“Moral responsibility was seen to develop the individual’s character, and such responsibility is impossible where virtue is not a matter of conscience but of constraint, of outer rather than inner compulsion” (Hall 175). This philosophical aspect of the book is centered in the character of Donatello in the novel *The Marble Faun*. This last novel of Hawthorne was published in 1860. Hawthorne’s stay in Liverpool as an American consul general provided him with the concept and background of the novel. It introduces four characters who are artists by profession. They are Donatello, Miriam, Kenyon, and Hilda. Donatello is an innocent, faun-like creature, who has grown in a rural arcadia in the company of nature. In this pre-lapsarian state of existence, he is not conscious of sin, “had no conscience, no remorse, no burden on the heart, no troublesome recollections of any sort . . .” (MF597). At this stage, the question of restrain by any external mandate is insignificant to him. He is a kind of simpleton whose innocence has kept him outside the periphery of any formal rules and restrains. He encounters evil for the first time when he confronts the monk Antonio in the evil and corrupt city of Rome. Antonio is a vicious creature who is Miriam’s evil genius. He knows the past of Miriam and malignantly dogs her steps. The mysterious and frightful circumstances of a past event points out that she was “accomplice in the crime” (MF 838). Antonio threatens her with the disclosure of that event in which she was implicated as a murderess. He says, “men have said that this white hand had once a crimson stain” (MF645). It makes her restless and miserable as she
Iqbal is haunted by the frightful memories of her past. She implores to him to deliver her from his bondage but he says, “we are bound together, and can never part again” (MF 644). He asks her to leave Rome with him and warns her, “You are aware of the penalty of a refusal” (MF 643).

Donatello is deeply in love with Miriam. He cannot bear her suffering and humiliation in the hands of the monk. His attachment to her offers him a possibility for a moral education. He kills the wretched monk by flinging him down from the Tarpeian Rock to rescue her from his pestering presence. She unconsciously, assists in transforming him from an unthinking animal like existence into a thoughtful human being. On the instinct of natural justice, voiced by her, he slew her prosecutor with her consent. He did what her eyes bid him to do, while he was holding the wretched over the precipice.

After this incident, a kind of transformation takes place in him. Donatello is bewildered with the novelty of sin and grief. His conscience is evolved which torments him day and night; yet, this torment is preferable to the bliss of ignorance. This transformation in his character depicts an evolution of good out of evil. “. . . the fierce energy that had suddenly inspired him. It kindled him into a man; it developed within him an intelligence which was no native characteristics of the Donatello whom we have heretofore known” (MF 689). It leads to the working of a moral consciousness resulting in the disappearance of that simple and joyous creature.

The coarse animal part of his nature is eventually thrown into the background. Donatello’s friend Kenyon speculates on his changed behavior, and the recently developed astonishing mental and moral maturity in him. Kenyon perceives a perceptible
difference in his character after the murder of Antonio. It seems to Kenyon that “from some mysterious source,” as sculpture feels assured, “a soul had been inspired” (MF741) in him. Donatello loses his natural impulsiveness and acquires, “the power of dealing with emotions” (MF737). Kenyon finds that he has gained a far deeper understanding to deal with higher subjects. The customs, rules and regulations of society become meaningful for him. He gains an insight into the moral mysteries of the world. “It was perceptible that he had already had glimpse, of strange and subtile matters . . . life forever afterwards” (MF 740-741).

The irrefutable connection between sin and education as revealed in the novel *The Marble Faun* is similar to Emerson’s views as expressed in his essay “Compensation”, “When he is pushed, tormented, defeated, he has a chance to learn something; he has been put on his wits, on his manhood; he has gained facts; learn his ignorance; is cured of insanity of conceit; has got moderation and real skill” (69).

The fierce primitive energy of Donatello on the verge of spiritual maturity develops only after the commission of sin. After passing through an agonizing phase, he is inspired by a new soul and intellect. Sin proves a means for his education; guilt leads to the evolution of the conscience. The guilt torments him with his crime and guides him towards a spiritual maturity. Miriam observes, “He has traveled in a circle, as all things heavenly and earthly do and now comes back to his original self, with an inestimable treasure of improvement won from an experience of pain . . . was the crime a blessing in disguise?” (MF 840) The deed has performed its office. No proof of Donatello’s commission of the murder remains, but the pang in his heart constantly reminds him of his guilt. He lifts his hand to his breast and says, “I have a great weight here” (MF 703).
It is followed by repentance and regeneration of soul. It kindles in him a mature man and develops intelligence. Miriam says, “Here is Donatello haunted with strange remorse, and an immitigable resolve to obtain what he deems justice upon himself” (MF 839). The right conduct is not enforced upon him to reveal an evolution of moral responsibility in him. He remains restless and is constantly haunted by his conscience until he subjects himself to the jurisprudence, on his own accord. The price of his guilt is the loss of his innocence and the peace of his mind.

“In seeking of his own accord to bring justice upon himself, Donatello becomes the fictional proof of Emerson’s theory that formal government is rendered unnecessary by the growth of private character” (Hall 175). Transcendental ideas, which chiefly occupy Hawthorne’s thoughts in the present tale, are expressed by Emerson in his essay, “Circles”, “Valor consists in the power of self recovery, so that a man cannot have his flank turned, cannot be out generalled, but put him where you will, he stands. This can only be by his preferring truth to his past apprehension of truth, and his alert acceptance of it from whatever quarter” (183).

The 19th century thinker and philosopher Thomas Paine’s political and moral thoughts also raised questions pertaining to the self governing society consisting of self governing individuals. It referred to the willingness of an individual to constantly choose and hold to the principles or ideals yet flexibly applying that deal in diverse situations. Paine was an offspring of the enlightenment who framed the American constitution. He focused on the application of the power of reason as an inner check upon the conduct of a free individual. Paine believed that natural law was inscribed in the divine order. It emanated a cosmos of a beautiful harmony and order which had existed prior to history
or governments and it was superior to them. The natural law was at least partially knowable through the moral disposition in man and the depth of his conscience. Paine wrote, “As for moral, the knowledge of it exists in every man’s conscience” (Age of Reason 185). If you break natural law your conscience will tell you if you practice being attuned to it. In this regard, Paine quoted Cicero, “the true law is right reason, comfortable to the nature of things, constant, eternal diffuse through all, which call us to duty by commanding, from sin by forbidding, which never loses its influence with the good” (Social and Political Thought 93).

Donatello’s character is conceived in the light of the teaching that has emerged in the 19th century. His character seems to develop around the ideology of evangelical Protestantism and emerges as an illustration of its teachings. He garners his intellectual energy from Thomas Paine also. It is represented through his willing submission to the jurisdiction of the state. After committing the murder of Antonio, he flees from Rome along with Miriam to some distant land. Everyone is clueless of his whereabouts. No policeman hunts for him. He has no fear of being apprehended and punished by the civil authority, yet he subjects himself to the course of legal proceedings voluntarily. He achieves maturity by his independent choice of right conduct not by the imposition of any external coercive mandate. The individual attains moral wisdom and character, through the use of his freedom to live conscientiously.

. . . man was able to practice virtue of his own free will, and through the spiritual experience of such practice develop integrity. To show the individual’s potentialities for growth. Hawthorne wrote his story of the
Faun, who, living as nearly as possible in state of natural simplicity and devoid of any formal knowledge of ethical principles; is transformed and educated by the activity of an innate moral faculty into a mature and civilized being. (Hall 176)

Donatello’s character also owed its allegiance to the American social ideology which surfaced in the 19th century. At that time, the mind of populace was preoccupied with the idea of boundless individualism, unobstructed liberty, and equilateral society, irrespective of state’s interference through the imposition of law. The democratic movement laid emphasis on an all powerful individual with an aspiration for an overall expansion of individuality. Like Democratic movement, Transcendentalism also focused on courage, restraint, self reliance, and social consciousness. It was believed that man was naturally and innately good, and his divinely implanted instincts were reliable guides to judgment and action. The same ideas were inherent in Jefferson’s democratic philosophy. “Jefferson legacy was that of faith in humanity; he touched the moral consciousness of men with the spark of inspiration and sounded the trumpet call to battle for human rights” (Baldwin 160).

In the transcendentalist phraseology “reason” meant “intuition”. Transcendentalists believed that “reason” was capable of apprehending truth better than “understanding”. The “understanding” referred to logical argument and scientific inquiry. Emerson and the other New Englanders acquired this attitude partly from the Germans and partly from their English counterparts, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle. It appealed to them largely because it provided a metaphysical justification for the ideal of individual freedom. If everyman could apprehend the truth by direct intuition
than any form of external mandate, political or religious institutions would turn futile. It affirmed that all men, and not merely elect few might achieve a state of grace by casting off external authority and responding to their spiritual intuitions. They stated that man should trust his own intuition, even, when it contradicted conventions and traditions.

Transcendentalists believed that as men acquired genuine self reliance, any form of external restrain became meaningless for them. Emerson looked forward to a society free from superficial restraints. In an epoch of American development, when possibilities of progress seemed limitless, it was easy to equate self-reliance with moral virtue. Henry David Thoreau in his essay “On Civil Disobedience” denounced all organized government. He proclaimed that the duty of the individual was to follow the dictates of his conscience against state. It was a philosophic anarchism but at the time when an individual was in danger of being crushed by social organization, such radical and non-conformist attitude was not altogether rejected.

In a political set up, where an individual was invested with incalculable powers, they were liable to fall in the abyss of all sorts of corruptions. Responsible citizens were apprehensive of the judicious use of the invested powers of individuals. Debates were also centered on ethical morality as a guide to check individual excesses. Its efficiency in preventing man from indulging in all kind of excesses boarding on lawlessness in their self-seeking concern was questioned. This discussion ultimately led to “conscience” as an important educating mentor of an individual. It did not need any formal training and instruction to guide an individual in his choices of right and wrong. It could check any aberration in man’s conduct such as licentiousness and egotism born out of inner discord or instinct. Hawthorne like Foucault was wary of the state’s power and skeptical about
relying upon its judgment for enforcing morality, which he found innately present in an individual.

Inner check was the doctrine indispensible to the social and political philosophy of the 19th century’s democratic thinkers. Its roots were found in the works of Thoreau, “On the Duty of civil Disobedience”, Emerson’s “Self Reliance”, and in Thomas Paine’s “Common Sense”. “This belief in some faculty through which the moral law could be apprehended by the individual regardless of his background and training is fundamental to equalitarian philosophy in the first half of the century (Hall 174). Thomas Paine also emphasized on the naturalness of human solidarity and introduced civil society as a natural and potentially self regulating form of association, “counter posed to ‘government’ which is, at best, a necessary and artificial evil” (Lane).

Paine’s invocation of civil society was against the despotic regime of the organized power of any government or institutional authority. His philosophical speculations aimed to overthrow the outdated allegiance and entrusted the hearts and minds of citizens with a new responsibility. Paine asserted on the growth of self confidence of the civil society in such a manner that it could simultaneously control state action as well as keep alive the conscience of ordinary citizens towards their responsibility. He defended the dignity of ordinary citizens as the source of political legitimacy. Walt Whitman asserted in 1892:

The whole universe is absolute law. Freedom only opens entire activity and license under the law . . . Great-unspeakably great– is the will. The free soul of man! At its greatest, understanding and obeying the laws, it can then, and then only, maintains true liberty. For there is to the
highest, that law as absolute as any–more absolute than any-the law of liberty. The shallow, as intimated, consider liberty a release from all law, from every constraint. The wise see in it, on the contrary, the potent law of laws, namely, the fusion and combination of the conscious will, or the partial individual law, with those Universal eternal, unconscious ones, which run through all time, pervade history, prove immortality, give moral purpose to the entire objective world, and the last dignity of human life. (336-337)

Whitman along with the other democratic thinkers of the 19th century saw morality operative in the human conduct. He was convinced that human beings could achieve true liberty and happiness only through living out the moral impulse, which was the pervasive principle of the universe and innate in men. He believed that the regulatory and policing influence of the state in the lives of men could be kept at minimum since each individual’s behavior was policed by his own conscience. It would facilitate the growth of the human beings; and the full value of democracy would be realized then only. Donatello says, “I have no head for argument, but only a sense, an impulse, an instinct, I believe, which sometimes leads me right” (MF 839).

He is an uneducated individual who attains a state of grace by demonstrating the validity and effectiveness of conscience. It is his final action which validates the democratic faith in the individual’s inner control. “He fancies, with a kind of direct simplicity, which I have vainly tried to combat, that, when a wrong has been done, the doer is bound to submit himself to whatever tribunal takes cognizance of such things, and abide its judgment” (MF 839).
He revisits Rome with the purpose of delivering himself up to justice. During the carnival in Rome, he is arrested along with Miriam on his free will. Miriam’s family connections would have shielded her and Donatello from the consequences of the imputed guilt as one of her relatives was occupying a prominent position in the Papal government. But he was able to convince her to go for a life of penitence, “Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on midnoon, and under every deep a lower deep opens”(Emerson, Circle 179).

[II]

When we talk about the character of Miriam and the possible sources of *The Marble Faun*, we should not forget the influence of the contemporary Praslin murder case on the present story. Julian Hawthorne has suggested Miriam’s possible relation with Praslin murder case. Nathalia Wright in “Hawthorne and the Praslin Murder” (42) cites an analogue for the case of Miriam in the murder and suicide of the Duc de Choiseul-Praslin over an affair with his governess, Henrietta Deluzy-Desportes. Hawthorne may have been introduced to her in 1851. In the character of Miriam, the novel anticipates two contemporary studies in fiction of the Praslin murder – Joseph Shearing’s “Forget-Me – Not- the Strange Case of Lucile Clery” [1932] and Rachel Field’s “All This and Heaven Too” [1938].
Miriam Schaefer is an artist whose character is enveloped in mystery. She belongs to a rich and influential family, an English parentage from her mother’s side and Jewish connections from her father’s side. Her father belongs to the rich and princely families of Southern Italy which still retains great wealth and influence. She is a passionate, bold, and outspoken woman. She is responsible for the murder of the monk whom Donatello has thrown from the rock on her consent. In her early age, she was betrothed to old marchese, much older than her. She is modern and independent woman, thus, vehemently rebels against such an arranged marriage of disproportionate age difference. Besides that her destined husband was vile, evil, and treacherous creature. His characters lacked no traits of insanity. At the age, when the contract should have been fulfilled, she repudiated it unlike other girls of noble families. There was “something in Miriam’s blood, in her mixed race, in her recollections of her mother, –some characteristics, finally, in her own nature,—that had given her freedom of thought, and force of will, and made this prearranged connection odious to her” (MF 837). After her refusal, a terrible incident followed and unfortunately Miriam was implicated in the crime. She fled from the place and started a new life in Rome. Here, her identity was unknown. Antonio knew about it and constantly reminded her of the past and her suspected involvement in a murder.

As an artist, she makes paintings of Jael, Judith, and Salome. These characters represent murderous women who seek vengeance against men. She calls those pictures “ugly phantom” (MF 615) which she has not created but which “haunt me” (MF 615). These paintings have an underlying association with the terrible memories of her past from which she is trying to escape, “Miriam had doubtless conveyed some of the intimate results of her heart- knowledge into her own portrait” (618). She takes her vengeance
upon her persecutor Antonio by giving her consent for his murder. Hence, her paintings seem to reflect her self portrait.

Her true name and her relation with her persecutor remains a mystery till the end but her character is surrounded by the suggestive presence of many characters and incidents from the actual life. The beauty of Miriam is borrowed from the beautiful Jewess whom Hawthorne has seen at the banquet given in his honor on April 7, 1856 by the first Jewish Lord Mayor of London, David Salomons. She is also identified as Emma Abigail Salomans, daughter of Jacob Montefiore who was married to Philip Salomons in 1850. Emma was seventeen years old at that time and he was fifty four. This age difference between the two also reminds one about the difference of age between Miriam and the man she might has been betrothed (Laurence).

Praslin murder case could be seen in connection with Miriam’s antecedent mystery and Henrietta’s suspected involvement in the murder case. Henrietta Deluzy was working as governess of the children of Duc de Choiseul. In 1847, Duc’s wife dismissed her from the job out of jealousy. Duc promised to get her back on her job through a letter of recommendation from Duchesse. But his wife refused to give such letter and he became incensed. In August of that year, the Parisian world was astounded by the news of a terrible murder which took place at the residence of Duc de Choiseul. On August 18, 1847, Duchesse de Praslin was murdered by Duc de Choiseul Praslin in Paris. His wife appeared to be a jealous and neurotic woman who made the life of her husband a nightmare. Popular opinion held that the governess Henrietta Deluzy was his mistress, and an accomplice in the murder to let him free from a pernicious relation.
Apparently, in a fit of rage Duc stabbed his wife over and over, and shortly afterward poisoned himself before he could be arrested. This case awoke extra-ordinary public interest in France. The role of Henrietta in murder was never proved in that murder. After this episode, she migrated to America and married reverend Henry Field in 1848, the brother of Cyrus Field. Hawthorne was very well aware of her and may have met her because she moved in an intellectual circle until her death in 1875 (Laurence).

When Miriam reveals a name in connection with her past, her friend Kenyon gets startled and turns pale. This name was familiar to the world in connection with a mysterious and terrible event of a recent past, as Kenyon recalled, “The reader –if he think it worthwhile to recall some of the strange incidents which have been talked of, and forgotten, within no long time past –will remember Miriam’s name (MF 837)”.

Miriam was grieved to see Kenyon’s tremor after knowing her real identity. She thought that Kenyon suspected her guilty and asked him the same. Kenyon replied, “No; you were innocent. I shudder at the fatality that seems to haunt your footsteps, and throws a shadow of crime about your path, you being guiltless.” (MF 837) He alluded to some crime in which her name was involved, though, she was innocent. It was a well publicized episode hence, Kenyon knew about it. Miriam’s history and fate corresponded to the fate of unfortunate Henrietta. Though Henrietta was possibly innocent her social image was ruined by the charge of murder. She was acquitted in the trial but it could not restore her good image. Henry Bright asked Hawthorne about the original source of Miriam, and suggested Henrietta Deluzy’s name, Hawthorne replied, “Well, I dare say she was. I knew” (Wright 5-14).
The other significant context, in which this novel can be placed, is Hawthorne’s countrymen’s untiring effort to understand and write about Catholicism. All attempts to comprehend Catholicism by American writers are shrouded in ambivalence. From Washington Irving to James Fenimore Cooper, Hawthorne to Herman Melville and Mark Twain, the transatlantic journey had its own fascination for them. It was an attempt to revisit their old home. Europe represented for them a complex model of aesthetic refinement, beauty, historical depth, decadence, and moral ambiguity. Their European tours provided them with an opportunity to observe Catholicism from a close quarter. Catholicism fascinated and influenced the American writers and artists in their visit to European countries. The American writers were natives of the democratic republic of America; hence, they were wary of certain tendencies of Catholicism. They were suspicious of the massive authority and power of the Pope. At the same time, their democratic outlook provided them with a balanced perspective in appreciating its spiritual splendor. They loved the gothic structure as an expression of Christian spirituality e.g. St Thomas Aquins. The splendor of the church building related God with beauty, unity, and goodness. They saw beauty as a medium to convey the glory of God, a reflection of the higher being.

In 1860, Rome was occupied by Napoleon III’s troops and under a despotic papal government of Pius IX. The administration of Pope Pius IX reacted in a conservative fashion to the short republic of 1849-50 led by Mazzini and Garabaldi. When the Italian authors complained of the restrain on freedom of expression under the despotic papal
regime, Hawthorne enjoyed freedom of expression there. In *The Marble Faun*, one of the character says, “and Rome is not like one of our New England villages, where we need the permission of each individual neighbor for every act that we do, every word that we utter, and for every friend that we make or keep. In these particulars the Papal despotism allows us freer breath than our native air” (MF 652). But the phrase “Papal despotism” reflects his negative perception regarding the authority of Pope in church.

Hawthorne grew up in a culture that had passive anti-Catholic components. There were a few opportunities in New England to meet Catholics, and gain an independent perspective. His Italian stay provided him with an opportunity to observe it closely. A F Hewitt in “Hawthorne’s attitude towards Catholicism” (1885) studied Hawthorne’s relationship with Catholicism. For his study, he picked up references to Catholicism dotted throughout Hawthorne’s writings. Hewitt maintained in his study that Hawthorne was a liberal Christian, whose contact with Catholicism in European enabled him to find out what was wrong or what was right or rather attractive or unattractive in Catholicism (Hewitt).

Gilbert Voigt also summarized a valuable material from Hawthorne’s biography and notebook to ascertain that Hawthorne moved from the initial attitude of hostility to a more judicious view regarding Catholicism. Hawthorne observed that the Church of Rome was a very human institution. It made many grave mistakes but had several redeeming features. Both these aspects have been dealt in *The Marble Faun*.

Hawthorne shows the encounter of his two characters: Hilda and Kenyon, the natives of New England with the amoral and corrupt Rome. Hilda is an embodiment of female virtues who reflects some traits of Sophia Peabody’s character which are admired
by Hawthorne. He fondly called his wife “dove”. Hilda is also frequently referred to as “dove” in the novel. She is a staunch Puritan who is utterly alone in Rome without native homeliness and familiar sights and faces. She inadvertently sees the murder of Antonio, a crime, in which her friend Miriam has collaborated. Her situation becomes wretched by the necessity of confining all her trouble within her own consciousness. She has no one to share her burden, even her only friend Kenyon is away from her at that time. In this state of spiritual and moral crisis, she is drawn towards the magnet of Catholicism by its apparent comfort on all occasions for the pent up heart. She indulges in self–questioning, whether the New England faith in which she is born and bred can be perfect. “If it leaves a weak girl like me to wander, desolate, with this great trouble crushing me down?” (MF 794).

The attraction of Hilda towards St. Peter’s cathedral reflected Hawthorne’s perception regarding the spiritual comfort experienced by sincere Catholics. Hawthorne seemed to be impressed by the universality of the church and was particularly fascinated by its idea of “confession”. In one of his novels, The Blithedale Romance, his character Hollingsworth says, “I have always envied the Catholics their faith in the sweet, sacred Virgin mother, who stands between them and deity, intercepting somewhat of his awful splendor, but permitting his love to stream upon worshipper more intelligibly to human comprehension through the medium of as woman’s tenderness (BR 511).

Hilda’s restlessness and inner turmoil compels her to go inside St. Peter’s confessional booth, pro Anglica lingua. She goes inside the St. Peter cathedral with a hope to draw consolation from the confessional. She pours out her whole misery amid sobs and tears in the confessional box. She feels lightened after doing that. She discovers
a solace which she cannot find anywhere else. She is not ashamed of what she has done. She tells Kenyon, “I have a great deal of faith, and Catholicism seems to have a great deal of good, why should I not be Catholic, if I find there what I need, and what I cannot find elsewhere? The more I see of this worship, more I wonder at the exuberance with which it adapts itself to all demands of human infirmity” (MF 802).

It shows her recognition that regardless of the Church’s alleged shortcomings and the fraud and humbuggery of a section of its clergy, it also offers spiritual comfort. She feels that for every weakness of human nature, Catholicism possesses a remedy. It has marvelously adapted itself to every human need. Catholic theology characterizes human nature as wounded, accepting a tendency in a man to sin but still possessing the grace of God’s creation. When the priest in the confessional asks Hilda, why has she sought to avail a privilege exclusive to member of one true church and what were her grounds: confession or absolution? Regarding absolution, she says “never” and defends her refusal by adding that, “God forbid that I should ask absolution from mortal man!” (MF 796).

The confessional scene of *The Marble Faun* has its parallel in the novel *Villette* by Charlotte Bronte. Hawthorne must have read her novel and found here, the description of a protestant heroine confessing to a Roman Catholic priest. Hawthorne spent a prolonged period in Europe. In writing *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne used his European notebooks as frequently as he used his Brook farm notebook in writing *The Blithedale Romance*. The background of the novel is the picturesque and degenerate Italy of classic art, decadence and disease. In 1858, Hawthorne observed Catholicism, as he sojourned in Rome. This encounter enriched his understanding of sin, and its effect on human beings.
Soon after his arrival in Rome, he described the scene of a “lady confessing to a priest “within a ‘wooden confessional’ ” (N.B 184).

The Confessional boxes impress Hilda with its infinite convenience for its devout believers. After a tumultuous and disgusting phase of life, a devotee could go there and leave all troubles behind without any disquietitude “purifying themselves with a touch of holy water at the threshold.” (MF 794) On the contrary, a Puritan upbringing compels a person to keep all his torture in his pent up heart and let it burn there till it sears him into an indifference. Hilda has a great respect for the spiritual resources of Catholic Church which concurs with the opinion of the author. Hawthorne writes in his French and Italian notebook:

The ceremonies of the Catholic Church were a superb work of art, or perhaps a true growth of man’s religious nature; and so long as men felt their original meaning, they must have been full of awe and glory. Being of another parish, I looked on coldly, but not irreverently, and was glad to see the funeral service so well performed. (Gutenberg 9)

Hawthorne’s contemporary, James Fennimore Cooper from 1826-1833 went for a lengthy tour of Europe. Here, he encountered a living, vibrant Catholicism which surprised and intrigued him. He found a powerful spirituality that spoke to him. His Heidenmauer was centered on Catholic Church and society. He narrated his experience in Switzerland, which destroyed any anti –catholic sentiment in him (Beard 3:174). On 11 Sep, 1828, he went for a walking tour in Switzerland and arrived at Einsiedlen. It was home to Benedictine, an abbey. The shrine of our lady of the Hermits was close to the principal feast of the place, the feast of Angles on 14 September. Cooper wrote, “It was
touching to hear the prayers and see the bodies of pilgrims arriving and placing themselves before the shrine. . . . the interior of the chapel was well suited to excite the awe of the worshippers” (Beard, 1:325-26).

Cooper witnessed genuine prayers and worships and saw beauty at sacred places as an aid to worship and prayer, connected with the spiritual splendor. A similar stance toward Catholicism could be found in Hawthorne’s observation in his *French and Italian Note Book* (1858). Hawthorne observed while stepping into the Pantheon:

Everybody seemed so devout, and in a frame of mind so suited to the day and place, that it really made me feel a little awkward not to be able kneel down along with them. Unlike the worshippers in our own churches, each individual here seems to do his own individual act of devotion, and I cannot but think it better so than to make an effort for united prayer as we do. It is my opinion that a great deal of devout and reverential feeling is kept alive in people’s hearts by the Catholic mode of worship. (95)

Hawthorne was curious to know about Catholicism, as his American upbringing and Puritan heritage provided him with little opportunity to understand it rationally. Rome evolved under papal authority as a mere contrivance of man which gave Hawthorne an opportunity to test his ethical principles and reformulate his religious ideologue. Hawthorne’s democratic leanings made him apprehensive regarding the immense power of popish authority in church and the corruption inherent in it. Hawthorne held Pope largely responsible for the depraved condition of Catholic Churches. He seemed to agree with his mentor Thomas Jefferson who stated, “The
clergy, by getting themselves established by law and in grafted into the machine of government, have been a very formidable engine against the civil and religious rights of man” (Walker).

Hilda, like Hawthorne recognizes the fallible nature of man who represents the church and acts as a mediator between men and God. She finds that the spirit and program of Catholicism is contrary to political liberalism, humanitarian, social impulses, and all that is associated with democratic America. Hawthorne feels a kind of incomplete sympathy for Catholicism, as recorded in his notebook [1858]:

I suppose there was hardly a man or woman, who had not heard mass, confessed, and said their prayers; a thing which—the prayers, I mean—it would be absurd to predicate of London, New York, or any Protestant city. In however adulterated guises, the Catholics do get a draught of devotion to slake the thirst of their souls, and me thinks it must needs do them good, even if not quite so pure as if it came from better cisterns, or from the original fountain head. (96)

Hawthorne’s younger daughter Rose said that he might have sympathized with Catholicism more clearly, if his puritan perception would have allowed him. Rose was a converted catholic who founded a sisterhood for the relief of the cancerous poor in New York and died as mother Alphonso (Voight and Wegelin). Hawthorne was reared in an atmosphere hostile to Catholicism. Not only did the prevailing sentiment influence him but his puritanical upbringing also formulated his religious consciousness.

His extensive reading in the colonial history played an important role in shaping his opinion and the setting of his mind about the Roman Catholic Church. He absorbed
the eighteenth-century skepticism and morals. He himself shared the later eighteenth-
century distrust of established institutions. A reading of Thomas Paine alone would have
provided him with a remarkably lucid attack upon the Roman Catholic Church.

Undoubtedly, without tracing the direct influences, it was certain that Hawthorne
was already predisposed to hostility towards the Roman Catholic Church. He was ready
to condemn what he considered its excesses before his arrival to Europe. Ellery
Channing, Hawthorne’s contemporary and a transcendentalist wrote about Roman
Catholic Church, “It is remarkable fact, that the very spirit to which Christianity is most
hostile, the passion for power, dominion, pomp, and preeminence, struck its deepest roots
in the church. The church became the very stronghold of the lusts and vices which
Christianity most abhors (139).

Similar views are expressed by Kenyon about Roman Catholic Church, when he
describes it as a, “mass of unspeakable corruption” (MF 800) a mere contrivance of man
not an emanation of the broad and simple wisdom from on high. Hilda says, “If its
ministers were but little more than human, above all error, pure from all iniquity, what a
religion would it be !”(MF802). Hilda feels that her mother’s spirit is weeping to see the
daughter of a Puritan is ensnared by the gaudy superstition of Catholicism. The prejudice
against Catholicism in America came over with Puritans and Pilgrims who fled from the
Church of England under the despotic rule of Pope. Kenyon observes in negative vein,
the predominant corruption in the city after the sudden disappearance of Hilda from
Rome:

Being so innocent, she had no means of estimating those risks, nor even a
possibility of suspecting their existence. But - who had spent years in
Rome, with a man’s far deeper scope of observation and experience—knew things that made him shudder. It seemed to Kenyon, looking through the darkly colored medium of his fears, that all modes of crime were crowded into the close intricacy of Roman streets, and that there was no redeeming element, such as exists in other dissolute and wicked cities. (MF 827)

Kenyon’s skepticism towards Catholicism was reinforced when he met the clergy who was in the confessional box with Hilda. The same priest wanted to seize that innocent and instinctively human experience of Hilda in the “confessional” for the publication as part of their propaganda. It earned Kenyon’s ire. He exhibited his hostility towards the unjust activities of the Church and condemned the immoral disposition of some of its clergies by responding:

For here was priesthood, pampered, sensual, with red and bloated cheeks, and carnal eyes. With apparently a grosser development of animal life than most men, they were placed in an unnatural relation with woman, and thereby lost the healthy, human conscience that pertains to other human beings, who own the sweet household ties connecting them with wife and daughter. And here as an indolent nobility, with no high aim or opportunities, but cultivating a vicious way of life, as if it were an art, and the only one which they cared to learn. Here was a population, high and low, that had no genuine belief in virtue; and if they recognized any act as criminal, they might throw off all care,
remorse, and memory of it, by kneeling a little while at the confessional, and rising unburdened, active, elastic, and incited by fresh appetite for the next ensuing sin. (MF 827)

These observations of Kenyon remind us of Chaucer’s treatment of the Parson in the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. In the foregoing remark, Kenyon anticipates what Mark Twain has projected in his novel Innocents Abroad and Fennimore Cooper records in his letters. Twain’s comments become caustic when he turns his attention to some of the clergies of Roman Catholic Church. He wrote that, when the members of the Quaker City excursion were in Italy, “We were in the heart and home of priest craft—of a happy, cheerful, contented ignorance, superstition, degradation, poverty, indolence, and everlasting uninspiring worthlessness” (Durocher 132). The clergy consisted of “well-fed priests . . . fat and serene” (Durocher 108) in a very graphic contrast to the poverty-stricken masses of Italians. Twain implied that the hunger of these poor people was in direct proportion to the gastronomic surfeit of the clergies. Hawthorne also commented about the people reeling in poverty in Italy, in his French and Italian Notebook:

The very curious part of the spectacle was the swarm of beggars who haunted the street all day; the most wretched mob conceivable, chiefly women, with a few blind people, and some old men and boys . . . the whole wretched mob flung themselves in a heap upon the pavement, struggling, fighting, tumbling one over another, and then looking up to the windows with petitionary gestures for more and more, and still for more. Doubtless, they had need enough, for they looked thin, sickly, ill-fed, and the women ugly to the last degree. (373)
Hawthorne wrote further about the multitude of beggars in Italy which made the heart as obdurate as a paving-stone (NB 240). In commenting on the anomaly of a bankrupt Italy and a fabulously wealthy priest, Hawthorne was putting his finger on a sore spot. The indictment of the priest was overwhelming and represented a high point in Hawthorne’s condemnation of what he found blameworthy in the Church. This concurred with the opinion of Jefferson when he wrote, “In every country and in every age, the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own.”(Walker). Jefferson believed that, “religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship” (Walker). In Thomas Gladsky’s article “Cooper’s Other Americans”, he cited examples of Cooper’s anti Catholic attitude. He quoted Cooper’s statements:

that some terrible disclosures are about to be made, touching the Canadian monasteries, which are described as no better than brothels, in which murder is a common pastime. That the conventional system is infamous, and that it was framed to ‘comfort the priests’ . . . who are kept in celibacy to wheedle the women and thus extended influence of the papists, I make no doubt.’(Beard 3:174)

Cooper’s scathing attack on the moral depravity of the monasteries corresponded to Kenyon’s vehement condemnation of institutionalized religion. Through Kenyon’s criticism of the “confessional”, Hawthorne expressed his ambivalence regarding its spiritual efficiency. The author maintained a balanced judgment toward the Church that was at once unusual and interesting. The mysterious circumstances of Hilda’s
disappearance forced her lover Kenyon to think that: if the incident of the confessional was known in Italy, the eager propagandists, who were always prowling about for souls like cats in search of mouse would not let that opportunity pass, without forcing her to turn towards their faith. He suspected that they would not even hesitate in kidnapping her, “Hilda was most likely a prisoner in one of the religious establishments that are so numerous in Rome” (MF 830). He thought that she would be possibly under the spiritual assaults in barred portals or in convent –cells. After her release, Hilda disclosed to Kenyon “I was a prisoner in the convent of the Sacre Coeur, in the Trinita de Monte” (MF858).

Hilda went to the most offensive and ugliest part of Rome, adjacent to the Ghetto to deliver a sealed packet to someone. This packet was given to her, by her friend Miriam with earnest injunctions of secrecy and care. Miriam instructed her that, if nobody claimed for the said packet for a certain period, she should deliver it to the address written on it on a specified time. Hilda visited that place to fulfill her commitment and disappeared after that. Miriam was no longer in Rome. She left Rome soon after the murder of Antonio. After her departure, the municipal authorities came to know of the murder of Capuchin and his persecution of her. Her disappearance after the incident led to the suspicion that there was some connection between Miriam and that fatal incident. When Hilda went to deliver that packet, she was detained. The authorities suspected that the packet might contain some information regarding Miriam. They were also apprehensive of Hilda’s role in the episode. Hilda told Kenyon, “My entanglement with Miriam’s misfortunes, and the good abbate’s mistaken hope of proselyte, seem to me a sufficient clue to the whole mystery” (MF 858).
The remark of Hilda at the end of the novel depicted that Hawthorne’s attitude towards Catholicism was not unqualifiedly hostile: “In such custody of pious maidens and watched over by such a dear old priest, that – had it not been for one or two disturbing recollections, and also because I am a daughter of the Puritans – I could willingly have dwelt there forever” (MF 858). It reflected his honest insight into Roman Catholicism and an acknowledgement of the presence of positive virtues in some catholics irrespective of their faith. It is fair to point out that Hawthorne appears to be a compassionate humanitarian and a great democrat, who bestows approbation, where he feels, it deserves.

Nevertheless, we should not conclude from the foregoing remark that his attitude towards an authoritarian church, his conviction of its political activity, and an unwholesome hold on men’s allegiance changed in any perceptible degree. Like Jefferson, he was apprehensive of the abuse of disproportionate power in the hands of a fallen man as a mediator between man and God, “History, I believe, furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintaining a free civil government. This marks the lowest grade of ignorance of which their civil as well as religious leaders will always avail themselves for their own purposes (Walker).

Hawthorne retained his spirit of magnanimity towards certain representatives of the Church but the very idea behind Catholicism made him wary of it because of his republican convictions. On the whole, he was willing to observe the Catholic Church with a fair mind and a full heart as he was not hostile towards it except for what he considered for good reasons.
Works Cited:


