

“With a glance of dark meaning”; or, Bloodstained Allegories in Spenser and Hawthorne

Andrew Hadfield and Michael Jonik

Over and over again, there was the idea of woman, acting the part of a revengeful mischief towards man. It was, indeed, very singular to see how the artist’s imagination seemed to run on these stories of bloodshed, in which woman’s hand was crimsoned by the stain; and how, too,—in one form or another, grotesque or sternly sad,—she failed not to bring out the moral, that woman must strike through her own heart to reach a human life, whatever were the motive that impelled her.

Nathaniel Hawthorne,
The Marble Faun

And the blood has its strange omniscience.

D.H. Lawrence,
Studies in Classic American Literature

It has long been acknowledged that Hawthorne was a close and careful reader of Spenser.¹ He often wrote about reading his treasured copy of *The Faerie Queene*; he and his wife read cantos of the poem out to their children at bedtime; his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, adapted the first book of the poem for children; and his daughter was named Una after the heroine of Book I (Miller 49, 56, 409–10, *passim*; Peabody; Hosington and Anne Shaver 289). According to Gary Scharnhorst, Hawthorne was the anonymous reviewer of the first American edition of Spenser’s *Poetical Works* in the *Boston Post* in 1839 (668). It is thus hard to imagine another nineteenth-century writer—and there are many, given Spenser’s importance for writers of Gothic fiction, poetry, and romance—who was more obviously influenced by the greatest Elizabethan poet.² Despite this, the ways in which Spenser has shaped Hawthorne’s literary imagination have not often been fully explored, and Gregory Staley is a rare exception in acknowledging that Hawthorne’s debt to Ovid in his work is an Ovid “re-modelled by Spenser” (137). This is assuredly due, at least in part, to an over-compartmentalization

of academic writing which has served to isolate scholars and critics in their distinct fields or time periods. Yet the relative lack of scholarship on the Spenser-Hawthorne relationship may also be due to a tradition of reading Hawthorne in terms of the development of Puritan allegory, especially in terms of John Bunyan, rather than more ambiguous and amorphous writers such as Spenser. Henry James, for one, ascribes Hawthorne's "metaphysical moods" to his reading of both Bunyan and Spenser, those two "masters of allegory," together in a single breath. As James writes:

Hawthorne, in his metaphysical moods, is nothing if not allegorical, and allegory, to my sense, is quite one of the lighter exercises of the imagination. . . . It has produced assuredly some first-rate works; and Hawthorne in his younger years had been a great reader and devotee of Bunyan and Spenser, the great masters of allegory. But it is apt to spoil two good things—a story and a moral, a meaning and a form; and the taste for it is responsible for a large part of the forcible feeble writing that has been inflicted upon the world. (366)

Despite James's characterization, we should be careful to put Spenser and Bunyan uncritically together, as the two instantiate different literary and philosophical investments in their use of allegory. Although he acknowledges Hawthorne's first-rate works, for James, the influence of the two allegorists ultimately leads less to Hawthorne's richly allusive prose textures, marked by studied ambiguities of phrase and rhetoric, image and characterization—things Hawthorne found in Spenser, and which James would seemingly otherwise appreciate—than to James's opinion of allegory as one of the "lighter exercises of the imagination." What is more, Hawthorne's allegorical method notoriously combines not only Spenserian and Bunyanesque conceits (like the Valley of the Shadow of Death in "The Celestial Railroad"), but also unique features from New England Puritan typology, elements drawn from the historical "romance," as well as new understandings of symbol and allegory developed in Romantic poetics. Yet Spenser was probably the writer from whom Hawthorne learned most and with whom he struggled hardest to articulate his own literary style and voice; the ambivalent moral tenor of his romances is largely a response to Spenser's intricate and disturbing narratives.

Spenser's writing inflects Hawthorne's poetic sensibility or "mode of seeing" in often striking ways. From the ostensibly Spenserian resonances of "A Select Party," "The Birth-mark," "Alice Doane's Appeal," or "The Man of Adamant," to similarities between specific characters such as Archimago and Rappaccini and Chillingworth and specific references to "Epithalamion" in "The May-Pole of Merry Mount," Spenserian images and conceits surface across Hawthorne's oeuvre as if out of barely erased palimpsests. Like Spenser, he often mobilizes personified abstractions, prosopopoeia, masks, or ekphrases. Maureen Quilligan, in *The Language of Allegory*, recognizes *The Scarlet Letter's* debt to *The Faerie Queene's* formal structure, which relies on a single question or "threshold text" and multiple answers or interpretations of it dramatized through complex, self-referential wordplay (51). She therefore cites Hawthorne's initial image of the rose by the prison door as an analogous "threshold text" to Spenser's opening text, "Of Court it seems men of courtesy do call"; both narratives use these texts in order to unfold their verbal details in several linguistic, epistemological, moral, or imaginative registers (53).³ Beyond these affinities and references, the Hawthorne-Spenser anxiety (or allegory) of influence could be approached in terms of a series of shared imaginative conceits or philosophical concepts. Both writers are canny theorists of surfaces and veils, metamorphoses and masquerades. They offer a pageantry of darkness and light, a phantasmagoria of obscured faces and marked and hybrid bodies, dim objects and shining emblems, mirror- and snow-images and fleeting dream-like figures. They transport historical personages and events into estranged terrains and draw on a shared catalogue of mythological and Biblical figures. They thus subtly explore the complex relationships between ideality and materiality, abstraction and representation, imago and corpora.

This essay, then, will investigate their relationships by attending to one of the central motifs in *The Marble Faun* (1860), Hawthorne's last major work and arguably his most Spenserian, namely that of the blood-stained hand which cannot be washed clean. Blood is frequently invoked in *The Marble Faun* through an ensemble of allegorical and metaphorical figures, to the extent that it serves as a master trope. We might posit the novel as Hawthorne's hematology, if not hematography: Miriam's mysterious identity and wild unpredictability is conflated with her potentially mixed-race blood. Does she have Anglo-Saxon blood? Or Jewish blood?

Or “one burning drop of African blood in her veins” that “so affected her with ignominy that she relinquished all and fled her country?” (4:23). And, as with many of the Adamic parallels in the text, the description of Miriam’s genealogy suggests that this transgression will be transmitted down lines of blood descent. As blood indicates the nineteenth-century American obsession with racial purity in the novel, it also limns the limits—or transformations—of the human in the figure of Donatello. The Faun’s “wild blood” is shown to have been “attempered with constant intermixtures from the more ordinary streams of human life” (4:234). As with similar instances of human “staining” or of writing on the body in the “The Birth-mark” or *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne uses the figure of bloodstained hands in *The Marble Faun* to explore the historical, moral and psycho-physical complexities of human transgression. Quite obviously—if not to the point of cliché—bloodstained hands are markers of a subject’s guilt in performing a sinful act, and thus serve as potent physical reminders of some indelible moral turpitude. In the catacombs, for example, the characters encounter a stranger who “might be a thief of the city, a robber of the Campagna, a political offender, or an assassin with blood upon his hand” (4:35). Bloodstained surfaces in the novel are rarely clear indicators of subjective guilt, however, and thus provide evocative means for considering the vague or uncertain correspondences between physicality, affective response, and allegorical abstraction. As Donatello’s crime serves dually as a blood wedding with Miriam, it is left unclear as to who is to blame, or whether they might feel guilt or joy:

She turned to him—the guilty, bloodstained, lonely woman—she turned to her fellow-criminal, the youth, so lately innocent, whom she had drawn into her doom. She pressed him close, close to her bosom, with a clinging embrace that brought their two hearts together, till the horror and agony of each was combined into one emotion, and that, a kind of rapture. (4:173–4)

Does Miriam therefore wear the mark of a crime upon her? “‘Do you see it written in my face,’ she inquires, ‘or painted in my eyes?’ . . . ‘Or is it some blood-stain on me, or death-scent in my garments? They say that monstrous deformities sprout out of fiends, who once were lovely angels. Do you perceive such in me already?’” (4:209). Is Hilda, who only witnesses

the murder, likewise ambiguously marked by it? Even her portrait, made by a “young Italian artist” (4:330), is marked by this ambiguity:

Looking at the face and expression of this fair signorina, we seem to comprehend readily enough, that she is undergoing one or another of those troubles of the heart to which young ladies are but too liable. But what is this Blood-stain? And what has innocence to do with it? Has she stabbed her perfidious lover with a bodkin?

“She! she commit a crime!” cried the young artist. “Can you look at the innocent anguish in her face, and ask that question? No; but, as I read the mystery, a man has been slain in her presence, and the blood, spurting accidentally on her white robe, has made a stain which eats into her life.” (4:331)

As blood perhaps stains bodies and bodkins, it also stains the soil and streets of Rome, the Forum and the ruins of the Coliseum, such that human acts of barbarity seem irrevocably absorbed into its historical cityscapes. Like the unrevealed past of characters such as Miriam, the setting and its history form the backdrop of the drama: “There was much pastime and gayety, just then, in the area of the Coliseum, where so many gladiators and wild beasts had fought and died, and where so much blood of Christian martyrs had been lapped up by that fiercest of wild beasts, the Roman populace of yore” (4:154).

Sharon Cameron, in *The Corporeal Self: Allegories of the Body in Melville and Hawthorne*, anatomizes the different forms of corporeality in Hawthorne’s work, and thus provides a means to understand how bloodstained bodies become vehicles for the production, transmission or dislocation of allegorical meaning in *The Marble Faun*. As Cameron writes:

Renaissance and classical renditions of allegory emphasize the continuous relationship between the palpable body or emblem and the thing that it signifies, most nineteenth-and post-nineteenth-century interpretations designate allegory as that form which assumes splitting—of traits or levels of significance—as the mode’s essential feature. . . . The detachment of the allegorical object from any other *natural* object and the directive to read a phenomenon outside of its immediate context are, in fact,

related. . . . Hawthorne shows us the problematics of this way of conceiving allegory. . . . surfaces or icons tell tales of murder or dismemberment, of contagion and violation, of spells cast on the human body, of gross corporeal misappropriation, tell tales of bodily harm. What is complex about Hawthorne's tales is that (like post-nineteenth-century interpretations of allegory) their characters try to create a division between their own corporeal essence and the meaning of that corporeality, and (like earlier allegorical renditions, which refuse interpretive separation) they simultaneously register criticism of the meaning that is arrived at by the process of bifurcation between the palpable body and the meaning ascribed to it in some non-bodily sphere. (78–9)

Cameron meticulously probes the relation between physicality and allegorical correspondences and situates Hawthorne's use of allegory within its long and varied tradition. Yet, she does not mention the role of Spenser in shaping Hawthorne's mode of seeing nor, consequently, does she acknowledge Spenser's fundamental role in enabling Hawthorne to problematize the division between "earlier" and "post-nineteenth-century" versions of allegory. We contend that Spenser's influence manifests itself in *The Marble Faun* in Hawthorne's foregrounding of the physicality of acts of violence or transgression as simultaneously vague and indelibly written onto the body. Spenser complicates the tenor, meaning, and the vehicle of allegory through a notion of a "dark conceit," an understanding that was central to Hawthorne's writing, and which directs it away from a more straightforward interpretative mode. The novel's bloodstained hands function less as clear markers of a subject's guilt, than as a complex of dispersed and interrelated agencies. At the same time, among the manifold tropes involving blood in the romance, those involving the body as it becomes bloodstained are of special significance for recognizing the Spenser-Hawthorne relationship. They speak to Spenser and Hawthorne's shared sense of the symbiotic relationship between ways of seeing, the underlying drives of the human and natural worlds, and the possibility of making appropriate ethical responses to experience.

Whereas it would be beyond the scope of the present essay to explore these symbioses in full, we can begin to explore their importance by considering a scene from chapter XI, "Fragmentary Sentences," in which we find Miriam confronted by the mysterious stranger from her past

(in the shadowy form of the “Model”—another Spenserian magus) in the Borghese Grove:

“Do you imagine me a murderess?” said she, shuddering. “You, at least, have no right to think me so!”

“Yet,” rejoined he, with a glance of dark meaning, “men have said that this white hand had once a crimson stain.”

He took her hand as he spoke, and held it in his own, in spite of the repugnance, amounting to nothing short of agony, with which she struggled to regain it. Holding it up to the fading light (for there was already dimness among the trees), he appeared to examine it closely, as if to discover the imaginary blood-stain with which he taunted her. He smiled as he let it go.

“It looks very white,” said he, “but I have known hands as white, which all the water in the ocean would not have washed clean.”

“It had no stain,” retorted Miriam bitterly, “until you grasped it in your own.” (4:97)

Despite the obvious reference to Macbeth’s horror after the murder of Duncan, “Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?” (*Macbeth*, 2.2.61–2), here the encounter takes its cue from the opening two cantos of *The Faerie Queene*, Book Two, as a later passage in the romance makes clear. Donatello takes Kenyon, the sculptor, to “a certain little dell” in the Tuscan countryside. There he recounts the story of the one of his ancestors from the distant past who enjoys his time by a fountain with a beautiful nymph, “finding infinite pleasure and comfort” in her friendship. As Hawthorne continues, “If ever he was annoyed with earthly trouble, she laid her moist hand upon his brow, and charmed the fret and fever quite away” (4:245). However, things soon take a turn for the worse:

But one day—one fatal noontide—the young knight came rushing with hasty and irregular steps to the accustomed fountain. He called the nymph; but—no doubt because there was something unusual and frightful in his tone—she did not appear, nor answer him. He flung himself down, and washed his hands and bathed his feverish brow in the cool, pure water. And then, there was a sound of woe; it might have been a woman’s voice; it might have been only the sighing of the brook over the pebbles.

BLOODSTAINED ALLEGORIES

The water shrank away from the youth's hands, and left his brow as dry and feverish as before! . . .

"Why did the water shrink from this unhappy knight?" inquired the sculptor.

"Because he had tried to wash off a bloodstain!" said the young Count, in a horror-stricken whisper. "The guilty man had polluted the pure water. The nymph might have comforted him in sorrow, but could not cleanse his conscience of a crime."

"And did he never behold her more?" asked Kenyon.

"Never but once," replied his friend, "He never beheld her blessed face but once again, and then there was a bloodstain on the poor nymph's brow; it was the stain his guilt had left in the fountain where he tried to wash it off." (4:245–46)

The repetition of the motif indicates that the inability to wash away the bloodstain is an important structuring device in *The Marble Faun*. Yet the Spenserian intertext here is crucial. Hawthorne was surely responding to a mystifying crux in Spenser, when Sir Guyon, the Knight of Temperance, tries to wash the bloody hands of Ruddymane, the baby son of Mortdant and Amavia to no effect:

Then soft himselfe inclining on his knee
Downe to that well, did in the water weene
(So loue does loath disdainfull nicetee)
His guiltie hands from bloudie gore to cleene.
He washt them oft and oft, yet nought they beene
For all his washing cleaner. Still he stroue,
Yet still the litle hands were bloudie scene;
The which him into great amaz'ment droue,
And into diuerse doubt his wauering wonder cloue.

He wist not whether blot of foule offence
Might not be purgd with water nor with bath;
Or that high God, in lieu of innocence,
Imprinted had that token of his wrath,

To shew how sore bloudguiltinesse he hat'h;
Or that the charme and venim, which they druncke,
Their bloud with secret filth infected hath,

Being diffused through the senselesse truncke,
 That through the great contagion direfull deadly stunck.
 (II.ii.3–4)

The verbal and structural similarities between Spenser's and Hawthorne's descriptions are remarkable. To note only the most obvious connections: all three passages center on the impossibility of removing a bloodstain; Spenser makes it clear that the baby has "guiltie hands," later described as possessing "bloudguiltinesse," but we are not really sure why or how he is culpable, just as we are not sure why or how the knight is culpable in the second Hawthorne passage; Spenser's incident takes place beside a fountain, as does Hawthorne's second; all three passages describe a mysterious process of pollution/infection which is not understood by any of the protagonists; and the blood mysteriously transfers itself—or, in Spenser seems to transfer itself—to other parties.

Hawthorne's passages can be read in terms of the late nineteenth-century fear of the spread of disease, especially among Americans returning to Europe, and Italy in particular.⁴ But the real significance is imaginative and intellectual, Spenser's complex and mysterious account of the bloodstains working to create the unsettling imaginative world of Hawthorne's romance. Like the rose by the prison door in *The Scarlet Letter*, the bloodstains perhaps function, as Quilligan claims, as an allegorical "threshold text." Yet given the multifarious exploration of the physicality and psychology of bloodstains which he undertakes in *The Marble Faun*, it becomes clear that it is not merely the structure of allegorical narrative or forms of complex wordplay that Hawthorne finds valuable in Spenser, but it is rather a mode of seeing forms, bodies, and surfaces. Blood's material and metaphorical fluidity, that is, allows it to move from body to body or surface to surface, so to stain skin or clothing in a similar way that "souls" might be stained by guilt. To this end, in their fountain images, water and blood, hands or the brows, as well as woe or guilt or joy and innocence form an ambiguous affective-material assemblage. Straightforward contrasts of white hands and crimson stains might initially be mapped to psychological guilt and purity, but how they ultimately serve as physical manifestations of a repressed or hidden past are left uncertain. As Hawthorne writes: "Yet, how can we imagine that a stain of ensanguined crime should attach to Miriam! Or how, on

the other hand, should spotless innocence be subjected to a thralldom like that which she endured from the spectre, whom she herself had evoked out of the darkness!" (4:97–98).

For Spenser, his potent images occur at a crucial juncture in his poem. The Bloody Babe is the product of the union of Mortdant, a faithless knight who once had great promise, and Amavia. The three are found beside a fountain by Guyon, the Knight of Temperance, and his Palmer. Mortdant is already dead, and the dying Amavia tells the story of how, when she was pregnant, he went off on his quest and was seduced by Acrasia, the evil seductive witch. Amavia manages to rescue the incoherent knight but on the way home he drinks from the fountain which activates a poison that Acrasia has administered, and he dies. She stabs herself and, as soon as she has finished her story and asked the knight to look after their baby so he can stand as a witness to his mother's innocence, she dies.⁵ On the most straightforward level this is a story of unwise passion overcoming and obliterating reason, appropriate for the opening section of a Book that follows the adventures of the Knight of Temperance. However, the first two cantos also serve to qualify the story told in Book I, and it is unlikely that so careful and knowledgeable a reader as Hawthorne, who had read the book many times, did not pick up the various verbal, stylistic and thematic echoes as he read the cantos for *The Marble Faun*. Mortdant is a version of the Red-Cross Knight, the Knight of Holiness, the hero of Book I. The Red-Cross Knight's failing is his inability to understand that he has a body that has physical desire, which means that he, in characteristic romance fashion, fails to understand the nature of the dangers that threaten him. Seduced by Duessa, he almost suffers spiritual death beside a fountain in a description rich in comic irony:

Hereof this gentle knight unweeting was,
 And lying downe upon the sandie graile,
 Drunke of the streame, as cleare as cristall glas:
 Eftsoones his manly forces gan to faile,
 And mightie strong was turned to feeble fraile.
 His changed powres at first them selves not felt,
 Till crudled cold his corage gan assaile,
 And cheareful bloud in faintnesse chill did melt,
 Which like a fever fit through all his body swelt.

Yet goodly court he made still to his Dame,
 Poured out in loosnesse on the grassy grownd,
 Both carelesse of his health, and of his fame[.]
 (I.vii.6–7, lines 1–3)⁶

Drinking the waters from the fountain leaves the knight in a state of acute vulnerability, and the description of his senses failing and his blood freezing makes it clear that he is on the verge of death. The second stanza reveals that even as he is in mortal peril the knight still tries to make love to Duessa, the suggestive lines throughout making it clear that he fails in his efforts (“Poured out in loosnesse on the grassy grownd”). No children will result from this unfruitful union. The Red-Cross Knight has abandoned his quest and sexual passion has obliterated his reason: he is facing spiritual death, as well as bodily harm.

The Red-Cross Knight is imprisoned by the giant Orgoglio, but then rescued in the nick of time by Arthur and Una, before he is restored to spiritual health and able to defeat the dragon which menaces his future bride’s parents. Mortdant is not so lucky and it is clear that the story of his death serves as a counterpoint to that of the Red-Cross Knight. The fountain provides one obvious link, but there are several others, and Duessa and Acrasia can be easily linked as *femmes fatales*. The most obvious connection is Amavia’s description of her husband’s early virility as he set off on his journey: “He pricked forth, his puissant force to proue, / Me then he left enwombed of this child” (II.i.7–8). The lines echo the famous opening of the poem, “A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine” (I.i.1), which suggests that the Red-Cross Knight is a young, lusty man, not fully in control of his bodily desires, but blessed with an exuberant potency as he rides out ready for adventure. The same is true of Mortdant, but he is not as fortunate as his counterpart, and his sexual adventures lead to his death.

The question which remains with us after reading the episode in Spenser’s text is what should we understand by Ruddymane’s blood-stained hands? Amavia argues that they stand for her innocence:

Liue thou, and to thy mother dead attest,
 That cleare she dide from blemish criminall;
 Thy litle hands embrewd in bleeding brest
 Loe I for pledges leaue. So giue me leaue to rest.
 (II.i.37, lines 6–9)

Amavia sees herself as a pelican, allowing her son to drink her blood from her breast, a traditional image of Christ sacrificing himself, the stain a reminder of her virtue. A very different reading is proposed when Guyon attempts to wash Ruddymane's hands clean, the failed attempt to obliterate the symbol suggesting that Amavia is mistaken in her judgment of its positive connotations. For Guyon the bloody hands are "guiltie hands," and that is how a critical tradition has read them, signs of our original sin. Amavia, a suicide, is obviously not a reliable witness, her confused passion leading her to make the terrible error of taking her own life, which compounds and increases Mortdant's sinful failings (Kaske 165–73; Weatherby 172–9). Spenser leaves the reader uncertain how to read the scene. When he fails to remove the bloodstains, Guyon is confused and is not sure how the marks were passed on, whether they are the result of this particular couple's sins ("Their blood with secret filth infected hath"), or a more general sign of God's wrath imprinted on mankind. It is also not clear when the bloodstains appear: Spenser states that the infected blood "diffused through the senselesse truncke" to create a great stench, deliberately not making it clear whether the contagion takes place before or after death and whether that death is a spiritual or physical one.

The Faerie Queene poses a dilemma about the nature of sin. Is the sin here particular to Mortdant and Amavia? Are they an especially culpable pair? Perhaps, but we are reminded that Mortdant is not dissimilar to the Knight of Holiness in character or actions, showing that the line between success and failure, salvation and damnation, is a fine one. Should we read the bloodstained hands as a sign of God's anger with sinful mankind, an interpretation that is in line with Protestant theology and with Calvin in particular, the dominant religious figure in late Elizabethan England, and which has found favor with many critics who assume that Spenser was a Protestant poet?²⁷ The answer is surely that Spenser's poetry is far too challenging and ambiguous to be pinned down to any one reading, his deliberately ambivalent syntax opening up different possibilities and forcing readers to pause, slow down their progress through the narrative, in order to understand the sense. Furthermore, the use of carefully placed apparently innocuous verbal echoes, such as the verb "to prick," qualifies earlier passages, making readers return to what they have read and rethink what they imagine the poem has stated.

The passages in *The Marble Faun*, as one would expect from the author of *The Scarlet Letter*, leave the reader uncertain whether the bloodstains are a just mark of moral judgment or the actions of a malicious, otherworldly figure eager to cause harm in the human world. Miriam has made strenuous efforts to escape from accusations of a past crime, although we never discover whether she is guilty or innocent, or whether she might have committed a crime but was morally innocent, like Beatrice Cenci, the Renaissance noblewoman who killed the father who abused her. Whatever the truth of her past, Miriam then becomes implicated in present-day crime when Donatello, defending her honor and safety, kills the Capuchin monk who dogs her footsteps in Rome.⁸ In the end the reader, as in Spenser, simply cannot tell whether Hawthorne is making a point about humanity's fallen state, Miriam's secret guilt, or whether she is a persecuted outcast, a scapegoat who has to suffer for others' crimes (Fryer 62–84).⁹ But what is clear is that these ambiguities are wrought through a shared mode of seeing in which a physical sign is left to be variously interpreted, forcing the reader to decide what the passages signify.

Hawthorne has taken his cue from Spenser to produce an ambiguous episode which leaves the reader unclear how to read his story. Romance has always challenged readers to decide whether it is a genre of profound seriousness or enjoyable frivolousness, an indeterminacy that both Spenser and Hawthorne exploit. Does *The Marble Faun* provide insights into human depravity and sinfulness? The only explanation we receive for Miriam's behavior is based on her blood, as she is of mixed race, her father being princely southern Italian, and her mother, English, "but with a vein . . . of Jewish blood" (4:429). She explains to Kenyon that she is innocent—as he agrees—but that in her past she broke off an engagement to a "certain marchese," an arranged betrothal to a man much older than she, one to whom most "Italian girls of noble rank would have yielded" (4:430). However, "there was something in Miriam's blood, in her mixed race, in her recollections of her mother—some characteristic, finally, in her own nature—which had given her freedom of thought, and force of will, and made this pre-arranged connection odious to her" (4:430). This history explains everything and nothing. It provides the reader with an ostensible reason for Miriam's actions and her fate, and, therefore, the mechanics of the plot of *The*

Marble Faun. But, in providing a significant link to the passages based on indelible bloodstains derived from Spenser, Hawthorne gestures towards a much more disturbing history of corruption and decay that is at once a deep and satisfying explanation and a common literary trope of late nineteenth-century literature, common to gothic romances, vampire literature, realist fiction, and English and American fiction alike.¹⁰ If Miriam's blood makes her willful and hard to control, then perhaps she cannot be explained: her story resists allegorical interpretation, thwarting the reader who desires to unlock its mystery and penetrate the heart of her identity.

In a meta-narrative towards the end of the romance, Hawthorne similarly refuses to explain where Hilda has been during her disappearance and invites the reader to imagine what had happened:

Whence she had come, or where she had been hidden, during this mysterious interval, we can but imperfectly surmise, and do not mean, at present, to make it a matter of formal explanation with the reader. It is better, perhaps, to fancy that she had been snatched away to a Land of Picture; that she had been straying with Claude in the golden light which he used to shed over his landscapes, but which he could never have beheld with his waking eyes till he awoke in the better clime. We will imagine that, for the sake of the true simplicity with which she loved them, Hilda had been permitted, for a season, to converse with the great, departed Masters of the pencil, and behold the diviner works which they have painted in heavenly colours. Guido had shown her another portrait of Beatrice Cenci, done from the celestial life, in which that forlorn mystery of the earthly countenance was exchanged for radiant joy. (4:452)

This is a sly and paradoxical passage, which draws attention to the fact that, like *The Faerie Queene*, *The Marble Faun* is full of works of art—statues as well as paintings—visual metaphors and descriptions, and artistic practices, around which the plot revolves.¹¹ At one level, the narrator seems to be telling the reader that such art is diverting and pleasurable rather than serious, and that it resists explanation: Hawthorne cannot tell us where Hilda has been because he does not know. But he lets us imagine that she was granted her heart's desire, a desire that, as in Miriam's case, was influenced by her blood, which cannot be explained. Hawthorne is representing his art towards the end of his writing career

like Spenser's, leaving readers unsure whether he is "sage and serious," as Milton termed Spenser, or a suggestive writer capable of producing lines of great beauty but with a shaky moral and allegorical grasp, as Dryden saw him (Cummings 164, 202–3). *The Marble Faun*, with its striking literary pictorialism, is either a work of deep moral seriousness which requires hard interpretative labor to unlock, or one that resists allegorical interpretation and its pleasures in realizing that art is at odds with nature as well as allegory itself. It is hard not to see Spenser's description of Acrasia's Bower of Bliss, one of Hawthorne's favorite literary passages which partly inspired "Rappaccini's Daughter," with its lush sensuality of uncertain moral significance, lying behind the account of Hilda's unexplained sojourn.¹² And, in making this point Hawthorne was situating his own writing in a tradition of Spenserian romance.

What is more, by embedding or evoking a series of artworks, Hawthorne provides a para-textual archive of images that both reinforces and redirects his fictional explorations of his characters' ambiguous states of guilt and innocence. This is nowhere more evident than in the chapter "Hilda's Tower," in which Signor Panini sketches a portrait of Hilda which he entitles "Innocence, dying of a Blood-stain." The painting is made unbeknownst to Hilda, whose "spotlessness" is "impugned" by the knowledge of the murder (4:329). As it represents her inner torment, it sits in complex relation to the image of Cenci by Guido and to other works invoked in the novel:

The strange sorrow, that had befallen Hilda, did not fail to impress its mysterious seal upon her face, and to make itself perceptible to sensitive observers in her manner and carriage. A young Italian artist, who frequented the same galleries which Hilda haunted, grew deeply interested in her expression. One day, while she stood before Leonardo da Vinci's picture of Joanna of Aragon, but evidently without seeing it, (for, though it had attracted her eyes, a fancied resemblance to Miriam had immediately drawn away her thoughts,) this artist drew a hasty sketch which he afterwards elaborated into a finished portrait. It represented Hilda as gazing, with sad and earnest horror, at a bloodspot which she seemed just then to have discovered on her white robe. The picture attracted considerable notice. Copies of an engraving from it may still be found in the print-shops along the Corso. By many connoisseurs, the idea of the face

was supposed to have been suggested by the portrait of Beatrice Cenci; and, in fact, there was a look somewhat similar to poor Beatrice's forlorn gaze out of the dreary isolation and remoteness, in which a terrible doom had involved a tender soul. But the modern artist strenuously upheld the originality of his own picture, as well as the stainless purity its subject, and chose to call it—and was laughed at for his pains—"Innocence, dying of a Blood-stain!" (4:330)

Hawthorne's misattribution of Raphael's painting of "Joanna of Aragon" to Leonardo da Vinci follows the guidebooks he was likely to have used when in Rome (Murray 446). Nonetheless, the passage dramatizes through a series of suggestive ekphrases a complex scene of multiply directed gazes, vague resemblances, material surfaces, and affective states. It is a gallery of sorrowful female faces. As Hilda notes a resemblance between Joanna of Aragon and Miriam, she is portrayed by Panini in a manner such that art connoisseurs will later detect in her hints of Beatrice Cenci, another subject of a terrible doom involving a tender soul. Hilda's inner feeling of guilt finds external form as a forlorn gaze, one that can be displaced onto another painting (whether the Cenci or the copies of the work that appear along the Corso), or becomes transformed materially into a bloodspot on a robe. As such, Hawthorne deftly undoes any representational sureties at the very moment he posits them. Like Hilda's face, impressed by a "mysterious seal" that can only be rendered visible by a sensitive observer, the blood is ambiguously washable and indelibly staining. Bloodstains are both manifest and visible: later in the passage the picture-dealer who sells the painting will assert the bloodspot as a mark of clear guilt and purposeful vengeance, but it is also uncertain and imperceptible, leading the artist to defend Hilda's "innocent anguish" (4:331).

It is worth noting here that Hawthorne's concentration on blood in the passage stands in pointed contrast to Shelley's depiction of the count's murder in his *Cenci*, in which, as his character Marzio admits, "We strangled him that there might be no blood" (Shelley 183). For Shelley, Beatrice's guilt is clear even if the crime is bloodless; in Hawthorne's selective invocation of the story, Hilda is seemingly innocent but possesses the bloodstain of complicity. Thus, for Hawthorne, blood serves as a multifaceted allegory of representation: of artistic

originality and reproducibility, interpretation and misinterpretation, semblance and resemblance. At the same time, by extension, Hilda's bloodstain plays across metaphysical embodiments and physical immaterialities: it "copies" the original human stain that marks, invisibly, all of postlapsarian humanity. This is especially the case for feminine humanity, as descended from that originary copyist, Eve. In one sense, Hilda is the inverse of Donatello, who is a "marble Faun, miraculously softened into flesh and blood" (4:8), but who is "humanized" through his transgression. Hilda, by contrast, is seemingly innocent yet wracked by guilt. But more pertinently, this points to Hawthorne's interest in metamorphic figures whose liminality at once complicates categories of human agency or action—does Donatello's semi-animality absolve him from guilt in the name of instinct? Does Hilda's virginal aura or conflation with "Divine Womanhood" exculpate her from the murder that eats into her life? In both cases, it is left unclear. As in Spenser's blood-stained allegories, *The Marble Faun* both offers and refuses solutions to such exegetical and philosophical problems. Hawthorne, like Spenser, frames in pictures his ambiguous figures, but fails to fix their meanings. What remains are a series of duplicitous images and bodies, signs to be read and interpreted and misinterpreted, if not glances of dark meaning. "Thus coarsely does the world translate all finer griefs that meet its eye! It is more a coarse world than an unkind one!" (4:331).

In his review of *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Herman Melville favorably compares Hawthorne's early, and strikingly Borgesian short story "A Select Party"¹³ to Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*:

"A Select Party," which, in my first simplicity upon originally taking hold of the book, I fancied must treat of some pumpkin-pie party in Old Salem, or some chowder party on Cape Cod. Whereas, by all the gods of Peedee! it is the sweetest and sublimest thing that has been written since Spenser [sic] wrote. Nay, there is nothing in Spenser that surpasses it, perhaps, nothing that equals it. And the test is this: read any canto in "The Faery Queen," and then read "A Select Party," and decide which pleases you the most,—that is, if you are qualified to judge. Do not be frightened at this; for when Spenser was alive, he was thought of very much as Hawthorne is now,—was generally accounted just such a "gentle" harmless man. It may be, that to common eyes, the sublimity of Hawthorne seems lost in his sweetness,—as perhaps

in this same “Select Party” of his; for whom, he has builded so august a dome of sunset clouds, and served them on richer plate, than Belshazzar’s when he banquetted his lords in Babylon. (Melville 60–1)

Whether or not one agrees with Melville that “there is nothing in Spenser” that “surpasses” Hawthorne, or nothing that equals him, it is clear that by attending to the bloodstained surfaces and bodies of *The Marble Faun*, it is possible to better understand how Spenser’s and Hawthorne’s modes of signification mutually illuminate—and complicate—one another. And if, as Melville claims, Hawthorne’s “bright gildings but fringe and play upon the edges of thunder-clouds” (52), we might assert that his “darkness” is not only pulled from the crucible of Puritan inner torment or from the ravings of Shakespeare’s dark characters (as it is, perhaps, in Melville’s own work). Rather, Hawthorne’s “continued allegories or dark conceits” (or “grand conceits” as Melville has it) emerge fundamentally from his reading of Spenser. Spenser’s ambiguous renderings of the correspondences between the visible, physical word and its representations, meanings, or cognitions and contagions influence Hawthorne’s own ambiguous, blocked, failed correspondences. Far from James’s characterization of allegory as one of the “lighter exercises of the imagination,” renewed attention to allegory in Spenser and Hawthorne, as conjugated through its surfaces and bodies, allows us to rethink its potency as a trope or form of thinking poised at the intersection of the material and affective, epistemological and imaginative. To look for traces of the effect of Spenser on Hawthorne, then, we can find them in the blood, rising to the surface and indelibly marked on the skin.

University of Sussex

Notes

¹See, for example, Lee 468–9; Randall 196–206; Turner 543–62; Leibowitz 459–66; Schirmeister 348–9.

²See Radcliffe chs. 2–3.

³As Quilligan writes, “Thus, the letter itself becomes the moral blossom, and all the various interpretations of it offered throughout the book (of which Pearl is only one), become the real ‘moral’ of the story” (54).

⁴See Walton and Herbert. Further, it is important to note that while Hawthorne was writing his romance in Italy, his daughter, Una, was dangerously ill, which provides a significant context for thinking about the relationship between the two works. See also Miller, chs. 31–2.

⁵See Kaske 25–6.

⁶See also Hadfield 21–46, and Cooper 50–7.

⁷See King, 62–4.

⁸For analysis of the significance of this act and Miriam's guilt see Goldman 397–8.

⁹On the ambiguity of Miriam's identity and its role in the novel see Fryer 62–84.

¹⁰See Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*.

¹¹See Bender, *Spenser and Literary Pictorialism*.

¹²For Hawthorne's reading of this passage in Spenser see Leibowitz 459–66; for analysis of the significance see Miles 86.

¹³In "A Select Party," Hawthorne cites, among other possibilities that might fill his fantastic library of never actualized works, "the unwritten cantos of the Fairy Queen."

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