

## THE MARBLE FAUN AND THE SACRED FOUNT: A RESEMBLANCE

We have Mr. Marius Bewley's word for it that « The extent to which James took over Hawthorne's device of endowing ancient portraits with extraordinary resemblances to the living has been frequently enough noted by other critics. »<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, I should like to go on and discuss a more than coincidental specific parallel between pictures symbolically employed in Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James, a parallel not to my knowledge previously noted.

In Chapter XV of *The Marble Faun*, entitled « An Aesthetic Company, » Hawthorne has his four central characters—Miriam, Hilda, Kenyon, and Donatello—go to a « faded and gloomy apartment of an eminent member of the aesthetic body<sup>2</sup> » in Rome, where in the course of the evening they examine « a large portofolio of old drawings, some of which... bore evidence on their faces of the touch of master-hands » (p. 668). Raphael and Leonardo are mentioned, but Hilda lingers longest over a slight and damaged drawing of which she says, « 'I am convinced... that Guido's own touches are on that ancient scrap of paper!' » (p. 669). She tries to interest Miriam in following beneath the pencil-marks scrawled over it the design of « a winged figure with a drawn sword, and a dragon, or a demon, prostrate at his feet » and asserts that they have before them Guido Reni's « 'original sketch for the picture of the Archangel

1. MARIUS BEWLEY, *The Complex Fate: Hawthorne, Henry James, and Some Other American Writers* (London, 1952), p. 46.

2. NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, *The Marble Faun*, in *The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Modern Library Giant (New York, 1937), p. 665. Subsequent references to this edition will be made parenthetically in the text and the footnotes.



Michael setting his foot upon the demon, in the Church of the Cappuccini.' » Hawthorne does not describe the reactions of Miriam but does have her at the outset call the design « 'a hopeless affair' » and « 'a blurred scrawl' »; Hilda insists, however, and then we have it from the author that « Miriam pretty distinctly made out » (p. 669) the armed figure and the prostrate devil. But her continued reluctance is indicated as she counters Hilda's extravagant praise of the original painting by sneering at « 'the daintiness of Michael's character, as Guido presents him' » (p. 670). Hilda is shocked and remonstrates as follows: « 'Miriam!... you grieve me, and you know it, by pretending to speak contemptuously of the most beautiful and the divinest figure that mortal painter ever drew.' » Miriam apologizes easily and compromises to this extent: « 'Guido's Archangel is a fine picture, of course, but it never impressed me as it does you.' » Throughout, Hilda has clearly been urging Miriam to examine the sketch more closely and to commend it; just as clearly, Miriam has uncooperatively held back. Meanwhile, the actions and thoughts of Kenyon and Donatello are not revealed to us.

Hilda makes the next move. She asks that the face of the demon be studied, saying, « 'It is certainly unlike the demon of the finished picture.' »<sup>3</sup> Hawthorne the guide-book devourer and writer has her add uncharacteristically, at once, « 'Guido, you know, always affirmed that the resemblance to Cardinal Pamfili was either casual or imaginary.' »<sup>4</sup> Then,

3. Dorothy Waples suggests that perhaps the demon face Hawthorne had in mind « was not drawn by Guido, but by Michelangelo »; « Suggestions for Interpreting *The Marble Faun* », *American Literature*, XIII (November, 1941), 235. When at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Hawthorne once studied some sketches by Michelangelo and was especially impressed by a drawing of a strikingly ugly demon; NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, *Notes of Travel*, IV, 201-203, in *The Complete Writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Graylock Edition, 22 vols. (Boston and New York, 1900). If Hawthorne had such a sketch in mind when he was writing *The Marble Faun* — and who can tell? — he does not say anything about it in the novel.

4. Guido, perhaps taking a leaf from Michelangelo's portfolio, allegedly made the features of his fallen demon too closely reflect those of an



back in proper character, she concludes her speech: « 'Now, here is the face as he first conceived it.' » Hawthorne records nothing that Miriam says or does at this juncture. It is Kenyon who enters the discussion now; he calls the original sketch for the finished demon « 'more energetic' » than the final painted devil and adds significantly, « 'Neither is the face an impossible one. Upon my word, I have seen it somewhere, and on the shoulders of a living man!' » Hilda agrees, saying that she was struck by a resemblance « 'from the first.' » Kenyon calls Donatello over, and that innocent faun after a moment's study flings the sketch away « with a shudder of disgust and repugnance, and a frown, » whispering the identification which Hilda and Kenyon acknowledge— « 'I know the face well!... It is Miriam's model!' » (p. 670).

Then Hawthorne, as he so often does, wonders half-seriously and all-ambivalently whether Guido hit by chance on this typically evil face, whether an original owner of it haunted the artist in his day,<sup>5</sup> or whether a shadow followed Guido

ecclesiastical enemy of his, Giovanni Battista Pamfili, a cardinal from 1627 and the Pope — Innocent X — from 1644 to 1655. Although Guido denied the charge, a slight resemblance is apparent. See MAX VON BOEHN, *Guido Reni, Künstler-Monographien* . . . 10 (Bielefeld und Leipzig, 1910), p. 104. A more famous portrait of Pope Innocent X is that by Velasquez in the Doria Pamphili Gallery in Rome. Hawthorne must have seen this celebrated painting (as well as Gian Lorenzo Bernini's splendid bust of the same Pope, also in the Doria Gallery); his notebooks, however, do not say so. He does record visiting « the Pamfili Doria Palace, which, I believe, is the most splendid in Rome. . . . The pictures, most of them [he adds quickly], interested me very little (!) »; *Notes of Travel*, III, 269, 270. Hilda in *The Marble Faun* (p. 782) likes this gallery no more than Hawthorne, but she is sad when pictured as entering it. James admired Velasquez's portrait of Innocent X greatly; see his comments on it in *The Painter's Eye: Notes and Essays on the Pictorial Arts* (London, 1956), p. 83. It is curious that when James wished to suggest the « ugliness and melancholy » of Guy Brissenden in *The Sacred Fount*, he compared the character to « some fine old Velasquez or other portrait » ((New York, 1953), p. 158). There are only two other Velasquez images in James's fiction: see *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, New York Edition, 26 vols. (New York, 1907-1917), IV, 108, and XV, 266.

5. Hawthorne might have heard that Guido late in life developed



until his death and then took to « those ancient sepulchres [of St. Calixtus], there awaiting a new victim, till it was Miriam's ill-hap to encounter him ». Regardless of our answers—and Hawthorne provides only the questions—we are invited to consider that present evil is not unique but rather is partly a consequence of past evil.

The questions are followed by Miriam's flat denial: « 'I do not acknowledge the resemblance at all... and, as I have drawn the face [of the model] twenty times, I think you will own that I am the best judge.' » Characteristically, Hawthorne then neglects to pursue the obvious doubts raised in the minds of the auditors of this uncandid remark; it is merely added summarily that the four friends next talk about Guido's Archangel for a while and then agree to meet at the Capuchin Church the following morning to examine the painting, since all feel that the similarity between it and the ancient sketch is « a very curious circumstance » (p. 670). Finally, they propose a ramble through the Roman streets, the hour being romantically late and the moonlight ideal—for murder three chapters later.

Two chapters after « On the Edge of a Precipice » comes « The Burial Chant, » the scene of which is the Chiesa dei Cappuccini, a place both attractive and repellent to Hawthorne. On May 15, 1859, he revisited the church and for the first time saw there the original *San Michele Arcangelo* of Guido Reni, the gigantic mosaic copy of which in St. Peter's he had long admired. Of the copy he had written in February of 1958, « This is surely one of the most beautiful things in the world, one of the human conceptions that are imbued most deeply with the celestial. »<sup>6</sup> After he had studied the original at the Capuchin Church, he recorded in his notebooks

an insane fear of witches; if so, the fact would have strangely moved the brooding former reader of the annals of New England witchcraft. See JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS, *Renaissance in Italy*, 2 vols. (New York, 1887), p. 356.

6. *Notes of Travel*, III, 237; see also III, 322.



his preference for it over the « nearly or quite » « equivalent representation » of it in mosaic and then went on to describe the Archangel's face in the painting, with its « expression of heavenly severity, and the degree of pain, trouble, or disgust, at being brought in contact with sin, even for the purpose of quelling or punishing it »<sup>7</sup>. Then he added, « There is something finical in the copy, which I do not find in the original. The sandalled feet are here those of an angel; in the mosaic they are those of a celestial coxcomb, treading daintily, as if he were afraid they would be soiled by the touch of Lucifer. »<sup>8</sup> Note that Miriam, using the word « daintiness, » criticized Guido's painting of Michael in much the same terms as Hawthorne employed in discussing the mosaic copy; and she will do so again, in Chapter XX.<sup>9</sup> But Hilda praises the sketch in words similar to Hawthorne's for the original painting.

Hawthorne was repelled by the macabre basement chapels, in which the bones of some four thousand Capuchin monks—taken apart like engines and clocks, to paraphrase Mark Twain's grotesquely humorous word on the subject<sup>10</sup>—had been fashioned into wall and ceiling decorations. Mrs. Hawthorne undoubtedly excised some of her husband's pronouncements upon all this in his *Italian Notebooks*,<sup>11</sup> but she was obliged to let stand his descriptions of the fictional visit to the indoor cemetery by the taut-nerved Miriam and her reluctant Donatello, in Chapter XXI, « The Dead Capuchin. » In true guide-book fashion, Hawthorne pictures it all, including the « massivé pillars and pilasters made of thigh-bones and

7. *Ibid.*, IV, 341.

8. *Idem.* For a brief review of professional opinions concerning the competence of Hawthorne as an art critic, see CHRISTOF WEGELIN, « Europe in Hawthorne's Fiction », *English Literary History*, XIV (September, 1947), 226, n. 22.

9. See p. 26. below.

10. MARK TWAIN, *The Innocents Abroad*, II, 5, in *The Writings of Mark Twain*, Author's National Edition, 22 vols. (New York and London, 1899-1900).

11. See *Notes of Travel*, IV, 341-342.



skulls, » the « embossed ornaments » made « by the joints of the spine, and the more delicate tracery by the smaller bones of the human frame. » He notes « a certain artistic merit » amid, however, « much perverted ingenuity » (p. 701).

But before Miriam visits what is to be the resting place of the dead Capuchin, her nemesis whom Donatello hurled from the Tarpeian Rock, she and Kenyon seek out Guido's painting and discuss it most perplexingly. Hawthorne has the two stand before it and then quickly sets the stage for Miriam's Hawthornean criticism by saying that « It was an image of that greatest of future events, which we hope for so ardently,—at last, while we are young,—but find so very long in coming,—the triumph of goodness over the evil principle » (p. 695).<sup>12</sup> Kenyon has little to contribute, contenting himself at this point merely with confusing us. For he wonders where Hilda can be and then adds, « 'It is not her custom ever to fail in an engagement; and the present one was made entirely on her account. Except herself, you know, we [Kenyon, Miriam, and Donatello] were all agreed in our recollection of the picture.' » Incredibly, Miriam seconds this statement and even adds, « 'But we were wrong, and Hilda right, as you perceive...' » (p. 695).

Now, what does all this mean? The dramatic disagreement during the discussion of the original sketch from the portfolio the night before centered on the resemblance of the devil in it and Miriam's shadowy model. And it was only Miriam who refused to acknowledge this resemblance. Hilda, Kenyon, and Donatello saw it quickly. If the disagreement here mentioned concerns the unbelievably divine beauty of the

12. In these lines one can almost detect Hawthorne at work lecturing his somewhat naive wife Sophia. F. O. Matthiessen has valuably reminded us of « Elizabeth Peabody's remark that with all her sister Sophia's bravery in the face of much suffering, 'there was one kind of thing she could not bear, and that was, moral evil' »; *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York, 1941), p. 357. In Miriam's critical remarks which follow (p. 696), Hawthorne continues his « lecture ».



Archangel, then two difficulties arise which Hawthorne never resolves: first, during the evening discussion, Kenyon and Donatello are not reported as agreeing with Miriam against Hilda that Michael is unimpressively dainty; and second, in the ensuing conversation at the Capuchin Church, Miriam—who has just said that the three of them « were wrong, and Hilda right »—immediately goes on to reiterate her aesthetic judgment against Guido's painting. She says, « 'I see its defects to-day more clearly than ever before' » (p. 696) and then derides Michael's « 'unruffled wings' » and « 'unhacked sword', » his « 'exquisitely fitting sky blue tunic' » and « 'dainty air' ». She continues to echo Hawthorne's private judgment of the mosaic copy when she ridicules the angel's « 'half-scornful delicacy [with which] he sets his prettily sandalled foot on the head of his prostrate foe!' » Wherein, then, was Hilda right and Miriam wrong? Hilda was not alone in seeing that Lucifer was linked with Miriam's model; so Miriam's praise of Hilda's unique rightness cannot have reference to that resemblance which Miriam alone refused—or pretended to refuse—to recognize the night before. And if Miriam thinks that Hilda's judgment of the beauty of Michael is warranted, she is foolish to continue to assert that Guido's work is soft and to add that she herself could have painted the struggle better: « '... is it thus [she says] that virtue looks the moment after its death-struggle with evil? No, no; I could have told Guido better' » (p. 696). And she goes on to describe in graphic detail how the angel should have been portrayed.<sup>13</sup> A

13. Hawthorne's Miltonic symbolism, incidentally, is as confused here as it occasionally is elsewhere — in « Rappaccini's Daughter », for example. Miriam has just seen a death-struggle involving the putting down of the diabolical model by her loving equivalent of a saint with a flaming sword expelling Donatello and Miriam, who—if they are not linked Lucifers—may be imaged as a post-lapsarian Adam and Eve. Hilda wields a Michaellesque sword of flame, according to Richard Harter Fogle, in his *Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1952), p. 171. Kenyon himself may qualify as an archangel, since his words help to drive Miriam and Kenyon from any hope of earthly bliss.



still different reading, though most unsatisfactory, would interpret Miriam's odd praise of Hilda as meaning that the young girl uniquely saw the resemblance between the sketch and the finished painting. Such an explanation ignores Hawthorne's statement that « Miriam pretty distinctly made out » what it was that Hilda was showing to her; further, Hawthorne has the men join the discussion only after Hilda has changed the subject slightly in order to concentrate upon the similarity between the sketched Lucifer and the shadowy model. Still, this variant reading may be as acceptable to some as any other.

To conclude this part of my argument, Hilda in my view holds no unique opinion on Guido's *San Michele* and we have here a lapse in consistency by Hawthorne. It is clearly only Miriam's opinions which are importantly at odds with those of the rest of the group.<sup>14</sup>

Hawthorne throws no further light on this ambiguous incident. Henry James must have been puzzled by it too, although if so he was silent on the subject. Nonetheless, James read *The Marble Faun* carefully enough to comment most intelligently on it in his 1879 monograph on Hawthorne, and even to remember Hilda—with her incredible innocence, her love of the high clear air about her pure tower, her doves, and her wing-like influence<sup>15</sup>—when decades later it came time for him to adumbrate the character of his innocent and dove-like Milly Theale of *The Wings of the Dove*. And he might easily be imagined as having thought back to the confusion surrounding the Guido Reni painting in *The Marble Faun* when in 1901, a year before he published *The Wings of the Dove*, he wrote *The Sacred Fount*.

14. Hyatt H. Waggoner rightly charges Hawthorne with displaying at several points in *The Marble Faun* «unintentional confusion»; *Hawthorne: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1955), p. 200. Waggoner incidentally admires Miriam's description of the way an angel should look after a death-struggle with a demon and says (p. 221) that it «sounds... like the old Hawthorne of the great tales and romances».

15. See BEWLEY, *The Complex Fate*, pp. 37-54.



The high point in Chapter IV of *The Sacred Fount* comes when James has four of his leading characters—the curious narrator, the pretty but tired May Server, sharp Gilbert Long, and Ford Obert the painter—meet by pairs in « one of the rooms » of the estate at Newmarch which has « some pictures. »<sup>16</sup> After they come together, they exchange comments on one portrait in pastel, which is described in detail as follows:

The figure represented is a young man in black — a quaint, tight black dress, fashioned in years long past; with a pale, lean, livid face and a stare, from eyes without eyebrows, like that of some whitened old-world clown. In his hand he holds an object that strikes the spectator at first simply as some obscure, some ambiguous work of art, but that on a second view becomes a representation of a human face, modelled and coloured, in wax, in enamelled metal, in some substance not human. The object thus appears a complete mask, such as might have been fantastically fitted and worn. (p. 55)

The four begin to interpret the picture first in general terms, with Mrs. Server suggesting that the mask is of death and the odd narrator countering with the notion that the mask symbolizes life while « 'It's the man's own face that's Death' » (p. 56). When the narrator voices the opinion that the mask is « 'extremely studied and ... charmingly pretty,' » Obert is induced to comment that the mask « 'looks like a lovely lady' » (p. 56). The narrator follows up by agreeing, and he names May Server as the lady whose face the mask resembles. May chooses not to feel flattered and replies as follows: « 'You deserve... that I should say that the gentleman's own face is the image of a certain other gentleman's' » (p. 57). Obert picks up this notion: « '... it's a funny thing that it should really recall to one some face among us here, on this occasion—I mean some face in our party—that I can't

16. HENRY JAMES, *The Sacred Fount* (New York, 1953), p. 48. Subsequent references to this edition will be made parenthetically in the text and the footnotes.



think of' » (p. 57). The narrator says that he knows but will not tell whose face it looks like. Strolling away, Long refuses to try to make an identification, and the other three continue to reveal nothing: the narrator will not talk, May's curiosity is aroused, and Obert—«like a man desiring, but unable, to sneeze » (p. 58)—cannot bring out the name. Then Long, his back still turned, breaks out impatiently, «'The resemblance ... is simply to "poor Briss!"'—Guy Brissenden is an enervated husband, not now present.<sup>17</sup> Obert agrees sincerely; May's acquiescence the narrator silently labels as «rather for harmony.» A moment later, after the narrator «admitted that it was of Brissenden I myself had thought » (p. 58), May and Long drift down the gallery; the narrator and Obert continue to talk, and soon the narrator is wandering off to discuss his theories with Mrs. Brissenden. And James does not allude to the portrait again.

The significance of the picture of the man with a mask is obscure for two main reasons: first, only the strange narrator tells us what it looks like, directly by presumably accurate description and indirectly through his perhaps biased reporting of the words of other observers of it; and second, James does not follow through and make of the picture an explicit allegorical representation of the relationships of specific characters, but instead only has the four persons viewing it to do a little tentative hinting at identifications and then wander away.<sup>18</sup>

17. Guy Brissenden's condition, that of a sacred fount depleted supposedly by his wife Grace as she waxes livelier, has started the curious narrator on his line of analogical thinking: whose fount has Gilbert Long, now more eloquent, been tapping?

18. It would be predictable that James, taking a Hawthornean portrait for slight allegorical purposes, would merely touch upon its implications and then change the subject, in the light of what he said of symbolism in Hawthorne's fiction: «In *The Scarlet Letter* there is a great deal of symbolism; there is, I think, too much. It is overdone at times, and becomes mechanical; it ceases to be impressive, and grazes triviality. The idea of the mystic A (on Dimmesdale's chest) appears to me to be a case in point.



Now I should like to offer a brief interpretation of the picture in *The Sacred Fount*. The narrator is not an artist, but he is like the unknown artist of the portrait in question: both seek to get at the essential in personality; further, the artist has given us the picture of an unmasking, while the narrator is busy trying to lift the masks from those under his scrutiny. Guy has been exposed. Early in the novel his sudden agedness is described by the narrator, who goes on, « It took me but a minute then to add him to my little gallery... » (p. 22). Later, in the literal gallery, the narrator notes the similarity between the face portrayed and Guy's, as we have seen<sup>19</sup>. As for May Server, she is still a puzzle during the gallery scene. She is not yet exposed. The first time the narrator sees her at Newmarch, her back is turned (p. 44); when she faces about, he takes a careful look, while Mrs. Brissenden, to whom he has been talking, suggests that May is Long's sacred fount. But the narrator « didn't believe somehow—certainly not on such short notice—either in her happiness or in her flatness » (p. 45). On one level, this comment may mean that he cannot yet decide whether May is showing a frank face or a concealing mask to the world. Then, when the narrator soon thereafter sees May close up in the rococo room of pictures, he compares her « exquisite face » to a figurative « old dead pastel under glass, » since she is « all Greuze tints, all pale pinks and blues and pearly whites and candid eyes » (p. 51). The setting here and the figurative language used to

This suggestion should, I think, have been just made and dropped; to insist upon it and return to it, is to exaggerate the weak side of the subject»; HENRY JAMES, *Hawthorne*, Dolphin (New York, n.d.), p. 100.

19. I admit to an inability to do much with the fact that the man in the pastel portrait is called « young »; his face, however, is further described as « pale, lean, livid. . . without eyebrows, like that of some whitened old-world clown » (p. 55). Later, the narrator says of Guy that « he let his white face fix me in the dusk » (p. 227), which description tends further to link Guy and the « young » man in the portrait. Perhaps the face in the picture has the desiccated « youthfulness » of a corpse's face, with all vitality withdrawn.



picture May are both consistent with the use of the mask in the picture to symbolize her a little later. Further, May's being equated almost at once with the mask is in keeping with the plot: the narrator, Obert, and Mrs. Brissenden all know what poor Briss is really like, whereas the curious circlers about poor May have not yet seen more than her surface, her mask with its frozen smile.<sup>20</sup> So the unknown artist who portrayed the person unmasked may be likened to James's narrator, who sees almost creatively to place his subjects, call up their smiles, and expose what is beneath.

And now to conclude—in many ways the dramatic circumstances surrounding the Guido painting in *The Marble Faun* and the pastel portrait in *The Sacred Fount* are similar. In each novel, the work of art is introduced rather early: the sketch attributed to Guido appears in the fifteenth chapter of a novel containing fifty chapters, while the pastel appears in the fourth chapter of a fourteen-chapter novel.

In *The Marble Faun*, four characters—the painters Hilda and Miriam at first, and Kenyon and Donatello soon after—look at a sketch in a studio and then agree to meet and consider the painting purportedly based upon it. Talk is first of an aesthetic sort, then moves from the general to the particular; soon the four consider whether the devil's face in the sketch resembles that of the absent model. Donatello first says that it does, in a whisper and with a frown, but only after Kenyon and Hilda have said that they sense a resemblance to some living man. Miriam voices a strong denial of it all, which seems, however, not to be accepted by the others. The four walk away, generally in pairs; later three of them meet at the church containing the painting, but the talk does not concern identifications.

20. May Server's smile is repeatedly described as a painted and mechanical grimace (pp. 133, 139, 148, 153, 195). Again, James's occasional preoccupation with the smiles of his deceptive characters indicates another possible influence from Hawthorne. A major pattern of Jamesian imagery concerns masks.



In *The Sacred Fount*, four characters—Long and the painter Obert at first, and May Server and the narrator, who have been looking at sketches, soon after—examine a pastel portrait in a gallery. The remarks of Long to Obert are not reported but are called «an aesthetic lecture» (p. 52); when the group is complete, the four consider whether the unmasked face in the picture resembles that of the absent Guy Brissenden. Long first says that it does, while at a distance and without turning around, but only after the narrator has said that he knows but will not tell whose face the one in the pastel resembles. Obert agrees, but May concedes only for harmony that she too sees the similarity. May and Long walk away, while Obert and the narrator linger behind for a while. The four do not meet again as a group.

Each picture polarizes an opposition: the one, that of an archangel and the devil, hence good and evil; the other, that of a livid face and an elaborate mask, hence perhaps life and death, or appearance and reality. Each picture seems to be symbolic, but only vaguely so. The details of the treatment of neither picture can endure analysis without revealing some weakness in writing: Miriam's remarks are confused, and the Jamesian narrator's remarks hide rather than shed light. But in both novels the action is advanced by the puzzled, puzzling responses of the characters to the pictures, and as those persons seek resemblances they to a degree characterize themselves. Both novelists, then, use challenging pictures, hung in deceptive light, to elucidate character and implement plot, while the postures within the frames are thematically symbolic.

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