aspect of Hawthorne's Gothic that is dealt with also in his mythological tales: the Gothic sublime permeates through the traditional rites-of-passage plots especially at the point when transition transforms into transgression. It is the recognition of one's destructive power that becomes the main source of Hawthorne's Gothic terror, of the feelings of emptiness and nothingness, supported by the Puritan emphasis on the threat of damnation. And it is the counteracting power of love supported by imagination (dialogue and sharing, the acceptance of oneself as well as of the other, the expression of pity and mercy, the will not to judge but to understand) that can allow the protagonists to overcome terror and to accept one's (as well as the other person's) failure as an important step towards the continuation of the passage.

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- [5] Firestone, Chris L., *Kant and Theology at the Boundaries of*

as a significant element of American cultural and literary consciousness. In Chapter 6, "The Return into Time: Hawthorne," Lewis deals especially with the transformation of Donatello.

77 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Marble Faun*, in *Hawthorne.Colleced Novels*, p.1121. In both *Scarlett Letter* and *The Marble Faun*, however, this sacrifice is initiated by men, while the heroines' struggle is primarily aimed at the expression and fulfilment of love.

78 Ibid., p.860.

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