WILLIAM GILMORE SIMMS'S UNACKNOWLEDGED LEGACY: THE INFLUENCE OF SIMMS'S *MARTIN FABER* ON *THE SCARLET LETTER* AND *A MODERN INSTANCE*

by

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(Under the Direction of James E. Kibler)

ABSTRACT

In 1833, the Southern author William Gilmore Simms (1806-1870) published *Martin Faber: The Story of a Criminal*. Respectively seventeen and forty-six years following its publication, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and William Dean Howells' *A Modern Instance* (1879) were published. In *Martin Faber*, Simms set a literary precedent that would inspire specific character types and similarities of plot in both later novels.

INDEX WORDS: William Gilmore Simms, *Martin Faber*, Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, William Dean Howells, *A Modern Instance*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1833, four years after the appearance of his short story "Confessions of a Murderer" in *The Southern Literary Gazette*,[1] Southern author William Gilmore Simms would publish a novel, inspired by this shorter work, entitled *Martin Faber*. This was to be the novel that would, as is generally accepted, launch his literary career.[2] Edgar Allan Poe praised the novel, recognizing "Harpers finally undertook it, and it did credit to their judgment." He continues:

> It was well received both by the public and the more discriminative few, although some of the critics objected that the story was an imitation of "Miserrimus," a very powerful fiction by the author of "Pickwick Abroad." The original tale, however — the germ of "Martin Faber" — was written long before the publication of "Miserrimus." But independently of this fact, there is not the slightest ground for the charge of imitation. (Poe 272)

Indeed, *Martin Faber* exerted more of an impact on other fictional works than it ever was supposed to have acquired from them.[3] This influence even includes the work of Poe himself, whose demented, untrustworthy first-person narrators in short stories such as "The Fall of the

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[1] According to John C. Guilds in *Simms: A Literary Life*, "Confessions of a Murderer" was published in the twelfth number of the second series of the *Southern Literary Gazette*, which was published on November 1, 1929 (28).

[2] According to Kevin W. Jett in his 1999 essay "A Seductive Plea from the Gallows," though *Martin Faber* is such an important work of Simms's, it has since received very little critical attention (559).

[3] In his article "Caleb Williams and Martin Faber: A Contrast," Edward Stone shows that though critics such as Carl Van Doren, Floyd H. Deen, and William P. Trent have noted a close comparison between *Martin Faber* and William Godwin's novel *Caleb Williams*, Simms's novel is actually quite original. Simms defended himself against such charges in a letter to Rufus W. Griswold. He says in this correspondence: "'Martin Faber' belongs to the family of which

House of Usher" (1839), "The Telltale Heart" (1843), "The Black Cat" (1843), and "William Wilson" (1840) are remarkably similar to *Martin Faber's* first person narrator.[4]

As a supporter of the idea that Simms lent more artistic inspiration to successful writers than he borrowed from them, Molly Boyd provides in her essay "'The Fall of the House of Usher,' Simms' *Castle Dismal*, and *The Scarlet Letter*" a convincing case for the influence of Simms's *Castle Dismal* on the works of both Hawthorne and Poe. In a similar vein, my thesis addresses the possibility that Simms's *Martin Faber* also inspired *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), as well as for William Dean Howells' *A Modern Instance* (1879).

While neither Hawthorne nor Howells held Simms in highest esteem as an artist, both men were quite conscious of his existence. According to Boyd, Hawthorne bluntly stated to Evert Duyckinck—the literary friend that he shared with Simms—in a letter dated April 30, 1846: "Mr. Simms I do not like at all" (231). Howells also held certain similar reservations about Simms. Although we do not know which of Simms's qualities were particularly distasteful to Hawthorne, Howells publicly declared that he was unsure of Simms, both on a professional and on a moral level. In his June 1892 "Editor's Study," Howells praises William P. Trent's unflattering biography of Simms,[5] in addition to making several patronizing comments of his own concerning Simms's life and work. Howells asserts,

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Godwin's 'Caleb Williams' is the best known model. But those who read the two works will fail to see any imitation…" (Stone 480-481).

[4] In his article "A Seductive Plea from the Gallows; Reconsidering William Gilmore Simms's *Martin Faber.*"Kevin Jett recognizes that Poe "used [Martin Faber] as a basis for his short story 'William Williamson.'" He continues, "Both Simms's Faber and Poe's Wilson self-condemn their sinister deeds and must confront their conscious minds, represented by their Gothic 'double' figures…[and] Both characters are driven by selfish desires." (566) Also, in John Caldwell Guilds' introduction to *Martin Faber*, Guilds says that Simms's novel "anticipated by several years theories of fiction that Poe had yet to articulate" (xxvii).

[5] Much criticism has been directed towards Trent's biography *William Gilmore Simms* (1895). In "Antebellum American Literature from Natchez to Charleston," Peter L. Shillingsburg asserts

> the name of Simms is now chiefly useful as an illustration of a literary and social period gone by, and in a larger sense of the effect of isolation, want of discipline, and social surroundings upon a talent that might have been a very important one in the world…Had Simms been born now, in an impulsive generous society, which has dropped feudalism and slavery and which sees as an inspiration of progress what John Van Buren used to call "The Northern Lights," there is every reason to believe that he would hold front rank among American novelists.

He concludes, "There was never such another demonstration in history of the effect of social emancipation upon literature as has been furnished by the band of brilliant Southern writers since the war of secession" (153).

As is evident from their associations and comments, then, both Hawthorne and Howells were familiar with Simms, despite the fact that they did not regard him in the more respectful, positive, and forgiving way that they consistently viewed their Northern literary contemporaries: the very way, in fact, that they reacted to one another as writers.

Although Hawthorne epitomized the romantic period in American literature, and Howells has always been widely regarded as the staunch "father of American realism," the two authors

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that Trent committed "egregious errors" in his biography of Simms(8). And in "Trent's Simms," an essay in that provides a detailed account of the publication history of the biography, John McCardell takes into account the many literary critics, friends of Simms, and Southerners who have condemned the biography. He notes that a Baltimore literary journal called it an "abominable libel and an insult hard to be endured," and that a professor at the University of Virginia lamented, "Indeed, no Southern man can read this book without feeling his blood boil within him at the injustice of the author, at the aspersions cast upon his people and their motives" (196). He also explains that a great deal of "praise [was] lavished on the book by reviewers outside the South" (197). Trent privately admitted that there were "many limitations of my book, but I do feel sure that I studied my subject diligently and that nothing was further from my thoughts than to take the occasion to sneer…And if I occasionally appear to rely too much on my small satirical and humorous powers, it must be remembered that Simms's biography might have

held a mutual respect for one another. After their first and only meeting in Concord, Massachusetts, Hawthorne presented Howells with a card of introduction to Emerson succinctly inscribed with the message, "I find this man worthy." Ostensibly, as a reaction to Hawthorne's reserved acceptance of Howells as a fellow American author and his Northern sensibility, Howells stated, "I entirely liked Hawthorne." (Howells 51). Howells makes note of this exchange in *Literary Friends and Acquaintance* (1900) in the chapter entitled "My First Visit to New England." Howells was only twenty-three years old when he met Hawthorne, and this experience seems to have moved him a great deal. He recounts his feelings after their meeting: "I kept the evening of the day I met Hawthorne wholly for the thoughts of him, or rather for that reverberation which continues in the young sensibilities after some important encounter." (53).

While thorough research would indicate that Hawthorne had little else to say concerning the work of Howells or of other authors, for that matter, it is enlightening, in an attempt to determine the source of his dislike for Simms, to note that the opinions evident in many of his letters suggest that he disdained the South. He wrote to an English friend concerning the Civil War,

> I am ashamed to say how little I care about the matter. New England will still have her rocks and ice, and I should not wonder if we become a better and nobler [sic] than ever heretofore. As to the South, I never loved it. We do not belong together; the Union is unnatural, a scheme of man, not an ordinance of God; and as long as it continues, no American of either section will ever feel a genuine thrill of patriotism, such as you Englishmen feel at every breath you draw. (Letters 355).

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been made deadly dull and that it is a man's duty to his readers not to be dull." (McCardell 198-199).

Hawthorne went on to confess that he "should be very glad to exchange the South for Canada," (Letters 355) and that "New England is quite as large a lump of earth as my heart can really take in" (Bridge 155).[6] It seems highly probable that, because of his general abhorrence of the South, Hawthorne's unfriendly attitude toward Simms is related to Simms's Southernness.

Compared to Hawthorne, Howells appears to have struggled much more openly in his writing, to reconcile his passion for literature with his evident dislike of all things Southern (and particularly all things pertaining to the ante-bellum South).[7] Howells comments in *Literature and Life* (1902) that "we had really no use for an American literary center before the Civil War…Up to that time we had a Colonial literature, a Knickerbocker literature, and a New England literature. But as soon as the country began to feel its life in every limb with the coming of peace, it began to speak in the varying accents of all the different sections—North, East, South, West, and Far West" (175). Howells was convinced until the end of his career that nothing of moral substance or true literary value comparable to that of Northern literature could come from the slave-holding society of the South, despite the eventual "happy" mingling of American regional accents. Howells' anti-Southern bias is indicated and elaborated upon by L. Moffitt Cecil in his essay "William Dean Howells and the South" and by William Kirkland Finley in his doctoral dissertation *William Dean Howells on the South and Southern Literature*. Though Howells accepted the writing of many Southern authors while he was the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*, the writers were all post-bellum "reformed" Southerners, such as

[6] Hawthorne wrote these sentiments to his college friend, Horatio Bridge, from Liverpool on January 15, 1857.

[7] Howells certainly fell into the category of writers that Paul Hamilton Hayne would later criticize. Hayne observed "That a considerable number of vigorous and brilliant authors—some of genius even—have risen among us since the close of the civil war is a subject for cordial congratulation; but surely it is not necessary to the establishment or increase of their fame that a class of servile paragraphists…should profess to find the whole department of Southern *ante-bellum* literature a desert of antiquated rubbish" (Parks 259).

George Washington Cable (1844-1925) and Charles W. Chesnutt (1858-1932). Cecil notes that "Howells apparently believed that postbellum Southern writers were enabled to achieve literary significance because they had all been purged by the triumph of Northern armies" and that "the more "emancipated" a Southern author might be, the easier it became for Howells to discern literary merit in him." (21)

Poe, a Southern writer who also suffered the censure of the Northern intellectual elite,[8] recognized that Simms had been unfairly marginalized because of the biases of Northern literati:

> whatever may have been [Simms's] early defects, or whatever are his present errors, there can be no doubt that from the very beginning he gave evidence of genius, and that of no common order. His "Martin Faber," in our opinion, is a more forcible story than its supposed prototype "Miserrimus." The difference in the American reception of the two is to be referred to the fact (we blush while recording it), that "Miserrimus" was understood to be the work of an Englishman, and "Martin Faber" was known to be the composition of an American as yet unaccredited in our Republic of Letters. The fiction of Mr. Simms gave indication, we repeat, of genius, and that of no common order. Had he been even a Yankee, this genius would have been rendered *immediately* manifest to his countrymen, but unhappily (*perhaps*) he was a southerner, and united the southern pride — the

[8] Katherine Hemple Prown notes that in the November 22, 1845 edition of the *Broadway Journal*, Simms defended Poe from the censure of Northern critics, concerning Poe's presentation of the poem, "Al Aaraf" before an audience at the Boston Lyceum. Simms explains that because of the city's cold "vapors" and an unrefined audience who would prefer to see the performance of a "penny whistle elevation," the evening must certainly have been doomed to failure (*Broadway Journal*, 309-310). Though Prown is correct in her assessment of Simms's article, in that it emphasizes that the physical and social climate of the North was hostile to Southern writers—and particularly to Poe, after he had criticized Northern literary greats such as Longfellow—she incorrectly asserts that Simms implies in this piece that "A man as refined and erudite as Poe had no chance of satisfying an audience composed of social climbers, women, and 'sundry' other persons, none of whom possessed the breeding required to understand the true aim of art and aesthetics" (119).

> southern dislike to the making of bargains — with the southern supineness and general want of tact in all matters relating to the making of money. His book, therefore, depended entirely upon its own intrinsic value and resources, but with these it made its way in the end…

Poe concludes:

> It may be said, upon the whole, that while there are several of our native writers who excel the author of "Martin Faber" at particular *points*, there is, nevertheless, not one who surpasses him in the aggregate of the higher excellences of fiction. We confidently expect him to do much for the lighter literature of his country (274-275).

In his biography, Trent, in keeping with Howells' opinion of Simms, rebuffs both Poe's faith in Simms's integrity as a writer and the genius of *Martin Faber*:

> Poe was doubtless attracted by [the novel's] gruesomeness, and by the way in which Simms developed circumstantial evidence…But most readers of the present day would turn with loathing from the book; and few would read far enough to note the early appearance of a fault which was to mar all of Simms' future work—careless inattention to details, consequent upon hurried writing. (Trent 81-82)[9]

Since Trent's biography focused so heavily on both *Martin Faber*, and on Poe's appreciation of this particular novel, we can be relatively certain that Howells was at least aware of it. Because *Martin Faber* is such a key work in the biography, it seems quite possible that Howells read the novel.

[9] It seems probable that Trent may have mistaken Poe's attraction to Simms's first person narrator for a more general affinity for "gruesomeness." As has already been noted, the first person narrators in Poe's work closely resemble Simms's maniacal narrator, Martin Faber. And if it is inspected closely, Poe's fiction seems to bear a different brand of gruesomeness than Simms's does. They simply do not resemble one another in this regard.

The Scarlet Letter, whose publication fell between that of *Martin Faber* and *A Modern Instance*, can serve, in many respects, as a link between Simms's and Howells' novels. The now iconic characters brought to life in the pages of Hawthorne's classic novel bear striking resemblance to the heroes and villains in *Martin Faber* and *A Modern Instance*, and many circumstances in the novels also seem markedly similar. From the order in which the novels were published, we can assume that Hawthorne's novel was influenced by *Martin Faber*, and that certain characteristics of *A Modern Instance* were probably more likely to have been colored by *The Scarlet Letter*. But if analyzed carefully, *A Modern Instance* actually favors, in several respects, Simms's novel more closely than it does *The Scarlet Letter*.

Martin Faber, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *A Modern Instance* all center on crimes against women, a secret romantic obsession, the violation of a best friend's trust, and the issue of complicity in "secret sins." The villains in these novels hide the fact that they have abused women in ways that are deemed criminal in their societies. They also seek to conceal a situation in which they betray their closest male companions by involving them in their secret transgressions. Likewise, the betrayed companions in the novels are in love with the women who are romantically involved with the villains. Ultimately, in all three novels, justice prevails, but the female characters are left alone in the world. The romantic fate of these women is left unresolved in the end.

The plots of the novels are similar, but the characters are even more so. In all three novels, villains, victims, and heroes bear uncanny likeness in the details of their motivations, their personalities, and even in some cases in their physical characteristics. The following three chapters discuss the character types found in the three works: villains, victims, and heroes. The

fourth chapter will focus on other considerations, such as similarities in structure and literary techniques.

CHAPTER 2

THE VILLAINS

The villains in Simms's, Hawthorne's, and Howells' novels are vindictive, manipulative dominant males; but even so, the three authors all intend for the reader to identify or sympathize with them on a particular level. Despite the fact that the villains commit what are considered to be atrocious acts in their societies, they are undeniably pitiable or attractive in certain regards. They all try to explain away evil in order to gain acceptance. They are also compelled to confess their sins, demanding that loved ones keep their crimes secret, so that they might simultaneously share the burden of his heavy conscience and protect themselves from suspicious members of the outside world. They all have the parasitic need to feed on the goodness of others in order to survive. Their evil is so great that they would suffer from the starvation of their own souls if their sins were not shared.

Despite all of these remarkably close similarities, Simms's Martin Faber is entirely monstrous to the core of his being. Hawthorne's Roger Chillingworth is somewhat less so, and Howells' Bartley Hubbard is clearly the least sinister of the three. In the chronological progression of American literature from romanticism to realism, this evolution of Simms's seminal character from the basest murderer in *Martin Faber*, to a malevolent cuckold seeking revenge in *The Scarlet Letter*, and finally to a profligate husband who scandalously wrestles free of the confines of Victorian domesticity in *A Modern Instance* seems only fitting, considering both the order in which the novels were published and the attitudes and philosophies of each author. Boyd observes that while "crime and penance reflects Simms' own sense of community and a society in unified opinion," Hawthorne possessed a stronger "sense of the ambiguous and

arbitrary influences of society which can nurture or cripple the individual" (4). One can understand, from knowing the viewpoints of these authors, why Simms could make his villain much more damnable than Hawthorne seemed to have the capacity to create, despite the fact that both authors wrote what could be categorized as romantic literature.[10] And the conniving, self-serving Bartley Hubbard of *A Modern Instance* appears to be the least wicked of the villains because, as Arnold B. Fox recognizes,

> Howells came to believe…that the source of crime lies in society as much as it does in the individual. Society is responsible for such defalcations because it supports an economic system under which the accumulation of money is the highest aim of man, and as Howells became more acutely aware of the existing economic injustices, he came to attribute a greater share of guilt to the environment rather than to the individual." (Fox 59)

In fact, Howells claimed to a friend, Brander Matthews, that he had "drawn Bartley Hubbard, the false scoundrel," from himself (Bennett xx). As a result of the authors' moral perspectives, as well as the literary genres in which they wrote, their villains' moral accountability varies considerably. Although Simms's and Hawthorne's villains could properly be classified as megalomaniacs, while Howells' villain is little more than an egomaniac without much of a conscience, all employ similarly manipulative methods in order to take advantage of their victims, and each one is presented to the reader in a remarkably sensitive, sympathetic manner.

Of the three villains, *Martin Faber's* eponymous narrator has perhaps the profoundest effect on the reader's sympathy. Kevin Jett observes that Faber is at the same time "more

[10] Though many critics, such as William P. Trent, have labeled Simms as a romanticist, there is some debate as to his status as such. In *Simms: A Literary Life*, John C. Guilds explains that "Part of the debate over Simms's literary status centers around the long-standing question of

fiendish" because "his cunning springs from self-preservation," thereby making "good and evil ambiguous" (559). As Faber chronicles in first person his morally depraved existence, as well as the innermost workings of his mind, the reader gains an intimate view of his perverse point of view. Just as Faber attempts to convince the audience of his perspective by divulging the intimate details of his life, the audience eventually realizes that he has managed to commit every one of his misdeeds through manipulation. Because he seems to be sensitive, confident, articulate, intelligent, and strangely charming, his confession is particularly persuasive.

In the beginning of Faber's narration, as he is standing on a scaffold awaiting his own hanging, Faber explains how fate and the development of a criminal mind from an early age led him to murder, the crime for which he will soon be publicly executed. While Faber acknowledges that he was born into a good family, and blessed with parents who were very indulgent of him, he complains that since his father neglected him as a child, and because he was withheld from school later than were most children, his character never developed properly. As his narrative continues, he constantly refers to his formative years as being the source of his evil, and the results of his depraved actions as being the realizations of fate.

He describes that as a child he managed, through manipulation and the false justification of his actions, to exact revenge upon his teacher, Michael Andrews—an instructor who punished him for his impudence after class one day. Faber not only destroys his teacher's prized globes but he also manages to complain enough to his father about the incident to cause Andrews to lose his job, his home, and his position in society. As an adult, by using his abilities to mislead, Faber seduces, impregnates, and kills his girlfriend—who is also Andrews' daughter—and subsequently marries another woman whom he abuses emotionally.

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whether Simms should be considered a romantic or a realist—for he undeniably possessed

Upon confessing his murder to his wife and his best friend, William Harding, he as usual justifies his actions. Faber is not caught the first time Harding reports his crime to the authorities, because Faber lied in his confession to his friend about the location of the body. After Harding's report is disregarded for the first time, Harding is shunned by society for falsely reporting a crime. Faber characteristically uses this social ostracism as a tool to force Harding back into his own company. Until Harding finally acquires enough evidence to fairly convict Faber of the crime, his only means of survival (and being accepted back into society) lie with his parasitic "friend." Finally, when Faber is convicted of murder, and is awaiting his execution in prison, Faber plays on Harding's delicate sense of honor when he asks his friend to provide him with a knife so that he can commit suicide—so he can die a more honorable death than that of a public hanging. After attempting to escape from prison with the knife, and trying to force Constance to curse her existence, as well as Harding's life, he proves himself to be skillfully manipulative a final time. Clearly, throughout the novel, Faber proves his insidiousness through his skillful manipulation of his best friend, the community, the women with whom he is romantically involved, and ultimately the reader.

Roger Chillingworth and Bartley Hubbard do not inspire compassion as effectively as Faber, because the reader is not provided the same detailed survey of their moral landscape from their first-person perspectives. But in both Hawthorne's and Howells' novels, the authors similarly evoke sympathy for themselves by including descriptions of their past lives. The details of Faber's, Chillingworth's, and Hubbard's expertise in the field of manipulation, as well as the specific similarities of their actions, all provide strong evidence of Faber as a source of the later writers.

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characteristics of both."

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Chillingworth describes his pitiful soul to Hester, while he is chastising her for her infidelity, in order to inspire her pity. After Hester reminds her former husband that he never should have taken her as his wife because he knew that she never loved him, Chillingworth tries again to win her sympathy. He admits,

> It was my folly! I have said it. But, up to that epoch of my life, I had lived in vain. The world had been so cheerless! My heart was a habitation large enough for many guests, but lonely and chill, and without a household fire. I longed to kindle one! It seemed not so wild a dream,---old as I was, and sombre as I was, and misshapen as I was,--- that the simple bliss, which is scattered far and wide, for all mankind to gather up, might yet be mine. And so, Hester, I drew thee into my heart, into its innermost chamber, and sought to warm thee by the warmth which thy presence made there! (140)

In this passage, Hawthorne also prepares the reader to pity Chillingworth, a character who will later reveal himself as a cold, malicious monster who is megalomaniacally bent on destroying Hester Prynne's life and Arthur Dimmesdale's soul. Both the reader and Hester Prynne soon see through Chillingworth's false display of vulnerability. Although Chilllingworth has been wronged by Hester and Dimmesdale, he aspires to commit a worse crime. He intends to manipulate Hester so that she will lead a social life that will be more horrible than death, and to kindle in Dimmesdale a guilt that will entirely consume his soul, a sense of guilt so powerful that he will never be capable of revealing his sin to the world. Chillingworth is ultimately unsuccessful in his attempt to control Hester's and the reader's emotions, although he almost succeeds in completely suffocating Dimmesdale's nearly exhausted spirit.

In his actions, as well as his motivations, Chillingworth is strikingly similar to Faber in many important regards. Although Chillingworth does not inspire pity in the reader or in other

characters as successfully as Faber does, he is just as cunningly manipulative of the victims on whom he intends to take revenge. Although he is not as charismatic as Faber, Chillingworth is intelligent, articulate, and confident enough to be successfully manipulative of the victims he intends to punish. Faber seduces the impressionable young Emily Andrews, partially in order to continue avenging the punishment that her father, the schoolteacher, imposed upon him as a boy. Faber also tries to entice his wife Constance and his best friend Harding to have a love affair in order to destroy the purity of their spirits, since he is jealously aware that they love one another more than they care for him. Similarly, Chillingworth enjoys enacting revenge on Hester and Dimmesdale by encouraging their impotent passion for one another. Just as Faber derives a sick pleasure from witnessing and fostering the shameful yearning between his friend Harding and his wife Constance, Chillingworth's fantasy of revenge is fulfilled in part by seeing the agonizing sexual and emotional tension between Hester and Dimmesdale. Paralleling Faber's use of Harding's delicate sense of moral integrity as a tool against him, Chillingworth plays upon Dimmesdale's fragile sense of honor. Finally, in the same way that Faber banishes the Andrews family into obscurity and social ostracism, and by enmeshing Harding and Constance in the secret of his crime, Chillingworth forces Hester and Dimmesdale to be co-conspirators by swearing them both to secrecy. Chillingworth manages to maintain his control of the situation by threatening Hester with the knowledge that he is aware of the identity of her lover, and convincing Dimmesdale that he knows the blighted inner landscape of his soul.

Howells' character Bartley Hubbard, like Faber, is skilled in his ability to invent excuses for his actions, and expertly bends others to his will. In the beginning of the novel, a few of Bartley's former professors are trying to decide whether they should recommend their student for a job during their interview with a man who is searching for a new editor of a newspaper. The

faculty members are described as feeling that Bartley "deserved greater credit because his early disadvantages as an orphan…had been so great that he had entered college with difficulty and with heavy conditions." However, they

> had their misgivings…and still felt it a duty to call attention to the fact that the college authorities said nothing of the young man's moral characteristics, in a letter dwelling so largely upon his intellectual qualifications (20-21).

We later discover that it instead had "been [Bartley's] fortune to be left when very young not only an orphan but an extremely pretty child, with an exceptional aptness for study [who] had been better cared for than if his father and mother had lived," and that

> he had been not only well housed and fed, and very well dressed, but pitied as an orphan, and petted for his beauty and talent, while he was always taught to think of himself as a poor boy, who was winning his way through the world (27).

Obviously, from the beginning of his life, Bartley has been able to rely on the fact that others will be sympathetic to him, despite his moral shortcomings. Like *Martin Faber*, *A Modern Instance* attributes Bartley's weaknesses, in part, to his upbringing. Both Bartley and Faber were spoiled as children, and this overindulgence has caused them to feel entitled to take advantage of others in their adult lives.

Howells pointedly explains why Bartley becomes bad—a person capable of committing the crime of deserting his wife, which is a felony in the state in which the divorce proceedings are held at the end of the novel. Bartley, like Faber, toys with a girl (named Hannah Morrison) whom he has no intention of marrying, before he marries his wife (Marcia). While he does not impregnate or murder this poor girl, he does lead her to her destruction. Near the end of the

novel, Marcia encounters Hannah, who is drunk in the street. Marcia indignantly informs Bartley of the incident, saying,

> She reeled against me; and when I—such a fool I was!—pitied her, because I was on my way home to you, and was thinking about you, and loving you, and was so happy in it, and asked her how she came to that, she struck me, and told me to—to—ask my—husband! (345).

Throughout the novel, Bartley masterfully shifts blame from himself to others, making those whom he has wronged feel guilty. He abandons Marcia after they argue over his culpability in Hannah's plight. Even after he has left her, though, Marcia feels as though she is to blame for his flight. Since Bartley abused Marcia on such a deep emotional level over the years of their marriage, Marcia never fully recovers from his abandonment of her. Even until the last page of the novel, she feels as though she is to blame for their problems as a couple and for Bartley's many moral failings.

While the reader immediately recognizes Simms's villain because he exists among morally good characters, the villains in *The Scarlet Letter* and *A Modern Instance* are at the outset more difficult to identify because they are surrounded by other corrupt characters. Certainly, Hawthorne and Howells believed in the corrupting force of society on the individual more strongly than they did in the idea that corruption could emanate from within a man's heart. In keeping with the tradition of Southern literature's acceptance of evil as coming from within and of the creation of monsters, Simms allows Faber to be, in and of himself, a source of evil. In "Contemporary Southern Literature," Richard Weaver promotes the idea that monsters and acceptance of evil are very much a part of Southern literature: "We sometimes encounter the complaint that Southern literature abounds unduly in monsters […] It is my impression that

Southern writers, instead of rationalizing away monstrous evil, as the sociologists do, or averting their gaze from it, as the romantics do, choose to give it epical proportions." (68). Faber's society, which is unified in upholding healthy moral standards, is extremely different from the hypocritical Puritan society in *The Scarlet Letter*, or the equally hypocritical Victorian society of Howells' novel which is complicit in the Bartley's moral transgressions. As Fox states of Howells' novel,

> The purpose of *A Modern Instance* is not at all to picture forth the degeneracy latent in a selfish nature, but rather to show the effect that accidental circumstance and the influence of other people can have in determining which potentiality in each individual will be realized. It is not by chance that Bartley Hubbard fails to assume the proportions of the conventional villain, for it is quite clear that the fault is not his alone. Had he married someone other than Marcia, he might have turned out far better than he did, even allowing for all the obvious weakness of his character (Fox 57).

As we can see, although the villains in the three novels display different degrees of evil in their behavior, they all seek to manipulate others in order to achieve their loathsome designs.

CHAPTER 3

THE VICTIMS

Although we can be almost certain that Hawthorne and Howells used Martin Faber as a source of inspiration for the villains in *The Scarlet Letter* and *A Modern Instance*, the similarities between the female victims in the novels are somewhat more challenging to discern. One difficulty arises in that Simms's and Howells' novels each have two female victims, while Hawthorne's work has only one. However, the number of female victims in the novels is of little consequence, considering the many parallels between them. In all three novels, the women are, first and foremost, victims of misdirected passion. While their personalities differ widely, they are treated nearly identically by the villains and suffer similar consequences. Although the women accept blame for their involvement with the villains, they eventually manage to prevail over their unfortunate situations. Perhaps most importantly, when these women are left alone in the world at the end of each novel, they ultimately restore natural order and justice to the world.

In Simms's novel, Emily, who is young, sweet, and impressionable, is seduced, impregnated, and brutally murdered by Faber. When Emily realizes that she is pregnant with Faber's child, she encourages him to marry her. Clearly, Simms does not place any blame on Emily for the "sin" she has committed, unlike Hawthorne and Howells, who will burden their female victims with a relatively high level of accountability for their "unladylike" sexual appetites. After Faber convinces Emily that he never intends to marry her, she makes a speech to him in which she both blames herself and threatens to reveal the story of her love affair with Faber to the woman whom he, in fact, intends to wed. She exclaims,

> Now, O God, do I feel my infirmity—now do I know my sin. And this is the creature I have loved—this is the thing—wanting in the heart to feel, and mean enough in soul to utter falsehood and prevaricate—this is the creature for whom I have sacrificed my heart […] Think not, mean traitor, as thou art—think not to triumph in thy farther seduction. Me thou hast destroyed,—I am thy victim, and I feel the doom already. But thou shalt go no farther in thy way. I will seek out this lady, for whose more attractive person, mine and my honor and affections, alike, are to be sacrificed. She shall hear from me all the truth. (57).

Although Emily blames Faber for her pregnancy and her abandonment, she also holds herself accountable for her actions. In keeping with a more open-minded system of morality, Simms allows Emily to remain a force of goodness within the context of the novel, an entity that will help to avenge her own death. After Emily is murdered, she returns as the vision of a ghost who haunts and torments Faber and inspires Harding to obtain justice against the man who killed her. Ultimately, she succeeds in her task, becoming more than a victim. At the desperate moment before his death, Faber asks, "What specters are these that surround me? It is Emily" (149). In the end, Emily is vindicated as a woman who remained true to the man whom she loved, and who successfully avenges her own murder.

Constance Faber, the other female victim in Simms's novel is, in a sense, Emily's regenerative double. Constance marries Faber, and although she is quite different from Emily, she also suffers at his hands. She is mature and refined, born into wealth and privilege, whereas Emily, born into poverty, is young and innocent; but they are both equally vulnerable to Faber's evil. However, unlike Emily, she does not love Faber. Faber explains that this lack of feeling has caused him to abuse her on an emotional level:

> She loved me not from the first—How could she love me?—and only became my bride from the absence of sufficient firmness of character, to resist the commands or the solicitations of her parents…in due accordance with the discovery, my pride grew morbid and angry. (74).

In response to her lack of feeling for him, and her love for Harding, Faber tries to tempt her to commit adultery with his friend in order to make her, as he describes, "the instrument of my own dishonour" (74). She is tormented by her feelings for Harding, and she is aware that her evil husband schemes to destroy her goodness. Until the end of the novel, she avoids the temptation of Harding's love, and when Faber is finally hanged in the end, we can infer that she, now alone, has maintained her purity through faithfulness to her husband.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne is best viewed as a combination of Emily Andrews and Constance Faber. Hester embodies many of the traits of both of Simms's female victims. Like Emily, Hester suffers the shame of being pregnant out of wedlock. And similar to Emily, she has acted on her love for a man who refuses to marry her, or to reveal himself as the father of her child. But her similarities to Emily stop here.

Hester Prynne also closely resembles Constance Faber in several ways. Like Constance, who feels obligated to marry Martin Faber without loving him, Hester admits to Chillingworth, "Thou knowest that I was frank with thee. I felt no love, nor feigned any." (140). Also, like Constance, Hester is imprisoned by her husband's secret. Chillingworth manipulatively compromises to keep the secret of her baby's father, if she will keep the fact of their marriage a secret—particularly from her lover. And just as Constance must conceal and subdue her feelings for Harding, Hester struggles to hide her affections for Dimmesdale, whom she cannot reveal as her lover. In the end of the novel, after Dimmesdale reveals the "A" emblazoned on his chest—

his confession of love, illegitimate parenthood, and the sin of adultery, Chillingworth has lost his battle to destroy Dimmesdale's soul, and Hester emerges victorious from her experience. She is alone in the end, having indirectly achieved justice for her cause.

In *A Modern Instance*, Hannah Morrison plays much the same role that Emily does in *Martin Faber*. While Hannah is not perceived in the novel as being morally pure, she does act as a force that in the end inspires justice to be sought for the many wrongs Bartley has committed. Hannah, the girl Bartley cruelly misleads into believing that she has a chance of marrying him, before he marries Marcia, is depicted by Howells as being shamefully flirtatious and credulous. Much like Emily, who is distraught after she discovers that Faber intends to marry Constance, Hannah is heartbroken when she discovers that Bartley is engaged to Marcia. Later, after Marcia and Bartley are married and living in Boston, Hannah returns to haunt their marriage. When Marcia encounters her in the street, drunk, she realizes for the first time what a truly wretched person her husband is for having caused this poor woman so much pain. After she and Bartley quarrel about Hannah's plight, their decrepit marriage collapses. Hannah, like Emily, serves as the inspiration for justice and the catalyst for the dissolution of an unhappy marriage. It is interesting that Howells damns Hannah to a disgraceful last appearance for what seems to be a fairly innocent flirtation with Bartley, while Simms practically sanctifies Emily in the end of the novel, despite the sexual relationship that she has with Faber. As many critics have noted, Howells does not treat kindly the few women in his novels who were somewhat sexual (even in the most innocent ways). Also, he would never have portrayed sex or sexuality as openly as Simms does in Martin Faber. Howells was always terribly concerned with not including embarrassing subjects in his fiction, and he is remembered for his demand that a writer should include nothing that "would cause a reader to blush."

Constance, Faber's other female victim, resembles most closely Marcia Hubbard. Just as Constance patiently endures her husband's cruelty, Marcia accepts Bartley's abuse. And similar to the way in which Constance loves her husband's morally upright friend Harding, Marcia "worships" Bartley's decent and honorable friend Ben Halleck. Halleck's sister tells him that Marcia "seems to think you are perfect, and she never comes here but she asks when you're to be home" (355). Although Marcia does not love Halleck in the same way that Constance is romantically interested in Harding, she is similarly attracted to his goodness. She is in love with Bartley until the end, but she despises her husband's corrupt actions (which she is constantly convinced are her fault). She respects Ben Halleck as a person morally superior to her husband, and looks to him to fill the moral void in her life in the same way that Constance looks to Harding's company to make her marriage tolerable.

CHAPTER 4

THE HEROES

The characters in the three novels with the strongest similarities are the male heroes. Because they maintain relatively high moral standards throughout their lives, and ultimately help the female victims to bring about justice, William Harding, Arthur Dimmesdale, and Ben Halleck can all be fairly labeled as the male heroes. Despite the fact that they have many weaknesses, and that they are often victims themselves, they manage to defend the female victims, with whom they are in love, to the best of their abilities against their evil male counterparts, who happen to be their closest male companions. Additionally, each of the heroes has a particularly delicate sense of honor, and is also sensitive about his reputation in society. Each of these men is compelled to seek, and ultimately to reveal, truth in order to thwart or overcome the villain's evil.

Just as Faber "loves" Harding "with a feeling of singular power" (22) because of his friend's vulnerability and his effeminacy, the villains in *The Scarlet Letter* and *A Modern Instance* accept friendships with the heroes based on their perceived physical and emotional dominance in the relationship. Although Faber claims to love his friend strongly, we later realize that he seems to be friends with him more likely because of the power he feels capable of exerting over the man. Similarly, Chillingworth and Dimmesdale are linked in a power struggle over the issue of Hester's status as an adulteress. Finally, Bartley and Halleck maintain a relationship based on power and the need to indulge their passions parasitically. Bartley remains friends with Halleck in order to borrow money while maintaining the illusion of masculinity,

which certainly depends in part upon his abilities as a "breadwinner." Halleck keeps Bartley as a companion in order to remain close to Marcia, and to keep her safe.

Morally, mentally, and physically, Harding, Dimmesdale, and Halleck are almost identical to one another. Harding is described as

> a genius, and one of the first order, but his nervous susceptibilities left him perfectly hopeless and helpless. Collision with the world of man would have destroyed him; and, as it was, the excess of the imaginative quality , which seemed to keep even pace with his sensibilities, left him continually struggling—and as continually to the injury and over throw of the latter—with the calm suggestions of his judgment (22).

Like Hawthorne's and Howells' characters, Simms's Harding is described as "a nervous, susceptible, gentle youth" (35) whose character and physical characteristics provide a stark contrast to the villain of the novel. Dimmesdale receives an uncannily similar description. He possesses

> a mouth which, unless when he forcibly compressed it, was apt to be tremulous, expressing both nervous sensibility and a vast power of self-restraint. Notwithstanding his high native gifts and scholar-like attainments, there was an air about this young minister,---an apprehensive, a startled, a half-frightened look,---as of a being who felt himself quite astray and at a loss in the pathway of human existence, and could only be at ease in some seclusion of his own. Therefore, so far as his duties would permit, he trode in the shadowy by-paths, and thus kept himself simple and childlike; coming forth, when occasion was, with a freshness, and fragrance, and dewy purity of thought, which, as many people said, affected them like the speech of an angel" (133).

Like Harding and Dimmesdale, Halleck is also a highly intelligent man who is weak, both physically and emotionally. Halleck, having been injured by a bully as a child, sustains a limp as an adult. He is a nervous, sensitive man. Halleck's mother explains to Marcia Hubbard about her son's injury,

> He was the brightest and strongest boy that ever was, till he was twelve years old. […] One of the big boys, as he called him, tripped him up at school, and he fell on his hip. It kept him in bed for a year, and he's never been the same since; he will always be a cripple. (137).

Each character is physically weak, nervous, and effeminate.

Just as Harding and Constance are in love with one another in Simms's novel, Hawthorne's Hester and Dimmesdale obviously share a special romantic bond, and in *A Modern Instance*, Halleck is madly in love with Marcia, who "worships" him on a moral level. Chillingworth, like Faber, manipulates the relationship between his best friend and his wife in order to take revenge on the couple. He preys on their passions, as well as their moral sensibilities, to damn them and to make them suffer. At the end, however, neither villain succeeds in his plan of corruption. Harding and Constance never consummate their relationship, remaining pure in their love until the end, and Hester and Dimmesdale finally manage to redeem themselves in the eyes of God, despite their past.

The heroes in the three novels are also all highly concerned with their social standing and the public's perception of them as moral figures. After Harding is humiliated publicly for testifying against Faber in court without proper evidence to prove him guilty of murdering Emily, Harding considers suicide. Harding, being "universally avoided" because of what the public believes to be his false claims against Faber, is crushed. Faber describes that before his

best friend's infamy, Harding "had lived upon the breath of fame—he was of jealous reputation," and now "he was tremblingly alive to those very regards of the multitude which were now succeeded by their scorn and hisses" (91). Similarly, Dimmesdale is described as possessing a great deal of public respect at the same time that he harbors the secret of having fathered a child with Hester Prynne:

> While thus suffering under bodily disease, and gnawed and tortured by some black trouble of the soul, and given over to the machinations of his deadliest enemy… had achieved a brilliant popularity in his sacred office. He won it, indeed, in great part, by his sorrows. His intellectual gifts, his moral perceptions, his power of experiencing and communicating emotion, were kept in a state of preternatural activity by the prick and anguish of his daily life. His fame, though still on its upward slope, already overshadowed the soberer reputations of his fellow-clergymen, eminent as several of them were. (200)

Almost identically to Harding and Dimmesdale, Ben Halleck is obsessed with society's perception of him. He laments the fact that he does not have friends in the highest society: "It would have all been different if I had gone to Harvard. Then the fellows in my class would have come to the house with me, and we should have got into the right set naturally" (205-206). But while Halleck's standing in society is important to him, he also wars throughout the novel with his status in society as a morally superior man. He is foolishly in love with Marcia while she is married to Bartley, and although he never informs her of his feelings, he struggles with his secret love for her throughout the novel. Halleck clearly has difficulty accepting his flaw, since he sets the moral standard in his society. He feels like a hypocrite, and is tortured by the passions that

he refuses to indulge. At the end of the novel, Halleck becomes a minister in an attempt to bury his feelings for Marcia.

CHAPTER 5

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to similar characters, there exist significant correlations between *Martin Faber* and *The Scarlet Letter* concerning setting and literary techniques. Although these particular elements are not as numerous or as apparent as the shared character types, they are nonetheless quite important in showing how *Martin Faber* might have inspired *The Scarlet Letter* and *A Modern Instance*. Even considering the fact that Hawthorne and Howells told their stories with styles, sensibilities, philosophies, and interpretations that were clearly their own, they seem to have been inspired by *Martin Faber* in other ways.

One of the most striking borrowings exists in the settings. It can be no accident that Hawthorne borrowed the scaffold scenes in *The Scarlet Letter* from *Martin Faber*. Both Simms's and Hawthorne's novels begin and end with a very public prison and scaffold scene. In the opening of Simms's novel, Martin Faber is standing on a scaffold awaiting his hanging. He hears "the hissing scorn—the deriding shout" of the crowd as he looks fearlessly forward to death. This opening scene is replicated by Hawthorne. *The Scarlet Letter*, whose "narrative, which … issue[s] from the inauspicious portal" (116), the door of a prison, also opens upon the event of Hester Prynne's public shame and punishment. She is to be led to a scaffold on which she will be required to stand to endure the scorn of public opinion, the fiery words of religious officials, and the stern looks of her fellow Puritans. *Martin Faber* ends with the narrator being hanged on the same platform where the novel opened; and likewise the action of *The Scarlet Letter* closes upon Dimmesdale climbing the scaffold on which Hester was punished to repent of

his sins—there to reveal the scarlet letter branded on his chest. Although only one primary similarity in setting exists between the novels, it is indeed a very significant one.

Another close identification in setting exists among the wilderness scenes in the three novels. Like Simms, Hawthorne and Howells use the forest as scenes for exile, sexual license, and crime. In *Martin Faber*, the Andrews family, who has been ostracized from society, lives in a cottage in "in a lonely, and almost uninhabitable region" (68). Similarly, Hester Prynne, also a social outcast, lives in a "little, lonesome dwelling" in a remote area beside the forest (145). After Marcia breaks her engagement with Bartley Hubbard in the beginning of the novel, Bartley flees to a friend's logging camp to hide from the shame and pain associated with his and Marcia's break-up. And when Bartley finally abandons Marcia, as well as the rest of society, he flees to the frontier—to the wilderness of the West. He ultimately is "accidentally" shot in "Whited Sepulchre, Arizona, where Bartley Hubbard pitched his tent." (350). The wilderness is also a site of sexual liberation. Like Emily, whose meetings with Faber in the forest result in her pregnancy, Hester is finally able to confess her erotic feelings to Dimmesdale when they meet in the forest. Hester is transfigured into an openly sexual being in the novel's forest scene. She not only has the power to break her vow of secrecy with Chillingworth, but she also takes down her hair, removes her scarlet letter, and proposes to revive the "consecration" that once existed between them. Finally, the forest is a place for crime. In Simms's novel, Faber strangles Emily in the forest, and hides her body behind a boulder. Likewise, in *The Scarlet Letter* the forest is the ideal setting for witchcraft. The witch, Mistress Hibbins, asks Hester if she will accompany her to the forest one night, since "There will be merry company in the forest; and I wellnigh promised the Black Man that comely Hester Prynne should make one." (178).

One important literary technique is shared between *Martin Faber* and *The Scarlet Letter*. In the opening scaffold scenes, Simms and Hawthorne use an almost identical literary flashback technique in order to convey the feelings of the criminals who have mounted the platforms. In Simms's novel, Faber narrates that he takes a backward glance, at "the survey of my crimes, and…the past." (13). Faber continues, exclaiming "what a prospect does this backward glance afford! How full of colours and characters—how curiously dark and bright! I am dazzled and confounded at the various phases of my own life." (14). Almost identically, while Hester stands on the scaffold, the narrator describes how:

> Reminiscences, the most trifling and immaterial, passages of infancy and school-days, sports, childish quarrels, and the little domestic traits of her maiden years, came swarming back upon her, intermingled with recollections of whatever was gravest in her subsequent life; one picture precisely as vivid as another; as if all were of similar importance, or all alike a play. (125).

Here, Hawthorne closely follows Simms's technique in describing the psychological complexities of a criminal who is attempting to cope with the profundity of public punishment.

Clearly, the villains, victims, and heroes, as well as some of the settings and literary techniques among *Martin Faber, The Scarlet Letter*, and *A Modern Instance*, are strikingly similar. It seems highly probable that Hawthorne and Howells were influenced by Simms's novel. Despite the fact that neither author properly respected Simms as a fellow artist or properly acknowledged his indebtedness to him, it seems quite likely that they both drew upon *Martin Faber*.

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