POSTMODERN NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN THE WORKS OF
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE: METAFICTION, FABULATION
AND HERMENEUTICAL SEMIOSIS

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Sheila Frazier Kobler, B.A., M.A.
Denton, Texas
August, 1993
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Nathaniel Hawthorne has been viewed long and favorably as a modernist in his uses of irony and ambiguity. Nevertheless, he has been criticized by many readers for his weak plots and unsatisfactory endings, particularly in his novels following *The Scarlet Letter*. A major reason for this criticism has been an insistence upon reading Hawthorne according to the tenets of literary realism, when, in fact, Hawthorne was creating a new fictional form that was a precursor to postmodern metafiction. Hawthorne's self-begetting, self-reflexive fiction shows a progression in complexity and skill from his earliest stories and sketches to his last fragmentary novels. His major concern as an artist is the relationship between art and life, which he dramatizes in his works by spotlighting himself in the act of creating both his art and his life—a simultaneous act. Hawthorne, like many writers of the French *nouveau roman*, demonstrates the belief *scribo, ergo sum*. Moreover, Hawthorne's hermeneutical semiotics is illuminated in his works, which are primarily concerned with reading the text of the universe as a riddle and existence as an open-ended
spiral of time. Further, his writerly texts require readers to write their own versions of his text(s). Thus Hawthorne was practicing a highly sophisticated form of narrative art long before this kind of modernist and postmodernist writing was identified by Robert Scholes as metafiction, by Steven G. Kellman as self-begetting, and by Michael Boyd as self-reflexive fiction, and well before the advent of the French *nouveau roman*. Hawthorne, especially in his prefaces, as well as in his fiction, indicated his awareness of readers and their possible responses to his fiction long before reader response theory became a prominent influence in literary studies. Hawthorne's metafiction, fabulation, and hermeneutical semiotics are investigated in the tales and in all the novels in chronological order, including his unfinished works.
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CHAPTER ONE

PROLOGUE

No Romance sold unto
Could so enthrall a Man
As the perusal of
His Individual One--
'Tis Fiction's--to dilute to Plausibility
Our Novel--When 'tis small enough
To Credit--'Tisn't true!

(Emily Dickinson, 669)

Nathaniel Hawthorne has been viewed long and favorably by twentieth-century readers as being particularly modernist in his uses of irony and ambiguity, in his presentations of moral relativism and the darker side of human nature. Now critics of Hawthorne have begun to see his affinities with postmodern writers of metafiction, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Philip Roth, and John Hawkes. G. R. Thompson's *The Art of Authorial Presence: Hawthorne's Provincial Tales* (1993) provides the first extensive study of Hawthorne's narratology in the provincial tales in terms that link him to these postmodern romances. My study explores the entirety of Hawthorne's career, beginning with the earliest stories and ending with his last, fragmentary novels, and
demonstrates his position as a long-neglected precursor to the postmodern writers of metafiction designated as fabulators by Robert E. Scholes in his 1967 book *The Fabulator*. In fact, Hawthorne was a fabulator long before the name existed to describe the contemporary movement. In Scholes' second version of his book, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (1979), he explains that "it seemed that a movement of great importance in contemporary fiction was being ignored, misinterpreted, or critically abused because it lacked a name." He lays the blame for the poor reception of these works at the door of critics who "at that time were possessed by notions of fictional propriety derived from a version of realism that had seen its best days . . . while all around us a new and more fabulous kind of fiction was coming into being—a kind of fiction that had much to teach us and many satisfactions to give us" (1). Scholes defines experimental fabulation, or "metafiction," as he has called it, as having the following characteristics:

1. First of all, it reveals an extraordinary delight in design. With its wheels within wheels, rhythms and counterpoints, this shape is partly to be admired for its own sake. A sense of pleasure in form is one characteristic of fabulation.

2. The structure also, by its very shapeliness, asserts the authority of the shaper, the fabulator behind the fable.
3. The fabulator is important to the extent that he can rejoice us. And his ability to produce joy and peace depends on the skill with which he fabulates . . . . Of all narrative forms, fabulation puts the highest premium on art and joy. (2-3)

Hawthorne, indeed, is a precursor to this group of modern fabulators. He, too, was writing romances, mingling the actual with the fantastic, sometimes chagrined at his inability to write the kind of realistic fiction popular at that time in England and Europe. According to Hyatt Waggoner, however, Hawthorne's creative sensibility was simply not suited to the writing of documentary realism. Waggoner argues that in spite of Hawthorne's keen abilities as an observer, "he seldom made any direct and extensive use of his observations in his best writing" (Hawthorne: A Critical Study 39). Hawthorne tells us very clearly in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* that he is not writing novels, preferring instead, as Waggoner explains, to distinguish between "fact" (which the novel deals with) and "truth" (which is the province of the romance) and to transform fact into symbol, that is into meaningful fact (37-8). Waggoner recognizes that Hawthorne is not travelling in "the main stream of the English novel," which had been "realistic in intention" from Defoe through Dickens. He states, "That this tradition of the 'novel,' with its aim at realism and social criticism . . . was
unsuited to Hawthorne's sensibility and purposes is too clear to need extended comment, and that despite Hawthorne's occasional wish that he might write like Trollope" (249).

Hawthorne's strong sense of isolation from the mainstream of his literary contemporaries, resulting from his inability to produce realism and his insistence on being a fabulator (or romancer, as he called himself), certainly differs in degree from that of twentieth-century fabulators, who do enjoy, at least, a larger community of like-minded writers and, thanks to Scholes, a legitimate name. Perhaps even more surprising than the failure of some nineteenth-century readers to appreciate fully what Hawthorne was doing is the fact that most twentieth-century critics also fail to recognize Hawthorne as a highly successful fabulator.

Steven G. Kellman in The Self-Begetting Novel does no more than mention Hawthorne's influence on Henry James in his use of art to reflect art, referring to The Marble Faun, The Scarlet Letter, "The Birth-mark," and "Rappaccini's Daughter" (104-5). Scholes mentions Hawthorne on one page of Fabulation and Metafiction, agreeing with Borges' assessment and apparent dismissal of Hawthorne's allegories as "mere moral fables" that "reduce the complex to the simple" and "substitute a concept for an image," thus moving "away from the possibility of truth" (11). This evaluation of Hawthorne's use of allegory denies him a place among modern metafiction writers, whose epistemologies generally
lead them to see the world in ambiguous terms. Michael Boyd, in *The Reflexive Novel*, also omits Hawthorne from the list of writers who practiced a fabulative form of fiction. He attempts to correct the assumption that reflexivity is a "postmodern avant-garde development in fiction" by pointing to the long tradition of fiction about fiction, going back to *Don Quixote* and *Tristram Shandy*, a tradition "that is largely submerged during the nineteenth century's infatuation with naive realism but that appears in some of the works of the modern masters" (44).

Scholes, Kellman, and Boyd often use the terms "metafiction," "self-begetting," and "reflexive" almost interchangeably. In addition, Kellman quite appropriately connects the definition of the self-begetting novel to John Sturrock's general definition of the *nouveau roman* in his *The French New Novel* (1969): "... the property common to all *nouveaux romans* is that they embody the creative activity of the novelist—*they display the novelist at work*" (69). Certainly, most of Hawthorne's works are right at home with such a description, for we seldom fail to catch a glimpse of Hawthorne's shadow as we reflect on his works.

Despite Hawthorne's international reputation as one of America's first great romancers and the continuing high degree of critical interest in his work, he has somehow eluded the notice of genre critics who have discussed the *nouveau roman*, the reflexive novel, and metafiction as
romance or who have looked for roots of metafiction in the
tradition of American literature. Ironically, Hawthorne,
who often felt that his fiction-making was not appreciated
during the nineteenth century, continues to be ignored or
misunderstood by those very critics for whom he ought to
have an outstanding reputation as a primary precursor to
that now prominent group of postmodernist writers we often
refer to as romancers, fabulators, or practioners of
metafiction.

In various ways and to differing degrees almost all
critics of Hawthorne have recognized his use of self-
reflexivity, his creation of art reflecting on art, and his
conscious relationship with the reader, all of which are
characteristics of postmodern metafiction. None, however,
has made extensive connections of Hawthorne's work to the
modern experimental novel or to postmodern writers of
metafiction such as John Barth, Philip Roth, E. L. Doctorow,
John Updike, Robert Coover, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and
Thomas Pynchon. Michael Boyd states that artists who wish
to address themselves to the processes of artistic creation
or to the relationship between art and life may do so
discursively, as Wallace Stevens does in The Necessary
Angel, or directly as Stevens does in his poetry, which
dissolves the distinctions between critical and imaginative
modes of discourse. These modern writers face a dilemma as
they find their art in conflict with the modernist
imperative to remove the storyteller from the tale. Many of them, then, choose to make their self-consciousness an integral part of their fiction (15). The French novel from Proust to Beckett has moved progressively in this direction, as both Kellman and Boyd have thoroughly demonstrated. Hawthorne, too, went against the injunction of the realist movement in literature by interposing himself into the tale, speaking to his readers, and even asking the readers, sometimes, to create their own versions of the story. Modern writers of reflexive novels are primarily interested in the conflict between art and life, according to Boyd, and their novels are distinguished by their exposing the conflict and allowing the process of making a novel out of a given fictive situation to overshadow the situation itself.

I argue in this dissertation that a major theme, if not the major theme, of Hawthorne's art is his exploration of the relationship of art and life. This theme is present in many of his tales; furthermore, his preoccupation with it progresses over the course of his writing of the novels. Perhaps the tension he experienced between his desire to be an artist, not just a popular writer, and his nagging conviction that he should be an active, successful man of the world stimulated a more self-conscious attitude toward his work. For whatever reasons, Hawthorne persisted in his fascination with the artistic process and its ambiguous relationship to life, and his novels reveal an increasing
intensity of art reflecting on art. Possibly many of the criticisms of Hawthorne's novels could at least be ameliorated, if not entirely forgiven, if we look at them from this twentieth-century perspective.

Most Hawthorne critics believe that his greatest novel is *The Scarlet Letter*. They argue that his art falls off after this first nearly perfect work. *The House of the Seven Gables, The Blithedale Romance,* and *The Marble Faun* are often seen as structurally flawed or deficient. In fact, Hawthorne's increasing focus on the artist and the use of art to reflect on art has caused many critics to view his later novels, in particular *The Marble Faun*, as near failures. Perhaps these critics have imposed the tenets of realism onto these romances, when to read them according to Hawthorne's own statements about his art would possibly keep us on the curved and winding way of understanding what game this master fabulator is playing. As he states in "The Custom-House" preface, his greatest problem is to provide "a neutral ground where the Actual and the Imaginary might meet." Certainly, the tension of maintaining an equilibrium between the real and the fictitious would, of necessity, cause a writer to be highly self-conscious in the crafting of his art. Moreover, his statement clearly reveals that Hawthorne is aware of his experimentation with the possibilities and limitations of fiction-making. Obviously, Hawthorne's major concern as an artist is not the
depicting of surface realities, for he knew, as did Samuel Taylor Coleridge and as Wallace Stevens would declare later, that the realities we perceive are primarily those we produce ourselves by the shaping power of the creative imagination. This marriage of the imaginary or fictive act with the experience of the quotidian not only provided the base for Hawthorne's technique but also the subject he would explore with growing interest and intensity.

Like many twentieth-century fabulators, Hawthorne experimented with the romance, attempting to demonstrate the failure of positivistic realism. Indeed, Scholes could easily be describing Hawthorne's experimental romance rather than the experimentalism of modern writers as he defines their impulse to move away from "the positivistic basis for traditional realism" and their sense that "a whole new set of fictional skills" would be required if reality could be caught, if at all (4). Hawthorne and the modern fabulators turned backward to the fable as the form best suited to their purposes; however, these fabulators leave the story open-ended. Scholes contends that "modern fabulation grows out of an attitude that may be called 'fallibilism' [as Charles Saunders Pierce tagged his belief that we can never reach certitude nor exactitude]" (58) and that "modern fabulation accepts, even emphasizes, its fallibilism, its inability to reach all the way to the real. . . . It aims at telling such truths as fiction may legitimately tell in
ways which are appropriately fictional" (8). Certainly, Hawthorne's art reflects these characteristics.

Even though some readers of his romances criticize them for lacking structure, particularly in his handling of the endings in some works, Hawthorne so strongly believed in the essential unity of his works that he refused to publish them serially. He wrote to R. W. Griswold, one of his editors, that in all his romances "there is one idea running through them like an iron rod, and to which all other ideas referred and subordinate; and this circumstance gives the narrative a character of monotony; which, possibly, may strengthen the impression which it makes, if read off at once" (XVI 518). This statement implies that the role of the reader is a significant one, demanding a reader capable of imaginatively "mating" with the writer, as Scholes says we must if we are to understand a work (27).

Although Hawthorne was always aware of his readers, whom he both addresses and describes in many prefaces and in a large number of his works, he never describes them in terms of readers of popular fiction but as a small circle of friends willing to read his book of stories "in the clear, brown, twilight atmosphere in which it was written." He tells us in the preface to the 1851 edition of *Twice-Told Tales* that "Every sentence, so far as it embodies thought or sensibility, may be understood and felt by anybody, who will give himself the trouble to read it, and will take up the
book in a proper mood," which means that readers of
Hawthorne must be of a meditative temperament, interested in
ideas, and willing to engage their imaginations to fill in
those dimly-lighted gaps left, perhaps, deliberately by the
author. Hawthorne believed that readers who "chanced to
like them [the stories], were apt to conceive the sort of
kindness for the book, which a person naturally feels for a
discovery of his own" (IX 5, 6, 7).

Hawthorne's relationship to his readers is further
emphasized as he describes how they extended this same
"kindly feeling" toward "the Author" and came to regard him
as a "mild, shy, gentle, melancholic, exceedingly sensitive,
and not very forcible man, hiding his blushes under an
assumed name, the quaintness of which was supposed, somehow
or other, to symbolize his personal and literary traits."
With a touch of humor, he reveals his playful, reciprocal,
and highly self-conscious relationship with his readers when
he allows that "He [the Author] is by no means certain, that
some of his subsequent productions have not been influenced
and modified by a natural desire to fill up so amiable an
outline, and so act in consonance with the character
assigned to him; nor, even now, could he forfeit it without
a few tears of tender sensibility" (7). This reciprocity of
writer and reader in the act of creating not only each other
but also the work of fiction itself is further seen in
Hawthorne's frequent invitations to his readers to imagine
their own versions of the story even while he tells it to them, as he does, for example, in "Wakefield." Quite probably, the character Phoebe Pyncheon in The House of the Seven Gables represents Hawthorne's ideal reader as she completely merges both into the world Holgrave creates as writer/reader of Chapter XIII, his story of Alice Pyncheon, and into the world she creates as listener/reader/writer.

This invitation to the reader places Hawthorne indisputably on the playing field with reader response critics Jane Tompkins, Wolfgang Iser, Michael Steig, Stanley Fish, Umberto Eco, Richard Rorty, and Jonathan Culler. Iser believes that the aesthetic response should be analyzed "in terms of a dialectic relationship between text, reader, and their interaction" and that a literary work is not a documentary record of something that exists or has existed; rather, it is a "reformation of an already formulated reality, which brings into the world something that did not exist before" (The Act of Reading X). Steig's aesthetic response theory involves the text, the reader, the author's life, and the life of the reader (Stories of Reading XIV-XV). Rorty and Fish begin with all of these factors and then just keep on infinitely factoring out the formula.\(^2\) Culler's hermeneutical semiosis, however, may best represent the kind of fictional vision Hawthorne illuminates in his works. In his essay "In Defense of Overinterpretation," Culler takes a position between Eco's concern about
overinterpretation of a text and that of Rorty and Fish, who believe that texts are just to be used. Culler argues for the validity of deconstructing a text, saying that both Eco and Rorty share one thing—"a desire to dismiss deconstruction" (120). He says that "Deconstruction . . . stresses that meaning is context bound—a function of relations within or between texts—but that context itself is boundless: there will always be new contextual possibilities that can be adduced, so that the one thing we cannot do is to set limits" (Interpretation and Overinterpretation 120-21). Hawthorne's fiction is a fiction that is in itself an act of deconstructing the text of the universe. Readers observe him in the act of reading/writing his story and are thereby instructed how to approach his re-created puzzle or riddle of the universe by becoming readers/writers along with him.

Reader response criticism (despite, or maybe because of, its many permutations) is illuminating in explaining particularly what happens to Phoebe and Holgrave and in increasing our general understanding of much of what Hawthorne is doing in his fiction. The hermeneutical spiral of time underlies most of Hawthorne's works; his seemingly weak endings read from this perspective make perfect sense, for Hawthorne clearly sees existence as open-ended—a hall of mirrors. In fact, it almost seems as if Hawthorne collaborated with these critics. At any rate, he was
certainly already playing the metafictional game of the self-reflexive author who is intensely aware of the act of creation—both his and his reader's.

In addition, Hawthorne's works reveal a close affinity to writers of the nouveau roman, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Butor, Andre Gide, and Alain Robbe-Grillet, who assert the importance of the reader's role in the creation of the novel. Sartre claims, "There is art only for and through another" (Situations 2:93). Kellman says of Butor's La Modification that with his use of the vous pronoun "We are thrust into the center-stage of the novel and are forced to assume full responsibility for what occurs" (51). Gide unflinchingly hands over the pen in the following statement from Le Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs: "Then my book completed, I draw the line and leave the responsibility of operation to the reader; addition, subtraction, do not matter much—I do not think it is up to me to do it. Too bad about the lazy reader; I want others" (116-17). Ilona Leki says that Robbe-Grillet's writing and the writing of the group that came to be known as the Nouveau Roman was "characterized by increased emphasis on generative structures, on writing characterized as extremely conscious manipulation of narrative forms" (17). She states further that Robbe-Grillet "wrote because he wanted to construct, to create forms. Along with this deepened insight into his own intentions came a sharper picture of
the role of his audience and readers. The reader was now more insistently than ever asked to participate in the creation of the fiction by actively working at perceiving the construction the reader himself was engaged in while reading" (16-17). Hawthorne's metafiction, too, requires an energetic, imaginative reader willing to enter into the artistic game of the fabulator, not depending on highly developed characters or intricate plot to provide pleasure. The entire novel may be one large metaphor that forces readers to do a little improvisational soft-shoe of their own.

Possibly most of Hawthorne's art can be understood as one large metaphor of his experience of life, as he constantly interpreted the meaning of his art in relationship to life, which explains the many artists, art forms, and art objects we find in his short tales and his romances. This subject was, in my view, the iron rod that shaped both his life and his art.

In this dissertation I demonstrate how Hawthorne practiced a form of experimental fabulation that anticipated many of the characteristics and concerns of the modern experimental novel and argue that his fiction warrants him a premier position as a precursor to postmodern writers of metafiction. Jorge Luis Borges, in an essay in Other Inquisitions, claims that Hawthorne's "Wakefield" prefigures Franz Kafka, while arguing that Kafka "modifies and refines
the reading of 'Wakefield.'" He quite accurately asserts that it is a mutual debt and that "a great writer creates his own precursors" (Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales 410).

Since Hawthorne's concern with fabulation appears to show both a deepening and a progression in his works, I begin with a chapter on the short stories and follow with a chapter on each of the major novels, proceeding chronologically: *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Blithedale Romance*, and *The Marble Faun*. Chapter seven concerns Hawthorne's last phase, in particular *The Elixer of Life Manuscripts* and its relation to the progression of his work as a whole. Chapter eight is an epilogue, placing Hawthorne in a relationship with some post-modern writers of metafiction.
Notes

1John Carlos Rowe discusses the role of the narrator and the involvement of the reader, in Through the Custom-House: Nineteenth Century American Fiction and Modern Theory, Chapter Three, "The Metaphysics of Imagination: Narrative Consciousness in Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance (52-90). Hyatt H. Waggoner says in Hawthorne: A Critical Study that much of Hawthorne's work is reflexive: "What we have to recognize is that in some sense the story is the meaning, and the meaning, the story" (75). In Hawthorne's romantic aesthetic "the artist is always peculiarly central" (30). Similarly, John Caldwell Stubbs, in The Pursuit of Form: A Study of Hawthorne and the Romance, says that "Hawthorne attempted to confront him [the reader] with the process of the artist self-consciously probing and ordering human experience. Through artifice, Hawthorne sought to make us conscious of the drama of the mind searching for meaning in fiction" (XIV).

2In his essay "The Pragmatist's Progress," Richard Rorty argues against Umberto Eco's view, in his essay "Overinterpreting Texts," that a text has "internal textual coherence" (65). Rorty does not see "any way to present the metaphor of a text's internal coherence . . . . A text just has whatever coherence it happened to acquire during the last role of the hermeneutical wheel" (97).
CHAPTER TWO

"A SELECT PARTY" FOR HAWTHORNE'S MASTER GENIUS:
THE CELEBRATION OF A NEW AMERICAN FICTION

The Soul selects her own Society—
Then—shuts the Door—
To her divine Majority—
Present no more—

(Emily Dickinson 303)

Hawthorne's practice of writing prefaces to his works is in itself a reflexive act, and his prefaces are especially reflexive because of their intensely personal nature. Not only does he draw our attention to the story or the novel, but also, and perhaps more importantly, he causes us to think about the personality of the storyteller and about the kind of fiction he is writing. Indeed, Hawthorne finds it imperative to "introduce" his readers to his theory of fiction, for what he begets is, in fact, a new form in literature, a fabulative form that accommodates Hawthorne's epistemology. In the preface to The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne tells the reader that he is mingling the "Marvellous" with the actual and that this form, which he calls a "romance," not a novel (which is concerned with facts), is best suited for telling the kinds of realities and truths he can know and tell. For Hawthorne, the imaginary is far more real and true than
surface realities and appearances, which explains his preference for the creative imagination or the fictive act as the superior instrument for determining human truths and realities. The very act of the crafting of his new fictional form, the romance, then, also becomes a major theme in his fictions, as he points directly to himself as an artist/character in his fictions, working out his theory of how art or the imagination works to shape the worlds we live in and our understandings of human truths. Obviously, Hawthorne is intensely aware that he is fathering both a new art and a new artist—himself. The natural next step for the artist, clearly, is to dramatize his essentially imaginative view of life. In so doing, he holds his mirror not up to the exterior world but to his fictive process, thereby reflecting himself in the actual process of creating himself.

On October 17, 1835, Hawthorne made the following journal entry: "To make one's own reflection in a mirror the subject of a story" (VIII 15). He does, of course, develop this idea into "Monsieur du Miroir," but this story represents only the germination stage of what would become a fully developed gestation of Hawthorne's self-begetting fiction. The very next day he recorded a similar idea in his journal:

A person to be writing a tale, and to find that it shapes itself against his intentions; that the
characters act otherwise than he thought; that unforeseen events occur; and a catastrophe comes which he strives in vain to avert. It might shadow forth his own fate,—he having made himself one of the personages (VIII 16).

Here is an idea that comes to fruition in The Blithedale Romance, but this romance is not by any means the only work in which Hawthorne writes self-reflexively about the creative activity of the artist. At the outset of Hawthorne's career, then, he is already concerned with the interblending of the actual and the imaginary and how fiction can beget both itself and the artist who makes it. His practice of metafiction is evident in the majority of his early sketches and tales as he portrays himself in a highly self-conscious, self-reflexive stance. For example, he often creates an artist who creates artists within the story and often within a story within a story. Hawthorne's art begins, then, with a marked exploration of the meaning of fiction and the relationship of art to life, in particular, the relationship of the artist to his art as the primary theme that continues to shape his work throughout the course of his career.

Hawthorne's view of the self-begetting nature of the fictive process is clearly set forth in a letter he wrote to G. S. Hillard from Brook Farm: "An engagement to write a story must in its nature be conditional; because stories
grow like vegetables, and are not manufactured like a pine
table. My former stories have sprung up of their own
accord, not of a quiet life" (Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tale
302). His understanding that stories create themselves
becomes a central theme in all of his fiction.
Furthermore, stories not only shape and beget themselves,
they also shape and beget Hawthorne himself during the
fictional gestation. Thus, his many narrator/author
surrogates do, in fact, reflect Hawthorne himself—as he is
during the time of a particular fictive birth. Hawthorne's
multiple, diverse narrators reflect his affinity with
Hermes, appearing as messenger in many guises, and
underscore his experience of life as an interblending or
marriage of the fictive with the actual. For Hawthorne the
only reality is the "neutral territory," the impalpable
line between the exterior world and the interior world of
his novel. G. R. Thompson sees Hawthorne's use of various
narrators as primarily a matter of narrative technique
designed to undermine much of his Puritan background.
Thompson does not see these narrators as being
biographically linked to Hawthorne. If we read Hawthorne,
however, in the light of his twentieth-century fellow
metafictionists, we can see that, like them, he is
continuously begetting himself anew in ever-increasing and
varied forms.

One of Hawthorne's first published works, "Sights from
a Steeple" (1831), portrays the author as an artist positioned high on a steeple, somewhere between "heaven, far, far beyond" him and earth below. This description defines Hawthorne as artist and the form his art would take: at the beginning of "The Threefold Destiny," he says, "I have sometimes produced a singular and not unpleasing effect, so far as my own mind was concerned, by imagining a train of incidents, in which the spirit and mechanism of the faery legend should be combined with the characters and manners of familiar life" (IX 472). As he lolls on the steeple, much like Melville's Ishmael looking out from the topmast, he sees imaginatively "a slender foot and fairy limb" in the floating mass of clouds. But Hawthorne realizes that these bright dreams among the clouds eventually lead to "a deepened shade of nothingness," causing him to "shiver at that cold and solitary thought" (IX 191), so he turns his eyes downward to the earth. Significantly, Hawthorne is both above and at the center of the world he views, a god-like position from which he can view the sea in one direction and the cultivated fields, villages, and countryside in the remaining "three parts of the visible circle." The artist as observer, participant, and creator in his world is contained in this circular image; however, Hawthorne wishes to penetrate the inner world of the human heart. As the narrator says, "The most desirable mode of existence might be that of a
spiritualized Paul Pry, hovering invisible round man and woman, witnessing their deeds, searching into their hearts, borrowing brightness from their felicity, and shade from their sorrow, and retaining no emotion peculiar to himself" (192). Yet he realizes that he "can but guess" if he "would know the interior of brick walls, or the mystery of human bosoms" (192). Hawthorne's fabulative method of exploring the human heart is, of course, to blend earthly fact with imaginative fantasy as the best way to get at the abstract, unseen truths of the human condition.

Hawthorne illustrates his artistic concerns by writing tales that intrinsically treat the characteristics of his fiction, characteristics that identify his work as metafictional, fabulative, self-begetting, or reflexive. The tales of the 1830s set forth all the artistic themes that Hawthorne will explore and refine for the remainder of his career. For example, the interblending of fact and fiction, with fiction always supreme, is of primary concern in tales such as "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," "Little Annie's Ramble," "Graves and Goblins," "An Old Woman's Tale," "The Haunted Mind," "Young Goodman Brown," "Old News," "A Bell's Biography," "Fancy's Showcase," "Sylph Etheredge," and "Sunday at Home." Other tales reveal art as prophetic and/or self-begetting: the artist is capable of foreseeing the future because of what he sees in the past and present, as in "The Prophetic Pictures," "Edward
Randolph's Portrait," and "Wakefield." Still another group of tales portrays Hawthorne's artist quite obviously and self-consciously at work in the full arena of his task: "The Seven Vagabonds," "A Rill from the Town Pump," "The Devil in Manuscript," "Passages from a Relinquished Work," "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe," and "Fragments from the Journal of a Solitary Man." In this last group we meet the artist at work, the critic at work, and the reader at work. These three major groups, of course, overlap and blend into each other, but they do serve to demonstrate that Hawthorne was experimenting with various artistic techniques in order to express his view of the world and the relation of art to it. The tales mentioned above are not by any means the only ones concerned with Hawthorne's primary focus on the artistic process as a means for apprehending human truths, but they do give us, perhaps, more directly than some other tales, a portrait of Hawthorne as a young and then aging artist. The early tales are not to be dismissed as merely the solipsistic, juvenile, abortive attempts of a young man playing at being an artist, because these same concerns and characteristics mark the tales of the 1840s, such as "The Antique Ring," "The Birthmark," "The Hall of Fantasy," "A Book of Autographs," "The Artist of the Beautiful," "A Select Party," "Rappaccini's Daughter," "Drowne's Wooden Image," "P.'s Correspondence," and "Main-Street," culminating in

I do not include for lengthy discussion "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and "Young Goodman Brown" nor "The Birthmark" and "Rappaccini's Daughter," although all in various ways contain characteristics reflective of Hawthorne's artistic vision. These works have been thoroughly treated by many critics as Hawthorne's more important tales. Clearly, the first two demonstrate Hawthorne's fictional process of blending fantasy with the actual world to create new realities. The latter two are reflexive of the cold, observing scientist/artist. The artistic wizardry of Alymer and Rappaccini is used for evil purposes and symbolizes Hawthorne's belief that art can be used for wrongdoing as easily as for good. This theme is continued in various ways in the novels: evil wizards include Chillingworth and Dimmesdale; Marthew Maule, Holgrave's ancestor; Westervelt and Hollingsworth, in contrast to Hester, Holgrave, Coverdale, and Miriam.

Interblending Fact and Fiction

Among the first group of tales, we meet the narrator of "Sunday at Home," who extols the power of the imagination to create realities more truly real than actual events. As he sits at his window with the curtain drawn back, the actual scene below becomes a drama and he the
spectator, as if the world were a stage. In this sketch, Hawthorne shows us that the observer/reader of any scene must also become a writer, filling in what he cannot know. The story implies that what this hidden observer experiences is more fulfilling than what the churchgoers below experience inside the church. Those supposed participants in the actual event, in fact, receive less benefit from the external religious ritual than does the imagining outsider from his lofty vantage point, because they are only performing the motions without bringing their imaginations, and thereby their souls, to the worship.

The interblending of fact and fiction is also illustrated in "Little Annie's Ramble." As the narrator walks hand in hand with the innocent child, he allows himself to see the world anew through the imaginative eyes of the child. When they pass a toy shop, he muses to himself, "Though made of wood, a doll is a visionary and ethereal personage, endowed by a childish fancy with a peculiar life; . . . the chief inhabitant of that wild world with which children ape the real one" (IX 125). Then, in reciprocal fashion, he gives life to the doll, a fictional creation who can now see the real world as fictional: "A toy yourself, you look forth from your window upon many ladies that are also toys, though they walk and speak and upon a crowd in pursuit of toys, though they wear grave visages" (125). He says he will return to
the crowd a better person after his excursion into the fanciful world of childish imaginings. Hawthorne takes a Romantic view of the value of childish innocence and native feeling expressed in a peculiar life and wisdom arising from the child's peculiarly imaginative response to life.

"An Old Woman's Tale" and "A Bell's Biography" illustrate the interchangeable role of fiction becoming fact and fact becoming fiction. The old woman begins her tale by telling us that hers is a re-telling of the tale as she got it from one of the principals in the tale—a thrice-told tale. In this piece of metafiction, two young lovers fall asleep and have the same dream. They awake to discover that a shovel (which belongs to the old woman in the dream) is lying in front of them. They then use the shovel to unearth whatever (we are not told what) the woman in the dream failed to unearth. Similarly, the narrator of "A Bell's Biography" tells us he is writing the bell's history, a genre that is supposedly factual. The biographer says he is telling us the tales overheard or witnessed by the bell, an obvious contrivance or framed story by Hawthorne, removing the reader at least three times from the alleged event. By presenting history as fable, Hawthorne emphasizes the fictional nature of history, all "truths" are fictions. Sometimes we dream reality.³

This confluence of the imagined and the actual becomes
even more blurred in "Graves and Goblins" and "The Haunted Mind." The narrator of the first story is the ghost of a poet, who died young. This framed story, of course, concerns stories about the dead. The ghost narrator has visited a lonely mortal, an obscure writer, who often wrote down the "dreamy truths" the ghost inspired as he walked unseen beside him. The writer "mistakes them for fictions of a brain too prone to such" (XI 297). This happy ghost claims at the beginning of his tale that "all true and noble thoughts, and elevated imaginations, are but partly the offspring of the intellect, which seems to produce them" (289). In reality, "Sprites, that were poets once, and are now all poetry, hover round the dreaming bard, and become his inspiraton" (289). In this lighthearted tale, the sprites symbolize the superior role of the imagination or fancy in the creation of actual happenings; or put another way, our realities are determined primarily by our imaginings.

Michael Butor's use of vous in La Modification reflects Hawthorne's use of the second person in "The Haunted Mind." The narrator tells his story by using the second person in such a way that the reader cannot avoid being the "you" of the story and being drawn into the action as a participant. The narrator says that when you awake from slumber "so suddenly, you seem to have surprised the personages of your dream in full convocation round your bed" (IX 304). Caught
in suspended time, you experience the dream as possessing more reality than the physical surroundings. Hawthorne writes of this half slumber, "when the mind has a passive sensibility, but no active strength; when the imagination is a mirror, imparting vividness to all ideas, without the power of selecting or controlling them; then pray that your griefs may slumber" (306). He says, "By a desperate effort, you start upright, breaking from a sort of conscious sleep, and gazing wildly round the bed, as if the fiends were any where but in your haunted mind" (307). The imagination does not, however, produce only frightening images, for now you can use your imagination to create a dream companion in bed with you, your ideal love, whose presence dispels the nightmare. Now you are able to "plunge farther into the wilderness of sleep." He calls it "the knell of a temporary death," as the spirit "strays like a free citizen, among the people of a shadowy world, beholding strange sights, yet without wonder or dismay" (309). Clearly, in this story, Hawthorne creates for you the reader an opportunity (although it be a fictional one) to experience the reality of the imaginary.

The same idea of the interpenetration of the actual and the imagined is demonstrated in "P.'s Correspondence." The narrator speaks directly to the reader about his friend P., who has been confined at some point in an asylum for the deranged and who has corresponded with the narrator for
the duration. The narrator now tells us that at some future time he might publish P.'s letters because "P. had always a hankering after literary reputation, and has made more than one unsuccessful effort to achieve it" (X 362). Of course, in the story the narrator tells, he is already publishing one of the letters, which comprises the story we read. He says of P., "It would not be a little odd, if, after missing his object while seeking it by the light of reason, he should prove to have stumbled upon it in his misty excursions beyond the limits of sanity" (362). In this highly reflexive story, Hawthorne creates a narrator who tells the story of a surrogate Hawthorne, for P.'s description fits Hawthorne and the function of the imagination in the shaping of his fiction and his experience of life itself. The narrator has a rather pathetic view of P., but the reader must look at the structure of the whole piece in order to come to the reading of P. as a sympathetic character, one who sees much more clearly and fully than his friend, who may only be standing in the wings, waiting to use P.'s letters for his own literary advantage. The narrator says of P. in the first few lines: "My unfortunate friend P. has lost the thread of his life, by the interposition of long intervals of partially disordered reason. The past and the present are jumbled together in his mind" (361). He blames P.'s disease on the "involuntary sport of his imagination," and
says that P. beholds "these spectral scenes and characters with no less distinctness than a play upon the stage, and with somewhat more of illusive credence" (361). The narrator makes an accurate observation; however, he fails completely to read correctly the importance of the inextricable relationship between P.'s imagination and the external world in the shaping of his reality and, consequently, his art. P. concludes in his letter, "More and more I recognize that we dwell in a world of shadows; and, for my part, I hold it hardly worth the trouble to attempt a distinction between shadows in the mind, and shadows out of it. If there be any difference, the former are rather the more substantial" (367). P's statement is almost identical to one Hawthorne made in a letter to Sophia Peabody prior to their marriage.

Clara Pemberton in "The Antique Ring" also comes to the conclusion that the fictive act is superior to any physical object or event. In this story she commands her betrothed, Mr. Edward Caryl, a lawyer given "in his leisure in assisting the growth of American literature," to make up a story about the betrothal ring he has just given her. Edward is actually already published by Ticknor and Griswold and is in negotiation at present with Harpers about a collected volume of his "fugitive pieces in the Magazines, to be accompanied with a poem of some length, never before published" (XI 339). This story is another
reflexive portrayal of Hawthorne at work, creating his type of fiction, setting forth the requirements of his ideal reader, pointing to himself as artist, and illustrating the superiority of fiction over mere fact. Clara wants a simple prose story, no poetry, and she tells Edward that if he knows some actual facts about the history of the ring he may use them; however, she claims not "to be too scrupulous about facts" (338). Edward happens to have "the good fortune to possess himself of an available idea in a dream," and he connects this "with what he himself chanced to know of the ring's real history," to complete his task (340), obviously Hawthorne's preferred formula for fiction making. At this point in the story, we watch Edward begin to compose his narrative, which is then presented in the text as a tale within a tale, which he titles "The Legend." Edward then incorporates into his legend the story of the ring as the Earl of Essex tells it to the queen, who calls it a mere legend. Thus, Hawthorne's fabulation of a fabulation of a fabulation renders the importance of fact almost nil. When Edward reads his story to an audience Clara has convened for the occasion, he receives inane plaudits that Hawthorne would eschew: "Very pretty!--Beautiful!--How original!--How sweetly written!--What nature!--What imagination!--What power!--What pathos!--What exquisite humor!" (352). In contrast, Clara reacts honestly, showing her disappointment with the story's lack
of a clear moral, and wanting to know what thought he embodied in the ring. Edward answers with "a half-reproachful smile": "'You know that I can never separate the idea from the symbol in which it manifests itself'" (352). Consequently, in order to please Clara, he offers to "'suppose the Gem to be the human heart, and the Evil Spirit to be Falsehood'" and then begs her to let this explanation suffice. And Clara "kindly" responds that it shall suffice and declares: "'And believe me, whatever the world may say of the story, I prize it far above the diamond which enkindled your imagination!'" (352). Whether or not Clara really will esteem the story above the gem (and maybe only for sentimental reasons), we can never know. But the clear implication is that she spoke one side of Hawthorne's mind. Hawthorne says in this story that we must hear his stories as he, in effect, reads them to us. We must listen to what the story says to our imaginations if we are to understand what his fiction is about. We must speak Clara's words in earnest and prize the fictive process, as it was portrayed to us in this artistic creation, above mere factual accounting and popular fictional forms that end up with a neatly expounded moral.

Stanley Fish, in "Literature and the Reader: Affective Stylistics," says that "Coming to the point" is the goal of those who believe in content, in extractable meaning. Coming to the point fulfills a need that most literature
deliberately frustrates (if we open ourselves to it), the need to simplify and close. Coming to the point should be resisted" (89). As Fish argues and Hawthorne demonstrates, only fiction can describe the truth about the nature of reality, because reality is actually a fiction.

Self-Begetting and Prophesying

If the fictive process itself is at the heart of the first group of stories, the completed art object is the centerpiece of the second. Here supposedly finished art objects that have assumed "real" positions in the real world are revealed by Hawthorne as still going through a self-defining, self-begetting process, which either creates or merely reveals their prophetic powers. Increasingly, Hawthorne's art demonstrates how fiction becomes one with the realities of the external world in stories like "Edward Randolph's Portrait," "The Great Stone Face," "Drowne's Wooden Image," "The Prophetic Pictures," "Wakefield," "Feathertop," and "The Snow-Image," stories that illustrate the self-begetting nature of art and its prophetic powers.

In "Edward Randolph's Portrait," the narrator relates a story he has heard about the legendary portrait. In this re-telling of a legend, the facts do not primarily concern us or the narrator. A painting is the art object from which the life of this tale is derived, a prophetic tale, set in the former days of the province. The "reader" of
the painting is Alice Vane, the niece of the Lieutenant-Governor, a Tory, who wants to impose a tax, one which will, in fact, precipitate the Boston Massacre. Just returned from artistic studies in Europe, Alice is said to have miraculous restorative powers in her work with old paintings. She also has miraculous powers to see what the portrait is fortelling about the fate of her uncle; however, like most true seers, she is ignored, and her uncle signs the ill-fated paper she warns him against. Years later, when he dies a horrible death in Europe, he has come to bear the same visage as Edward Randolph.

Similarly, the Great Stone Face prophecy claims that someday a special person will come to the small, rural valley and bring in an era of prosperity and fame, which all of the inhabitants will enjoy. This person will reflect the identical visage of the Great Stone Face. All manner of accomplished men of the world arrive from time to time over the years, and the people initially proclaim each to be the fulfillment of the prophecy, always to be disappointed. Eventually, a poet comes to the valley and seeks out Ernest, who has lived quietly all along in the valley, unrecognized by his fellows as the very embodiment of the Great Stone Face. Ernest, of a poetic turn of mind, has read and meditated for years over the poems of this particular writer, all the time taking on more and more the characteristics of the face on the mountain. Perhaps the
poems are creating, or are having the effect of fulfilling, the prophecy in the person of Ernest as he meditates on them over the years. The artist is actually calling into being both his subject and ideal reader simultaneously, for they appear to be identical in this story.

When the poet finds Ernest, they talk of the poet's works and achieve a consummation of both the prophecy and the poet's work, for the poet recognizes Ernest as the Great Stone Face, representative of his subject—the ideal truth, and Ernest completes the poet's work by being the sympathetic reader. The narrator says that the Creator had bestowed upon the poet, or man of genius, who "had come down from heaven with wonderful endowments," the "last, best touch to his own handiwork." Indeed, the role of this artist is so great that the narrator tells us, "Creation was not finished till the poet came to interpret, and so complete it" (43). Therefore, the poet is the only person with the ability to prophesy or create "an image of the Divine," and then to recognize the fulfillment when he sees it. In fact, the narrator says, "the sympathies of these two men instructed them with a profounder sense than either could have attained alone" (45). Hawthorne here is describing the relationship that must exist between writer and reader for any procreative act to occur, as propounded today by reader response critics. In this story, in fact, the artist prophesies into being a reader embodying all his
aesthetic beliefs and subject matter. Hawthorne always wrote for a particular kind of reader, one described in his prefaces, one who fits the description of Ernest. Surely, the name of this fictional creation prophesies one characteristic in the nature of Hawthorne's ideal reader. And, surely, we recognize ourselves and each other as part of that esteemed ecclesia, just as Ernest does, as we read Hawthorne, the artist/creator.

In "Drowne's Wooden Image," Hawthorne prophecies himself into being as a self-begetting artist. Hawthorne slowly creates himself in the story in much the same way that Drowne carves the figure-head for a ship the Cynosure. While Drowne chisels a beautiful woman out of the block of wood, Hawthorne creates himself as creator of a beautiful story. As the ship's name implies, this art should be of such stunning brillance that all eyes should turn toward it for guidance and direction. As Drowne labors in the creation of this beautiful woman, bringing the human emotion of love to his great technical skill as an artisan, he is visited by Copley, the celebrated Boston painter, whom Hawthorne has fictionalized from the actual portraitist John Singleton Copley. This fictional artist recognizes the almost life-like appearance of the figure, excepting the omission of one other touch. When Drowne answers him with a sensitivity that acknowledges the truth of the painter's observation, Copley grasps the carver
fervently and tells Drowne that he is "'a man of genius!'" (X 311). Copley's recognition of Drowne's artistic calling, signified by his symbolic laying on of hands to embue Drowne with supernatural power, once more exemplifies Hawthorne's view of himself and his art in terms of a Messiah figure ushering in a new law of fiction. This law of fiction will be more concerned with the spirit of creation than with the mimesis of realism. Leaving the shop, Copley glances backward and catches a glimpse of Drowne as he clasps the figure to his heart, a very graphic depiction or image of Hawthorne, the artist, as he engenders life into his fiction by the mating of the imaginative fire of his inner being with the raw materials of the exterior world. "'Strange enough,'" says Copley, "'Who would have looked for a modern Pygmalion in the person of a Yankee mechanic!'" (X 312).

Copley visits the shop daily, enchanted by this "very spirit of genius" that enables Drowne to "transcend all rules" of art and makes Copley "ashamed of quoting them" (313). The whole town becomes aware of the miracle being wrought in Drowne's shop and the remarkable likeness to a real, breathing human being this image possesses. On the morning Captain Hunnewell arrives to claim his figure-head, he emerges from the shop with a living woman of incredible beauty and so identical to Drowne's image, the crowd outside believes it is, in fact, the image come to life.
Some think Drowne has sold himself to the devil. Smiling intelligently, Copley says to Drowne, "'What painter or statuary ever had such a subject! No wonder that she inspired a genius into you, and first created the artist who afterwards created her image!'" (318-19). Hawthorne illustrates in this outer, surface story, which is his cynosure, the creation of an art that requires a reader, a type of Copley, one who is cognizant of and sensitive to the making of an artistic structure that blends the ideal with the actual to create a new life, a Pygmalion.

Among the short stories "The Prophetic Pictures," perhaps, best explores the prophetic nature of Hawthorne's aesthetics. Another highly reflexive work, the story begins with Walter Ludlow exclaiming, "'But this painter!'" A description follows of an artist accomplished not only in the skill of painting, but also a man of science, "a true cosmopolite"; however, his most astounding attribute is his reputed ability "to paint not merely a man's features, but his mind and heart" (IX 167). In this story, Hawthorne's artist does not call into being the events that will ensue after he paints the portraits of Elinor and her betrothed, Walter. Rather his artist's sensitivity allows him to see into the future relationship of these two lovers, prophetically implied in the portraits by the subtle betrayal of the expressions on their faces. In fact, so sure is the painter of future events that he sketches a
scene that will come to pass in the marriage of Elinor and Walter and which we and the painter will witness occurring at the end of this outer story. Thus, time folds in on itself in this prophetic sketch of his subjects. Elinor and Walter first see the painter as he enters his studio: "by the picturesque, though careless arrangement of his rich dress, and, perhaps, because his soul dwelt always among painted shapes, he looked somewhat like a portrait himself" (171). The ease with which the artist moves back and forth from art to life, with scarcely a perceptible barrier, emphasizes the essential oneness this artist experiences with his creation: art and life beget each other.

The painter's suggestion of posing both lovers in the same painting is not acceptable because of the limited space for hanging a large work in their new home, so he proceeds to create two separate works. However, he conceives of the two as one painting, working first on one and then the other as the two figures in the paintings regard each other, because in his "mystical language" he says that "the faces threw light upon each other" (172). When Elinor and Walter view the final work, they both notice a change of expression on each face that does not seem true; however, when Walter turns to Elinor, he sees on her face the same expression she wears in the portrait, one of sadness, grief, and terror. He, on the contrary, cannot
see anything in his portrait other than an improvement, a "'livelier expression than yesterday'" (175). Elinor turns to the sympathetic painter, who shows her his prophetic sketch of the tragic future event and tells her that he could change the portraits, but she refuses to let him. Elinor is a better reader than Walter; she accepts the truth of art.

Other readers of the likenesses visit the couple's home and comment frankly on the portraits when the couple is absent from the room. These commentators, in reflecting Hawthorne's awareness of the widely varied possible responses to works of fiction, can be seen as representing categories of readers about which Hawthorne had strong feelings. One group, the travelled gentlemen, professing to be knowledgeable in these matters, "reckoned these among the most admirable specimens of modern portraiture."

Undoubtedly these readers are the dilettantes. A second group (never a favorite audience for Hawthorne) represents the mass of readers who believe in artistic realism and can see nothing more or better in the paintings than their great verisimilitude. A third group, "people of natural sensibility," are presented in a more sympathetic light. Indeed, Hawthorne here reflects or prophesies his own reactions to much of the art he viewed at the Manchester Exhibit of Art in 1857. The pictures "wrought their strongest effect" on these readers, who gazed carelessly at
first, but returned "day after day" to study "these painted faces like the pages of a mystic volume." This group of critics would dispute "as to the expression which the painter had intended to throw upon the features [of Walter]; all agreeing that there was a look of earnest import, though no two explained it alike" (176-77). But Hawthorne's ideal reader, "a certain fanciful person" announced one day, "after much careful scrutiny," that "both these pictures were parts of one design" (177). He epitomizes the kind of reader who can look at the parts of a work, its structure, its process, and come to an understanding of what the artist intended, the kind of reader required of Hawthorne and his more modern fellow writers of metafiction. These readers can fill in the gaps of the surface structure by bringing their imaginative faculties to meditate deeply upon the fictional object, not being satisfied with superficial readings of a work.

After a while, people notice that the couple has, indeed, acquired the identical expressions of the portraits, and Elinor sadly covers the portraits from view, possibly in denial of the prophetic truth of the paintings, but more likely in acceptance of its fulfillment. The artist, meanwhile, has taken a trip into the beauties of nature, where he receives his inspiration. In a worshipful apostrophe to his talent, he exclaims, "'Oh, glorious Art! . . . Thou art the image of the Creator's own!'" (179).
Recognizing his essential insulation from human emotional attachment in order to be a prophetic artist and having achieved his greatest creation in these paintings, he returns to the couple's home and knocks on the door: "'The Portraits! Are they within?' enquired he of the domestic; then recollecting himself—'your master and mistress! Are they at home?'" (180). He has merged his art and the objects of his art into one reality, but significantly asking first about the portraits. He enters their parlor just as Walter is about to stab Elinor, fulfilling the prophetic sketch; however, the artist steps into the sketch of his own making and changes the outcome of the prophecy. Consequently, we can read between the gaps in this story, reflected in and by the overtly described artistic process, and realize that Hawthorne is stepping into the story in the guise of his surrogate artist to remind us that he is the regulator of this fictional destiny: "He stood like a magician, controlling the phantoms which he had evoked" (182).

In "Wakefield," the transparent line between the imaginary life and the actual one disappears, for this story illustrates how we do, in fact, beget our lives by the powers of the imagination, even those of us who may not seem to be very imaginative, like Wakefield. Wakefield tells his wife one October evening that he is taking a stagecoach trip and will be gone a few days. He does not
tell her where he is going, nor does his wife ask. Borges, as a reader of this story, expresses surprise that Wakefield "does not yet know what will happen." When this story is read, however, as an analogy to Hawthorne's own imaginary journeys, none of Wakefield's actions should seem strange to us. Hawthorne, too, does not know where his fiction-making will take him, for he knows that a story will "shape itself against his intentions; that characters act otherwise than he thought; that a catastrophe comes which he [the storyteller] strives in vain to avert" (XIII 16).

As the irony of his name suggests, Wakefield, perhaps, has been a walking dead man, or maybe he has just been lying dormant in his field, awaiting his birth. At any rate, Wakefield contrived to effect his death because he wanted to be born again into a new existence, so in essence by removing himself from his life in order to observe what it might be without him in the picture, he achieves a kind of negative prophetic creation of himself. And as he observes his own twenty-year wake, he prolifically makes up even more versions of his life, until one day he decides to beget his old life again and walk into his home as if he had never left. Of course, most of us dream all manner of lives for ourselves much of the time. But most of us rarely act out these sometimes wild variations of our lives, at least not to the point of escaping our everyday
surface existences as does Wakefield—and certainly not for twenty years. Hawthorne, however, encourages us to do essentially what Wakefield has done, that is, to reflect on the nature of life by distancing ourselves enough from the everyday "iron tissue of necessity" (IX 136-7) to observe ourselves in the act of our self-creating. For Wakefield, this act is a necessity, as it is for Hawthorne himself.

In this story, Hawthorne again reveals the artistic process, himself in the mask of a narrator, one who tells us right away that he is making up a story from an allegedly true newspaper account. Moreover, this narrator's fictional activities are mirrored by Wakefield's own imaginative self-creation, and both are surrogate artists for Hawthorne in this highly reflexive hall of mirrors. But equally important in the fabulation of this story is the role of the readers, whom Hawthorne invites to write their own versions of the story, or if they prefer, they may "ramble" with him through the "twenty years of Wakefield's vagary." Clearly, Hawthorne esteems the "meditation" above any simplistic moral; instead, he trusts that there will be "a pervading spirit and a moral, even should we fail to find them, done up neatly, and condensed into the final sentence" (131). Obviously, Hawthorne is not interested in writing merely a surface, realistic piece of fiction because he knows that to wear the "guise" of reality in a fiction is less true than to expose the facts
of fiction-making, which is the main concern of his works. Consequently, what life and truths we must look for in Hawthorne's art lie beneath the surface, as they do for Wakefield.

As readers, we must approach this fiction in the same spirit Mrs. Wakefield does in her "reading" of Wakefield's story. She, too, refuses to accept the surface story of her husband's disappearance. Knowing his penchant for game-playing and making up little secrets, she thinks sometimes when she is "writing" (as we do) various scenarios for him (He is in his coffin or in Heaven) that he is not dead and "doubts whether she is a widow" (133). Instead, she remembers her husband's "crafty smile" as he left home that day, looking backward into the partially opened door (already Wakefield has become a self-reflexive author). Therefore, when Wakefield decides to resurrect himself and pick up his life again, he can do so with the full expectation that his wife/reader, will be able to mate (in Robert Scholes's use of the term) with his fiction. Mrs. Wakefield understands all along (as Sophia Hawthorne surely did) that her husband moves back and forth through an invisible line between fact and fiction, actually a nonexistent plane. Hawthorne expects his readers, also, to be of the "imaginative faith," described in "A Select Party," and to be able to create their contrivances for moving through his fictional spaces.
In Hawthorne's autobiographical story "A Select Party," a Man of Fancy gives an entertainment at one of his "castles in the air" and invites various personages, such as the Oldest Inhabitant and Destiny. But the most important guest is the Man of Genius, who is, of course, none other than a fictionalized Hawthorne, prophesying himself into existence in this story:

a young man in poor attire, with no insignia of rank or acknowledged eminence, nor anything to distinguish him among the crowd except a high, white forehead, beneath which a pair of deep-set eyes were glowing with warm light. It was such a light as never illuminates the earth, save when a great heart burns as the household fire of a grand intellect. (X 65-66)

The narrator tells us that this Master Genius is the one "for whom our country is looking anxiously into the mist of time, as destined to fulfill the great mission of creating an American literature, hewing it, as it were, out of the unwrought granite of our intellectual quarries." Moreover, this great artist may very well mould his art in "a guise altogether new," which will be "our first great original work" and "shall do all that remains to be achieved for our glory among the nations." Just as Hawthorne believed he moved among most of his fellows unrecognized and unappreciated, so too the Man of Genius, appropriately
discovered by a Man of Fancy, "dwell as yet unhonored among men, unrecognized by those who have known him from his cradle," and "none pay reverence to the worker of immortality" (66).

Although the guests at this party are at least superior to their earthbound fellows who "mistook the castle in the air for a heap of sunset clouds" and who "lacked the imaginative faith" to be worthy to enter this castle, they do lack at first the insight to accept joyfully their literary messiah as they break bread together at the fabulous feast prepared by their fanciful host. After the guests are taken on a tour of rooms filled with the "original conceptions" of various famous sculptures and works of literature, they finally acknowledge the Man of Genius as the most worthy guest, and Posterity leads him to the "chair of state beneath the princely canopy" (71). The narrator begins the story by claiming that those who cannot see the castle in the air do not recognize "the truth, that the dominions which the spirit conquers for itself among unrealities, become a thousand times more real than the earth" on which those who are earthbound "stamp their feet, saying, 'This is solid and substantial!—this may be called a fact!'" (58). This statement is echoed by Fish's understanding of the writing and reading of a text: "What I am saying is that I would rather have an acknowledged and controlled
subjectivity than an objectivity which is finally an illusion" (87). In spite of the narrator's strong endorsement of imaginative faith, he ends the story with what seems at first glance a warning about taking trips to Nowhere unless you know how to get home again. The lighthearted tone, however, diffuses the cavalier statement that whether these fanciful guests "contrived to get back at all" is something that should "concern themselves, much more than the writer or the public" (73). The important word here is contrived, implying that it is really up to the person of imagination to create an ending, a way out of the fiction as well as a way in. Thus, in this fanciful tale, Hawthorne fictionalizes in a lighthearted manner both his very real desire to be the messiah of American letters and the kind of faithful reader who may well recognize him as such.

Hawthorne gives a fuller definition for his Man of Genius and the American art that he will mould in "a guise altogether new" in "The Artist of the Beautiful." Even though the surface of the story seems to conform to the tenets of realistic fiction, unlike the pure fantasy of "A Select Party," one intent of this work is to undermine literary realism. Hawthorne illustrates the weaknesses of realism, ironically, by turning these seemingly flesh and blood characters into symbols representative of the conflict between Hawthorne's fabulative form of fiction and
Significantly, Hawthorne's use of the word *guise* in "A Select Party" emphasizes the fact that art comes to us dressed in some sort of garb, that art is always a contrivance, never a documentary report of certainty as the realists would have it. This delightfully ambiguous *guise*, which is itself reflective of its own artistic function, gives us a clue to the nature of this original fiction that the Master Genius will create: like modern reflexive fiction, it is admittedly and self-consciously a fabrication. The meaning(s) of a piece of fiction must be discovered by the reader since they are necessarily hidden beneath the obvious exterior surface of the fiction—disguised in the structure of the whole fictional work.

In "The Artist of the Beautiful," Hawthorne's omniscient narrator presents a sympathetic portrayal of the artist of the beautiful, Owen Warland, another expression of the Master Genius, who, of course, is a surrogate for Hawthorne. As an apprentice, Owen practices fabulative watchmaking, much to the extreme vexation of his old pragmatic master, Peter Hovenden, and to the amusement of Hovenden's daughter Annie (whom Owen loves). Annie defends Owen when her father chastises him for experimenting with "his usual foolery to seek for the Perpetual Motion" by saying, and more astutely than she knows, that Owen is

"'inventing a new kind of timekeeper'" (X 447-48). Little
does Peter know that he is demeaning a way of perceiving time and space that future writers of metafiction proclaim superior to Peter's quite equally artificial method of marking time, although he believes his utilitarian philosophy is undeniably the truth. Accusing Owen of possessing an "irregular genius," Hovenden sings the praises of Robert Danforth, who depends "upon main strength and reality" to earn his bread "with the bare and brawny arm of a blacksmith" (449). None of these materialistic pragmatists appreciates what Owen creates, and eventually his living artifice dies by their hand.

In this story, Hawthorne demonstrates through Owen's transforming a pragmatic time-measuring device into a beautiful butterfly that we must gain a new insight into the mechanism of time and space if we are to experience the life of beauty created by the artist. Owen's getting lost in the wheels within the wheels of his watchmaking provides the moving image to describe Hawthorne's fabulative art, his delight in design and his knowledge that this kind of fiction transcends the quotidian. The wheels within a watch are limiting in that they artificially impose a "real" time on infinity; but Hawthorne would lift us out of the weight of earth's humanly determined time so we can experience with Owen's butterfly a world of beauty, spiritual freedom, possibility, and mystery.

But even if the Artist of the Beautiful never gains an
understanding audience, he cannot stop creating his art, as he comes to realize after offering his greatest achievement as a bridal gift to his beloved Annie, now married to the rough-hewn blacksmith. The butterfly is crushed in the hand of her infant son. When the butterfly tries to fly back into its creator's hand, Owen says, "'Not so, not so! . . . Thou hast gone forth out of thy master's heart, There is no return for thee!'' (475). The artist has been "big with the inspiration of an idea," just as the philosopher (467), and now his artistic offspring must either live or die, depending on the reception of its audience.

Hawthorne's readers must be aware of the internal or hidden movement in his works in order to understand his art. The internal mechanism of the watch and the hidden transformations of the larva inside its cocoon as it becomes a butterfly provide apt symbols for the nature of Hawthorne's art. As in Hemingway's iceberg theory of fiction, what actually gives dignity to the movement of the story is concealed from view, thus providing a plethora of possible interpretations and emphasizing the ambiguity of surface appearances. Hawthorne again conceals his real subject, which is the artistic process itself, by telling some other story. Further, these two images illuminate Hawthorne's Hermetic view of time and art: art effects transformations in the spiraling progression of time.
In "Feathertop" and "The Snow-Image," Hawthorne portrays his creative process and the necessity for a proper audience if his works are to take on life. In the form of two seemingly contradictory types of artists, Hawthorne portrays his sometimes dual attitude toward the artistic process. In "Feathertop," the artist is a witch, Mother Rigby, while the creators of The Snow-Image are innocent children. However, what the two types of artists have in common is their "imaginative faith." After all, even the devils believed in the messiah. What Hawthorne esteems most is the creative imagination, which he knows is truly a divine faculty in all of us, especially for the artist. Like God in the Garden of Eden, Mother Rigby and the children use earthly materials to construct their living fictions, yet they must breathe life into them by the power of their imaginations.

John W. Wright has pointed out many of the self-reflexive characteristics of "Feathertop" in his essay "A Feathertop Kit." Primarily, he discusses how the names reflect a metafictional structure for the story.6 Certainly, Mother Rigby's name denotes the act of rigging up a particular object out of unlikely materials, which, of course, emphasizes the act of contriving a reality. And her helper in witchcraft is Dickon, obviously the devil in the manuscript. Hawthorne exposes the fictional process in this story and affirms that the masquerade best describes
the reality of life, for most people are hard put to
distinguish the farce from the fact. Furthermore, the
artist/witch is no more guilty of falsehood than those
upright citizens in much of Hawthorne's work who disdain
the relevance of art as an instrument for perceiving
truths.

The mother in "The Snow-Image" symbolizes the kind of
reader who can mate imaginatively with Hawthorne's romance
fiction. She, like Mrs. Wakefield, can move easily through
that airy space that defines the line between fact and
fancy. Mrs. Lindsey, in many ways a surrogate for
Hawthorne, has enjoyed watching her two small
children/artists create their snow-image; in fact, "she
looked more at them than at the image" (XI 13), perhaps
because she delights so much in observing the creative
process itself, especially since the two artists are both
the offspring and reflection of her own imaginative nature.
Hawthorne, too, obviously enjoys creating self-reflexive
fiction because he finds observing the process of fiction-
making itself more compelling than the actual image or
story. When they complete their little snow girl, giving
her the kiss of life, the mother looks up from her sewing
and thinks she sees a newcomer to the neighborhood, for the
snow-image is running about in the yard with her children.
The children do not have to persuade her, however, of the
reality of this living artifice. But the life of this
creation is dissolved by the father, a pragmatic man "a dealer in hardware" (7), who refuses to believe the child is made of snow and insists on bringing her indoors to warm her frozen body. Perhaps, the father is the kind of reader who approaches a fiction in all kindness of heart, but his insistence on reading only the surface of a story from the critical stance of a realist prevents him from experiencing the real life of the story, one that requires a more imaginative viewpoint.

Reflecting the Artist

The highly reflexive tales in the third group of stories focus the spotlight on the storyteller. Pointing directly to himself as he becomes writer, director, stage manager, chorus, and often the major character in the work, Hawthorne focuses attention on the process of the fiction-making as it is happening. Moreover, we are instructed as observers/readers to become creators of the story along with the author. All these instructions distance us from mere plot and action, causing us to see the story as unfinished and to become aware of the necessity of completing its structure in our reading. Our job as readers, according to Robbe-Grillet, is to contemplate the fiction-making itself from a metafictional perspective.

In his lighthearted tale "A Rill From the Town-Pump," Hawthorne symbolizes the lofty calling of the artist in the
homey image of the Town-Pump. Mock epic in tone, the story presents the pump as artist in Shelleyan terms: it is the channel through which the source of life flows. Moreover, the water is as pure as that of Blake's "rural pen stained with water clear." The pump brings forth the clean water of nature, from a source far removed from the muddying water of corrupt monarchies or human institutions. In his Miles Gloriosus soliliquy, the pump brags that he is "the chief person of the municipality" (IX 141). And sounding like an animated Statue of Liberty, he claims:

I am seen at the busiest corner, just above the market, stretching out my arms, to rich and poor alike; and at night, I hold a lantern over my head, both to show where I am, and keep people out of the gutters. (142)

Launching into a milennial vision of a new world in which he and the milk cow will usher in Temperance, he chastises all Reformers and advises his defenders to cease their pugnacious tactics, for he is impervious to the world around him, as he draws on "that deep, calm well of purity, which may be called my soul." His purpose is to pour out his soul and "cool earth's fever, or cleanse its stains" (148). However, he does hope that the young Rachel will drink "SUCCESS TO THE TOWN-PUMP." Again Hawthorne uses the romantic image to describe the perfect reader. This Biblical allusion to the story of the marriage of Jacob and
Rachel can be read as symbolic of Hawthorne's desire to find the ideal audience, for whom and with whom he can procreate a new people and a new law of fiction. Clearly, Hawthorne does not believe art should serve as propaganda for ephemeral social reforms; rather, art best serves human needs when it can quench a spiritual thirst, as the messianic offspring of Jacob and Rachel earlier invited another woman at a well to do.

In "The Seven Vagabonds," Hawthorne's surrogate narrator identifies himself as an itinerant novelist or storyteller, who has happened upon a wagon puppet-show, which "consisted of a multitude of little people assembled on a minature stage," including "artisans of every kind" (IX 351). This "mimic world," itself full of artists, appeals to the narrator, whose metafictional perspective serves to intensify our metafictional stance as we regard the artistry of Hawthorne's story, a story about artistry. Thus art is reflecting on and being reflected by numerous other art forms, all of which elevate the artistic process to a supreme position. In fact, the god-like artist behind the whole fabricated world is symbolized by the old man, who with the turn of his hand calls a whole world of life and movement into being. The narrator's affinity with the puppeteer is expressed in his apology for artistic pursuits: "Indeed, I liked the spectacle, and was tickled with the old man's gravity as he presided at it, for I had
none of that foolish wisdom which reproves every occupation that is not useful in this world of vanities" (352). Furthermore, he claims that he possesses "more perfectly than most men" the faculty for throwing himself imaginatively into foreign situations (352). And for this storyteller, the ultimate justification for his occupation is that he will be connected to the "confederation," to the human brotherhood, as he joins this group on their way to the camp-meeting.

In "Main-Street" the narrator introduces a showman in the first sentence of his story and immediately hands over the narration to him, without the usual quotation marks that separate one narrative voice from another. Consequently, the two narrators appear to be the same person, retelling the story of a story previously given in a stage performance to a quite different audience than the one for whom he now writes. We are told the same story the first audience is told, but with the embellishments of the new story, which is about the telling of the story to the first audience and that audience's response to it. By writing from this metafictional stance, Hawthorne causes his readers to become conscious of his self-conscious artistry, as he calls attention both to himself in the act of creating and, also with equal importance, to the role his readers play in the whole process of fiction-making. Undoubtedly, this outer story is the real story Hawthorne
is writing, and we are the real audience.

The story-within-the-story is concerned with portraying in pictorial form "the march of time" as it might have passed on main-street. The author's pictures, however, offer skeletal suggestions rather than detailed realism, a fact which elicits complaints from an "acidulous-looking" critic in the audience. The showman justifies his art by arguing, "'Human art has its limits, and we must now and then ask a little aid from the spectator's imagination!'" (XI 52). Similarly, E. L. Doctorow says, "As a writer of fiction I could make the claim that a sentence spun from the imagination, i.e., a sentence composed as a lie, confers upon the writer a degree of perception or acuity or heightened awareness, but in any event some additional usefulness, that a sentence composed with the most strict reverence for fact does not" (Essays and Conversations 16). So Hawthorne's smug realist critic refuses to cooperate, proclaiming, "'I make it a point to see things precisely as they are!'" (52). Later in the presentation, this same critic interrupts, "'This is ridiculous! ... Here is a pasteboard figure, such as a child would cut out of a card, with a pair of very dull scissors!'" (56). The showman responds by telling the critic that he does not have "'the proper point of view'": "'You sit altogether too near to get the best effect of my pictorial exhibition. Pray, oblige me by removing to this
other bench; and, I venture to assure you, the proper light and shadow will transform the spectacle into quite another thing." Refusing to distance himself from the fiction, as Hawthorne requires of his readers, the critic reasserts that it is his "'business to see things just as they are'" (57). Another spectator enters into the criticism by pointing out an error in geneology. These two continue to interrupt the show; however, one young lady in the audience represents his ideal audience, in whose face he has "'watched the reflection of every changing scene'" (63). This fictional young woman would surely understand what Doctorow says about fiction:

Fiction is a not entirely rational means of discourse. It gives to the reader something more than information. Complex understandings, indirect, intuitive, and nonverbal, arise from the words of the story, and by a ritual transaction between reader and writer, instructive emotion is generated in the reader from the illusion of suffering an experience not his own. A novel is a printed circuit through which flows the force of a reader's own life" (16).

In Hawthorne's story the showman concludes by casting himself in a god-like role, having control over time:

"'Therefore, by my control over light and darkness, I cause the dusk, and then the starless night, to brood over the street'" (67). Finally, he alludes to his incomplete work-
-that he could call up the present as well as the future. But to have dispensed with the past is important, for now "mankind should be at liberty to enter on new paths, and guide themselves by other laws than heretofore; if, indeed, the race be not extinct, and it be worth our while to go on with the march of life, over the cold and desolate expanse that lies before us" (80). In this story, Hawthorne clearly puts himself in the spotlight, allowing us to watch him as he creates his new kind of fiction, as he answers the critics, as he rids himself of the past and its laws of fiction, and as he describes the type of reader he requires for an understanding of his artistry.

The chatty, self-reflexive narrator of "Alice Doane's Appeal" takes up almost three pages of text, introducing us to the tale he says he has previously published in The Token. This outer framed story serves to draw attention to the author himself, to previously published works, and to the audience of two young ladies he has persuaded to listen to the reading of his manuscript, having led them to the supposed scene of the murder described in his manuscript. We readers are distanced, in one sense, from the events of the story because we are now aware of the author's presence; yet, Hawthorne's narrator manages to involve us in the making of the stories, the story of Alice Doane that he reads to the women and the story we read about his reading to the women. This narrator intrudes constantly,
sometimes talking directly to us, his other audience, explaining what he is doing, how he is reading to the young ladies. Often he summarizes the inner story he tells to the women, obviously not the only--nor major--story being created in the work. The narration frequently telescopes from a detailed story into a skeletal plot and a description of how he wrote the story, all of which emphasizes the writer himself.

Moreover, a third story emerges as Leonard Doane, a character within the story of Alice that the narrator tells the women (and us), tells his story of his sister Alice to the wizard. The narrator interrupts Leonard's story, summarizes, and then allows Leonard to finish his narration. The narrator intrudes again to tell us how he "gazed into the faces" of his "two fair auditors," so that he could read their response to his reading. He is satisfied at this point because "Their bright eyes were fixed on" him (XI 275). Again, he telescopes the conclusion, saying that he "dare not give the remainder of the scene, except in a very brief epitome," telling us that the reader of the story "had been permitted to discover" that the wizard has been the machination behind the events of the story (277). Earlier the narrator has told the reader that the wizard could "fill in the gaps" of Leonard's story. And now the real readers and audience can also discover that the wizard, of course, represents
Hawthorne, the real artist behind this narrator and all of the "cunningly devised" stories in this outer story, which is, of course, the real story.

As the narrator finishes reading his story, he tells us that he is "a little piqued" because his two listeners laugh at the end of his tale. They probably do so out of nervousness, but he thinks they are ridiculing the reality of his story. Consequently, he determines to make a test "whether truth were more powerful than fiction" and proceeds to tell a story of Cotton Mather. He enkindles their imaginations, however, to such a pitch that they run away from the fearful images the author provokes. Hawthorne knows that it is impossible to separate truth from fiction. Again, Doctorow's view reinforces Hawthorne's: "I am thus led to the proposition that there is no fiction or nonfiction as we commonly understand the distinction: there is only narrative" (26).

Hawthorne defends his decision to become an artist in "Passages from a Relinquished Work." In this autobiographical fiction, he presents several passages that he has paradoxically not relinquished, for they are, in fact, published. Each of these passages can stand alone as a short tale within the larger work. The position of the narrator is extremely self-conscious as he reveals his rebellion against Parson Thumpcushion in the first sketch, "At Home," which actually describes his leaving home:
But my chief motives were discontent with home, and a bitter grudge against Parson Thumpcushion, who would rather have laid me in my father's tomb, than seen me either a novelist or an actor; two characters which I thus hit upon a method of uniting. After all, it was not half so foolish as if I had written romances, instead of reciting them. (X 408)

In this passage, an ironic Hawthorne deprecates his own art in the very act of defending it. Clearly, the narrator does not really believe that writing romances is foolish; rather, he paradoxically bestows significance on the creative act, even though the real artist may never be rewarded in any practical way with fame or money, a perennial literary thorn in Hawthorne's side.

The storyteller/narrator informs us that the following pages will draw a picture of his "vagrant life, intermixed with specimens . . . of that great mass of fiction to which I gave existence, and which has vanished like cloud-shapes." He further explains that he often rehearsed his stories whenever he could collect a little audience and that the indulgence of the flow of his fancy was its own reward. Then we are told that he will give us a sketch of the circumstances in which the story was told, thus framing his "air-drawn pictures" in realistic settings, which may be "more valuable than the pictures themselves" (408-9).

Indeed, this whole work is the story or framework of
Hawthorne's self-reflexive portrayal of himself in the act of begetting himself as artist and, as the narrator says, the frame of the story—or the exposed artist at work—is more valuable than the obvious tale of the storyteller.

The narrator ends the story with a reflexive reference to another of his (actually Hawthorne's) stories, "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe," telling of its great success on stage while disdaining fame as humbug. He says, "I manufactured a great variety of plots and skeletons of tales, and kept them ready for use, leaving the filling up to the inspiration of the moment" (416). In fact, every time he retells a story, he says that it varies from his preconceived idea. Furthermore, he always provides several beginnings and catastrophes, "a happy expedient, suggested by the double set of sleeves and trimmings, which diversified Sir Piercy Shafton's wardrobe"; however, he also claims that his "best efforts had a unity, a wholeness, and a separate character, that did not admit of this sort of mechanism" (417). Significantly, in this passage Hawthorne exposes the obvious contrivances of the artist as he makes his story. The artist practices sleight-of-hand, pulling out a multitude of deceptions from his double-visioned imagination. He admits to being a concocter of illusions. Consequently, we are forced to realize again that all events are truly fictional, for our perceptions of any reality, fictional or actual, are as
varied and as illusional as those of the artist. As readers of Hawthorne, then, we are called upon to fill in the gaps, pulling meanings out of our own fictional sleeves, for things are often not what they appear to be.

The narrator actually acknowledges his inability to accomplish what he has conceived, so reality, even the one the artist has seen and created imaginatively, always eludes complete expression. In fact, even as we create (along with the author) a particular fictional reality, the fiction-making itself overcomes us, pursuing its own course, creating itself as it goes. Therefore, Hawthorne portrays life and art as process. If the artistic purpose is to reflect the nature of life and the way we experience it and if our experience of life is largely created by our imaginings of it, what better image of Hawthorne's art than the artist at work in the unending procreative act? The only "fact" art can really capture is the ephemeral and illusive nature of the human condition.

In this same work, the narrator mentions the celebrated storyteller, who will appear that evening to recite his famous tale, "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe," which is "as yet an unfilled plot" (417-18). Moreover, he says that the storyteller never decides until he steps on the stage "whether Mr. Higginbotham should live or die" (418). Thus, the story we readers are told is the story of the creative process, which becomes the primary meaning of
the work we read, a meaning by no means trite or simplistic, for Hawthorne illustrates in his fiction a reality that is truer than a fiction based on a supposed reality. All stories, then, must be open-ended. If life and art are process, how can we ever come to a certain ending when the ending refuses to create itself? And how can we ever know for sure when a thing commences?

Hawthorne's story "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe," mentioned by the narrator of "Passages from a Relinquished Work," does, indeed, begin in a quite uncertain manner, and the multiple narrations within the narration further undermine any hope of attaining certainty as to what really happened (happens?) to Mr. Higginbotham. The narrator tells the story of a pedlar, Dominicus Pike, who hears of the death of Mr. Higginbotham from a fellow traveler and then proceeds to repeat the story everywhere he stops. Significantly, the story takes on a new life of its own as the pedlar of tales embellishes it for each new audience, until the story eventually requires thirty minutes for the telling. Adding to the confusion is the refutation of the pedlar's story by the elderly farmer, who claims to have drunk a glass of bitters with Mr. Higginbotham that very morning. Later, the story is further confused by the negro man, who affirms that the murder occurred but that "no colored" man was involved, as the pedlar has heard the story. Quite possibly, the negro man has heard the story
for the first time from the pedlar and simply adds his version in order to dispel any suspicion of himself as the alleged negro involved in the alleged murder. By the time the pedlar arrives at Parker's Falls, however, he does not "profess to relate" the story "on his own authority, or that of any one person," but only as "a report generally diffused" (IX 112). He has moved from relating a factual piece of news to telling a story quickly become legend.

The use of the word catastrophe in the title, of course, proves to be highly ironic. Its Greek roots denote an overturning or a disastrous conclusion, which is what the outer story of Mr. Higginbotham keeps on trying to accomplish. In Greek drama, the word describes the point following the conclusion or the denouement. The problem for us in this story, however, is that we cannot quite kill off Mr. Higginbotham. And without a deceased Mr. Higginbotham, we have a story that refuses to cease. Instead, the story continues to introduce conclusion after conclusion, leaving us unsure of what has really happened—if anything. Thus we find ourselves right back at the beginning of the begetting of this story, in true Joycean style. This story illustrates the validity of yet another assertion by E. L. Doctorow:

I think the beginnings and ends and moments are artificial constructs. It's possible to cut and slice history really any way you want to, so that something
is seen to be beginning or ending. That's probably why history belongs more to the novelists and the poets than it does to the social scientists. At least we admit that we lie" (67).

In two of his earliest stories, "The Devil in Manuscript" and "Fragments from the Journal of a Solitary Man," Hawthorne portrays himself as a defeated artist, one whose works are unrecognized; in fact, in these two stories Hawthorne sets up a narrator and his friend Oberon, both of whom are doubles for himself. In the first story the narrator tells of a visit to his friend whom he calls Oberon, "a name of fancy and friendship between him and me" (XI 171). Oberon is in a particularly despairing mood as he determines to burn his tales, for which he feels "a mixture of natural affection and natural disgust, like a father taking a deformed infant into his arms" (173). Oberon has died a young man, the narrator of "Fragments from the Journal of a Solitary Man" tells us, and he is attempting to carry out Oberon's wishes regarding the burning of his papers. However, he is uncertain about what he should do with the journal because Oberon dies in mid-sentence while giving instructions. Consequently, the narrator publishes portions of the journal, which we can now read, accompanied by the narrator's commentary on his friend's life and work. In the journal, we read of Oberon's dread of both death and old age, preferring to die
young than to grow old and lose his beauty and powers, which he already feels are waning. He regrets that he will die never having "discovered the real secret" of his powers and the "mighty treasure" within his reach because he never knew "how to seek for it" (XI 315). In "Devil in Manuscript," Oberon says of his tales as they burn in the fireplace, "'They blaze ... as if I had steeped them in the intensest spirit of genius'" (XI 176).

Clearly, Hawthorne demonstrates in these thinly veiled pictures of himself as artist that his whole life is defined by his calling to be an artist of intense genius. He is aware that his art is experimental and not likely to be competely understood. In these prophetic tales of himself (with the exception of his forecast of an unusually early death), we see the young Hawthorne uncannily forecasting the future of much of his work and of his increasing despair as an aging artist who continued to push into unknown regions of artistic forms of expression. For while The Scarlet Letter and The House of the Seven Gables have been well received, The Blithedale Romance and The Marble Faun have been generally regarded as lesser works, a waning of Hawthorne's powers. His fragments of the romance he was writing when he died have left many readers unsure of what to make of them. He does, indeed, die in mid-sentence. However, the embers from his burning tales did set the town on fire, just as he thinks they are gone
forever and he proclaims himself "a triumphant author" for having "startled thousands in fear and wonder from their beds!" (178). Indeed, Hawthorne is acknowledged as a major influence on modern writers, but just as he feared, he has not been recognized for the significant contributions he makes in his art to the new laws of literature he, himself, unceasingly demonstrates and proclaims in his short fiction. He, of course, does not give his new American fiction a name, but today it is not difficult to see that Hawthorne was writing the *nouveau roman* and works of metafiction long before Proust, Joyce, Beckett, Barth, and other modern and post-modern writers. It remains for this self-begetting literary messiah to startle most readers and writers of metafiction out of their beds in wonder at his fearful accomplishment. After all, in "Monsieur du Miroir," Hawthorne's surrogate narrator says to his double in the mirror: "'Farewell, Monsieur du Miroir! Of you, perhaps, as of many men, it may be doubted whether you are the wiser, though your whole business is REFLECTION'" (X 171).
Notes

'There are, of course, different views of Hawthorne's narrative technique. Jonathan Auerbach, in The Romance of Failure: First Person Fictions of Poe, Hawthorne, and James, says that Hawthorne is separate from his third person narrators, demonstrating a "willingness to keep himself out of his fiction" and that his first person narrators are kept "distinct from their author" (72). Further, Hawthorne's stories that "take art as their explicit subject, and thereby appear to afford the greatest opportunity for self-reflection, also manage to avoid the pitfalls of solipsism' (74). Michael Dunne, in "Varieties of Narrative Authority in Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales (1837)," does say that Hawthorne's tales focus on narrative strategies that begin in his early tales and preview narrative techniques that mature in The Marble Faun; however, Dunn states that these strategies "did not grow uninterruptedly toward a Jamesian sort of organic perspective or toward some metafictional sort of game-playing" (48). Arlin Turner, in Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography, notes that many of Hawthorne's early tales evolved a formula for "interweaving in fiction the homely and the fantastic to produce the desired 'garb of truth,'" and frequently "the reader takes a position beside the author to observe the narrator in the telling of his story, and to become, along with him, a critic and speculator on the methods and purposes of fiction" (55-56).
All references in the text are to the separate volumes in *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*.

For a full and excellent treatment of Hawthorne's use of dreams, see Rita K. Gollin's *Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Truth of Dreams*. Gollin says, "Through dreams and their threshold, reverie, he would enter interior life and encounter its demons in fiction, asserting that the adventure is crucial to human understanding" (1).

For a detailed discussion of Hawthorne's relationship to the visual arts see *Prophetic Pictures: Nathaniel Hawthorne's Knowledge and Uses of the Visual Arts* by Rita K. Gollin and John L. Idol, Jr.

In discussing "Wakefield," Borges relates Hawthorne to Pirandello and Andre Gide in regard to Hawthorne's "coincidence or confusion of the aesthetic plane and the common plane, of art and reality," calling Hawthorne's "momentary confluence of the imaginative world and the real world . . . modern." (From "Nathaniel Hawthorne," reprinted in *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, James McIntosh, ed., 408.) Sharon Cameron, in "The Self Outside Itself: 'Wakefield,'" sees Wakefield's journey as the attempt to be "other" to oneself, to "watch oneself from outside it": "Being 'other' to ourselves—as if dead to ourselves—we are simultaneously dead to those around us"; consequently, she sees Wakefield's story as a "tale of terror." (Reprinted in *Nathaniel*..."
Wright says that "Hawthorne insinuated himself into this tale as merely the teller of his 'version' of a legend he actually invented. It is left to the reader who may notice this ambiguity to ponder its strategy if any and perhaps to differentiate the authorial and narrative viewpoints." ("A Feathertop Kit" reprinted in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales, James McIntosh, ed., 440.)
CHAPTER THREE

HAWLTHORNE AND HESTER:

REFLECTIONS OF THE SELF-BEGETTING ARTIST

I rose--because He sank--
I thought it would be opposite--
But when his power dropped--
My Soul grew straight.

(Emily Dickinson 616)

Hawthorne's focus in The Scarlet Letter is unmistakably upon Hester Prynne, the heroine of his first and, by consensus, best long work of fiction. More important than seeing Hester as triumphant heroine, however, is to see her as the surrogate for Hawthorne in a work that is reflexive of the author as artist, beginning in "The Custom House" preface and continuing until the final scene.

Seeing Hester's artistry in the novel is nothing new, but viewing her as Hawthorne's surrogate artist illuminates the significance of Hawthorne's autobiographical relationship to Hester and of his choice of a female protagonist.

Since I am arguing for the self-begetting nature of this novel, his choice of a female to symbolize the kind of
artist he is seems particularly appropriate, for Hester not only begets herself through her artistry, but she also begets the incarnation of herself in Pearl, who, as many critics have noted, is the embodiment of Hawthorne's form of fiction. Hester, Hawthorne's reflection of himself as a self-begetting artist, is also an artist, who creates herself in the practice of her craft, the fulfillment of *scribo, ergo sum*. The offspring of both artists is a fabulative, highly reflexive form of art embodied in the child Pearl, who is, of course, a reflection of Hester as artist and twice-removed a reflection of Hawthorne, the real father of all three artists. Pearl, then, symbolizes the artist and the art, for she is not only the letter incarnate; she is also a self-begetting artist in her own right. In Pearl, Hawthorne achieves a seamless blending of form and content, the perfect mirror of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Steven G. Kellman says in *The Self-Begetting Novel* that one characteristic of this kind of novel is that it "projects the illusion of art creating itself" (3). If we read Hawthorne's novel as a symbol of the creative act (as the main action of the plot suggests), then, perhaps, without straining the highly symbolic nature of the work, we can read the letter A as primarily standing for Art or Artist. Consequently, we can read this novel as being about a novelist in the act of creating himself as a novelist
after a long career as a writer of short tales, the majority of which portray an artist reflexive of Hawthorne in the act of creating himself as an artist and demonstrating the kind of fiction he wants to create. The Scarlet Letter, then, is the offspring of Hawthorne's long gestation of his art. Indeed, he produced his "hell-fired" novel in a short six months that he describes as being at least as intense as the experience of giving birth to a child.

Kellman describes Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu as the culmination of the self-begeting novel, in which "we are at once confronted with both process and product, quest and goal, parent and child" (3). Certainly, The Scarlet Letter shares important characteristics with Proust's novel. Proust, like Hawthorne as artist, records his search for a vocation in A la recherche, the book that provides evidence that he has found his calling as a novelist. Kellman explains that "the nascent fiction gives life to the aging Marcel, who is in turn about to create it. Galatea and Pygmalion embrace." Similarly, in The Scarlet Letter, we see Hawthorne in "The Custom-House" preface draw attention to himself, in what he calls an autobiographical manner, as he describes how he rises from the dust of the Custom House to become a literary man once again after his dormant period of being Surveyor of the Custom House. The creating of this novel, then, marks the birth of Hawthorne as novelist.5
In "The Custom-House" preface, Hawthorne engages his readers from the outset in the creation of his novel, as self-begetting novels do. We are made aware of the process of the fiction and how we should read it, as we look at the author himself in the preliminary stages of both discovering his subject, the letter A, and his reading of the letter and its effects on him. All of these self-conscious actions focus the spotlight firmly on Hawthorne from the moment the Scarlet Letter baptizes him with the fire of an imagination that will speak in a tongue symbolic of his fiction, a fiction that in its very form is illusive of translation, a form that places Hawthorne firmly in the Hermetic tradition.

Significantly, Hawthorne does not receive his story in a clap of thunder on a mountain top, as a fixed text of great certitude, carved in stone. Instead, he discovers makings of the story in the upper room of the Custom House, as he rummages through the dusty records of former surveyors. And, like those first Christians who tarried in the upper room, waiting to be born of the spirit into the New Law, Hawthorne, like the believers at Pentecost, experiences a tongue of fire as it appears to him in the letter A. For Hawthorne, the Alpha signifies his new birth, a birth begotten by the fire of the creative imagination, as he is made in the image of the Creator. Certainly, Hawthorne has made reference in numerous of his tales to the relationship of the artist to the Creator, from whom he
receives unction to be the messiah of a new fiction, to create his own worlds as well as to interpret the world made by the Creator.

In telling us about the genesis of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne gives us old Surveyor Pue's version of Hester Prynne's story, which has been written down as Pue remembered it from the old men who were children themselves when Hester was an old woman and who got their versions from what they had heard from older people—a tale many times removed and always reflected through the somewhat unreliable memories of old people. The "truth" as we get it from Hawthorne is written down by a fallible human being. The Surveyor does not deal in supernaturally revealed truth; rather, he passes on accounts of Hester's story or "truth" as it has been handed down from one fallible human witness to another. Clearly, Hawthorne undermines at the outset of his novel any solid ground for certainty as it pertains to human life and truth. Hawthorne is a purveyor of human truths, which are inherently variable. But the important fact about Pue's manuscript is that the first part of the account describes Hester's Prynne's good works, the saintly person she is at the end of her life, obviously the most significant reading of Hester. The second part of his story gives what Hawthorne calls "the record of other doings and sufferings of this singular woman," which are clearly secondary in Pue's estimation (I 32). Hawthorne refers us
to his story "The Scarlet Letter" for this second part of Hester's story. Surely, Hawthorne has a reason for so directly explaining to his readers that he is, in effect, reversing the structure of the story as he finds it in what he claims is an authorized and authentic document. One reason may be that he wants to influence his readers from the beginning to reflect on Hester through the favorable eyes of Pue and past readers of Hester and her letter. Moreover, he is emphasizing the letter itself as the shaping force of Hester's life. The letter creates the effects in her life. Without the Scarlet Letter, Hester Prynne would not be Hester Prynne.

Moreover, Hawthorne desires us to see Hester in a good light because Hester is the fictional incarnation of Hawthorne as artist, an artist of the heart, one who creates life for herself, one who provides a crucial link in the "magnetic chain of humanity." Hester is the Alpha, not the Omega, because the fiction Hawthorne creates is open-ended. The Alpha is in the beginning, not the end. Hawthorne's art is human, though maybe divinely inspired; therefore, his art represents life and art as continually being begotten, always in flux. Fixed truths are highly incompatible with this kind of fiction, with Hawthorne's vision of the human condition. Therefore, the metafictional perspective Hawthorne immediately sets up in the story-within-a-story sequence emphasizes the fictional process itself and the
impossibility for humans ever to arrive at certitude. This process is at the same time reflective of Hawthorne's rebirth into his fiction-making, the fabulative, fallible form his fiction would take, and a mirror of the Hester Prynne story he then creates.

This story, The Scarlet Letter, is created with great subtlety and symbolism to portray Hawthorne's genesis as a highly original artist forging a new American fiction out of the "burning heat" of the red cloth. Hester, his surrogate in the novel he has created from the letter A, continues to beget the same form of fiction, as she, too, forges her art from the same burning letter, worn significantly on her heart, the focus of Hawthorne's art and the source of his personal morals. Both Hawthorne and Hester produce a Pearl of great price, for The Scarlet Letter is acknowledged by many readers as one of America's first important works of fiction, a fabulative romance that did what he hoped his fiction would do: "open an intercourse with the world," not only for Hawthorne, but also for a uniquely American literature.

As Hawthorne steps over the threshold of the Custom House to become "a citizen of somewhere else," he tells us that Salem has never provided him with "the genial atmosphere which a literary man requires, in order to ripen the best harvest of his mind." He then asserts that he "will do better amongst other faces" and playfully, yet
hopefully, adds that perhaps "the great-grandchildren of the present race may sometimes think kindly of the scribbler of bygone days, when the antiquary of days to come, among the sites memorable in the town's history, shall point the locality of "THE TOWN PUMP" (45). In this farewell to his Puritan heritage, Hawthorne clearly states his need to find another place more compatible to his view of the world and, more crucial to Hawthorne as artist, a place more supportive of a vocation not highly regarded by his ancestors or by his contemporary New England milieu. Hawthorne recognizes that the kind of artistic vision from which he must create his works inescapably calls into question the absolutes on which his society is based. Unable to write realistic stories suitable for the Godey's magazine, stories essentially affirmative of the American pursuit of materialistic happiness and righteousness, Hawthorne turns to the subject of the artist in conflict with society. In his highly symbolic art he is at once able to explore his relationship to a society unappreciative of his calling as artist and especially of his fabulative form of art, a form that by its very nature undermines the certitudes of his society. He, of course, has portrayed himself as this type of artist, in very thinly disguised ways, in almost all his short fiction, the body of work alluded to at the end of "The Custom-House" preface. Thus this short end to the preface serves as a prophecy for the direction Hawthorne's art will now turn, a
kind of manifesto for a freer artistic life. Significant, though, is Hawthorne's ever present hope of someday being acknowledged by his townspeople. His type of the good artist always desires to connect with the heart of humanity, even while understanding the necessity of sometimes having to disconnect from those conventions and traditions that restrict and enslave the human spirit. It is in this spirit that he steps over the threshold of the prison door in the, perhaps, more complex guise of Hester Prynne, his fictional surrogate, his symbol of the artist he himself is in the act of becoming in creating the narrative of *The Scarlet Letter*.

The novel opens within the historical setting of early colonial New England, dominated by Puritan law. Into this milieu, we watch as Hester, who is the embodiment of "the narrative," is "about to issue from the inauspicious portal" of the prison to begin a new life.8 We, as readers, are brought into the process of this tale just as Hester steps over the threshold, for the narrator immediately gives us a symbol by which we might understand this story. We are handed one of the flowers from the wild rose said to have "sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Anne Hutchinson, as she entered the prison-door," and we are told that hopefully it might "symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow" (48). Significantly, Hawthorne hands us a symbol of individual
freedom, a freedom found in nature. Apparently, then, we are expected to find this "sweet moral blossom" in nature, not in the human constructs of organized theology or government. Looking at the narrative, which is none other than Hester, from the perspective of a symbol that connotes ideas of natural freedom and natural love, the reader may, indeed, interpret the story as one of human frailty and sorrow, instead of the just suffering brought about by the wrath of Jehovah, God of the Puritans.

The underlying subject of The Scarlet Letter is the letter A itself. Reading the A in its primary role as the beginning letter of the alphabet, we quickly recognize that this novel is inextricably intertwined with the creative processes of language, the means by which all humans create themselves and their worlds and connect to the external world. For Hawthorne, connecting to "the magnetic chain of humanity" is crucial for human happiness; therefore, his artistry in words creates the vital link in satisfying his great desire to feel alive, to be a part of his external world. However, Hawthorne's artistic genius in its very nature has little affinity with the simple mirroring of the outer world; instead, he knows that everything we do is impossible to explain or depict in any kind of absolute terms. The mirror at best can only reflect a reversed semblance of reality. The largest portion of Hawthorne's works repeatedly demonstrate his belief that our lives are
things we have made up, fictions of our own devising.

Hester Prynne's Puritan community certainly understands the life and death power of language in assigning Hester's punishment. In marking Hester with the scarlet letter A, her judges think they have made an absolute and final reading of her relationship with her lover. Furthermore, this letter will for all time define Hester's identity, they think, and will also determine how they will react to her as an outcast from their strict, righteous community. But Hawthorne illustrates the impossibility of judging what actually happens in the hearts of his fellow humans by taking the power of the word away from Hester's accusers and placing the pen directly in Hester's hand for the writing of her story. The Puritans (and Hawthorne, of course) have allowed this letter of the Law to fall into the hands of a self-creating artist, one who begins even before the public wearing of her letter (and it does immediately become hers) to shape the letter in her own image, to read the symbol in her own way. Thus, Hester emerges from the tomb/womb of the dark prison wearing the artistic symbol of her self-creation, wrought from the granite of the stern Puritan judgement. Clearly, she is already in charge of her text, even as she ascends the scaffold for her humiliation. Even though she is in a state of intense emotion, this public trial by fire only confirms what Hester has already forged for herself through the fire of her creative artistry.
Significantly, the efficacy of art has already undermined the original intended function of this letter, for Hester has created a work of great beauty, a symbol to be wondered at and admired.

Hester's first act upon emerging from the prison door is to repel the grim, grisly town-beadle when he attempts to draw her forward by placing his hand on her shoulder. He is described as being the embodiment of "the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law." Hester's action is described as being "marked with natural dignity and force of character" as she steps "into the open air, as if by her own free-will" (52). The words "as if" emphasize the fact that Hester is making up her own version of her letter and, therefore, her life, a life lived in a freedom of her own devising. It may be make-believe, but eventually over the years Hester makes her audience doubt what they first believed. Moreover, her pushing aside of the beadle symbolizes her attitude toward her judgement and toward Puritan law. Her rejection of their version of Hester Prynne is further emphasized by reminiscences of her childhood and her former life in Europe, which become the focus of her thought and emotions as she stands on the scaffold. This remembrance of times past is an important factor in her rebirth trauma on the scaffold, for Hester continues to draw nourishment from the liberating influences of her early years in a more progressive environment. Only
one young mother in the crowd of unkind Puritan women reacts as a sympathetic reader of Hester's letter, a letter that has enraged the onlookers because of its "elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold-thread."

Hester's artistry is a reflection of her own rich nature: the letter is "so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy" that it seems to be "a last and fitting decoration" to her dress (53).

Indeed, this letter depicts the true Hester being true to herself, even as her letter announces a quite different Hester Prynne than the one the Puritans expected to see emerge from the prison. Hester's understanding of what it means to be true is in obvious conflict with the rigid codes of her society. Consequently, Hester's scarlet letter sets her apart from the Puritans even more than they intended, for in the process of creating her letter, Hester in effect begets herself as an artist. No wonder they hardly recognize her. No wonder she puts them under her spell.

Her fantastic artistry draws all eyes to the letter worn above her heart, which is a cynosure of her (and Hawthorne's) art. Whether the Puritans want it or not, her creation does represent a guiding light. Thus by means of the mystery of art, Hester's letter transforms her in the eyes of her audience.

As she ascends the scaffold to face the crowd that has so cruelly rejected her, save one young mother, she
parallels Christ's humiliation on Calvary. Both Christ and Hester are persecuted and judged by followers of the Old Testament: the-eye-for-an-eye-and-tooth-for-a-tooth-crowd. Pharisees and Puritans are interchangeable for all practical purposes. Similarly, the mark of shame upon Hester's breast and the crown of thorns Christ was forced to wear eventually become cynosures, brilliant symbols of humility, service to others, love, and compassion. As cynosures, both Hester and Christ are ironically lifted up and exalted in places reserved for sinners and criminals. In the minds of the religious leaders of their respective communities, of course, they are criminals—both have, after all, broken the laws of the same Old Testament. Nevertheless, from their much greater hearts and enlightened understanding of human nature, both of these Creators forgive their enemies, becoming givers of life in their roles as servants to humankind.

If these allusions to Christ seem too strained, we must remember the intense religious texture of this novel: its Puritan concern with sin and redemption and the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, the supposed vicar of Christ in the world of the novel. In addition, the structure of the novel hinges on the three scaffold scenes, a type of the Trinity. On the scaffold we see an unholy trinity in the persons of Hester, Pearl, and Dimmesdale in the second and third scenes, for I will argue that Dimmesdale never actually
achieves an efficacious transformation, as does Hester during her first appearance on the scaffold, and as Pearl does in the final scene. Perhaps it is important that Hester, not Dimmesdale, is present in all three scaffold scenes, suggesting that she is the one who suffers and thus completes all of the work of atonement and, in fact, fulfills the role of a surrogate Christ for her community, not Dimmesdale, who utterly fails. Surveyor Pue does not, after all, write a tale about Arthur Dimmesdale.

Hawthorne has created Hester as his surrogate, symbolic of the messiah-like role he so often creates for himself in his short fiction. Just as Hawthorne begets himself as the messiah of a new law in American fiction, so does Hester beget herself and her new law. In the beginning was the word for all three of these self-begetting creators, who know the fallibility of humans and that the only way atonement can be achieved is by total and unconditional forgiveness. Hawthorne even admits in "The Custom-House" preface that in spite of the faults of his co-workers at the Custom House, he always remembers them with affection, refusing to judge them for their infractions of the rules of their government jobs. Surely, we are to see Hawthorne's reading of Hester as his recognition that we cannot so easily put an absolute label on what we think we know about the events outside ourselves, or within ourselves, for that matter.
In between the scaffold scenes, we read the work of two lesser artists in this novel, Chillingworth, Hester's estranged husband, and Dimmesdale, Hester's lover. Both represent the kind of artist Hawthorne disdains and fears. Chillingworth, a quasi-medical man, symbolizes the cold scientist and observer, experimenting and practicing his "art," as the narrator frequently calls it, on Dimmesdale in order to penetrate the minister's heart and thus violate the sanctity of the individual. Unlike Hester and Dimmesdale, who create texts for themselves from the letter that each one wears (although in significantly different ways) in response to a priori laws adhered to by their Puritan community, Chillingworth's actions arise in response to no text at all. He is the isolated artist who has never really needed to be connected to the warm heart of humanity. In the first days of his January/May marriage to Hester, he spent almost all his time in solitary scholarly pursuits, devoting little time to his young, vibrant bride. He is a self-creating artist of the most dangerous kind, for his art leads inexorably to the destruction of both his marriage and of Dimmesdale. Chillingworth brings all his artistic perspicacity to the discovery of the man whom he thinks did him an injustice. Actually, the injury is merely to Chillingworth's pride, which serves as the inspiration for the practice of his art. His idiosyncratic art, however, has no audience; he is only concerned with what art can
reveal to him. Therefore, he sets out to find the companion text to Hester's, and his method is to deconstruct a text in order to find what is not readily apparent in the visible text, which is, of course, Hester's. The result of his method is the destruction of the missing part of the total story, Arthur Dimmesdale. Nevertheless, Chillingworth's deconstruction of the text does prove to be a valid way to approach a text, for he does indisputably find at least a factual truth.

Dimmesdale, in contrast to Hester and Chillingworth, is not a self-begetting artist. He is inspired only by a muse outside himself, the a priori theology of the Puritans, in particular the Old Testament. His text is handed down to him with fixed answers and an absolute standard for judging all human behavior. Ironically, the Reverend Dimmesdale rationalizes himself out of the necessity to be judged by the Puritan theology he so eloquently preaches to his adoring flock. He knows that he is a false prophet, yet his overweening spiritual pride and love of self prevent him from confessing his sin—and his relations with Hester are always seen as sin by Dimmesdale. He only halfway admits to being any kind of sinner, rationalizing that his people will simply credit his insistence upon his sinfulness to superiority to them in his religious life. His congregation, of course, attributes his greater spirituality to his greater awareness of sins that the ordinary people
hardly acknowledge as sin in their own lives. Thus, Dimmesdale hides his letter A within his heart, possibly because of his arrogance. Rather than allowing the letter to work some kind of absolution in his life, he chooses to work out his own absolution by self-punishment, possibly by some kind of self-flaggelation upon his breast. Denying Christ's work of atonement on the cross, in effect, Dimmesdale creates an heretical inner conflict that eventually destroys him. Hawthorne repeatedly demonstrates in his fiction that the deceptive artist, one who misuses the creative gift, especially for selfish reasons, will at the last become an agent for death, rather than life, as Hollingsworth does in The Blithedale Romance. Dimmesdale is never a self-begetting artist, but he does become a self-abortion one by refusing to be honest. He lives by the letter of the Old Law, and the letter kills him.

In contrast to Chillingworth and Dimmesdale, Pearl, the epitome of Hawthorne's ideal artist, is part "airy sprite" and part human. She quite appropriately draws her life from both the "spiritual world" and her "material frame," obviously a reflection of Hawthorne's form of art. Moreover, this combination of the spiritual world and the earthly world reflects her parentage, Dimmesdale the spiritual father and Hester the natural mother (91-92). Hawthorne's portrayal of Pearl's development over the seven years of her intense isolation required to complete his
"Creation," and her birth into the wider world of human connection is reflexive of his own (and Hester's) years of isolation and gestation as they create themselves as artists and develop their unique, fabulative form of art. The years Hawthorne spent largely in his solitary upstairs bedroom and Hester's seven years also spent by the sea represent an oyster-like period of suffering and isolation, as each produces out of themselves their "living hieroglyph"—Pearl (207). Moreover, she symbolizes their perfected art, the mirror of both the artist and the art. The following description of Pearl foreshadows the final scene of Miriam in The Marble Faun, as she kneels beneath the open circular dome of the Pantheon—isolated from the world, yet symbolic of the infinite variety and transformations of existence open to those who are free of societal restraints and are able to experience life in an Hermeneutical spiral of Time: "Pearl's aspect was imbued with a spell of infinite variety"; moreover, "there was an absolute circle of radiance around her, on the darksome cottage floor" (90).

Pearl's relationship to Hawthorne is doubly linked in that she is not only his fictional offspring, but she is also modeled after his real-life daughter, Una, whom he describes in his journals in terms equally descriptive of Pearl. In addition, Pearl's resemblance to Hawthorne is evident in many of the descriptions of her. She, like Hawthorne, grows up without a father in the house and is
given much freedom to develop according to her natural inclinations. Hester imposes few rules upon Pearl, who possesses "an order peculiar" to herself (91). Her imagination also works like Hawthorne's in her constant creating of other realities from ordinary objects, the form often suggesting to her the content and thus blending inseparably into one meaning. Pearl's "witchcraft," of course, never effects any "outward change" upon the object, the object simply becomes, as to Hawthorne, something else. Further, she is described as having "a sportiveness of mind," a phrase Hawthorne repeatedly uses in his short fiction to describe his surrogate artists (95). And, like many of his other surrogate artists (The Man of Genius in "A Select Party" and also Hester) Pearl bears a physical resemblance to her fictional father: she has a "rich and luxuriant beauty; a beauty that shown with deep and vivid tints; a bright complexion, eyes [which are black] possessing intensity both of depth and glow, and hair already of a deep, glossy brown, and which, in after years, would be nearly akin to black." Moreover, "there was a fire in her and throughout her" (101). Further, Pearl's strangeness identifies her with Una, who was according to Hawthorne, always more at home in a fictional world than in the actual one. Of course, Hawthorne, too, is more at home in his fictions than in his exterior world as he creates a highly romantic, fanciful art, one that is strange to many
readers, not readily accepted nor understood. Hawthorne's art does not fit a priori definitions for fiction any more than do Pearl and Una, on whom he bases his artistic form.

Significantly, Pearl's first attachment to the physical world is to the scarlet letter on her mother's bosom. As an infant, she smiles first at the shining letter, not at her mother, as she grasps it with her infant hand. From that time on, Pearl reads her identity as well as her mother's by the scarlet letter. It is the shaping influence of her life. This A symbolizing Art/Artist/Author allows her to beget her own life in the freedom of her creative imagination. Hester and Pearl increasingly see each other as reflections of each other, and certainly we can see them as reflections of Hawthorne. On one occasion, however, as Hester looks into Pearl's eyes at the image of herself being reflected there, she sees another face, "fiend-like, full of smiling malice, yet bearing the semblance of features that she had known full well, though seldom with a smile, and never with malice in them." It seems to Hester "as if an evil spirit possessed the child, and had just then peeped forth in mockery" (97). Clearly, this face is Dimmesdale's. Is Hester reading Dimmesdale as being motivated not by the Holy Spirit but by the Devil? Her intuitive, imaginative reading of the minister is accurate, for Dimmesdale's self-delusion allows him to deceive himself and his flock as to the true nature of his "artistry," in his role as the voice
of God to the Puritan community. The elfish quality of Pearl's childish play, of course, emphasizes in Hester's imagination the judgment of her Puritan community against her and her offspring. In a half-playful game with Pearl, Hester asks Pearl whose child she is, to which Pearl answers, "'I am your little Pearl.'" Hester responds, "'Thou art no Pearl of mine!'" Pearl then becomes serious, wanting to know who really "sent her hither"; however, when told that the Heavenly Father sent her, she rejects Hester's answer, placing her small finger on the scarlet letter and crying positively, "'He did not send me! . . . I have no Heavenly Father!'" Hester, in these early days of her banishment, wonders "betwixt a smile and a shudder" about the townspeople's story that the Devil is Pearl's father. (98-99)

Hawthorne's "Devil in Manuscript" and other works reflect his intense feelings about his calling as artist. Like Hester, though, he generally writes about the Devil in his art in only a half-serious manner. In The House of the Seven Gables, however, he seriously demonstrates how the wizardry of art can be used for either good or bad results. Any time art is used to deceive or control, Hawthorne condemns the artists. Clearly, Dimmesdale's artistry falls into this category. For Dimmesdale, his false art is a means to justify his ends, which is a blatant misuse of his talent. Another reason Hawthorne plays with the idea of a
demon in his creative offspring is that he, like Hester, knows he is in conflict with his Puritan forefathers in his choice of vocation, and especially in his rebellion against their strict, oppressive rules. Significantly, he places Pearl in the category of other rebels like Luther, who according to "his monkish enemies, was a brat of that hellish breed" (99). Hawthorne does not read Pearl, Hester, or himself as evil; he merely satirizes the limited view of the Puritans and only ironically reads his artistry as of the Devil. In Pearl's rejection of the Heavenly Father as her parent, Hawthorne symbolizes his rejection of the Puritans' Heavenly Father. The Puritans, who are the forefathers of Hawthorne, Hester, and Pearl, have disowned and disinherited them, Hawthorne indicates, because of their independence of mind and because they have followed their natural creative impulses. Thus, as Pearl insists, they have no father—either Heavenly or earthly. Pearl knows she is sent hither by the creative power of the word, a word the Puritans reject—the creative word of Hawthorne, author of his own world. Consequently, Hawthorne, Hester, and Pearl become self-begetting artists. The scarlet letter A signifies Adultery for all three in that each rejects Puritan law in favor of consummation with the muse of Art.

Both Hawthorne and Hester, nevertheless, choose to use their Puritan heritage as a backdrop for the crafting of their art. Lacking a rich culture and ancient traditions
for the creating of an American art, Hawthorne turns to his distant Puritan past as the best, perhaps only, material available, from which he can create his art. In "A Select Party," Hawthorne sets forth his desire to create an American fiction from "the unwrought granite of our intellectual quarries" (X 66) and to send this new American literature out into the world. Pearl is the symbol of this kind of fiction, for she is the offspring of artists who are shaped to a large extent by the American soil on which they are begotten. In "The Custom-House" preface, Hawthorne states clearly that Salem is his "natal spot," which makes it his home, in spite of the fact that he is really a misfit there, being "an idler" at the "topmost bough" of his Puritan family tree (10-12).

Reflexive of Hawthorne as artist, Hester finally returns to Boston as a result of its being, as the narrator of The Scarlet Letter says, "the spot where some great and marked event has given the color" to her lifetime. Furthermore, the narrator explains her return as if it were a new birth. She steps across the threshold of her little cottage to begin a new life—"of her own free will." She again takes up "the symbol" of her red badge and assumes the role of prophesying a new age of greater freedom, especially for artists such as she (and Hawthorne). Undoubtedly, Hawthorne's prophesy has been fulfilled in the works of postmodern writers of metafiction.
Indeed, Hester's and Hawthorne's sin is the same—their breaking away from Puritan restrictions to create their own lives according to their own laws. Hawthorne states in the preface his hope for his offspring: "My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth" (12). But he and Hester remain essentially in their birthplaces (Hester's real birth is in Boston, not Europe), the places in which they begat themselves imaginatively at the same time they "became citizens of somewhere else" by means of their creative art. Only in their joint offspring, Pearl, do they realize their fictional dreams, because she is the symbol of their highest artistic achievement. She is their letter to the world, a self-begetting artist who escapes the confinement of New England and becomes an artist in the image of her true parentage. By the end of the story, Pearl makes connection to humanity, to the larger world beyond New England, and her works of art are described as being "wrought by delicate fingers" (262). Neither Hawthorne, Hester, nor Pearl creates crude, easily read art. Instead, each produces creations of great intricacy, meaning, and beauty—accurate reflections of the real world of Hawthorne's imagination.

Pearl is described as "the scarlet letter in another form" on the day she and her mother go to the Governor's Hall. Hester has "with morbid ingenuity" created "an
analogy between the object of her affection and the emblem of her guilt and torture." The two are described by an onlooker as "'the woman of the scarlet letter'" and "'the likeness of the scarlet letter running along by her side.'" (102). This doubling image continues as they are both reflected in exaggerated distortions of themselves from the mirrors inside the Governor's Hall. Hester's scarlet badge is enlarged and dwarfs her reflection in the convex surface of the knight's armour, reflective of the way her Puritan audience reads her letter at that time.

All of Hester's identity is now inextricably woven into her letter, everything she does is read in terms of the letter; consequently, she allows her full creative powers to flow into the creating of her daughter in the image of her letter. Hester, of course, makes a living by her art of needlework, but only on Pearl's garments does she give full expression of her creative powers and passion. When she pleads for the Governor to permit her to keep Pearl, she quite accurately claims, "'Pearl keeps me here in life.'" Pearl is, in fact, both her natural child and the object of her artistic expression. For Hester to be deprived of either would result in her death—as she says, "'I will die first!'" rather than give her up (113). Pearl connects Hester, the artist, to the chain of humanity and simultaneously inspires her imaginative life, a combination that Hawthorne sees as essential for the kind of artist he
wishes to be.

In response to her elders' questioning of her knowledge of the catechism and their inquiry as to who she is, Pearl, "the scarlet vision," responds, "'I am my mother's child . . . and my name is Pearl'" (110). Finally, she capriciously answers Minister Wilson that "she had not been made at all but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison-door" (112). Perhaps, Pearl is the blossom the narrator of this story gives us at the beginning of the narrative, by which we are to interpret the events he recounts. If Pearl is a reflection of Hawthorne's artistry--both as artist and art form--then surely he intends us to see Pearl and Hester in a sympathetic light. Hester has already experienced her "fortunate fall" into experience, into human connection. Hawthorne's art is based on the law of the heart, the natural law of human sympathy and love, symbolized by the rose-bush--and the fall into "human frailty and suffering." It remains for Pearl to make this connection.

Pearl, however, is solely Hester's child, unable to be born into the world of human emotions, precisely because of the womb-like existence imposed upon both Hester and Pearl by the Puritan community. But more importantly, Pearl cannot break out of the spell of separation from humanity until she is acknowledged by her earthly father. Until then, she seems suspended in a world of almost pure fancy--
not one Hawthorne sees as healthy for anyone, especially an artist. Nevertheless, Pearl already has filled in the gaps of the scarlet letter's text by reading intuitively and imaginatively (as Hawthorne wishes us to do) enough to know that Dimmesdale's constant covering of his heart has some connection to her mother's letter A, and thus to herself. If her mother wears a letter on her bosom, then should not her father have some similar mark? Especially since Pearl herself is also dressed to look like the letter? Pearl says Dimmesdale does have a scarlet letter and asks why he wears it covered up. It seems unnatural to her for Dimmesdale's letter to be hidden since she and her mother wear theirs so openly and with great artistry. She knows a significant part of the story is withheld. Finally, the second scaffold scene confirms to her that Dimmesdale is, indeed, part of the text of the letter A. She knows, too, that the three of them should stand "at noontide" together on the scaffold so the public can read the full text. Until this event happens, Pearl remains cut off, a bastard child, and she knows it.

Dimmesdale, also, is essentially cut off from the full course of human life by his hiding the true letter of his life. His text to the world is inevitably partial, and thereby self-isolating, because of his deception. Chillingworth, of course, continues to practice his evil art of penetrating the sanctity of Dimmesdale's heart.
Chillingworth's medicinal and psychological arts combined with Dimmesdale's own guilt and concern for his eternal soul eventually lead Dimmesdale back to the scaffold at midnight, under cover of an overcast sky. Clearly Dimmesdale does not really want to confess his sins publicly. This ascension to the scaffold and his shriek into the night air are witnessed by no one. Uncovering his eyes, he "mutters" to himself, "'It is done.' . . . 'The whole town will awake, and hurry forth, and find me here!" Obviously, if Dimmesdale had wanted to confess, he would have ascended the scaffold at noontide as Hester does (and as Pearl will ask him to do). Even a child knows the proper time to make such a public confession. His covering his eyes also indicates only a half-hearted revelation of himself to the eyes of his townspeople. What Dimmesdale is doing out there in the middle of the night on the scaffold is simply another form of his self-flagellation. Only this time he devises a punishment that comes as close as he dares to the real thing. Acting out a confession in the real place for criminals provides Dimmesdale with at least a sensation of having confessed. This bit of artistry, however, is just as deceptive as all of his artistic rhetoric has been from the pulpit.

As a matter of fact, Dimmesdale's actions on the scaffold appear to be an almost heretical substitute for Christ's finished work of atonement for sin. Dimmesdale's
words "It is done" parallel and simultaneously deny Christ's words, "It is finished." Dimmesdale believes that he can save himself, that he can cling to or revise his old law, to bring himself as a living sacrifice, worthy to atone for himself. Thus, he pre-empts the Old Law and denies the New Law. Clearly, Dimmesdale's spiritual vision of himself as self-saviour is as cloudy as the sky overhead. If the townspeople could not hear him because of the cloud cover, then does God? If God does hear, he seems to answer with an A for Anathema, for Dimmesdale clearly does not experience Absolution.

Even though Dimmesdale reads the meteor as a direct divine revelation to him, the narrator reads Dimmesdale as "a morbid self-contemplative," whose solipsism "had extended his egotism over the whole expanse of nature, until the firmament itself should appear no more than a fitting page for his soul's history and fate" (155). Dimmesdale has not only separated himself from his human family by his self-spiritualization, but he seems to have elevated himself to the level of God, or perhaps even higher than God. At any rate, he has clearly lost touch with both humankind and God, for Dimmesdale can see only himself, which gives him a false reading of every text he encounters. Nevertheless, Chillingworth sees Dimmesdale linked by Pearl to Hester as they hold hands on the scaffold, forming a human emblem of the letter A, and he correctly reads the full text of the
letter, at least as it pertains to the Puritan's assigned meaning of the letter. For a brief moment, the guilt-weakened Dimmesdale receives strength from Pearl and Hester as they form an electric chain through which life flows into Dimmesdale, but he refuses to accept this connection to humanity, especially from emblems of fallen humanity. Dimmesdale, too, is fallen, but he does not equate his fall to that of ordinary people because he believes that he is set apart by God. Consequently, his fall is not fortunate. Otherwise, he would be brought into connection with suffering humanity.

In contrast to Dimmesdale, Hester's public acknowledgement of her breaking the Puritan law sets her free to be herself. Her isolation permits her to develop her intellect. Indeed, she eventually "scorned to consider it desirable" to retrieve her position in society (164). Her long seclusion causes her to no longer "measure her ideas of right and wrong by any standard external to herself" (159). How similar that view is to Hawthorne's realization that he could not measure his literary works by the external standards of his time. Paradoxically, Hester's letter A eventually takes on meanings much different than the meaning intended by the Puritans. As the years pass, Hester's letter to the world changes in the eyes of its readers. Hawthorne demonstrates in these changing and various readings of the scarlet letter that no text is
fixed. Its meaning changes upon each reader's response to it at different times. No two readers interpret it the same way necessarily, and certainly the original audience in this novel reads Hester's A in later years in vastly different ways. Eventually, "many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification." Now, the A stands for Able, for Hester's audience has watched her in her role as "self-ordained" minister to those who suffer. She is now viewed as a Sister of Mercy, the scarlet letter having "the effect of the cross on a nun's bosom," imparting to Hester "a kind of sacredness, which enabled her to walk securely amid all peril" (161).

The rulers and leaders of the Puritan community, "fortified in themselves by an iron framework of reasoning" because of their duty to guard "the public morals," are slower to change their interpretation of Hester's letter. They, too, nevertheless, eventually relax their "sour and rigid wrinkles" into "an expression of almost benevolence" toward Hester. In contrast, the ordinary readers, those without a position of authority to lose, "had quite forgiven Hester Prynne for her frailty," no longer looking upon her letter as a token of "that one sin," but as "a symbol of her many good deeds" (162). These readers' responses to Hester's text present a fine example of modern reader response theory, which rightly claims that what we know about an author or come to know and what we have experienced
or will experience does inevitably affect our reading or "understanding" of a text at different times. Hawthorne certainly knows that this kind of relationship with a text (and with life) is a reality. He also knows that a text or fiction can create or change a reader, just as the author's subject can create or change him. Again, we see a living example of life and fiction as process in the act of reflecting and creating each other.

Hester's readers now point her out to strangers as "that woman with the embroidered badge" (certainly an ameliorative reading of the scarlet letter). They now claim her as "'our Hester,'" who is "'so kind to the poor, so helpful to the sick, so comfortable to the afflicted'" (162). The first part of Hester's story is briefly told as a whispered footnote. The narrator says, "It is to the credit of human nature, that, except where its selfishness is brought into play, it loves more readily than it hates" (160). Thus, Hawthorne affirms nature as the final moral authority in this compliment to Hester's audience. He also affirms Hester as a good artist who begets a text from her letter that results in service and love toward her fellow humans. Hers is an honest text. In contrast, Hawthorne condemns Chillingworth and Dimmesdale, both of whom have hidden texts that seek to deceive their audiences. Hawthorne tells us in "The Custom House" what the relationship of an author or speaker should be to his
audience, whom he describes as "the few who will understand
him, better than most of his schoolmates and lifemates" (3). While Hawthorne says the author would fail in being
"decorous . . . to speak all" of his depths to more than
"the one heart and mind of perfect sympathy," he by no means
indicates that the artist should deliberately deceive his
audience for selfish ends (3-4). He simply means that the
author's sanctity of being should be preserved as well as
that of his subject or audience. Condemning deception, he
says:

But--as thoughts are frozen and utterance benumbed,
unless the speaker stand in some true relation with his
audience--it may be pardonable to imagine that a
friend, a kind and apprehensive, though not the closest
friend, is listening to our talk; and then, a native
reserve being thawed by this genial consciousness, we
may prate of the circumstances that lie around us, and
even of ourself, but still keep the inmost Me behind
its veil. To this extent, and within these limits, an
author, methinks, may be autobiographical, without
violating either the reader's rights or his own. (4)

Clearly, Chillingworth and Dimmesdale fail this test.
Hester's honest creation of her text and her true relation
with her audience unquestioningly identify her as
Hawthorne's artist.

In contrast to Dimmesdale's morbid self-contemplation,
Hester's contemplative development travels outward and includes all of humanity, especially the unequal status of women. She has imbibed the spirit of her age, the narrator says, which has emancipated the intellect: Bold men of thinking "had overthrown and rearranged . . . within the sphere of theory . . . the whole system of ancient prejudice." The narrator adds that Hester's spirit of speculation is to the Puritan forefathers "a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter" (164). Similar to Holgrave (another of Hawthorne's surrogate artists) in The House of the Seven Gables, Hester now believes that society needs to be "torn down and built up anew" (165). Certainly the narrator is correct in saying that the scarlet letter "had not done its office," at least not in the way the Puritans had intended (166). However, the letter has done a far better office because it has called forth from Hester the subject and form of her artistic nature. The scarlet letter has created the artist Hester even as she has created the letter, providing the inspiration for her self-begetting art. And more importantly, the letter, symbolic of the mystery and liberation inherent in the creative act of imaginative language, allows Hester to travel beyond the narrow views of her proscribed community. The narrator says of Hester, "It is remarkable that persons who speculate the most boldly often conform with the most perfect quietude to the external regulations of society. The thought suffices
them" (164). Hester's creative intellectual development brings her eventually, as it does Holgrave, to the conclusion that the past does not have to be, and cannot be, completely razed, which allows her to live with equanimity in her present condition, in the liberation of her self-styled text. At the end of her life, we see Hester, quietly teaching those who come to her for advice, as she looks forward to a new woman and a new law "to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness (263)."¹⁰

This hope for a new future is symbolized by Pearl's creating the letter A for herself out of the green eel-grass the day Hester encounters Chillingworth by the sea. In this scene, Pearl and Hester mirror each other as Pearl's activities reflect how Hester's letter has equipped her to be "no longer so inadequate to cope with Roger Chillingworth" (167). Pearl's letter, "freshly green" (178), is a reflection of Hester's scarlet letter, symbolizing the liberating effect of the letter on her life. It has been a source of life, not death, in contrast to the hidden texts of Chillingworth and Dimmesdale. Hester's breaking free of the "guise" of not knowing Chillingworth and her resolve to reveal all of her text to Dimmesdale are reflected in Pearl's imaginative play by the sea, an image of freedom.

As Pearl, having "inherited her mother's gift for
devising drapery and costume," plays in the small sea pools, she is enchanted by her image reflected in the mirror of a pool. Playfully she beckons the visionary girl to take her hand and come play with her. But to Pearl it seems as if the vision is saying, "'This is a better place! Come thou into the pool!'" (168). This entire episode is a small story-within-the-story of Hester Prynne, whose story is itself the story of Hawthorne's letter to the world.

Hawthorne's reflexive creation of his letter to the world is mirrored in Pearl's creation of her letter A from green eel-grass: "The child bent her chin upon her breast, and contemplated this device with strange interest; even as if the one only thing for which she had been sent into the world was to make out its hidden purport" (178). The symbolism is loaded—and economical. Now, in mimic form, like her mother, Pearl fashions her own letter to the world and, in essence, transcends the limitations that her physical world imposes upon her. Pearl's reflexive act is a mirror thrice-removed from Hawthorne's act of self-creation. He knows that he creates out of himself, as does Pearl, who has "no other playmate" but her reflection in the pool (168).

Furthermore, he knows that his creations are none other than himself in different versions or guises, as he probes the nature of reality, the riddle of existence, in his fictions. The description of Pearl's fanciful play mirrors
Hawthorne's fictional process and form: "She had flirted fancifully with her own image in a pool of water, beckoning the phantom forth, and—as it declined to venture—seeking a passage for herself into its sphere of impalpable earth and unattainable sky" (177). Pearl's jumping into the puddle to join her visionary friend is an ingenious symbol of Hawthorne's art form—the blending of the actual with the marvellous—for as Pearl looks down at her feet resting solidly on the bottom of the puddle, "out of a still lower depth" comes "the gleam of a kind of fragmentary smile [reminiscent of Wakefield's smile], floating to and fro in the agitated water" (168). Clearly, this symbolical blending of the real-life Pearl and her phantom-like double demonstrates Hawthorne's vision of reality as an impalpable blending of our flesh and blood selves with that self-created phantom, which reflects us and our realities as fragmented, illusory, and fictional. Pearl, like Wakefield, moves effortlessly between her palpable and impalpable worlds.

Simultaneous with Pearl's fashioning of her letter A out of eel-grass, a letter "freshly green, instead of scarlet," Chillingworth tells Hester that the council has debated whether she might now remove her scarlet A from her bosom. Not surprisingly, Hester responds, "'it lies not in the pleasure of the magistrates to take off this badge'" (169). As some critics convincingly argue, Hester wears the
Therefore, only Arthur, for whom the A really stands, at least in its moral and emotional significance to Hester, has the authority to remove it. Because Hester believes she has sinned only against Arthur's conscience, only he has the authority to remove the A that comes from his name. While she in no way ever concedes that the consummation of their love was wrong, according to her law of nature and her law of art, she nevertheless respects Dimmesdale's right to his beliefs (as does Hawthorne) and has continued her penance as long as Dimmesdale maintains that their action is sinful. When they meet in the forest soon after Hester's confrontation with Chillingworth, she is at last freed by Arthur to fling her letter into the brook. If Hester has worn the letter A as a symbol of her love for Arthur Dimmesdale, then the elaborate artistry of her letter, its great beauty, its beneficial effects on Hester are at once explained. Furthermore, Hawthorne identifies Hester with Owen Warland and Drowne, who are also inspired by the muse of romantic love to create art of great beauty. Hawthorne's muse is simultaneously reflected in both the form and content of his art, the romance. As Robert Scholes points out, the romance is orgastic in form, which emphasizes its self-be-getting nature (26-27).

The meaning of the letter A is much more complex for Hester and Pearl than the superficial reading the Puritans
originally intended. However, Pearl's green letter A does, in fact, reflect the freedom with which Hester has fashioned and worn the letter, a letter created in her own image, not that of the Puritans. Equally important to the narrator's description of Pearl's letter-making is the emphasis on the letter as a text, a text she has woven for herself directly from the physical world of nature. Pearl's pondering of the letter, her "inevitable tendency to hover about the enigma of the scarlet letter," and her contemplation of the letter she has now devised "as if the only thing for which she had been sent into the world was to make out its hidden import" is a mirror of Hawthorne, who also seems to be sent into the world for the sole purpose of making out the hidden import of the letter A, symbol of his own artistry of words. Furthermore, this artistry reflects his approach to knowledge of the world—as he sees the universe as an hermeneutical text, a hieroglyphic, full of hidden import.

Pearl, the fledgling writer and maker of the new, green A, now wonders if her mother will ask her its meaning, as she has so often asked Hester the meaning of the scarlet letter. But Hester tells Pearl that the green letter "has no purport." Perhaps Hester knows that Pearl must experience a fall into communion with the larger world of humanity before her artistry can reflect anything more than her innocent freedom and isolation. When she then asks Pearl the meaning of the scarlet letter, Pearl gives the
best (and most primary) reading yet: "'It is the great letter A. Thou hast taught it me in the horn-book'" (178). Quite clearly, Hester identifies the meaning of her letter in its primary signification as a symbol of language, a letter that must always be read in its varying combinations with other letters if it is to communicate meaning of any kind to readers. Inherent in this view of the letter A as simple alpha is the recognition that language is not any more fixed than is a particular letter in the alphabet in its varying transformation into words. Consequently, the artist of language can create worlds of limitless possibilities because of the fluid nature of language. Moreover, Pearl has correctly read so many other significant people and events in the novel that we have no reason to doubt her accuracy in this reading of her mother's letter, or that her reading is not, in fact, Hawthorne's. Since Pearl is the very embodiment of Hawthorne's fabulative form of fiction and a reflection of both Hester and Hawthorne as artists, we are able to see how Hawthorne, as the first creator of the text of the letter A, reads the letter A. The identities of all three of these artists are interwoven with the letter, for the written word is their tool of art, their means for exploring truths about the world.

The meeting in the forest between Hester and Dimmesdale provides yet another context in which to read Hester's letter. Removed from the context of their Puritan
community, both are free to examine the meaning of the letter in a natural setting, without a priori readings of their act of love. In this fresh forest setting, both Pearl and Hester blossom into the radiance of their natural beauty. Here, they come alive and flourish in the fullness of their artistic visions. Pearl dances through the woods, capturing sunbeams as she goes, listening to the stories the brook tells her. Hester, in the presence of Dimmesdale flings her scarlet badge toward the "narrative" of the brook, but it falls short, symbolic of the fact that Hester's letter is her art and she can never rid herself of it, for her art is precisely what gives meaning to the narrative of her life. When she loosens her hair, she is transformed into the fullness of her nature as a woman, hoping for a long-awaited consummation of her love for Dimmesdale in a permanent union. Like Drowne and Owen Warland, Hester is prevented from enjoying a real-life relationship with the muse who inspired her artistry of the beautiful.

Before Hester encounters Dimmesdale, Pearl asks her mother whether it is true that The Black Man is the one who has branded her with the scarlet letter, as old Mistress Higgins has told Pearl. Hester responds that it is true. Perhaps Hester, at this point, acknowledges her affinity for the dark mysteries of wizardry and her rebellion against the whitened sepulchres of Puritan Boston. This affirmation
aligns Hester with other of Hawthorne's good practitioners of wizardry, Hawthorne's often-used symbol for Art. Hawthorne, of course, refers repeatedly in his works to the devil in the manuscript—precisely because he sees his art in serious conflict with the morals and mores of his own society, not because he sees Art as inherently evil, as his Puritan heritage does. Indeed, this conversation between Pearl and Hester regarding their readings of the letter A prepares Hester for a much freer encounter with Dimmesdale. In fact, Pearl's reading of the letter as simple alpha, symbol of artistic language and open-ended communication, clarifies Hester's (and our) reading of her text, placing her letter firmly in the context of language itself. Language is a means to knowledge, and Hester's (and Hawthorne's) fall into a union with the muse of romantic love reveals the act of making Art essentially an orgastic fall into experience, into an intercourse with the whole procession of humanity. Therefore, Hester and her progenitor, Hawthorne, know that they are begetting fruit from the tree expressly forbidden to them by their Puritan community. Rejecting all societal and religious strictures, these artists seek knowledge in the natural promptings of their humanness, thereby achieving their own self-begetting, making themselves in their own images. 

The happiness Hester and Pearl experience in the shade and sunshine of the forest emphasizes the necessity for a
fortunate fall into the processes of the natural world, which include both procreation as well as destruction. Pearl sees and hears stories everywhere, particularly in the brook, an obvious image of the narrative. The brook "whispers tales" and "mirrors its revelations" to Pearl, who is herself another narrative mirrored by the brook and who is also the reflection of her mother, the first narrative in Hawthorne's narrative. Pearl commands the brook "to pluck up a spirit." The narrator tells us that "Pearl resembled the brook" (186). Thus, she is a natural narrative, reflecting her mother's sad spirit as she looks at herself in the brook, then at Hester's discarded letter, which the brook has refused to wash away, and then at her mother seated beside Dimmesdale, not wearing her letter. Pearl refuses to accept this reading of her mother's text, as does the brook, which refuses to wash her letter away. This little episode is prophetic of the outcome of Hester's narrative, for Dimmesdale, too, refuses to read Hester as any other text than the Hester of the scarlet letter. Hester is and will remain true, in the last analysis, to her actual identity--her letter A, which, though inspired by Arthur, ultimately stands for Art. Fortunately, Pearl, unlike the sad brook, is also capable of reflecting and absorbing the sunbeams that dance through the forest and come to rest on her. She represents for both Hester and Hawthorne a freer and happier expression of Art.
Clearly, Hester's reading of the letter A is influenced by her independent thinking, the muse of natural law, of her inner being. The context of the letter, then, is one of freedom from the Old Testament muses that shape Dimmesdale's reading of their shared scarlet letter. The only context he can actually trust is the one defined by the Old Testament prophets. In fact, for Dimmesdale to follow a religion that seeks to subdue evil passions represents his best choice, for his true colors rush to manifest themselves in dark, evil acts as soon as he leaves the forest. Hawthorne here implies that some humans are apparently born good, while others are innately evil. It follows, then, that persons of evil natures will more likely than not produce evil acts (and art) when left to natural law. Hester clearly falls into the category of those who are innately good, for left to her own nature, she devises art of great beauty and a life of goodness and service to her fellow humans. And it must be emphasized that her artistic expression of the text imposed upon her by the Puritan community is startlingly in contrast to what they have expected. Hester simply and with great strength and grace of character begets herself out of herself—a cynosure for the entire community.¹³

Dimmesdale, on the other hand, shocks himself once he resorts to natural law as his guide. Freed from religious and societal regulations, he discovers some of the worst possible desires surfacing, and only with great self-
restraint does he suppress their complete expression. The title of the chapter describing Dimmesdale after he leaves the forest, symbolic of the shedding of his religious and social law, appropriately describes his true nature, for he is, indeed, "The Minister in a Maze." Without the identity he has taken on from the a priori muses of the Old Testament, he is, in truth, lost. Furthermore, he is incapable of creating a morally acceptable self from any kind of inner muse, as does Hester. Neither can he provide any kind of moral guidance for himself. The narrator states that Dimmesdale's "inner man" is "incited to do some strange, wild, wicked thing or other, with a sense that it would be at once involuntary and intentional; in spite of himself, yet growing out of a profounder self than that which opposed the impulse" (217).

Dimmesdale's inner light is indeed dark as he almost overtly expresses what surely are considered by his Puritan community to be among the most scarlet of sins: first, he is tempted to make blasphemous remarks concerning the communion supper--the very crux of Christian faith; second, he almost takes away the one comfort left to the eldest widow in his congregation by rejecting belief in the immortality of the soul; third, his desire to commit the most scarlet sin of all by making a lascivious remark to "a maiden newly won" by his Sabbath sermon following his vigil on the scaffold (219). Clearly, Dimmesdale sublimates sexual passion into
religious fervor. These fiery sermons result in a consummation with his audience that is supposed to be divinely inspired, but obviously they represent an alternate channel into which his sexual energies can be diverted. The narrator tells us that this third encounter with the young maiden presents Dimmesdale "with a mightier struggle than he had yet sustained." Forbearing to teach "a knot of little Puritan children" some "very wicked words," he then almost allows himself, as a reward, the pleasure of shaking hands with a drunken seaman from the ship's crew of the Spanish Main: Mr. Dimmesdale longed "to recreate [my emphasis] himself with a few improper jests, such as dissolute sailors so abound with, and a volley of good, round, solid, satisfactory, and heaven-defying oaths!" However, he controls this urge not so much by "a better principle, as partly his natural good taste, and still more his buckramed habit of clerical decorum" (220). Old Mistress Hibbins appears at this point to offer him fellowship among the company of evil wizards. She alone among the Bostonians sees Dimmesdale's true colors. The narrator says that this incident "did but show his sympathy and fellowship with wicked mortals, and the world of perverted spirits" (222).

Not surprisingly, then, Dimmesdale in great fright rushes straight to his study, recognizing that he has returned from the forest a "wiser man," with "the knowledge of hidden mysteries" which the simplicity of his former self
could have never attained (223). Dimmesdale knows that his nature requires the strictures of his Puritan religion as an ordering principle for his moral behavior. Immediately upon entering his room, he places one hand on his bosom and the other on the Hebrew scriptures. This action emphasizes the real muses of his art, the Old Testament prophets. These muses have created Dimmesdale and he, in turn, creates art in their image. He burns his partially written Election Day Sermon, and in a feverish trance sublimates his sexual energies, which were aroused by Hester in the forest and then by the newly-won maiden, into his most powerful artistic creation ever. His all-night tryst with these muses culminates in the sermon that mesmerizes both himself and his audience.

Without doubt, the kind of art Dimmesdale produces in this sermon is condemned by Hawthorne because it is deceptive, not revelatory of the truth nor of an artist standing in "a true relation" with his audience. Indeed, Dimmesdale succeeds so well in his wizardry that he transports his audience into his mind, but more importantly, his art has taken over, "continually lifting him out of the written discourse that lay before him, and filling him with ideas that must have been as marvellous to himself as to his audience" (249). His audience "could not rest until they had told one another of what each knew better than he could tell or hear" (248). Hawthorne often expresses this
relationship between the artist and the artistic expression itself and between the reader of the art and the object, as well as the relationship of the small group of readers who enjoy an affinity with the artist as well as with each other.

This kind of interaction among Dimmesdale and his hearers is described by Fish in the following way: "If the speakers of a language share a system of rules that each of them has somehow internalized, understanding will, in some sense, be uniform; that is, it will proceed in terms of the system of rules all speakers share" (84). Dimmesdale's Puritan audience shares with the artist of this "eloguent" text the common background that allows for the amazing unity of their response to his artistry. After all, they, too, are created by the same a priori laws, which have been passed down through the Old Testament muses. Consequently, Dimmesdale reaches the zenith of his artistry and reputation as one of New England's loftiest personages as he stands "on the very proudest eminence of superiority, to which the gifts of intellect, rich lore, prevailing eloquence, and a reputation of whitest sanctity, could exalt a clergyman in New England's earliest days" (249). At the end of his sermon, he evokes an audible response from the "highly wrought" emotions of the crowd that is "more impressive than the organ tones of the blast, or the thunder, or the roar of the sea," which is "blended into one great voice by the
universal impulse which makes likewise one vast heart out of the many" (250). Dimmesdale is at this point "apotheosized by worshipping admirers" (251). Both Dimmesdale and his audience have been seduced by his deceptive wizardry.

Realizing that his death is imminent, Dimmesdale calls on Hester to support him as he ascends the scaffold. In keeping with the Hebrew law, Dimmesdale's sin brings about his death. Hawthorne does not hint at the coming of any grace upon Dimmesdale from the Christ that the minister supposedly believes in. In fact, Christ plays almost no role as a muse for Dimmesdale. Christ is neither the alpha nor the omega for him. Dimmesdale has usurped Christ's role by being his own sacrifice, thus atoning for his sin. In his overweening desire to be seen by his parishioners as the perfection of holiness, Dimmesdale has created the same kind of art as do Alymer in "The Birthmark" and Dr. Rappaccini in "Rappaccini's Daughter." These artists believe in the omega; the end justifies the means, even if death is the end of their perfectionist, solipsistic art.

In fact, Dimmesdale appears to glory in his last minute confession, for now he will never be required to suffer banishment and humiliation, as Hester has. Moreover, his confession contains sufficient ambiguity to ensure a variety of interpretations among his adoring followers—and he knows it. He never does explicitly name his sin, nor his relationship to Hester and Pearl. Consequently, one reading
from those in his audience is that he merely uses Hester's sin as an analogy. The whole relationship to Hester and Pearl is thus reduced in purport to the status of a parable.

Dimmesdale begins his confession in the first person, claiming to be "'the one sinner of the world!'" (254). Again his solipsism and arrogance produce a self-centered, almost heretical text. Following this grand assertion, Dimmesdale falters. The narrator tells us, "It seemed, at this point, as if the minister must leave the remainder of his secret undisclosed" (255). Significantly, Dimmesdale switches to third-person narration, which quite effectively distances him from the person he proceeds to describe.

Again Dimmesdale only has courage to act when he can escape into the deceptive kind of artistry he has for seven years woven about himself and his followers. His artistry has become a minister's black veil, for Dimmesdale has created a fictional self that separates him from any reality.

As he steps in front of Hester and Pearl, Dimmesdale asserts that Hester's scarlet letter is "'but the shadow of what he [the anonymous "he" Dimmesdale is now describing] bears on his own breast.'" Even in this final feeble moment, he manages to deceive his audience with the artistry of his confession that "'he" had for years "'hid it [his sin] cunningly from men'" (255). But worse, as he literally steps in front of Hester, he also overshadows her by claiming that his stigma is of greater substance and
importance than the one Hester has worn openly and for which she has suffered the consequences. In his final moment, Dimmesdale usurps Hester's scarlet letter, which, far from being but a shadow of his own, shines brightly in the open light of day. Perhaps what readers might see when Dimmesdale throws off his clerical band is but the shadow, or reflection, of Hester's scarlet letter, a letter Dimmesdale now attempts to wear over his heart in the practice of his hidden, deceptive art. For him to believe that he has usurped Hester's open artistry and the dignity her years of suffering and creativity have brought her seems to be Dimmesdale's ultimate self-deception. The narrator tells us that after awhile "there was more than one account of what had been witnessed on the scaffold" and then says that "the reader may choose among these theories" that he has recounted. Some present at the revelation "denied that there was any mark whatever" on Dimmesdale's breast, affirming his purity (259). But we can now also read these words to mean that Dimmesdale's text is ultimately an empty one.

In contrast to Christ, who asked (at least in the version of the text most acceptable to Puritans) no questions of the two sinners being crucified with him, but simply gave them the promise of being with him that day in Paradise, Dimmesdale refuses to grant Hester anything. He answers, "'I don't know'" to her pleas for absolution and
the hope for a reunion in heaven. Ironically, Dimmesdale sees his affair with Hester as his means to salvation because he thinks that he has proven himself one of the elect.

In contrast to Dimmesdale, Hester accepts the efficacious work of Christ on the cross. When she responds to Dimmesdale's theology with the words "'I know not!'" (254), she places herself in the same category with those sinners Christ forgave, as He prayed to his Heavenly Father to forgive them for "'they know not what they do.'" Christ's word is an hermeneutical, moving, creative text, capable of meeting all types of readers where they are, and in this process, his word moves beyond logos into the realm of rama, a living word. Clearly, then, Hawthorne and Hester create texts that resemble the creative word of The Word, incarnate, for these self-begetting artists create themselves in words without end.

The beginning of The Scarlet Letter is, of course, "The Custom-House" preface; however, this beginning is crucial to our reading of the ending of Hawthorne's text of the letter A. The preface is an integral part of the novel as a whole, which is why Hawthorne refused to omit it for the second edition of The Scarlet Letter. This metafictional device at once sets up the relationship of the author to his audience, making us insiders to the creative process itself. We are invited to watch the author as he discovers his subject
among the dusty pages from the past. Furthermore, we can watch his reading of the scarlet letter, his reaction to Hester's story, and thus detect his attitude toward her. In fact, what we really observe is the artist Hawthorne in the act of discovering the subject that will actually create him as artist, just as the poet in "The Great Stone Face" is created by and completed by his subject when he finds him in the person of Ernest, who is the mirror image of the Great Stone Face. Indeed, the metafictional structures of these two works are quite similar: In both works, exterior images (the mountain and the scarlet letter) are reflective of a human being, one who in turn is reflective of the artist, who, of course is a mirror of Hawthorne himself. The exterior symbols are read by an audience over the course of many years as having various meanings. In both cases, the author eventually discovers or creates the "living hieroglyph" of his or her art. This discovery results in the author's completion because he has begotten himself in the tangible form of his art, his fictional offspring.

The reciprocal act of creation between artist and artistic subject has resulted in the fictional text of The Scarlet Letter, the offspring of Hawthorne and his surrogate Hester Prynne. This union places the scarlet letter A irrevocably over the heart of Hawthorne, who alongside Hester, steps over the threshold of the prison to acknowledge, in fictional guise, his own act of adultery:
In their self-creating acts, both express their rejection of the prison of the Puritans. But most significantly, they offer to the world in their offspring Pearl a new kind of art, one that is highly fabulative and self-begetting. Thus, Hawthorne's fiction is reflexive of the kind of artist he always wanted to be, one who is free to travel beyond the strictures of his Puritan background. In this novel, Hawthorne affirms the freedom of the artist to give birth to a new law of the heart and, consequently, to a new way of creating one's life. In Hester, Hawthorne clearly portrays the efficacy of the written word when it falls into the hands of an artist who knows, through her own experience of the fictional process, that all truths must arise from the human heart in conflict with itself, not from the exterior worlds of theologies, philosophies, and institutions.
Darrel Abel argues in "Hawthorne's Hester" that Dimmesdale is the true center of the novel, a position that Nina Baym strongly challenges in "Plot in The Scarlet Letter." Baym says, contrary to Abel, that Dimmesdale is not the true center of the story, asserting that "From a structural point of view, this [Abel's] view is untenable" (402). Robert L. Berner also sees The Scarlet Letter as Hester's story, in his essay "A Key to 'The Custom-House.'"


For example, Joel Porte says "Hester Prynne is clearly the type of the artist," noting especially the Oriental characteristics of her art, her mystic symbol. In "The Dark Blossom of Romance in The Scarlet Letter" (376).

Porte says that Pearl "comes to stand for that romance art which has the truth of secret human passion as its basis" (375).

Berner says, "One purpose of the sketch . . . is to define The Scarlet Letter as an integral part of an artistic career, while at the same time, demonstrating that it represents a new departure . . . not merely to a new genre—the romance—but to a definition of the human condition" (41). Michael D. Bell, in "Arts of Deception: Hawthorne, 'Romance,' and The Scarlet Letter," argues that Hawthorne's romance form
allows him to question the values of his contemporary world and his heritage.

6All quotations are from The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. I.

7Henry James wrote: "In fact, The Scarlet Letter was in the United States a literary event of the first importance. The book was the finest piece of imaginative writing yet put forth in the country. . . .something might at last be sent to Europe, and the best of it was that the thing was absolutely American" (Hawthorne 99-100).


9Daniel G. Hoffman, in Form and Fable in American Fiction, says that "the Puritans badly bungled the case of Hester Prynne in what they intended the scarlet letter to mean" (177). Also Brodhead says that the Puritans' branding of Hester with the scarlet letter represents their "strict symbolism," one that "moves to rigidify experience into formal categories"; however, Hester rejects their codes as "her personalized letter is presented as an act of creative self-expression, a product of her own imagination that has its meaning in terms of her own knowledge of herself" (45).

10Richard Harter Fogle says, in "Realms of Being and Dramatic Irony," that "Hawthorne permits his reader, if he wishes, to take his character from his control, to say that Hester Prynne is a great woman unhappily born before her
time, or that she is a good woman wronged by her fellow men. But Hawthorne is less confident" (315). In Nathaniel Hawthorne: Tradition and Revolution, Charles Swann sets forth a view concurring with mine. He says, "I want to argue that Hester finishes as rather more than a social worker. . . . she is genuinely subversive in that she desires and prophesies a radical subversion of the patriarchal structure of the society and, most significantly, of the religion that legitimates that patriarchy" (90). Swann also responds to other readings of Hester (90–95). He expresses disappointment with Nina Baym's "'gradualism'" in The Shape of Hawthorne's Career. He chides Michael Colacurcio for saying that Hester only comes to "'some insight about the double standard or perhaps about the new morality'" in "Footsteps of Ann Hutchinson: The Context of The Scarlet Letter." He says that Austin Warren fails to see Hester as feminist, only "'feminine and familial'" in "The Scarlet Letter: A Literary Exercise in Moral Theology." Sacvan Bercovitch calls Hester's prophecies "'moments of reconciliation'" and says she "'must now make compromise the work of culture.'" In The American Adam R. W. B. Lewis says, "But if Hester has sinned, she has done so as an affirmation of life, and her sin is the source of life; she incarnates those rights of personality that society is inclined to trample upon. The action of the novel springs from the enormous but improbable suggestion
that the society's estimate of the moral structure of the universe may be tested and found inaccurate" (112).

11Seymour Gross, in "The Tragic Design of The Scarlet Letter" says Hester's ornate embroidery is "an implicit rejection of the community's view of her act" (337) and that the letter really stands for Arthur, the only one who "has the power to remove the letter" (339). Also, Ernest Sandeen, in "The Scarlet Letter as a Love Story," says that "Hester Prynne can never honestly bring herself to regard her relations with Arthur Dimmesdale as 'sinful'" (350).

12For an opposing view, see Daniel G. Hoffman in Form and Fable in American Fiction. Hoffman says "Pearl's allegorical function brings into The Scarlet Letter the pagan values which Hawthorne had synthesized in 'The Maypole at Merry Mount.' But in The Scarlet Letter the amoral freedom of the green natural world is viewed with yet greater reservations" (179). Furthermore, Hoffman states that Hester proceeds toward "stoical resignation and reintegration with society" (185).

13Hyatt Waggoner, in "Three Orders: Natural, Moral, and Symbolic," says that "despite Hester's rise, no certainty of final release from evil or of the kind of meaning to be found in tragedy, no well-grounded hope of escape from the sin of the sinners can be assured" (323).

14Joel Porte, in In Respect to Egotism: Studies in American Romantic Writing, reads Dimmesdale's confession as
"an act" (156).

Joel Porte says that Hester issues forth from the prison, "the place of gestation," with her letter "virtually saying, 'I am A,'" and he also says that "literal self-definition is the narrative's first gesture." Porte asks, "How can Hester be degraded when her letter stands at the top of the scale?" (162). Further, Porte contends that "the infant alpha of seventeenth-century American female individualism and egotism grows into the new woman of nineteenth-century and later feminism, and perhaps--why not?--into the fully achieved omega of 'mutual happiness' envisioned by Hawthorne for some ultimate America of the spirit" (63).
CHAPTER FOUR

HOLGRAVE: HAWTHORNE'S FABULATION OF A FALLIBILIST

One need not be a Chamber--to be Haunted--
One need not be a house--
The brain has Corridors--surpassing
Material Place--

(Emily Dickinson 670)

Hawthorne's narrator of *The House of the Seven Gables* writes a preface within the novel itself, which, in effect, provides two prefaces to this work: Hawthorne's and the narrator's. This second preface, of course, is reflexive of the first preface, as well as being reflective of the story the narrator is in the process of telling, thus reflecting at the outset of the novel upon himself as writer and on the process itself of fiction making. Two important aesthetic ideas about the nature of Hawthorne's art are presented in the narrator's prefatory remarks, ideas symbolized by the Pyncheon mirror and the wizardry of the Maules. Both symbols are wrapped in mystery and supernatural speculations, which also define Hawthorne's aesthetic of mingling the marvellous with the actual. The narrator tells us that the Pyncheon mirror "was fabled to contain within its depths all the shapes that had ever been reflected
there." "Had we the secret of that mirror, we would gladly sit down before it, and transfer its revelations to our page." However, an unsubstantiated story claims that "the posterity of Matthew Maule had some connection with the mystery of the looking-glass, and that—by what appears to have been a sort of mesmeric process—they could make its inner region all alive with the departed Pyncheons," in particular, in their acts of "some deed of sin, or in the crisis of life's bitterest sorrow" (II 20-21).

Hawthorne, however, does not grant his narrator, who has by now included the reader in the making of this story, the ability of "transferring" the revelations of the mirror to "our page." Hawthorne's narrator knows that whatever the "secret of that mirror," it is not one that would allow a simplistic claim to the mimetic recording of truth or reality (20). In contrast, the real power to call up life from the past is clearly given to the Maules, who possess a mesmerizing wizardry capable of raising the dead. The mirror itself symbolizes Hawthorne's reflexive, fabulative form, just as the wizard symbolizes the kind of artist required to create this form of art. Undoubtedly, Hawthorne rejects the certainty of realism as a literary method and affirms his fabulative form of fiction as the more truthful way to discover the uncertainties of finding truth(s).

In this prefatory section of the novel, the narrator quite matter-of-factly tells us that any attempt to tell about an event from the past with absolute certainty is impossible and that all of the legendary stories of fact
about the Maule-Pyncheon feud are just that—legends. Thus, in the beginning of the narrator's story he straightforwardly tells us that the account he will give of the Maule-Pyncheon feud (with our help, of course) will be fabulative. Significantly, he then proceeds to dramatize the fact that his fiction is a contrivance by allowing Holgrave, our contemporary Maule, to usurp the narrator's role, to become the writer/artist of the Maule-Pyncheon story by his actually writing Chapter XIII, the "Alice Pyncheon" chapter of the novel. Holgrave, then, writes another version of the Maule-Pyncheon story in his story-within-a-story. This chapter, in fact, continues and develops narrative techniques and reader response awareness that Hawthorne began to experiment with in his short stories, in particular "Alice Doane's Appeal."

No one, to my knowledge, has ever seriously questioned why Hawthorne chose for one chapter of his romance to move his narration out of the pen of his omniscient, self-conscious, sometimes chatty, third person narrator and put it into the pen of Holgrave, one of the characters in the book, and Hawthorne's surrogate artist. In doing so, Hawthorne must have meant to accomplish something that he thought he could not accomplish as well by sticking with his third person narrator for this story of Alice Pyncheon. Much of the rest of my study of this novel examines what Hawthorne does in and around the "Alice Pyncheon" chapter of
the novel and offers reasons for his doing so, while also showing how Hawthorne continues his major employment of the narrative activities of post-modernist fabulators of metafiction and fallibilism and many current reader response theories of fiction.

Hawthorne introduces Holgrave's tale within a tale at the conclusion of the chapter called "The Daguerreotypist" and immediately preceding the reading of the "Alice Pyncheon" chapter to Phoebe. Before reading aloud, Holgrave tells Phoebe that he believes himself "'a little mad'" from the hold that the Maule-Pyncheon feud has upon him, but he says that he has found a method of trying to throw off the past by writing this bit of Pyncheon family history "'in the form of a legend, and mean[ing] to publish it in a magazine.'" Phoebe is surprised to hear that Holgrave writes for such publications as the Graham and Godey ladies' books. Holgrave, however, claims to be good at this kind of writing, bragging that "'In the humorous line, I am thought to have a very pretty way with me; and as for pathos, I am as provocative of tears as an onion!'" Phoebe agrees to let him read the story to her, if it is "'not very long'" "'nor very dull'" (186). Thus Hawthorne has neatly established critical judgments of the legend made by its author even before we get to hear the story. Hawthorne, in effect, requires that the reader judge whether Holgrave does write with humor and pathos and, furthermore, to decide if the
tale is either too long or too "'very dull.'" We are also prepared to examine Phoebe's reaction in the face of her prior fears that Holgrave may not be able to hold her attention. As it turns out, Holgrave more than holds her attention, he puts her under his spell, but that is another story, to come later.

Thus Holgrave ostensibly reads aloud in Chapter XIII his written version of what happens to Alice Pyncheon, a story that he has been accumulating from various sources through the years. He begins with a very positive, self-assured tone ("There was a message brought, one day . . . ") , sounding much more at first like an omniscient narrator than a person reporting hearsay evidence and legendary testimony. For example, in the opening paragraphs of the chapter, he reports verbatim what purports to be a conversation between Matthew Maule, the carpenter, and Scipio, the servant Colonel Pyncheon has sent to summon Maule to do some work on the House of the Seven Gables. Following this conversation, Holgrave's story moves into several paragraphs of strictly narrative material about the history of the conflict between the Maules and the Pyncheons. In these paragraphs, Holgrave is equally firm and confident, sounding as if he knows precisely and totally what he is talking about, that he really is telling the full and complete historical truth about the feud. Prior to beginning to read the story to Phoebe, Holgrave tells her that "'The truth is as I say!'"
In the early paragraphs of a written chapter of a supposedly oral presentation from a nonexistent written text, a reader has no reason to doubt Holgrave's prideful assertion. Holgrave sounds exactly like an eye-witness reporter, one who has been there for the whole three-generation story, obviously an impossibility. But his method (or Hawthorne's) is so artful at this point that readers are not allowed to bring up the argument against him that he could not possibly have been there, and cannot possibly tell the story in this omniscient fashion. Hawthorne is really having his own way with his readers, as Holgrave is having his with Phoebe, as I shall show later.

When Holgrave completes this narrative "history" of the Pyncheon-Maule feud, he returns to the reporting of conversation, again between Matthew Maule and Scipio, when Maule arrives at the house to do the alleged carpentry work required by Colonel Pyncheon. The same mimetic, "objective," and omniscient details continue to dominate Holgrave's narrative, in which he now describes Pyncheon and his quarters, as the colonel awaits the arrival of Maule. As Pyncheon and Maule begin their conversation, Holgrave continues to read his written words with the same "omniscient" voice, reporting that Pyncheon speaks to Maule, "with a smile" (195). If readers could momentarily escape from Holgrave's fiction within Hawthorne's fiction, they would realize that Holgrave is only doing what all first-
person fictional narrators pretend (with reader approval) to do: to practice total recall of all conversations. It is one of the most often practiced fictions about fiction. But when Pyncheon stops talking this time and Maule responds, Holgrave suddenly writes (or speaks) in a different manner: "and it is said that a smile came over his face" (195). Surely, we must ask ourselves as readers why Holgrave reports one man's smile as a fact and the other's as hearsay.

One possible answer lies in seeing the first phrase as Holgrave's prideful assertion that he can know that a Pyncheon would smile in such a situation, but in seeing the second phrase as Holgrave's subconscious admission that he can only report hearsay evidence of what his own ancestor would have done. Although Holgrave believes that in his tale he is giving shape to history, the truth is that history is, as must be the case in truth, giving shape to his tale. As a descendant of the Maules with their mystical powers over the Pyncheons, Holgrave believes (wrongly, of course) that he understands the Pyncheons; he not only believes that his ancestors could actually control Pyncheons, but he also believes that he knows how the Pyncheons would have acted. If they must act as a Maule wants them to, surely a Maule will always have prior knowledge of what is coming. So Holgrave sees himself as totally omniscient in regard to Pyncheon behavior. But his
having to report that his own ancestor is said to have smiled means that doubt is intruding upon Holgrave about how well he really understands the Maules. If he does not understand them, he has little hope of understanding the history of this conflict. Likewise, if Holgrave does not understand his forebears, he must be beginning subconsciously to wonder if he can understand his own motives. These self-doubts cause Holgrave to make these less than conscious distinctions in his story.

Through the painful writing of this text, which the reader of the novel never sees but knows must exist, Holgrave is trying to throw off the curse of the Maules, which is not only on the Pyncheons, but also on the Maules. Holgrave is, in fact, approaching the discovery of something important about himself through his writing of this Alice story: that he is more humane than he is a Maule. But the final and complete truth that the past must be accepted, even when it cannot be understood totally in terms of black and white, cannot become a truth upon which Holgrave can act until he has done more than write the text: he must also read it to Phoebe. In order for that truth to come to the fore, this whole series of events must occur: Holgrave must be possessed by the story; he must write the tale down; he must offer to read it to Phoebe; she must agree to listen; Holgrave's knowledge of the significance of what he has written must grow as he reads to Phoebe; she must be
strongly affected by the reading, putting herself into the position to be totally controlled by Holgrave, and, finally, Holgrave must (unlike the Maule he has always thought himself to be) act, in responding to Phoebe's response, like the loving, humane person that he is in the act of becoming. Of course, each of these acts may be viewed as resulting from each participant's absolutely free will or as being necessities that each person (being what he or she has become by this point) must fulfill as a participant in something resembling, if not actually being, an inevitable chain of historical events. Whichever is true (and Hawthorne will never tell us which he thinks is), Holgrave has to admit (without yet directly admitting it) that he is fallible, that the truth is not only other than what he has said it is, but it is even more than he knew it could be.

Another way of explaining what happens when Holgrave writes and then reads his tale to Phoebe, of course, is to suggest that Holgrave has lost control of his own story. The fictional process reveals another kind of truth, to Holgrave, which has taken over in the story, causing its author to write things that he really does not consciously intend to write. However we explain what has happened to Holgrave in the actual writing of his tale, we must see the change from objective, omniscient, all-knowing narrator to a conjectural, fallible fabulator as being a change to the condition that the postmodernist critics contend is the
"real" relationship between reality and the writer of fiction.

Hawthorne's chapter also requires that a reader abandon a modernist emphasis on a fixed text that allegedly affects all trained readers alike and submit to a moving text that may even move the same postmodernist reader differently at different times. Indeed, Holgrave's own text moves himself and Phoebe in ways neither expected. After all, Holgrave thinks he has captured the past and has proclaimed "'The truth is as I say!'" Obviously, Hawthorne is parodying realistic fiction and affirming a kind of fiction that recognizes both life and art as simultaneous processes.

Meanwhile, back in the written chapter that purports to be a report of Holgrave reading aloud, Holgrave as author and reader seems totally to have lost confidence in his ability to tell final and complete truths about the feud. Holgrave tells for the first time about the possible sources of his story: "Now, what was unquestionably important, a portion of these popular rumors could be traced, though rather doubtfully and indistinctly, to chance words and obscure hints" (196). Sources of contradictory evidence and hearsay testimony begin to dominate his tale. Holgrave speaks of "The wild, chimney-corner legend (which, without copying all its extravagances my narrative essentially follows)" (197). He writes that "Matthew Maule is said to have turned a cold ear." During the conversation between
Maule and Pyncheon, the Pyncheon ancestor's portrait on the wall "is averred to have lost all patience" (198). Subsequently, Holgrave writes, "According to some versions of the story" and follows that with "others say" (199). Finally, "the old Puritan's portrait seems to have persisted in shadowy gestures of disapproval" (199). Actually, Holgrave's verbal gestures are what have become shadowy, tentative, equivocal, after having started his tale with the apparently firm intention to make the truth be what he says it is. If Holgrave may be said to have lost control of his story, Hawthorne (who is still the first fabulator of this chapter) has not lost control of his. The truth that is coming out through Holgrave's tale is much more than the limited truth (perhaps error) that Holgrave thinks he is putting into it.

The fabulist's form of truth that Hawthorne is setting forth through Holgrave's story has much to do with the effects that the past in general and a person's family in particular have upon a person. Although a reader cannot ascertain the relative importance of inherited and environmental effects, Holgrave does initially arrive at the House of the Seven Gables with preconceived notions about what the Pyncheons symbolize in regard to the past. He once thought that he had to be completely antagonistic toward them, but he is now discovering through his writing and reading of the Alice Pyncheon story that his relationship to
history is much more complicated than he once thought, and that he may even be in error. Of course, the Pyncheon good nature and loving presence in Phoebe may have some bearing on Holgrave's new understanding of his own text, just as reader response critics claim can happen to us as readers when new insights or knowledge about a given event affect our understanding of it.

As Holgrave records his ancestor Matthew Maule's debating with Colonel Pyncheon over what may have been "a regular contract" or just "a private written agreement" to assure Maule of his rights in the case and to guarantee the house to the Pyncheons, Holgrave begins to feel as overwhelmed by his confrontation with "fiction writing" as does Maule in confronting an aristocratic colonel. Maule, initially full of self-confidence (like Holgrave) has entered the house and into the fray with such banging on the door that Scipio says, "'Anybody think he beat on the door with his biggest hammer!'" (192). In the debate with Pyncheon, Maule seems to have lost and given up too easily: "the carpenter's terms appeared so ridiculously easy that Mr. Pyncheon could scarcely forbear laughing in his face" (199). Holgrave, who began his tale with similar audacity, lives again his ancestor's momentary loss of confidence in facing a Pyncheon, through his act of reading this story to Phoebe. Does he begin to feel that his ancestor did wrong in securing his rights? In any case, Holgrave feels his
ancestor's shame, loses confidence, and writes in a more suggestive, less certain manner. Whatever the cause, Holgrave does begin to see the Maules in the same light (or same darkness) that he has previously reserved for the evil Pyncheons. His new vision affects his story telling. His story telling affects his new vision.

In Holgrave's version, however, Maule takes charge of the situation again and demands the presence of Alice Pyncheon, whose "clear, crystal medium of a pure and virgin intelligence" will provide the "only chance of acquiring the requisite knowledge" (200) about the missing document. This demand parallels Holgrave's demand that Phoebe be the medium by which he will acquire the requisite knowledge of the past. If he can take charge of Phoebe and persuade her to his version of "truth," then he will vindicate his attitude toward the evils of the aristocratic Pyncheons. Simultaneously with this action in his tale, Holgrave stops using all the equivocal language and becomes once again the confident, omniscient narrator. Both Maules are back in control of their fictions and their realities, because both are involved in a male-female sexual relationship, where, they certainly believe, woman is the weaker vessel. As Holgrave writes and reads, "So Alice put woman's might against man's might; a match not often equal, on the part of woman" (203). There is not a lot of tentativeness here. The reader of the chapter should by now be aware of the many
sexual symbols and references in Holgrave's story. His own relationship with Phoebe lies at the heart of his depiction of what supposedly happens between Alice and Matthew.

But what we cannot know is how much Holgrave knows about his feelings toward the equally pure and virginal Phoebe and when he comes to know what he does know. A companion question is this: When and how does Phoebe begin to affect Holgrave's convictions about his preconceived attitude toward the Pyncheon-Maule feud? Surely, we must recognize that Phoebe's reaction to Holgrave's oral presentation is somehow changing the tale he wrote. In fact, we can never know how closely Holgrave follows his written text in his oral presentation. But we should probably also recognize that Phoebe has been influencing Holgrave from the moment of their first meeting, which is to say that she may well have influenced his written tale before she began to influence his oral one.

At any rate, somewhere in his story line, Holgrave recognizes a crucial difference between Alice and Phoebe. Phoebe totally lacks the sin of pride, and possibly of deceit, practiced by her ancestor Alice. Her clear, honest reflection of Holgrave's effect on her chastens him and challenges his preconceived notions about inherited family evil. For purposes of explaining how Holgrave comes to the realization that he is a changed man, we can confine ourselves to the writing and reading of the Alice Pyncheon
story itself. Obviously, such a story and Holgrave's need to write it come about during a long period of real and fictional gestation; it is Holgrave's (re)birth trauma about which I am primarily concerned here, for Hawthorne's concern is to dramatize the self-begetting nature of fiction.

Just before Holgrave reads his story to Phoebe, but after he has written it down, Holgrave makes a vociferous exposition to Phoebe about the evils of the past, in particular the evil embodied in the aristocratic Pyncheons. In fact, at this time, in between his writing and reading of the story, Holgrave tells her that the Pyncheon house should be burned to ashes, thus destroying all traces of the past and the notions of planting a family and building a "'house for posterity'" (183). Indeed, Holgrave is so vigorous in his attack upon the Pyncheons and the past that Phoebe exclaims, "'How you hate everything old!'" Fortunately, Phoebe is not old. Surely Holgrave's passionate attack here (probably the most passionate he has ever made) stems in large part from his already having written the Alice Pyncheon story, during whose composition, as noted earlier, he begins to realize that he can no longer fully accept his own view of the past as totally evil and in need of being burned away. Part of his passion here also owes to the fact that he is falling in love with Phoebe, falling under her spell, a spell that a Pyncheon is weaving around a Maule,
which is the reverse of history. Therefore, from a position that Holgrave senses (knows, feels, fears?) is considerably weakened by his own writing and by Phoebe's influence on him, he attacks more vigorously than ever before. He feels under siege. Hawthorne demonstrates his own full awareness that this love/hate passion for Phoebe is tearing Holgrave apart both personally and philosophically. These two passages appear in the chapter preceding "Alice Pyncheon":

With the insight on which he prided himself, he fancied that he could look through Phoebe, and all around her, and could read her off like a page of a child's story-book. But these transparent natures are often deceptive; those pebbles at the bottom of the fountain are farther from us than we think. (182)

But had you peeped at them [as Holgrave passionately attacks the past] through the chinks of the garden-fence, the young man's earnestness and heightened color might have led you to suppose that he was making love to the young girl! (182)

Despite what Holgrave may have learned about himself, about his attitude toward Phoebe and toward the past in writing the Alice story, he cannot come to a full realization and a full change without getting out of his fiction into the "real" world of the novel. His attitude toward Phoebe is bound up in both the writing and the
reading. Holgrave's misreading of Phoebe's nature occurs after he has written his manuscript but before he reads it to her. Holgrave says that he has written the story in order to affect, perhaps even to seduce in a sense, the kind of woman who reads those ladies' books. If he has written it for such women, does he think that Phoebe is like those women? Apparently he thinks even less of her, saying, he can "read her off like a page of a child's story-book."

Surely one of Hawthorne's intentions in all of this is to say that Phoebe is much more than a child and far better a reader of written and human "texts" than those readers who are easily satisfied by sentimental romances. So what kind of reaction does Holgrave expect from Phoebe to his tale? Surely he does not even pretend to read it to her as if she were a literary critic, someone who can tell him whether or not the story is "right" for those "other" women, in whose legions Holgrave may have falsely placed Phoebe. Holgrave's intentions remain murky to him during this stage of his gestation. Holgrave's readers can fill in the gaps of this fictional structure and see that, perhaps. Holgrave's real purpose in reading his story aloud to Phoebe is to affect her, to weave a counter-attacking spell upon her, to seduce her to his point of view. If he hopes to seduce Phoebe mentally in the reading, then we have accounted for his placing so many sexual innuendos and symbols in his text. A few of those have come out in passing earlier, but noting at
least three more is useful in the argument here:

As Alice came into the room, her eyes fell upon the carpenter, who was standing near its centre, clad in a green woolen jacket, a pair of loose breeches, open at the knees, and with a long pocket for his rule, the end of which protruded. (201)

Setting aside all advantages of rank, this fair girl deemed herself conscious of a power—combined of beauty, high, unsullied purity, and the preservative force of womanhood—that could make her sphere impenetrable, unless betrayed by treachery within. (203)

At some paces from Alice, with his arms uplifted in the air, the carpenter made a gesture, as if directing downward a slow, ponderous, and invisible weight upon the maiden. (204)

Continuing in the critical posture that we cannot ever really know how much Holgrave knows about what he is doing, what his "real" intentions are in writing the Alice story, and wanting to read it to Phoebe, we can know (because Hawthorne says so) that by the end of the reading, Holgrave has mesmerized Phoebe, thereby repeating the history of Matthew and Alice. In Chapter XIV, "Phoebe's Good-bye," and
immediately after the supposedly oral presentation, Hawthorne, through his omniscient narrator, writes of Phoebe: "A veil was beginning to be muffled about her, in which she could behold only him, and live only in his thoughts and emotions" (211). Holgrave has put her into this condition through a combination of instruments: the story of what Matthew did to Alice, in which Phoebe can see herself being likewise affected; the tone of Holgrave's voice, which readers can never hear but can only imagine; sexual innuendos already identified here, and others of similar nature; Holgrave's own body language, which Hawthorne calls "mystic gesticulations by which he had sought to bring bodily before Phoebe's perception the figure of the mesmerizing carpenter" (211). The last of these instruments is the most interesting. Clearly, the times would not have allowed either Holgrave to make or Hawthorne to describe the kind of seductive body movements that might cause a maiden to lean "slightly towards" a young man and seem "almost to regulate her breath by his" (211). So, in effect, Hawthorne has to cause Holgrave to resurrect Matthew's body to help him achieve Phoebe's enchantment. Holgrave's written (and now read, with passion, I imagine) description of Alice's reaction to Maule can also serve as a description of Phoebe's reaction to Holgrave, by way of Maule's mesmerizing figure: "A power, that she little dreamed of, had laid its grasp upon her maiden soul. A
will, most unlike her own, constrained her to do its
grotesque and fantastic bidding" (208).

Fortunately for Holgrave's and Phoebe's future together
(Alice is not freed until Matthew marries another, and then
she dies), Holgrave does not at this time subject Phoebe to
do his "grotesque and fantastic bidding." Clearly, at this
point in Holgrave's reading, he and Phoebe are responding as
participants in the story. The fiction has taken over,
illuminating their feelings for each other as they identify
with Matthew and Alice. But most important, Holgrave now
sees in his present light the faulty foundation of his past
dogmatic truth and, as a result, he no longer has the desire
to destroy Phoebe, as Maule destroyed Alice. Instead, by
now, Holgrave is capable of not repeating history, of not
doing what he might have been expected to do as a Maule.
Rather than destroying Phoebe (symbolic of the past and of
the idea of planting a family), as Matthew destroyed Alice,
Holgrave chooses not to perpetuate the potential for evil or
his inherited powers of artistic wizardry. Although evil
exists in both families (pride in Alice and the Pyncheons
and revenge and pride in the Maules), some things passed
down from the past are good: Phoebe and potentially
Holgrave. Holgrave has already expressed this attitude at
the end of the Alice story, when he reports that his
ancestor grieved deeply because he had completely destroyed
Alice, when all he wanted to destroy was her pride. It
takes the Maules a long time to learn that pride cannot destroy pride. Phoebe demonstrates to Holgrave that humility can cause pride to see itself for what it is. This ending reflects Holgrave's evolving feelings about the past, in contrast to his earlier words of anarchy. But Holgrave needs to act out his story before he can finally realize the truth, or come to terms with what he has already said in his written story. As Michael Boyd points out, drama diminishes the gap between illusion and reality more than any other art form because word becomes action, which is of course closer to immediate reality for both actors and the audience (126). Even though Phoebe's influence on Holgrave earlier has been a factor in his changing attitude, her succumbing to his oral story is crucial in his deciding not to revenge (burn to ashes) the past by mauling her. Ironically, by accepting a part of the past, by affirming that even from the Pyncheons good (Phoebe) can arise, Holgrave does, in fact, succeed in shedding the part of the past that is repressive and evil and that has rendered him "a little mad."

Significantly, Hawthorne here dramatizes in Holgrave the artist's powers both to create and destroy. Previous Maule wizards went too far in controlling their subjects, as do Alymer and Rappaccini, in Hawthorne short stories. But Holgrave's allowing the creative act to have its full sway over himself and his audience prevents his becoming the cold, destructive artist. He, in contrast, achieves a self-
mesmerization, an epiphany of sorts, which allows him to be reborn as a different kind of artist, one who is now much more akin to Hawthorne's Town Pump, who eschews reformers and other dogmatic preachers. So Holgrave, who set out to relieve his madness by telling what he thought would be a factual, objective, historical story, has ended up in mystery and wonder, with "mystical gesticulations," whatever those are, but with a much more significant form of intuitive truth. These truths are the kind that can only arise out of all authors admitting that they cannot avoid being fallibilists and that in order to produce any truth at all they must be dedicated fabulators.

Hawthorne also humorously recognizes the possibility of various reader responses: Holgrave "now observed that a certain remarkable drowsiness (wholly unlike that with which a reader possibly feels himself affected) had been flung over the senses of his auditress" (211). Phoebe is in that trance-like state, referred to earlier, in which Holgrave perceives (perhaps not with total accuracy) that he has caused Phoebe to "behold only him, and live only in his thoughts and emotions" (211). The reader, Hawthorne admits playfully, not being subject to Holgrave's seductive tone of voice and suggestive body language, may have enjoyed some other kind of drowsiness.

The "Alice Pyncheon" chapter, then, is the place where Holgrave discovers some truths about himself and his past by
admitting that he cannot tell a totally factual story about history. It is also a chapter in which Hawthorne demonstrates his own ability to be a fabulator of a fabulation within a fabulation. The chapter is not merely a plot purveyor or a parody of Hawthorne's own ability to be a popular magazine writer, although it may, indeed, be both these things, and more. Most significantly, this chapter is crucial in illustrating how Holgrave becomes a changed person. Holgrave's conversion is not sudden and contradictory, as some critics believe, but has clearly been prepared for, thoroughly documented, and believably (yet with the mystery of art) dramatized.

Such mysteries of art entrance Scholes in Fabulation and Metafiction, in which he cites Jorge Luis Borges' estimation of Hawthorne: "An allegory like Nathaniel Hawthorne's, which at its best is 'refractory, so to speak, to reason' may approach the ungraspable." However, Borges wrongfully, I believe, "reproaches Hawthorne for a tendency toward reducing his own allegorical intuitions to mere moral fables" (11). This assessment of Hawthorne's fabulative fiction is inaccurate in the light of his handling of Holgrave's story. It is neither an allegory nor a moral fable, but it is a fine example of a tale involving metafiction and fallibilism. Hawthorne, through the very kind of fabulation that Borges advocates, does not allow us a "graspable" answer to reality. Nor does he allow Holgrave
to maintain his dogmatic stance about right and wrong, truth and error. Indeed, Hawthorne allows Holgrave, through his own fabulation (which he does not know is one) to come to the realization that he cannot have certain knowledge or "graspable" answers that are "right" for all persons, for all times. Perhaps if Hawthorne had not caused Holgrave to write as a fabulator (which Hawthorne knows all artists of genius, in truth, to be), Holgrave could not have discovered the truth that he develops despite himself. Hawthorne undoubtedly believed that Godey's rarely published the work of fabulators. Such magazines are always too much into "truth." From his new fallibilist position, Holgrave, far from being a dogmatist, now concedes that his former desire to raze the past is merely destructive. Advocating a house built of stone, Holgrave now affirms the continuity of the past, not its annihilation. Quite willingly he allows that each succeeding generation should change the fashions inside the house to suit its particular needs. Surely, this current generation of readers must also embellish Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables in response to past and present "critical decoration." Holgrave's acknowledgement that the fashions of the house will and must change indicates that Hawthorne joins the ranks of the fallibilists, not the preachers and allegorists. Clearly, Hawthorne was a fallibilist before the term existed. Hawthorne was far too intelligent, perceptive, and
knowledgeable to be dogmatic. He saw reality as shadows, as ambiguous and ephemeral flickerings of a fire, as the not quite accurate reflections of mirrors. Reality for Hawthorne is not a "graspable" certitude, but an intuitive experience controlled largely, of course, by the imagination. When Hawthorne wrote the "Alice Pyncheon" chapter and gave it to Holgrave to read to Phoebe, he produced a nearly perfect illustration of what Scholes says fiction should do:

Like the sexual act, the act of fiction is a reciprocal relationship. It takes two. Granted, a writer can write for his own amusement, and a reader can read in the same way; but these are acts of mental masturbation, with all the limitations that are involved in narcissistic gratification of the self. In the full fictional act, however, writer and reader share a relationship of mutual dependency. The meaning of the fictional act itself is something like love. The writer, at his best, respects the dignity of the reader. He does this by assuming a sensitivity and intelligence 'out there' which will match that of his own best writing self. The reader, at the same time, respects the dignity of the writer. He does not simply try to take his pleasure and his meaning from the book. He strives to mate with the writer, to share the writer's viewpoint, to come fully to terms with the
sensibility and intelligence that have informed this particular work of fiction. When writer and reader make a 'marriage of true minds,' the action of fiction is perfect and complete. (27)

Clearly, as fabulator, Hawthorne created a text for Holgrave that Holgrave says he has aimed at something other than sensitive and intelligent readers. Holgrave, whether he knows it or not, failed to write a Godey's story, because Phoebe does not "read" Alice as a tainted, fallen woman, deserving of judgment and censure. Rather, Phoebe "becomes" Alice. Hawthorne, whether Holgrave knows it or not, aimed the text at Phoebe, who can mate with Holgrave as she, too, enters the fiction-making as both reader and recipient, a reader of Holgrave's text and a "writer" of the text in her own right. For without Phoebe's response, the text we have would not have been created at all. Phoebe, in fact, mates so completely with Holgrave that she shares his evolving viewpoint and falls under his spell, as he has fallen under hers. Hawthorne brings "a marriage of true minds" upon Holgrave and Phoebe. But more importantly, Hawthorne expects his reader to mate with him also in the act of fiction, as we create along with him (in numerous and various ways) the text(s) of *The House of the Seven Gables*. Hawthorne's masterly performance of facilitating communication between two of his characters has also made it possible for every reader to try to do what Scholes says is
the only thing that a critic should try to do: to talk about
the book's "abstractable content" and "perform a useful
service" of facilitating "that communication between reader
and writer which may lead to reader understanding and a
valid experience of a book."

The happy ending of *The House of the Seven Gables* is
erroneously proclaimed as contrived, weak, facile, and
unsatisfactory by many critics of Hawthorne's work.
Contrived? Yes. But with an Hawthornian *contrivance* so
subtly crafted that his readers must look thoughtfully at
the romance to understand it. We must distance ourselves
from the work, as Hawthorne's metafictional devices require
us to do, so that we can see his wizardry at work in this
piece of fiction. He illustrates with sleight-of-hand the
self-begetting mystery of the creative act. Indeed,
Holgrave's "sudden" conversion does seem to pop out of a
magician's hat, as a rabbit does--out of nowhere. But we
know, as observers of all magicians, that their creative
manipulations of our perceptions depend totally on their
skills in blending the actual with the imaginary to produce
a reality. While Holgrave's radical change may appear to
many readers as unprepared for and clumsily handled by
Hawthorne, the opposite is the case for readers who have,
with Holgrave, allowed the fictive process to procreate a
new reality--an epiphany. Epiphanies are, after all, sudden
and transforming, arising from the complexity of heretofore
hidden and unconnected knowledge.

Hawthorne himself tells us in the preface to this romance that when "romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation, it is usually through a far more subtile process than the ostensible one" (2). Clearly, then, Hawthorne intends for his readers to look at the process of creation in this fiction, because the process of fiction making itself is a major concern in this work—as Hawthorne so intensely dramatizes in his story-within-a-story. He even tells us that we must look at the romance itself (surely referring to its fabulative form) if we would know meaning. Thus Hawthorne achieves in The House of the Seven Gables by means of his metafictional form what Kellman describes in The Self-Begetting Novel, "This device of a narrative which is in effect a record of its genesis is a happy fusion of form and content" (3).

This metafictional contrivance, then, draws attention to the fictional process itself—the real subject, perhaps, of all Hawthorne's work. What Hawthorne accomplishes by exposing fiction as fiction is his revelation that all of our actual experiences of life are just as embued with fiction as they are with fact. Rita K. Golin claims that Hawthorne's perceptions of life are essentially dreams—daydreams that Hawthorne as artist creates from a mesmerized or dream-like consciousness (Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Truth of Dreams 74). Indeed, the position of the
narrator of "Sights from a Steeple" represents Hawthorne's "neutral territory" in which the artist hopes to create his fictions without losing his equilibrium. Like Ishmael on his topmast, in this half-trance or mesmerized state, the artist can see higher (or deeper) truths.

When Holgrave arrives at the House of the Seven Gables, he comes equipped with the wizardry of his ancestors, who have misused their prophetic and mesmerizing abilities. We see Holgrave in the actual act of learning something that Hawthorne learned or was born knowing: the artist must remain constantly aware of the potential for evil, which is inherent in every gift of genius. Aylmer and Rappaccini, as scientific geniuses, represent for Hawthorne the danger of the creative mind's becoming so far removed from the procession of life that it can care only for the art object itself.

How wrong Hawthorne has demonstrated T. S. Eliot to be in his belief that the artist can maintain "a continual extinction of personality" in his creations. Eliot even uses a scientific fact as his analogy for how an artist should create—as if he were only a catalyst, leaving no part of himself in the art object and vice-versa. Although Hawthorne is a highly self-conscious artist, he affirms over and over again the efficacy of the organic process itself and the power of fiction to illuminate our common experience of the uncertainties of life. Certainly,
Hawthorne has dramatized in Holgrave his view of the type of artist and artistry he affirms and celebrates, for Holgrave (despite himself) is motivated by love for Phoebe, just as Drowne and Owen Warland are motivated by the women they love in their living creations. Perhaps, the cold, catalytic observer-artist is, in fact, less accurate in his vision precisely because he is emotionally removed from the organic nature of life. As Scholes points out, the romance form is orgastic, reflective of the natural rhythms and procreative cycles of life (26). The fact that Hawthorne chose this form not only reflects his view of art as a comingling of the imagined and the actual, but, more importantly, the form itself reflects his great emphasis on the self-begetting nature of both life and art. After all, Hawthorne's purpose is to explore the nature of the reality that we call life—many versions of it.
Works Cited

1All references are to the text of the novel in The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. II.

2Robert L. Berner, in "A Key to 'The Custom-House,'" agrees that Holgrave is Hawthorne's surrogate (38).

3Clark Griffith, in "Substance and Shadow: Language and Meanings in The House of the Seven Gables," says that the fate of the Maules "so far slipped Hawthorne's own mind, apparently, that he was obliged to resort to an awkward, obviously contrived flashback (cap. xiii) in order to reintroduce them" (393). Jane Benardete, in "Holgrave's Legend of Alice Pyncheon as a Godey's Story," argues in support of Holgrave's assertion that he has indeed written a story for one of the ladies' books. She attributes Hawthorne's "imitiation of Godey's style" as an opportunity "to demonstrate his ability to produce a facile story" and at the same time to demonstrate how much better his stories are than those in the popular magazines. She even asserts that this tale is written in a "superficial manner" that sets it apart from "the complex, serious structure of his novel as a whole" (233).

4Rudolph von Abele, in "Holgrave's Curious Conversion," criticizes Hawthorne's handling of Holgrave's conversion in these strong terms: "The pivot of this final scene is the abrupt 'conversion' of Holgrave, the last surviving Maule,
from a bearded, peripatetic and enthusiastic reformer to a settled and weary conservative—in part through the yeasty work of his love for Phoebe Pyncheon, but also, one imagines, in part through the influence of the fortune into most of which he is destined to come if he marries her. But one finds it impossible to accept this 'conversion' at face value: it comes much too neatly, and is scarcely prepared for in the body of the book. And as a matter of fact, this is no trivial affair, inasmuch as the significance of the entire book hangs on how this 'transformation' is regarded" (395).

¹From "Tradition and the Individual Talent," where Eliot says a number of things about the creative process that run totally opposite to the argument I am making about Hawthorne's creative process. Eliot says, for example, that "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." And he says "... the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates." (From Twentieth Century Criticism, William J. Handy and Max Westbrook, eds., New York: The Free Press, 1974, 30-31.)
CHAPTER FIVE

RECOVERING COVERDALE:

UNMASKING HAWTHORNE'S MASQUERADE

The One who could repeat the Summer day--
Were greater than itself--though He
Minutest of Mankind should be--

And He--could reproduce the Sun--
At period of going down--
The Lingering--and the Stain--I mean--

When Orient have been outgrown--
And Occident--become Unknown--
His Name--remain--

(Emily Dickinson 307)

Many critics have judged Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance to be a failure and an embarrassment to the author's artistry. Others see the work as merely weak and ineffectual. Most often criticized is Hawthorne's ending of the story. Coverdale's confession is seen by many readers as an escapist, trite ending to a story that lacks cohesiveness of tone and plot. Hyatt Waggoner, however, attempts to salvage Hawthorne's reputation by reading the work as a poem, a much more appropriate approach, for it
allows a more suggestive, symbolic reading of the story (Hawthorne: A Critical Study 188). Moreover, Zenobia consistently suggests that Coverdale is a poet always in the process of making a poem out of their experiences at Blithedale.

Henry James and other critics have insisted, to varying degrees, upon reading the work as a piece of realistic fiction, judging it to be a failure because it lacks verisimilitude according to the tenets of literary realism. Unfortunately, these critics still too often refuse Hawthorne the right to be a writer of romance, a plea he repeatedly sets forth in the prefaces of his works as well as inherently in the works themselves. But The Blithedale Romance demands to be read, if not as poem, then as pure romance. The content is undeniably romantic, and Hawthorne's romantic, fabulative, metafictional form only underscores his hidden subject in this work--his view of reality as an interblending or marriage of the actual and the imaginary and as the interplay between artist and audience in the creating of human realities in a work of fiction.

In almost all of Hawthorne's works, the underlying and primary subject is the relationship of the artist to his artistry, to reality, and to his audience. Hawthorne as a mature writer of longer romances or novels first appears in the disguise of Hester Prynne, the self-begetting artist.
Then in *The House of the Seven Gables*, he explores his relationship to the past in the guise of Holgrave. In that work we watch as Holgrave is transformed by the power and mystery of the fictional process into a fabulative fallibilist. By the time Hawthorne writes *The Blithedale Romance*, he has become even more overtly self-reflexive. In this work he uses a first person narrator, who, of course, is Hawthorne's surrogate artist. Coverdale is the very embodiment of the reflexive artist, a mirror of Hawthorne, as he immediately draws attention to himself as the writer of the work he is ostensibly in the act of producing and the work that we are in the act of reading. From the outset, Hawthorne, the first writer of the story, and Coverdale engage the reader in Coverdale's autobiographical account of his experiences at Blithedale, recorded by Coverdale twelve years after the events occurred.

Michael Boyd says that reflexive novels are inherently "writerly novels," meaning that the author depends on the reader to enter into the fictional act as both reader and writer in order for any kind of text(s) to be created, which accounts for the fact that reflexive novels do not depend on unity of tone or coherence of plot in order to achieve their purposes (176). In the reflexive novel the two acts of reading and writing are inextricable, not only for us as readers/writers of Hawthorne's text, but also for Hawthorne himself as the first reader/writer of the events he turned
into The Blithedale Romance. Therefore, what Hawthorne has done in this novel is to reflect himself in the act of fiction-making through his surrogate Coverdale. He shows us how Coverdale's reading/writing about his "reality" of Blithedale is also, in fact, a mirror image of what we as readers/writers of this fiction are doing. In short, all of this mirroring of writers reading and readers writing emphasizes the processes of fiction and their efficacy in revealing the truths we can discover and re-discover by bringing the fictive imagination to focus on external actualities.

If critics have found The Blithedale Romance puzzling, then Hawthorne has achieved his purpose, for the whole work is a contrived riddle, as mysterious and deliberately wrought as Priscilla's little purses. Just as readers of such postmodern writers as Thomas Pyncheon and Kurt Vonnegut must bring their talents as detectives to the reading of novels like The Crying of Lot 49 and Cat's Cradle, we must also enter into the solving of Hawthorne's romantic mystery alongside the artist Coverdale, using his imaginative tools as a means for discovering the hidden contents. In reading/writing Coverdale's autobiography with him, we must not only read between the lines, but also beneath the covers and the masks, so prevalent in this work. A romance progresses by hints, innuendo, fits and starts, confusions. Certainly, protagonist Miles Coverdale, as his name may
suggest, is confused and so are we as readers of this metafictional maze.

Nevertheless, Coverdale hopes to make some sense of his experiences at Blithedale, especially in regard to his relationship to the triangle composed of Priscilla, Hollingsworth, and Zenobia. Consequently, our role as readers is to proceed along with Coverdale in putting together the pieces of the puzzle that constitute this novel. In order to unveil The Veiled Lady, who is really symbolic of Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, we must look for the clues Hawthorne has subtly hidden in the structure of his novel. From the preface onward into the novel, Hawthorne weaves, in level after level of stories-within-stories, and in varied versions of his story, a tale that is primarily about the telling of a tale. It is a tale that purports to be an attempt at shaping actual events into some kind of "truthful" meaning or reality. In other words, Hawthorne's subject is revealed in the intricacies of the artistic structure itself. If we are to find out what Hawthorne's Veiled Lady is really all about, we must take our clues not from overt plot development but from the way Hawthorne tells this story. The romance is really all about the relationship of fiction to actual event in the structuring of the reality that we call life.

In the preface, Hawthorne says that he has chosen his own experiences at Brook Farm in order "to establish a
theatre, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives." He makes a plea for a "Faery Land, so like the real world, that, in a suitable remoteness, one cannot well tell the difference, but with an atmosphere of strange enchantment, beheld through which the inhabitants have a propriety of their own," claiming that this "atmosphere is what the American romancer needs." Clearly, Hawthorne's epistemology is dominated by an imaginative view of reality. He says that his life at Brook Farm was "the most romantic episode of his own life—essentially a day-dream, and yet a fact—and thus offering an available foothold between fiction and reality" (III 2). This mystery of the interblending of fiction and fact is dramatized in The Blithedale Romance through Coverdale's attempt to uncover the truth about Priscilla, The Veiled Lady, with whom he has so desperately wanted to establish a romantic relationship.

Among the possible romantic relationships in this novel, certainly a major one is the relationship between Hawthorne and his sympathetic reader. The whole story is concerned with the portrayal of the artist in the act of establishing an artistic intercourse with readers who share his sensitivity. Those who would achieve an artistic consummation with Hawthorne, the romancer, must approach his
artistry the same way he approaches his artistic subject, often identical with his audience, as in "The Great Stone Face." This sympathetic approach is symbolized in The Blithedale Romance by Priscilla's handiwork, the artistry of her purse-making, which is, of course, reflexive of Hawthorne's fiction-making. The kind of art Hawthorne (and therefore Coverdale) produces requires a special sensitivity on the part of the recipient in order to find the entrance into its hidden contents, just as Priscilla's purses require an understanding of the mystery of her contrivance in order to find the secret opening. Coverdale describes her artistry in the following passage:

She now produced, out of a work-bag that she had with her, some little wooden instruments (what they are called I never knew), and proceeded to knit, or net, an article which ultimately took the shape of a silk purse. As the work went on, I remembered to have seen just such purses before. Indeed, I was the possessor of one. Their peculiar excellence, besides the great delicacy and beauty of the manufacture, lay in the almost impossibility that any uninitiated person should discover the aperture; although, to a practiced touch, they would open as wide as charity or prodigality might wish. I wondered if it were not a symbol of Priscilla's own mystery. (III 35)

Indeed, in this romance, Hawthorne is reflexive of both
himself as a writer (in the guise of Coverdale) and of his artistry (in the form of Priscilla's purse-making), for what we have in this work is Coverdale's weaving, or knitting, a work of art whose contents are just as nearly impossible to get at as those of Priscilla's purse. In a sense, then, Coverdale's artistry reflects Priscilla, who symbolizes both his subject and his form of art. Priscilla is, in fact, "the riddle" of The Blithedale Romance, the riddle Coverdale attempts to solve in the act of creating this story. He is trying to contrive a way into the mystery of Priscilla, the mystery of Art. Consequently, we as readers/writers of Coverdale's romance stand in a reflexive position with him in respect to Hawthorne, who first poses the riddle to Coverdale as his surrogate artist in the fiction itself. However, Hawthorne poses the riddle to us, in reality, just as he has, in reality, posed the question to himself in the fictional guise of Coverdale, who ostensibly writes The Blithedale Romance that was, in fact, written by Hawthorne. What all of this actually means is that Hawthorne expects us as readers to write the text(s) of this romance in the same way(s) that he and Coverdale do. In this privileged position, then, we are invited by Hawthorne and Coverdale to lift the veil of Art worn by these two artists in order to complete the fictional act—which is to experience all of the mystery, wonder, and joy of a romance initiated by artists with whom we share an affinity of heart and
imagination.

Coverdale has been soundly chastised by Gordon Hutner in his Secrets and Sympathy: Forms of Disclosure in Hawthorne's Novels as "nothing more than a voyeur" who because of his "inflating of his faculty of compassionate understanding and implicit perception actually distorts sympathy so violently that its moral quality is negated" (104). However, as readers, we stand in a corollary position with Coverdale in regard to the interpreting of Hawthorne's creation (for the riddle of Priscilla in the novel represents the mystery and beauty of Hawthorne's artistry); consequently, we are stimulated to read Coverdale's actions toward Priscilla in a sympathetic manner. Hutner's disapproval of Coverdale's failure to lift Priscilla's veil and save her from Westervelt, as Hollingsworth does at Priscilla's last performance as The Veiled Lady, does not take into account the fact that Coverdale is a cover for Hawthorne himself.

As readers of Hawthorne, we would, indeed, be shocked to see him, in any guise, rushing in and "penetrating the sphere" of anyone without the full permission of that subject. We know that Holgrave in The House of the Seven Gables avoids this very crime when he realizes that the Maules' powers of wizardry have been used for evil, selfish purposes in the past, so he resists penetrating the sphere of Phoebe's individuality, the sanctity of her soul, during
his reading to her of his story of Alice Pyncheon. Certainly, Hawthorne does not approve of taking advantage of a maiden who has fallen under a veil of mesmerization, for Matthew Maule, Holgrave's ancestor, stands condemned in Holgrave's story-within-the-story of *The House of the Seven Gables* for taking advantage of Alice Pyncheon while she is caught under the veil of Maule's mesmerization. In contrast, Holgrave, who is himself transformed by his own wizardry into the kind of artist Hawthorne endorses, waits for Phoebe voluntarily to respond to him and to his artistry. Holgrave does not penetrate the veil or attempt to lift the veil that the wizardry of his fiction-making has woven around Phoebe. Instead, she is allowed to contrive her own way out of the spell, just as Hawthorne advocates in "A Select Party," in which his surrogate narrator says that those of the "imaginative faith" must find their own way home after their sojourn in the realms of fancy at the party given by The Man of Fancy.

Hawthorne's emphasis on the reciprocal imaginative act between reader and writer is equally applicable to Coverdale's relationship with Priscilla. This romance is not successful because Coverdale's means of communication is not met by a sympathetic reader. For some reason, Priscilla, who weaves a beautiful art, full of mystery, remains beneath the veil she and others have contrived. We do know that as a child she has lived primarily in the realm
of her imagination, contriving fairy tales about the beautiful sister whom she has never known until she comes to Blithedale. Her artistic muse has been the pure fantasy about this woman who is herself almost pure fantasy. Zenobia, whom we and Priscilla learn late in the novel is Priscilla's sister, is an actress whose real name we never know. Her identity is totally a masquerade, on stage as well as in real life. At Blithedale she is allowed to continue a life of fiction, merely playing another role as a member of a community that is itself an alternate reality. Thus, both women never escape their worlds of fancy, primarily because they refuse to exist in any realm other than a contrived one. Hawthorne knows that the best fiction-making depends on an intercourse with the external world of human action. Otherwise, the artist can produce nothing but sterility and impotence, and when one artist lost in fantasy becomes the muse or audience for another equally lost in fantasy, the union produces destruction.

Blithedale is neither reality nor fiction, but a real artificial creation based on false assumptions about the human condition. Hawthorne indicates in this novel that too often we are victims of someone else's wizardry and that too often this wizardry is evil because it is wrought for selfish reasons. Moreover, too often those who create these artificial utopias forget that they are impossible because they forget that their fabricated ideal is only another
construct, one that usually denies individuality and thus violates human nature. Coverdale recognizes the dangers inherent in our artificial realities, especially if we forget that they frequently demand our wearing a mask and playing an assigned role. Both Priscilla and Zenobia fail to contrive a way out of the fictions they have woven for themselves and called reality, but more importantly, they have allowed first Westervelt and later Hollingsworth to capture them in their evil wizardry. What seems so blithe at Blithedale is, in fact, terrifying. The "playing" or "playfulness" that art begins with can bring either destruction or restructuring. For Zenobia the result is destruction. She commits suicide, because she has failed to be a successful artist in her own right. She has confused reality with artifice and played the role assigned to her by her evil muses; consequently, she is a self-aborting artist, standing vividly in contrast to Hester Prynne and her restructuring through the processes of art in The Scarlet Letter.

Priscilla, on the other hand, seems never to have been born. Wrapped in her own fancy, she fails to see in Coverdale the qualities of a good artist, an artist who refuses to take advantage of her innocence and ignorance, even though she is drawn magnetically toward Coverdale in turn. Coverdale waits for Priscilla (or art itself) to respond to him voluntarily, for he knows that to force
himself upon her would be a violation of her sanctity, just as Hawthorne also knows that for art to stand in a true relation with the artist or the audience, it must be free to run its course, its process. To impose a false ending results in sterility. Furthermore, Coverdale can see that Priscilla is completely enamoured with Hollingsworth and under Zenobia's control. She has allowed Zenobia to veil her once more in town as she did in the tableau vivant at Blithedale. Thus she is art being manipulated for evil purposes. If Coverdale does not rush in and rescue Priscilla, he should not be blamed by some readers as being too solipsistic and cold to have any real feelings for others. He is hardly the cold observer. He is simply the kind of romancer of which Hawthorne himself approves.

Hutner does, in fact, make the point that Hawthorne believes a relationship should proceed by communicating indirectly, but he does not see Coverdale as a surrogate for Hawthorne in The Blithedale Romance, in fact, to the contrary. However, if we refer to the same letter Hawthorne wrote to Sophia before their marriage, as Hutner does in his argument for the type of sympathy required by Hawthorne for a relationship in which their two lives may best communicate on an intimate basis, perhaps we can discover that Coverdale is only proceeding in his relationship according to the same guidelines Hawthorne sets forth for himself and Sophia. Hawthorne writes,
Thou wilt not think that it is caprice or stubborness that has hitherto resisted thy wishes [to tell his mother and sister of his engagement to Sophia].

Neither, I think, is it a love of secrecy and darkness. I am glad to think that God sees through my heart; and if any angel has power to penetrate into it, he is welcome to know everything that is there. Yes; and so may any mortal, who is capable of full sympathy and therefore worthy to come into my depths. But he must find his own way there. I can neither guide him nor enlighten him. It is this involuntary reserve, I suppose, that has given the objectivity to my writing. And when people think that I am pouring myself out in a tale or essay, I am merely telling what is common to human nature, not what is peculiar to myself. I sympathize with them—not they with me. (Love Letters, II 79-80)

Coverdale knows, then, as a reader of Priscilla, that her purse-making reflects the mystery of her being, and that to discover her mystery, he must be a sensitive observer. Like all readers of Hawthorne's art, Coverdale "must find his own way" into the knowledge of Priscilla—and only if he is "capable of full sympathy." This relationship of reciprocity fits Robert Scholes' previously cited definition of a successful "mating" between the writer and reader. Scholes also says this understanding of the fictional act is
achieved only between a writer and reader who "read" each other in a way to provide mutual pleasure. Hawthorne indicates in this letter to Sophia that as an artist he can only create what he observes and also that he observes in an attitude of sympathy. In other words, he brings emotions that he considers "common to human nature" to bear on his subject. By means of his artistic sympathy, he is able to understand and then recreate and reveal highly personal mysteries that are experienced universally.

This reciprocity of sympathy generated by Hawthorne's art does, after all, reveal Hawthorne to his readers. He also indicates in the letter to Sophia that this intimate revelation of himself is actually what he most desires. Similarly, Hawthorne explains his relation to his art and to his audience in Coverdale's defense of his role as an observer of the activities of Zenobia, Priscilla, and Westervelt as he watches them from his hotel window when they are all back in town. His room is situated directly across from them, providing the ideal artistic perspective for Coverdale, for he clearly relates his action as that of an audience watching a drama unfold itself on the stage beyond the parted red velvet curtains of Zenobia's townhouse. Knowing that Zenobia has seen him watching them by her condemning salutation and closing of the curtain ("It fell like the drop-curtain of a theatre"), Coverdale reacts by telling himself and his readers that Zenobia should have
known him better than to suppose that his was "a mere vulgar curiosity":

She should have been able to appreciate that quality of the intellect and the heart, which impelled me (often against my own will, and to the detriment of my own comfort) to live in other lives, and to endeavor—by generous sympathies, by delicate intuitions, by taking note of things too slight for record, and by bringing my human spirit into manifold accordance with the companions whom God assigned me—to learn the secret which was hidden even from themselves. (160)

Hawthorne argues in "The Custom-House" preface to The Scarlet Letter that the author should stand in "a true relation" with his audience. Undoubtedly, Coverdale desires to stand in a true relation with Priscilla, Zenobia, and Hollingsworth. In response to Zenobia's questioning what it is Coverdale wants to discover about her, he answers truthfully, "The mystery of your life . . . And you will never tell me" (47). From the beginning of their life together at Blithedale these three form a circle, a sphere that Coverdale can never penetrate. All three have hidden agendas. Coverdale does not, even though his name suggests he might. His name, like the name Blithedale, is, in fact, highly ironic. Blithedale is blithe only on the surface, just as Coverdale's calling to be a poet requires him to
uncover surface realities in order to expose what is covered up by the masquerade of life at Blithedale. In fact, Hollingsworth eventually shuts Coverdale out completely because he is unwilling to support Hollingsworth's plan to usurp the community for Hollingsworth's own purposes. Zenobia loves Hollingsworth and apparently betrays Priscilla in the end so that she can fund his project and win his heart away from Priscilla. She constantly fears that Coverdale will see through her masquerade and, therefore, maintains a fairly hostile attitude toward him during most of the time Coverdale knows her. Priscilla, however, remains a mystery for all of us, and especially for Coverdale, who as a reader/writer of Priscilla, must have her full sympathy in order to find his way into intimate communication with her. He needs Priscilla to stand in a true relationship with him. Unfortunately, she is unable to do so because she is the victim of the kind of artists that Hawthorne abhors.

Priscilla, symbolic of art itself, says that she "has no will" and that she is easily swayed by others. Thus, Priscilla's relationship to Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Westervelt is that of Art, which has no will of its own, being misused by evil wizards. She remains under a veil created by the mesmerizing artistry of Hollingsworth, even though he does set her free from the spell placed upon her by Westervelt. And the actress Zenobia also misuses her
powers of art when she persuades Priscilla to return to her old bondage to Westervelt. Priscilla worships Zenobia, the sister she only came to know at Blithedale after having fantasized about her for most of her life, a situation Coverdale describes in his re-creation of Old Moodie's story, which he entitles "Fauntleroy," one of the many stories-within-a-story of Hawthorne's story. For some strange reason, Priscilla is more susceptible to evil wizards than to those good wizards like Coverdale, and he recognizes in his story that Priscilla is "in thrall in an intolerable bondage, from which she must either free herself or perish" (190). Thus, the hidden agendas are the realities at Blithedale, making "true relations" an impossibility. Things are simply not what they seem.

Hawthorne's early sketch "Sights from a Steeple," describes the author as an artist positioned high up on a steeple somewhere between heaven and earth, a position that reflects Hawthorne's fabulative form of fiction. In this neutral territory, he can see "a slender foot and fairy limb" floating among the clouds. Yet he does not wish to float, himself, too far into pure fancy, for he knows these clouds will lead him eventually into "a deepened shade of nothingness!" (IX 191), which is precisely what happens to Zenobia and possibly to Hollingsworth and Priscilla. Thus Hawthorne's artist/narrator looks toward the earth below him, desiring to be connected to the heart of humanity.
What Hawthorne describes in this story is his desire to write in a fabulative form since it best lends itself to the kinds of truths he believes can be discovered through art. Although Hutner has criticized Coverdale for being a voyeur, prying into the lives of others for selfish reasons, Hawthorne seems to be affirming the likes of Coverdale in the words of his surrogate narrator in this story:

The most desirable mode of existence might be that of a spiritualized Paul Pry, hovering invisible round man and woman, witnessing their deeds, searching into their hearts, borrowing brightness from their felicity and shade from their sorrow, and retaining no emotion peculiar to himself. (IX 192)

The kind of Paul Pry Hawthorne describes is not the aloof, uncaring artist, who isolates himself from the ordinary intercourse of the procession of humanity. To the contrary, the artist knows that he must not lose himself in the clouds of pure fancy, as Zenobia and Priscilla do, a condition that removes them from the whole circle of life that the artist can see from his vantage point of the steeple. Therefore, he focuses his gaze downward to mingle with human activity in the real world in order to avoid being carried away by the clouds of fancy into that "deepened shade of nothingness" (IX 191). Coverdale, likewise, removes himself from his companions at Blithedale from time to time by secluding himself high up in his
woodland bower. Yet Coverdale does not retreat to his secluded spot in order to isolate himself from the flow of human events, for he still has a view of Blithedale below him, as does the artist from his steeple. He is merely trying to gain artistic distance from his surroundings and companions so that he can get a clearer picture of the life they are in the process of creating, for Blithedale is a consciously created reality, and in this respect Coverdale's view differs from that of the artist on the steeple, who looks down on ordinary life. Even though the ordinary world is also an imaginative construct, according to Hawthorne's epistemology, it is not self-consciously created, as is Blithedale.

Particularly because he is an artist, Coverdale is quite aware that he is observing a fiction as he ponders the drama of Blithedale unfolding before his eyes. He is at once playing a role in the play he observes and creating another version of it in his "real-life" role as an artist. In this respect he reflects Hawthorne's reference in his letter to Sophia to the kind of art he creates—he obtains an objectivity in his work by the very fact that he sympathizes with the common lot of humanity and in so doing he can not do otherwise than pour himself out to those readers who in turn sympathize with him. The artist on the steeple, like Coverdale, knows that he "can but guess" the inner "mystery of human bosoms" (IX 192). Therefore,
Hawthorne's directions to Sophia as to how she must approach his inmost being mirror his own manner of establishing a communication with his subject and his reader. It is only by indirection and mutual sympathy, according to Hawthorne, that we can uncover the mystery of the heart. And this approach is precisely the one Coverdale takes in his relations with Priscilla during his sojourn at Blithedale and even as he writes down his experiences.

Coverdale says that Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla are "the indices of a problem" (69), a problem that he cannot easily remove from his mind, for he cannot distinguish what is real from what is fictional in their lives and relationships at Blithedale. Their riddle also symbolizes the larger riddle of existence itself, the riddle all of Hawthorne's work plays with in one guise after another. This concern is revealed early in the novel during Coverdale's illness, which he calls "an avenue between two existences": one is his "life of old conventionalisms" and the other "the freer region that lay beyond," or death. Coverdale's existence, then, like Hawthorne's is a constant blending of fantasy or fiction with the reality of the external physical world; thus, his artistry is both the means to explore the riddle of existence and the riddle itself.

In his attempt to solve the riddle, Coverdale deconstructs the drama he has witnessed and participated in
(even though primarily as an observer) at Blithedale. He tries to solve the riddle of Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla by writing or creating this fictional autobiography. The events set down are by his own admission often of his own fictionalizing, resembling Old Moodie's story about Fauntleroy. The way Coverdale deconstructs the riddle or text of their lives at Blithedale is by dramatizing a self-conscious writer/reader of the events he has experienced and observed. From his metafictional stance, he fills in the gaps of his fragmentary glimpses into the secrets of his tri-partite riddle. His hermeneutic method eventually underscores the impossibility of reaching a final solution or answer to the riddle of existence, and his self-dramatization only emphasizes the fact that readers of Hawthorne's text must also enter into the metafictional game by creating fictional texts about Hawthorne's fictional texts.

Thus, as readers we must also, along with Coverdale, deconstruct Hawthorne's masterful riddle—but with Hawthorne and Coverdale added into the equation we must attempt to solve. Of course, Hawthorne and Coverdale both know that they are inextricably woven into the riddle, which is this novel. The only way we can look with Coverdale at the "indices of his problem" is by eventually distancing ourselves, placing ourselves as readers upon another metafictional level (as Coverdale does from his forest
perch) so that we can also observe Coverdale as part of the riddle. And then at an even higher remove (like Paul Pry from his church steeple), we can watch the Master Riddler, Hawthorne, manipulating his fictional devices to produce the illusion of his Veiled Lady—which is, in fact, this novel, a novel that reveals the romance between Hawthorne and his artistry, which is unmasked finally in Coverdale's last words of the novel:

The reader, therefore, since I have disclosed so much, is entitled to this one word more. As I write it, he will charitably suppose me to blush, and turn away my face:—

I—I myself—was in love—with—Priscilla! (247)

Coverdale is, indeed, in love with Priscilla, who symbolizes both the form and content of Hawthorne's artistry, not to mention Coverdale's. This narrator, as Hawthorne's surrogate, dramatizes the intimate relationship between Hawthorne and his art. Priscilla certainly reflects in her own artistry of purse-making and in the enigmatic nature of her personality that she is the offspring (or art object) of Hawthorne. Indeed, Coverdale's confession of his love for Priscilla, which is often criticized as a weak, unbelievable ending to the novel, may be one of Hawthorne's best sleight-of-hand maneuvers. He pulls Priscilla from his own fictional purse, or bag of tricks, and declares through Coverdale that he is in love with her. Thus, the ending of
The Blithedale Romance is a declaration of Hawthorne's love for his artistry, an artistry characterized by veils and often hidden under cover by the witchery of Hawthorne's illusions.

Coverdale's stammering, hesitant confession of love for Priscilla once again draws attention to Coverdale himself, the self-conscious artist. The ending of Blithedale has been severely criticized as weak and inconclusive; however, Coverdale's stammering confession places him (and Hawthorne) in the Hermetic tradition of prophets who often reveal truths in an unknown tongue. Umberto Eco describes this phenomenon as follows:

Truth is something we have been living with from the beginning of time, except that we have forgotten it, then someone must have saved it for us and it must be someone whose words we are no longer capable of understanding. So this knowledge may be exotic . . . .

For the second century, this secret knowledge would thus have been in the hands either of the Druids, the Celtic priests, or wise men from the East, who spoke incomprehensible tongues. Classical rationalism identified barbarians with those who could not even speak properly (that is actually the etymology of barbaros--one who stutters). Now, turning things around, it is the supposed stuttering of the foreigner that becomes the sacred language, full of promises and
silent revelations. ("Interpretation and History" 31)

Perhaps Coverdale stammers out his confession because he, like Holgrave, experiences an epiphany or surprising illumination of his true feelings brought about by his fiction-making. His wizardry has transformed him into a seer. Eastern influence does, in fact, riddle this novel—Zenobia's name, the veils, the pseudoscience of mesmerization. From an Hermetic viewpoint, Coverdale's name fits perfectly into the tradition of hidden knowledge, and his "foreign" position as the outsider at Blithedale, the blundering poet, qualifies him above any one else to stammer or stutter the truth. Coverdale, then, a guise for Hawthorne, provides another expression of Hawthorne's belief in the sacredness associated with art and the artist. Readers must, indeed, be able to read not only between the lines, but between the broken up words, to interpret Hawthorne's silent revelations.

Coverdale has lost Priscilla to Hollingsworth—a not very satisfactory ending to a romance. But Coverdale knows, as does Hawthorne, that art can fall into the hands of artists like Hollingsworth who can waste and destroy the possibilities of art. That Coverdale's love of Priscilla endures is highly significant. Coverdale's closing confession tells his readers that this romance is Hawthorne's love letter, a dramatization of the artist making love to his art. Furthermore, this utterance reminds
Hawthorne's audience that he desires to stand in a true relation with the processes of art, which means that he must be careful not to impose fixity upon the artistic process. Priscilla (art) says she has no will of her own, but left to herself she does have the capacity to weave an extraordinary art that reflects all the fragility, beauty, and mystery of existence. Hawthorne, however, does not force or manipulate art in order to present a fixed, true ending. Creator and created allow art to be open-ended. The processes of art, reflexive of Hawthorne's view of existence, continue in patterns that reflect the riddle of life as Hawthorne experienced it--intricate patterns that lead to mystery not certitude. His metafictional stance and game playing in this novel remind us that he also desires his audience to stand in a true relationship with him and his art--and he knows that this relationship arises when readers make their own ways through the flexible and mysterious aperture that he called The Blithedale Romance.
Notes

1Robert L. Berner, however, describes Coverdale as "impotent," not a surrogate for Hawthorne, in "A Key to 'The Custom-House'" (39).

2All citations are to The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. III.
CHAPTER SIX

DREAMING ON THE HERMENEUTICAL EDGE OF A PRECIPICE:

HAWTHORNE AS THE MARBLE FAUN

Perception of an object costs
Precise the Object's loss—
Perception in itself a Gain
Replying to its Price—

The Object Absolute—is nought—
Perception sets it fair
And then upbraids a Perfectness
That situates so far—

(Emily Dickinson 1071)

If The Scarlet Letter, The House of the Seven Gables, and The Blithedale Romance are Hawthorne's versions of the kunstleroman, portraying the artist as artist, then The Marble Faun takes Hawthorne's reflexive artistry to yet another level of genius, for in this novel he is embodied in the art object itself. Michael Boyd says in The Reflexive Novel that for Samuel Beckett "'life' is a figure for 'writing' where existence is seen as an act of composition and text and world become one" (131). Throughout Hawthorne's works this blending of the quotidian and the interior reality of the imagining, dreaming mind is
repeatedly dramatized by Hawthorne's many surrogate artist figures in their creations of art objects that are simultaneously reflexive of the artist, creations that place reality into Hawthorne's "neutral territory," where fact and fiction blend to form an alternate reality. Clearly, Hawthorne saw his text and the world as one. Clearly, he saw himself as an act, or more precisely, as a process of self-creation. As such, we can watch and even participate in his many compositions of himself. In this work readers can once again observe and respond as "writers" of the text along with Hawthorne, who overtly invites us to do so in many of his prefaces and fictions. He tells us in the preface of this novel that he has always written to "that all-sympathizing critic," the reader he has created and called a "mythic character," even though he says that he "had always had a sturdy faith in his actual existence" (IV 1). Thus Hawthorne completes his fictional world, creating not only the artist and the art object, but also his implied reader, a fictive world that exists in that "neutral territory" where the line between his exterior and interior worlds is impalpable.

Indeed, in The Marble Faun, Hawthorne has succeeded in mingling the truths of the multitude of self-portraits from past works and from the multiple facets of himself as artist that he portrays in Miriam, Kenyon, and Hilda, bringing them to life in this his ultimate self-creation. Readers must
recognize Hawthorne himself as the bust of Donatello, as the marble faun, for he has accomplished the amazing feat of spiritualizing this marble with his mighty genius, which is further reflected in the larger content of The Marble Faun itself. Obviously, Hawthorne agrees with Kenyon's remark to Miriam that "'it is good to work with all time before our view'" (119). In this novel, he succeeds in re-creating the world, going back to the origins of human history, encompassing all of human experience, and then creating a world in his own image, for Hawthorne sees the world as a mirror to his soul and reads its text as his unique story. This is Hawthorne's fate.

The Marble Faun is undoubtedly Hawthorne's most inclusive and complex work, for he attempts to unify all of his concerns, all of the many facets of his being into this most completely developed portrait of himself. In this highly complicated metafictional structure, he brings into play all the artistic devices he has previously experimented with and takes them to higher levels than ever before. In The Scarlet Letter Hawthorne exemplified his art form in Pearl, the offspring of his self-begetting surrogate artist Hester Prynne. Pearl perhaps represents Hawthorne's childhood stage in the development of his art as he sends his newborn fiction out into the world to establish an intercourse with the procession of life, while the statue of the marble faun symbolizes his adult form. Pearl, a human,
The Faun of Praxiteles, an object of art, comes to life in the person of Donatello: art precedes life. In coming full circle (an image Hawthorne uses repeatedly in *The Marble Faun*) from Pearl to the Faun of Praxiteles, Hawthorne emphasizes the marriage of life and art, as well as the interpenetration of birth and death.

In all of Hawthorne's earlier works, he refuses to give absolute answers to the relationship between the past and the present, good and evil, and death and immortality. These questions occupied his life and work. He lived in them, embodying himself in them in his art. *The Marble Faun*, of course, explores all of these concerns; however, the primary focus is on the nature of existence, in particular, the reality of death and the question of immortality. The figure of the sculpted faun in its multifaceted, multidimensional form reflects and embodies Hawthorne's ontological and eschatological concerns. Thus he reveals in artistic form an epistemology that is essentially hermeneutical in its emphasis on metamorphosis and transformations.

The title itself provides clues to the subject of this novel. The substance of marble suggests both death and immortality. A highly ambiguous symbol, the unfinished bust of Donatello leaves the question of immortality open. While it could be a figure of the stasis of death, or life cut
short without resolution—as is the nature of human existence—it might just as easily lead our imaginations toward the possibility that Donatello is not held or entrapped by the marble. Instead, Donatello could be emerging from the stone, shedding the substance of death, the marble, at the same time he is being begotten by the hand of his creator. Death has merely provided a new, an immortal substance out of which an immortal Donatello will emerge. Therefore, death itself can be shaped and sculpted into another level of existence. The bust is left unfinished because Hawthorne refuses to give surface answers to his riddles; furthermore, he might also want to portray the unending nature of existence since his view of the world is that it is always in flux, a process. We do know that Hawthorne places a great deal of faith in unseen realities because of his ability to create realities from his imagination, which often have more substance than the shadowy realities of the exterior world.  

In many of his early short tales, Hawthorne portrays similar trust in the ability of the artist and the nature of art itself to be prophetic in the sense of actually seeing the unseen and thus prophesying actual objects and events into being ("The Prophetic Pictures" and "The Great Stoneface," for example). After all, Hawthorne has by the power of his creative imagination begotten himself as artist and as man. His self-reflexive art has repeatedly portrayed
the self-conscious creating of himself, a creation that reveals itself as process. From the mystery of his unseen world of the creative mind, Hawthorne has spun out his own web, or text, of life in the many art objects and surrogate artists figures he has begotten. The creative process itself is so central to Hawthorne's sensibilities that it provides him with a personal eucharist as well as an epistemology. He has been creating himself all of his life and he knows it. A man who has lived his life, creating it in such a highly self-aware state, knowing that he can bring actual objects into the world, giving substance to dreams, might have some difficulty believing that the creative process ends with physical death. In The Marble Faun he sees life and art as inseparable; moreover, he portrays life and art as process. Thus, existence is process, an open-ended affair that proceeds in stages, which he illustrates in his description of the three-fold process of sculpture in chapter thirteen, "A Sculptor's Studio."

Maurice Beebe's Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce places Hawthorne in the tradition of the Ivory Tower, a tradition that gives to the artist the role of God. Beebe says the artist hero must "test and reject the claims of love and life, of God, home, and country, until nothing is left but his true self and his consecration as artist" (6). Further, he states that "the-time-and-eternity theme" appears
frequently in the artist-novel because of the artist's desire to escape death and become immortal; thus, "the artist would somehow remove himself from the bonds of the chronological time which drives him relentlessly from cradle to grave" (10). Beebe sees the beginnings of art as religion in magic and occultism, which he says takes its most respectable forms in platonic idealism, religious mysticism, and transcendentalism. Then he states that if an artist "of a particular sort" has no conventional religion, "his otherworldliness is likely to take the direction of magic, alchemy, and satanism" (113). Hawthorne's affinity with the tradition of art as religion can be seen throughout his fiction. In addition, Hawthorne is implicitly linked to the Hermetic tradition of romantic spiritualism that influenced many nineteenth and twentieth century writers. Beebe states that this influence was "simply there, an atmosphere of the times" (115). He identifies two strains of romantic spiritualism:

One strain of spiritual romanticism could be traced from Plato to Leibnitz to Berkeley to Swedenborg to the German idealistic philosophers to Coleridge and Carlyle to Poe to Baudelaire to Mallarme to the Symbolists. Another would lead from the beginnings of the Hermetic tradition to the cabalists to the illuminists, who flourished in France and Germany in the years just before the French Revolution, to the occult researches
of a half-mad Gerard de Nerval to the Rosicrusionism of Villiers de L'Isle-Adam to the satanic decadence of fin de siècle writers like Huysmans, Baron Corvo, and Aleister Crowley. (115)

Quite easily, Hawthorne's works can be "read" according to what Umberto Eco calls "Hermetic semiosis" in his essay "Overinterpreting Texts" (45). Eco says that "most so-called 'post-modern' thought will look very pre-antique" (25). He briefly outlines two ways of interpreting the world as western thought developed. One is the linear rationalism of the Greeks and Romans as set forth in the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. The second is that of the Eleusian Greeks:

Fascinated by infinity, the Greek civilization, along side the concept of identity and noncontradiction, constructs the idea of continuous metamorphosis, symbolized by Hermes. Hermes is volatile and ambiguous, he is the father of all the arts but also God of robbers--*invenis et senex* at the same time. In the myth of Hermes we find the negation of the principle of identity, of non-contradiction, and of the excluded middle, and the causal chains wind back on themselves in spirals: the 'after' precedes the 'before,' the god knows no spatial limits and may, in different shapes, be in different places at the same time. (29)
Hawthorne repeatedly demonstrates the "after" preceding the "before" in *The Marble Faun*, as well as in many other works, as he allows various art objects to portray a future event and future events to repeat a past event; thus time is the cadeusus spiraling backward upon itself as it moves into the future. For Hawthorne, time is infinity and events are immortal. Thus, life, itself, is immortal, appearing and reappearing in many guises, as did Hermes, and as does Hawthorne in his fiction. Since Hawthorne sees life and art as interchangeable, we can surmise that he also believes that life can continue in various guises as it undergoes the metamorphosis of existence. And if time winds back on itself, humans do exist omnipresently.5

Significantly, second century Hermetism looked for truth in books; however, according to Eco, Hermetic "truth becomes identified with what is not said or what is said obscurely and must be understood beyond or beneath the surface of a text. The gods speak (today we would say: the Being is speaking) through hieroglyphics" (30). Hawthorne uses the word *hieroglyphic* repeatedly in his fiction to express the hidden mystery of reality, and it is this mystery that he seeks to explore and recreate in his art. Consequently, Hawthorne's text is a deconstruction of the world as text, which we are invited to weave along with him. However, it is necessary for us to recognize and use the clues he gives us to find the key to the riddle he creates.
Actually, Hawthorne creates first so that we may have the pleasure of being creators also, as we look beneath the surface of his hieroglyptic. What better word to describe Hawthorne's airy, artistic perspective than hieroglyphic?

According to Eco, another important belief in the hermeneutical tradition is that the universe is "one big hall of mirrors," and, as such, "any individual object both reflects and signifies all the others" (31). Hawthorne's metafictional artistry, then, provides the perfect vehicle for mirroring his inner perception of reality. As he says in "Monsieur du Mirroir," his whole business is "REFLECTION." In *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne sets up a series of mirrors in the many objects of art, both those created by his artist characters and possibly more significantly those ancient art objects that are "read" and created anew by Miriam, Kenyon, and Hilda. Through the processes of art, time repeats itself, infinitely, only in new guises. Certainly, in *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne reflects the story again and again in multiple and various forms, from the sculptures, paintings, Gothic structures, the frescoes at Monte Beni, the legends, the fountains, the fragments of ancient ruins and monuments, to the painted windows of Gothic cathedrals, to the very landscape of earth and sky. Clearly, Hawthorne is a precursor of Borges.

The unifying image in *The Marble Faun* is the hermeneutical circle or spiral, which determines both the
structure and theme of the novel, though hidden beneath the surface story. The first and last chapters have the same title, "Miriam, Hilda, Kenyon, Donatello," which signifies the beginning and ending of their relationships in Rome. But more importantly, the hermeneutical, spiraling movement of events in the novel allows Miriam and Donatello to evolve to a higher level of existence, while Kenyon and Hilda choose stasis and its inevitable devolution. In the first chapter, all four characters stand on the same level, physically, all given the chance to move in the same direction metaphysically. Moreover, the narration itself moves in a spiraling form, for we learn almost at the end of the novel that the narrator is retelling the story of Donatello second-hand from Kenyon, as he views Kenyon's unfinished bust of Donatello, which has stimulated the narrator's own version of the story.

While Hawthorne's many descriptions of the architecture of Rome have been severely criticized as superfluous, distracting intrusions in the text, merely Hawthorne's showing off his knowledge of the city, I argue that they provide essential clues to the structure and meaning of this work. They function as symbols, reflecting the movement of the narrative Hawthorne is constructing. His repetitious use of these descriptions is not intended to irritate his readers; rather, they provide little nudges periodically that direct his readers and keep them from getting lost in a
search for a traditional linear narrative thread. Hawthorne's narrative thread does, indeed, twine mysteriously, and a reader must follow with patience and a sense of adventure to eventually appreciate the intricate, arabesque construct of Hawthorne's text of the world.

The story begins with all four characters at the sculpture gallery in the Capitol at Rome as they view the Dying Gladiator, which occupies the center of the room, and nearby another sculpture of the Human Soul, "with its choice of Innocence or Evil." So, quickly Hawthorne tells his readers that his subject is about death and the consequences of innocence and evil. It is highly significant that this first art object mentioned in the novel portrays death as a process, not an end. And it is even more significant that the novel ends with the unfinished bust of Donatello, which Kenyon has created when his limiting vision is superceded willy-nilly by the mysterious powers of art that lie hidden within him. The unfinished bust of Donatello portrays the evolution of the human soul from innocence to evil as an inevitable process that paradoxically brings not only death, but also life. Life, too, is portrayed as unending, for Donatello's image in the marble is in the process of being transformed into another stage of existence, not into the stasis of death. Thus, these two major images, one occurring at the beginning of the novel, the other at the end, form the caduceus, symbolizing the continuity of
existence. Surely, the fact that Hawthorne first published this novel in England under the title of The Transformation means that he saw life as a series of changes, which he transformed into an art object that embodies this view.

The second paragraph of the story describes the view from the Capitol, an all-encompassing, metaphysical vista that directs our attention downward to the city and outward to the Alban Mountains, at once including past, present, and future. The narrator says that "we glance hastily at these things--at this bright sky, and those blue distant mountains, and at the ruins, Etruscan, Roman, Christian, venerable with a threefold antiquity, and at the company of world-famous statues in the saloon--in the hope of putting the reader into that state of feeling which is experienced oftenest at Rome." His hope is that "our narrative--into which are woven some airy and unsubstantial threads, intermixed with others, twisted out of the commonest stuff of human existence--may seem not widely different from the texture of all our lives" (6). Clearly, Hawthorne wants to transport his readers into his neutral territory where we may reflect on the text of the world in a highly selfconscious way, creating our own text along with Hawthorne. In this mood, then, Miriam, Kenyon, and Hilda are struck by the resemblance of Donatello to the Faun of Praxiteles. The narrator claims that Praxitiles has "subtly diffused, throughout his work, that mute mystery which so
hopelessly perplexes us, whenever we attempt to gain intellectual or sympathetic knowledge of the lower orders of creation." In his praise of Praxiteles, Hawthorne is holding up a mirror to himself, for he stands in an analogous relationship to the earlier sculptor in the creation of his own _Marble Faun_: "Only a sculptor of the finest imagination, the most delicate taste, the sweetest feeling, and the rarest artistic skill—in a word, a sculptor and a poet too—could have first dreamed of a Faun in this guise, and then have succeeded in imprisoning the sportive and frisky thing, in marble" (10). In a letter to Henry Bright on March 10, 1860, Hawthorne says that the idea of Donatello is "an agreeable and beautiful one," but one not easily presented to the reader (XVIII 247). Obviously, Praxitiles succeeded and so does Hawthorne, even though he acknowledges the difficulty of creating a being "neither man nor animal" because the "idea grows coarse, as we handle, it and hardens in our grasp." The idea of the Faun "may have been no dream, but rather a reminiscence of a period when man's affinity with Nature was more strict, and his fellowship with every living thing was more intimate and dear" (10-11).

Here Hawthorne sets forth the need for such an intermediary as a Faun to interpret the riddle of the universe for humanity. Hawthorne as artist stands in an analogous position to the Faun, as well as to Praxitiles.
His identification with both artist and art object is, of course, a continuation of what Hawthorne has been doing in his self-reflexive art all along, particularly after he is born into the world as artist in the guise of Hester Prynne and as art object in the guise of Pearl, the living hieroglyph. As Hester passes through "that inauspicious portal" (which is symbolic of Hawthorne's inauspicious birth as a self-begetting artist), we are told that the rose will serve "to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow" (I 48). Similarly, in The Marble Faun, Donatello "forms the keynote of our narrative" (22). In both novels, Hawthorne portrays nature as inherently innocent and offers nature itself as the text from which we weave our own text. The basis of authority for judging morals lies in nature, and the rose and Donatello are products of nature.

Hawthorne tells us that the riddle to the Faun is indicated by "two definite signs," which are his two ears." These are "leaf-shaped, terminating in little peaks" (10). These signs place the Faun in that "neutral territory," the position Hawthorne sees as the essential one for interpreting the seen and unseen realities of human existence. And it is on these two points that Donatello refuses to reveal himself to his artist friends. Similarly, it is on these two points that Hawthorne refuses to answer
those readers who insist on a realistic reading of his text. In order for readers to enter into the universe Hawthorne is weaving, they must enter that "neutral territory" with him, stepping into that impalpable space between the physical and spiritual realities so that they, too, will be able to contrive multiple and various texts of existence.

The Faun of Praxitiles is so life-like that the narrator says, "It is impossible to gaze at this stone image without conceiving a kindly sentiment towards it, as if its substance were warm to the touch, and imbued with actual life" (9). Conversely, Donatello affects his friends as being the Faun come to life. They observe that there is "an undefinable characteristic about Donatello that set him outside of rules" (14). Just as we can observe that Hawthorne's new American fictional form placed him outside the prevalent literary rules, so Donatello's ignorance of his actual age causes Hilda to remark that he "has nothing to do with time." Miriam, too, is delighted that in Donatello "nature and art are just at one" and that his ignorance of his age is "the equivalent to being immortal on earth" (15). The three artists have been sporting as imaginative people love to do, the narrator says, and the impression Donatello makes on them lifts them to "a certain airy region . . . The world had been set afloat" (16). In this mood, then, they become the kind of "readers" of art that Hawthorne desires.
At this point in their discussion of immortality, Kenyon turns his attention to the sculpture of the Dying Gladiator. Annoyed that the man is taking such a long time to die, he says:

"Flitting moments--imminent emergencies--imperceptible intervals between two breaths--ought not to be incrusted with the eternal repose of marble; in any sculptural subject, there should be a moral standstill, since there must of necessity be a physical one. Otherwise, it is like flinging a block of marble up into the air, and, by some trick of enchantment, causing it to stick there; you feel that it ought to come down, and are dissatisfied that it does not obey the natural law." (16)

Ironically, Kenyon (through the alchemy of Hawthorne's artistry) will achieve the identical effect in his sculpture of Donatello. Hawthorne has, indeed, captured the moving idea of infinity in his and Kenyon's marble faun. Immortality, in one sense, does break natural law as it moves human life, "between two breaths," into another sphere of the hermeneutical spiral of time, into a supernatural form. The block of marble, which represents for Kenyon death and stasis, is converted by Hawthorne into an immortal movement unrestricted by "rules," as he causes Kenyon himself to be caught up into another level of perception, though only momentarily, so that he breaks his own aesthetic
rules to create the living, unfinished marble bust of Donatello.

The circling movement of the characters and events mimics Hawthorne's hermeneutical passage of time and also prepares readers for the transformations that occur in both Miriam and Donatello as they reflect Hawthorne's own transformation and self-creation into an immortal existence. Some months before, the party of friends had descended into the catacomb of St. Calixtus; thus moving downward from one of Rome's highest points (in the narrative structure of the novel) and from artistic creations of death into the lower regions where they confront actual death: "They went joyously down into that vast tomb and wandered by torch-light through a sort of dream" (24). The intricate passages form a labyrinthine maze that eventually leads them into a circular-shaped chapel. Their torches "illuminated this one, small, consecrated spot," a contrast to "the great darkness spread all round it, like that immenser mystery which envelops our little life, and into which our friends vanish from us, one by one" (26-27). In this place of death, Miriam vanishes from her friends into "that immenser mystery of life" and has her first confrontation with the model, who is the embodiment of evil and death. She is never connected to the consecrated circular chapel, which seems somehow to restrictive a text for Miriam's experience of life.
The next chapter is entitled "Miriam's Studio," and the narrative now spirals upward as Donatello climbs the stairs to the uppermost floor of the ancient palace where Miriam lives. Miriam and Donatello stand in a reflexive position with Hester and Pearl, for it is by Miriam's fortunate fall that Donatello becomes a full expression of Hawthorne's epistemology. Pearl is sent out into the world as Hawthorne's letter to establish an intercourse with humanity; likewise, Donatello as a symbolical Hermes is sent into the supernatural world, a letter or messenger to connect humanity to what lies beyond the physical page of the text of the natural world. He is the link between the physical and spiritual world and Miriam is his anima.

In this chapter, "Miriam's Studio," Miriam expresses many of her artistic beliefs as she converses with Donatello. Hawthorne uses this occasion to reveal Miriam to us as Donatello looks at various sketches and, in particular, a portrait of a woman, all of which are self-portraits of Miriam. Miriam is clearly Hawthorne's self-portrait as artist in this novel. Although he portrays some of his artistic characteristics in Kenyon and Hilda, they ultimately represent earlier, now rejected, facets of Hawthorne's artistry. Kenyon almost makes it into Hawthorne's circle of surrogate artist figures, but the earthbound Hilda holds him back. As we wander with Donatello through Miriam's studio, we immediately begin to
read Miriam's character in the light of these self-portraits and their ominous suggestions of hidden crime or sorrow. Miriam is obviously using art to create and reflect herself. Her form of metafiction employs the reading and creating of herself in the images of Biblical and Apocryphal heroines, Jael and Judith respectively. In addition, to these sketches, Miriam has drawn many scenes of domestic bliss, always with herself as the figure of an onlooker, never a participant. The most significant portrait, however, is that of the beautiful lady, which the narrator imagines must have resembled the young Rachel wooed for seven years by Jacob. Donatello, of course, immediately recognizes the young woman in the painting as Miriam. At this point in the text, the narrator deliberately limits his otherwise omniscient view of what the portrait looks like, distancing himself from Miriam to perhaps give us a more direct look at the Author:

We know not whether the portrait were a flattered likeness; probably not, regarding it merely as the delineation of a lovely face; although Miriam, like all self-painters, may have endowed herself with certain graces which other eyes might not discern. Artists are fond of painting their own portraits . . . in all of which there are autobiographical characteristics . . . traits, expressions, loftinesses, and amenities, which
would have been invisible, had they not been painted from within. Yet their reality and truth are none the less. (49)

This passage clearly shows Hawthorne's desire to reveal himself to his audience. Miriam, too, has "doubtless conveyed some of the intimate results of her heart-knowledge into her own portrait, and perhaps wished to try whether they would be perceptible to so simple and natural an observer as Donatello" (49). Hawthorne tells us to look for him beneath the surface of this novel. Perhaps, like Donatello, the reader must experience the remaining events of the novel, especially the fortunate fall, before coming to a perception of Hawthorne's heart-knowledge, which he is in the process of revealing to those readers who are willing to follow him through the mysteriously winding path of his metafictional maze. "'I must needs follow you,'" Donatello says to Miriam (50).

The next action of the novel leads Miriam to Hilda's tower, a perhaps more lofty dwelling than that of Miriam or Kenyon, for she lives in a dove-cote that has been for centuries a shrine to the Virgin. Hilda is a copyist with a great skill of capturing a particular spiritual essence from the various paintings of the old masters. Miriam finds her at work on a copy of Guido's Beatrici Cenci, which stimulates the two artists to read Beatrici's face. Miriam, who sees herself as a reflection of Beatrici, is amazed that
Hilda has so accurately captured the sorrow in Beatrici's heart. At first, Hilda reads Beatrici's sorrow as merely something that sets her apart. She is a fallen angel, but not because of sin. After Miriam reminds her of the facts of Beatrici's history, Hilda quickly changes her sympathetic attitude, saying that her "'doom is just,'" but Miriam pleads for mercy from Hilda and argues that "'perhaps it was no sin at all, but the best virtue possible in the circumstances'" (66). At that moment Hilda recognizes that Miriam's expression is identical to that of the portrait. Consequently, Hilda serves as a foil to the kind of virtue that Miriam (and Hawthorne) advocates. Hilda wants no part of an hermeneutical text of the world.

With this open-ended view of morality, we now follow Miriam down to the Villa Borghese where she meets Donatello the Faun. In direct contrast to the linear Christian view Miriam has just heard Hilda defend in her fortress tower, Miriam now enters symbolically into a pagan Garden of Eden. Donatello tells Miriam that the happiness he feels in her presence will last "'Forever, forever, forever,'" and she is struck with his "profound conviction of his own immortality" (81-82). He quickly draws Miriam into his mirthful mood, and we are told that even though she is inclined to melancholy and has a soul "apt to lurk in the darkness of a cavern, she could sport madly in the sunshine before the cavern's mouth." They seem like "creatures of immortal
youth" as they follow the strain of music heard in the distance (83). Donatello draws her along with him by the chain of flowers he has "twined" (84). Similarly, Hawthorne draws his readers along with him into his twisting, turning fictional dance, for this novel symbolizes his own sportive dance in the face of the cavern of death. Hawthorne and his readers, like Miriam and Donatello, must dance to the cadence of the music in the distance, "extemporizing new steps and attitudes" (85).

Donatello, Miriam's artistic muse, seduces her into an imaginative mood that transforms her into a sylvan nymph. His entreaty, "'Dance, Miriam, dance!'" (86) sweeps her up into "a wild ring of mirth" (88), as they are joined in their dance of life by all sorts of people representative of Hawthorne's sympathetic chain of humanity. This imaginative dance transports the mingling celebrants back into the Golden Age. The narrator relates the dancers to a bas-relief on a sarcophagus, on which "a festive procession mocks the ashes and white bones that are treasured up, within" (88). On these marble coffins "some tragic incident is shadowed forth" (89), which is mirrored by the sudden appearance of the model who breaks Miriam's momentary enchantment and elicits Donatello's passionate offer to "clutch him by the throat" and be "rid of him forever" (91).

Significantly, Hawthorne's dance of fiction leads to a recognition of death and evil. In this analogy, Miriam is
fully aware of the powers of Art, and she is equally aware of where the artist is capable of leading Art, for Miriam tells Donatello once more to leave her, and he once again refuses to leave her: "Not follow you! . . . Not follow you! What other path have I?" Miriam's relationship to Donatello, then, provides another picture of Hawthorne as artist and his relationship to Art. Hawthorne (and Donatello) is the artist of the fortunate fall, for the fall into the circle of humanity and its frailty is essential for the experience of "any deeper truths" (282).

The next chapter, "Fragmentary Sentences," once more illuminates Hawthorne's hermeneutical vision of the riddle of existence, demonstrated by Hawthorne's overt pointing to the narrator's confessed conjecturing about the conversation between Miriam and the model:

In weaving these mystic utterances into a continuous scene, we undertake a task resembling, in its perplexity, that of gathering up and piecing together the fragments of a letter, which has been torn and scattered to the winds. Many words of deep significance--many entire sentences, and those possibly the most important ones--have flown too far, on the winged breeze, to be recovered. If we insert our own conjectural amendments, we perhaps give a purport utterly at variance with the true one. Yet, unless we attempt something in this way, there must remain an
unsightly gap, and a lack of continuousness and
dependence in our narrative; so it would arrive at
certain inevitable catastrophes without due warning of
their imminence. (93)
The narrator's refusal to be omniscient again symbolizes
Hawthorne's refusal to be an omniscient observer of the text
of the universe. In these most mystic concerns, such as the
mystery of the relationship of good and evil, Hawthorne
asserts no final answers; however, he does defend the
necessity of filling in the "gaps" in the text. He knows
that this kind of approach to deciphering the riddle of life
is all that humans can ever do; moreover, he knows that
humans have an insatiable need to create some sort of
narrative of themselves and their experience of life.
Furthermore, he implies in this short chapter that Miriam's
crime is one we all share: "one of those fatalities which
are among the most insoluble riddles propounded to mortal
comprehension; the fatal decree, by which every crime is
made to be the agony of many innocent persons, as well as of
the single guilty one" (93). And death is the consequence.

Hawthorne's narrative spirals upward again from the
depths of Miriam's despair and back to the present moment in
the next chapter, "A Stroll on the Pincian." Hilda and
Kenyon look down from the promenade at Rome spread out below
them, enclosed by "the solid frame-work of hills that shut
in Rome, and its surrounding Campagna; no land of dreams,
but the broadest page of history, crowded so full with memorable events that one obliterates another; as if Time had crossed and re-crossed his own records till they grew illegible" (101). From this vantage point, they can see the red granite obelisk,"oldest of things" (100). Rome, the Eternal City, provides Hawthorne with the perfect symbol for his view of Time, as objects from three civilizations mingle into a oneness of transformations and the dust of past lives mingles with the ink on his page, a perfect description of Hawthorne's creating life out of death, or rather his view of life and death mingling to produce another living offspring under a different guise.

Thus, from their lofty perspective, Kenyon and Hilda view "the city of all time, and of all the world." In the distance "ascending out of the central mass of edifices," they can see the top of the Antonine column and nearby "the circular roof of the Pantheon, looking heavenward with its ever-open eye" (110). The Pantheon will be the place they last see Miriam kneeling on the floor, beneath the open-eyed, circular dome, at the end of the novel, and now they look down at her far below them, thinking they have just seen her kneeling before the model. The description of Rome being built over the grave of old Rome is a foreshadowing of Miriam's new life at the end of the novel, for she, too, must rise above the dead corpse of her past.  

In chapter thirteen, "A Sculptor's Studio," Hawthorne
holds up a mirror to the mysteries of his own artistic process in his description of the three-fold stages of sculpture. The first stage in the creation is the "hastily scrawled sketches of nude figures on the whitewash of the wall," which are the sculptor's "earliest glimpses of ideas" that will emerge in the "imperishable stone" or "remain as impalpable as a dream." The second stage is seen in "a few very roughly modelled little figures in clay or plaster"; the third stage is the final marble. Hawthorne says that the clay stage is more interesting than the marble, for "then is seen the exquisitely designed shape of clay," the process by which the shape "advances toward a marble immortality." More importantly, this stage is "the intimate production of the sculptor himself, moulded throughout with his loving hands, and nearest to his imagination and heart" (114). In the plaster cast, we are told, "the beauty of the statue strangely disappears, to shine forth again with pure white radiance, in the precious marble" (114-15).

If this novel represents Hawthorne's marble faun, then his self-reflexive artistry invites us to follow the hermeneutical maze along with him, looking for the subterranean processes of his construction. In so doing, we can deconstruct the text of the riddle of immortality as Hawthorne sees it. The process of creating the final marble leads first to death, as "the beauty of the statue strangely disappears" in the plaster cast stage, and remains dead
unless re-created by the chisellers. Hawthorne clearly implies here that his novel, too, remains in a dead stage unless it falls into the hands of those readers who can see the figure of his marble faun inside the plaster cast or surface story of Miriam, Donatello, Kenyon, and Hilda. He says that the sculptor only needs to present this class of artificers with the object before their eyes, "a plaster-cast of his design, and a sufficient block of marble, and tell them that the figure is embedded in the stone, and must be freed from its encumbering superfluities; and, in due time, without the necessity of his touching the work with his own finger, he will see before him the statue that is to make him renowned. His creative power has wrought it with a word." Further, he says, that no other art has such "effective instruments" to accomplish the work of genius, which can relieve for the artist the "drudgery of actual performance; doing wonderfully nice things by the hands of other people, when it may be suspected, they could not always be done by the sculptor's own." Hawthorne, too, creates art that depends on readers who will accept his invitation to "write" the novel with him. In fact, he says that the sculptor "can claim no credit for such pretty performances, as immortalized in marble," and that they are not the work of the sculptor, "but that of some nameless machine in human shape" (115).

As Miriam observes this process in Kenyon's studio, she
thinks to herself that just as these busts exist in the block of marble "so does our individual fate exist in the limestone of Time. We fancy that we carve it out; but its ultimate shape is prior to all our actions!" (656). Therefore, in this sculpting analogy, Hawthorne describes existence as a circle. Immortality, then, pre-exists the birth. Our fate is to be determined by the first sketches of our being, lived in the malleable clay of earthly life, and then immortalized in its ultimate shape as a living creation. Moreover, Hawthorne suggests in this passage that his fate as a self-creating artist has been predetermined. The outcome of his fate is symbolized in the sculpted head of Milton—an obvious reflection of Hawthorne himself. Hawthorne describes the head of Milton, which has been done "in another style": "not copied from any one bust or picture, yet more authentic than any of them, because all known representations of the poet had been profoundly studied, and solved in the artist's mind" (117-18). The sculptor has rather "mingled" the "special truth" of each into "this one work" and in so doing has succeeded in "spiritualizing his marble with the poet's mighty genius" (116).

Hawthorne's idea of divinity in art (similar to that of Maurice Beebe) is set forth in the chapter called "The Aesthetic Company." The four friends are at a party made up
of artists at the apartment of another artist. This group is described as "free citizens" who are isolated in every other clime but "this Land of Art." In this "congenial atmosphere," they are at home (132). At last, Hawthorne finds the home he has sought ever since he stepped through the door of the Salem prison in the guise of Hester Prynne. In Rome, Hawthorne can take his "heresy" out into the open sunshine and declare that a sculptor "should be even more indispensably a poet than those who deal in measured verse and rhyme," because language is shifting while marble is not. Marble "ensures immortality"; consequently, it "assumes a sacred character" and "no man should dare to touch it unless he feels within himself a certain consecration and a priesthood," for he will bring before the public "the delicate evolution of spiritual, through material beauty" (135-36). Thus, Hawthorne in his indirect way tells us the purpose of his Marble Faun. Indeed, this novel makes the claim that spiritual truths can best be discovered through the alchemy and beauty of art.

The prophetic nature of art is dramatized by a series of "reader responses" to some sketches found by Hilda and Miriam, which Hilda believes are Guido's sketches of his Archangel Michael hanging in the Church of the Cappuccini. Hawthorne says again that there is "an effluence of divinity in the first sketch" and that "the charm lay partly in their very imperfection; for this is suggestive, and sets the
imagination at work; whereas, the finished picture, if a
good one, leaves the spectator nothing to do, and, if bad,
confuses, stupefies, disenchant, and disheartens him." In
the events that follow, Hilda demonstrates her ability to be
the kind of reader Hawthorne desires for she says, "'If you
take pains to disentangle the design from those pencil-
marks, that seem to have been scrawled over it, I think you
will see something very curious'" (138). The sketch looks
as if there had been "an attempt (perhaps by the very hand
that drew it) to obliterate the design" (139).

Hawthorne also attempts to obliterate the sketch of his
idea by writing over the hidden story or design with a
surface story at the same time he fleshes his story out in
the external events in the lives of his characters. What
Hawthorne is doing beneath the surface of his picture is the
real story. Many readers of his surface story become
disenchanted because they cannot see the richness of his
genius hidden in the complication of his creation, and,
perhaps, lack the imagination necessary to receive the
suggestions and clues he leaves for us to find in the
weaving of his text. Melville says the same thing in his
famous "Hawthorne and His Mosses," warning that a reader of
Hawthorne cannot be a superficial "skimmer" of his pages,
but must drop a plummet to fathom the depths of Hawthorne
and his hidden messages. Clearly, Hawthorne saw the world
in much the same way he describes these sketches, and he has
contrived a fiction that reflects his approach to probing the mystery of the world. As the four friends read the sketch of Michael the Archangel destroying the devil, Donatello recognizes the face of the model in the face of the devil. Thus, Hawthorne gives us a clue to his reading of the model and of the future events that this piece of art is prophesying.

The moonlight ramble that follows takes the party of artists to the Fountain of Trevi, legendary for its purity and as a meeting place for lovers. Here Donatello tells Miriam that he will drink what she drinks, a foreshadowing of their future communion with fallen humanity, but Hawthorne undermines the reading of their crime to follow as an evil by having them drink of this fountain whose source is ancient and "as pure as the virgin who first led Agrippa to its well-spring" (144). When they reach the Coliseum, Miriam makes the circle of shrines and prays at the Black Cross before she sees the model following her. Donatello sees her fit of madness and despair and not long after he throws the model off the Tarpeian Rock, the place from which other criminals were thrown as punishment for their crimes. Now Guido's sketch comes to life as Donatello destroys the evil model.

The death of the model occurs, however, after a discussion among the artists, during which they discuss the nature of the chasm of death at the foot of the rock. This
place is also known as Traitor's Leap. In this chapter, "Dreaming on the Edge of a Precipice," Hawthorne sets forth his view of life as being essentially an imaginative construct. Miriam has told Hilda that the chasm is "'merely one of the orifices of that pit of blackness that lies beneath us, everywhere'" and that "'the firmest substance of human happiness is but a thin crust spread over it, with just reality enough to bear up the illusive stage-scenery amid which we tread'" (161-62). As the group allows their fancy to lead them to questions of evil and the strange power of death that seems to affect us sometimes as we look it in the face, drawing us into the chasm out of sheer curiosity and a desire to know the mystery once and for all, one of the party draws back and urges them to leave the place, saying that it is midnight, "'too late to be moralizing here'" and that they are "'literally dreaming on the edge of a precipice'" (169).

Miriam and Donatello, however, remain on the edge of the precipice in their dream-like trance; consequently, when the model confronts Miriam again, she and Donatello inadvertently conspire in throwing him over the cliff. This altered state has caused Miriam in her extreme despair to separate herself from her external reality, giving her the sensation of merely observing herself as one does in a dream. Later, she tries to convince Donatello that he must not think that he has not actually murdered the model; he
has only dreamed it. Miriam, however, never sees their deed as evil. Like Hester Prynne, she adheres to a higher law.

The friends are to meet the next day at the Church of the Cappuccini to view Guido's painting. Hilda, who has witnessed Donatello's act, does not meet her friends. In the church, they see a body lying in state in the nave of the church, but decide to view Guido's picture first, which Miriam immediately reads as the triumph of good over evil. Obviously, she is equating the evil with the dead model and good with Donatello. She urges Donatello to go with her and view the dead monk so that he may overcome his terror of death. Both are surprised to find the dead model transformed into the dead monk. Meanwhile, Kenyon's observation of their reaction to the monk stirs his intuitive faculty so that he surmises the truth: this ability is described by Hawthorne as "an exceedingly quick sensibility, which was apt to give him intimations of the true state of matters that lay beyond his actual vision" (189). Of course, this sensibility is reflexive of Hawthorne's ability to see the unseen mysteries of the universe by means of his intuitive response to the clues he finds half obliterated beneath the dust of accumulated Time. Miriam is so shocked by the sight of the monk that she fancies she sees it move and believes that she has imagined the face of the model in place of the correct one. When she returns for a second look, she admits it is the model
because she recognizes the scar he bears and she forces
herself to touch him in order to be sure she has not seen a
vision.

Following this revelation, Miriam insists on looking
into the grave prepared for the monk, while Kenyon refuses.
In this action, Miriam mirrors what Hawthorne is doing in
this novel—he is looking into the grave, squarely at death.
In a most subtle way, he demonstrates the relationship
between death and art in the arrangement of the skeletons in
the cemetery. Hawthorne looks on this arrangement as "a
strange architecture," describing the Gothic qualities of
the arches, vaulted ceilings, and pilasters made up entirely
of skeletons as having been "wrought most skilfully in bas-
relief" (193). Consequently, Hawthorne sees in this
architecture of death a ghastly joke on humanity and says
that among these artifacts of death it is hard to feel
immortal. He repeats and reverses the implication of this
artful arrangement of death, however, in the architecture of
this novel as he explores the fact of physical death and the
possibility of immortality. If death can be understood in
terms of artful constructs, perhaps immortality, too, can be
artistically sensed by the artist, even though it lies
"beyond his actual vision."

Miriam and Donatello leave the cemetery, and Miriam
leads him into the Medici Gardens, where she hopes to revive
his spirits. Significantly, the classical landscaping of
this garden fails to provide comfort or direction. This interlude represents the Garden after the fall, a contrast to the intricate, spontaneous, sylvan dance that occurs in the pagan Borghese Garden. Donatello is now transformed from the innocent faun into a full human initiated into the knowledge of evil, a knowledge that connects him to humanity. Miriam, however, attempts to bring him into her sphere of existence, one similar to Hester's, hoping that their love will be "mighty enough to make its own law, and justify itself against the natural remorse" (199). But Donatello sadly tells her, "Farewell" (200).

At this point in the narrative, the four friends separate: Donatello returns to his ancient Monte Beni in Tuscany, followed by Kenyon who intends to take his bust in marble; Miriam follows them unseen; and Hilda seeks purification from the knowledge of Miriam and Donatello's crime by going to confession at St. Peter's and inadvertently betrays them to the powers of Rome. All four characters undergo transformations during this time, but only Donatello and Miriam progress to a higher level of perception in the hermeneutical spiral of time. Hilda remains a Puritan, and Kenyon eventually forfeits his potential to be the kind of artist Hawthorne approves.

Meanwhile, Hawthorne's hermeneutical narrative takes us back in time to pre-recorded history as he traces Donatello's lineage "into that gray antiquity of which there
is no token left, save its cavernous tombs, and a few bronzes, and some quaintly wrought ornaments of gold, and gems with mystic figures and inscriptions . . . . The line was supposed to have had its origin, in the sylvan life of Etruria, while Italy was yet guiltless of Rome" (232). Donatello had his beginnings from the Pelasgic race, "the same noble breed of men, of Asiatic birth, that settled in Greece." Hawthorne admires these people for their enrichment of the world with their dreams and their supposed intermingling with the gods, again demonstrating his unquestionable affinity with Eastern modes of thought. They mirror Hawthorne himself as an artist of dreams, one who sees his role as a creator inspired by divinity. Donatello's "progenitor was a being not altogether human," and Hawthorne sees his art as inspired by a source not altogether human either (233).

The structure of Monte Beni repeats the labyrinth motif Hawthorne uses to portray the hermeneutical approach to the riddle of existence, as he has already demonstrated in the repetitive, spiraling shape of the narrative, in the movement of the action in time, and in the descriptions of the catacombs and of St. Peter's Cathedral. As Kenyon enters the villa, he sees Donatello's face appearing at successive windows in his spiraling descent from his tower, and once inside the villa, he sees one apartment opening into another in "an almost interminable vista," reminding
him of "the hundred rooms in Blue Beard's castle, or the countless halls in some palace of the Arabian Nights" (219).

After drinking some of the Monte Beni wine in a manner that symbolizes the way a reader should imbibe the wine of Hawthorne's fiction, Kenyon looks around in an ancient saloon and perceives a series of faded frescoes on the old walls. The frescoes are so covered with dust and partially scrubbed away that he must "puzzle out the design," just as readers must puzzle out the design of Hawthorne's text (226). Indeed, Hawthorne leaves us another clue here in his narrative as to the hidden nature of his real subject and tells us that we must "puzzle out" the world he has created in his novel, which reflects his way of understanding the mystery of Creation. His text is no more facile to us than the text of the world was to him, if we know to read beneath the surface. Always, however, the act of piecing together the text of the world as it is mirrored in Hawthorne's Master Puzzle leads only to suggestion, never to dogmatic absolutism. The story Kenyon sees in the frescoes is a mirror to that of Donatello, for the figure who provides "the principal link of an allegory" in the series of pictures resembles Donatello (227).

Later, Kenyon hears the story of Donatello's ancestor from the butler in Hawthorne's story-within-a-story. In addition, he has access to "many chests of worm-eaten papers and yellow parchments" and "musty documents" (236) that
contain the history of the Beni family (reminiscent of Surveyor Pue's documents about Hester Prynne in the Custom-House). Therefore, Hawthorne's hermeneutical hall of mirrors emphasizes the circular nature of history, in the beginning is the end, which implies a new beginning in the end, as Donatello repeats the ancient story of his ancestor. Donatello's loss of innocence and fall into the knowledge of evil and suffering are a repetition of the story on the ancient wall and are essential elements in the progress of transformation into the common bond of humanity, into a deepened sensibility. Furthermore, this fresco repeats Donatello's connection to Michael the Archangel in Guido's painting. He is, therefore, associated with the knowledge of evil and suffering and with avenging good by throwing the evil model over Traitor's Leap. Hawthorne never says that Miriam and Donatello are evil or that they have committed an evil; rather, they are the innocent victims of evil and must suffer the effects of evil in the world (just as Hester and Pearl do).

When Donatello and Kenyon visit the dell where Donatello spent many happy hours as an innocent youth, Kenyon sees a marble fountain containing a marble nymph pouring water into a marble basin from an urn that first collects the water from "the infant tide" (243). Here Donatello tells the story of his oldest forefather (whom he calls the knight), who brought a maiden to the same spot and
made the spring their family well. According to legend, she may have been a sprite. She clearly represents Hawthorne's artistic muse for she is both sunny and shadowy, full of little mischiefs, changeable, thoroughly delightful, and symbolic of love. Once more Hawthorne repeats Donatello's story in his ancestor, for one day the nymph does not respond to the knight's call as he washes a blood-stain from his hands in the fountain. Now Donatello returns to his fountain where he used to call up from the fountain his own nymph and converse with the animals in a language of nature, but finds the fountain forsaken. The sylvan dance is over.

From here they go up into Donatello's tower, a symbol of death and exile, where they both privately remember the death of the model as they look down to the ground. Kenyon tries to bring Donatello back into the world of the living as they discuss the Creator of the world. In Kenyon's reaction to the view of heaven and earth, as he is suspended between the two, we readily see Hawthorne's favorite meta-critical perspective on the nature of creation as a hermeneutical text:

Nay; I cannot preach . . . with a page of heaven and a page of earth spread wide open before us! Only begin to read it, and you will find it interpreting itself without the aid of words. It is a great mistake to try to put our best thoughts into human language. When we ascend into the higher regions of emotion and spiritual
enjoyment, they are only expressible by such grand
hieroglyphics as these around us. (258)

In this novel Hawthorne creates a grand hieroglyphic in
language, in spite of Kenyon's opinion. The novel is so
structured as to mimic the mysterious face of human
existence, the page of the universe, as Hawthorne reads it.

In fragmented form, in snatches and glimpses, in the
art objects, and in nature itself, Hawthorne tells and
retells the human story as he sees it repeating itself in
Time's great Hall of Mirrors. His epistemology requires
both the analysis of the fragmented, limited views combined
with the synthesis that comes with a metaphysical and
metafictional distance from the individual parts. Filling
in the gaps of the world's text is essential to Hawthorne's
vision and to our vision of Hawthorne. Of course, he
recognizes that we do not all read the text of the world the
same way. Each reader will process the text according to
the varying states of emotion and intellect brought to bear
upon the text. Kenyon and Donatello illustrate Hawthorne's
reader response theory as each reads the shapes of the
clouds they both look at tempered by each one's unique
vision, creating widely differing realities.

As Kenyon attempts to encourage Donatello to enter into
life again, he finds it difficult to capture him in the bust
he is in the process of sculpting in the clay stage.
Donatello is changing so rapidly, deepening his humanity,
that Kenyon finds his task nearly impossibly impossible. When he one day "let his hands work, uncontrolled" as if he were guided by spiritual forces beyond him, he brought forth in the clay the exact expression Donatello wore as he held the model over the precipice (271). Donatello urges Kenyon to preserve it forever in marble, in a moment of self-flagellation. Significantly, Hawthorne does not allow Kenyon to do so, for "his last accidental touches, with which he hurriedly effaced the look of deadly rage, had given the bust a higher and sweeter expression than it had hitherto worn" (273). This version of Donatello is clearly the view Hawthorne wishes his readers to have of his Marble Faun. As Kenyon strays among the vineyards later, he feels like a wanderer in search of ancient Eden; however, Hawthorne suggests that Donatello's fallen Eden is superior to the original one: "Adam saw it in a brighter sunshine, but never knew the shade of pensive beauty which Eden won from his expulsion" (276).

The Marble Saloon, which Kenyon discovers one rainy day as he wanders through "the great, intricate house," is another symbol of immortality (277). Its superiority to the family chapel is illustrated by comparing the descriptions of the two rooms and by the fact that the chapel merely provides a space that Kenyon must walk through in order to reach the Marble Saloon. The chapel represents death: it is dusty and dim, unused for perhaps half a century; the
marble vase for the holy water is encased by a prodigiously thick spider web across the circular brim, the holy water itself reduced to dried mud. Obviously, Christianity has waned in its efficacy. In contrast, the marble saloon is described as "a beautiful hall . . . floored with rich marbles, in artistically arranged figures and compartments" (278). The walls are covered in the most precious and variegated marbles, especially the giallo antico. Niches lined with this marble were designed to hold statues. At the upper end of the room rose two pillars of Oriental alabaster and the spaces between the marble were frescoed with arabesque ornaments, while the vaulted ceiling "glowed with pictured scenes" (279). Hawthorne equates this artistically created marble room with life. Moreover, the substance of the marble itself in its artistic uses suggests the efficacy of the artistic imagination to discover the secret to immortality. Kenyon has discovered immortality in this room, deep in the intricate design of this ancient house, hidden from view:

It is one of the special excellences of such a saloon of polished and richly colored marble, that decay can never tarnish it. Until the house crumbles down upon it, it shines indestructibly, and, with a little dusting, looks just as brilliant in its three hundredth year, as the day after the final slab of giallo antico was fitted into the wall.
To Kenyon, this room seemed to magically imprison the sun, which "must always shine" (279).

The marble saloon is also the place where Kenyon meets Miriam, and from which she emerges with a new lease on life. In fact, the dust of mortality vanishes from both Donatello and Miriam after her conversation with Kenyon in this miraculously life-giving room. Kenyon acknowledges that "'a wonderful process is going forward in Donatello's mind,'" and both see that his fall from innocence is a fortunate fall (282). Kenyon is thus far a life-begetting artist in the image of Hawthorne, for he proposes to take Donatello on a ramble through the countryside, telling Miriam that it will be good for him after "'his recent profound experience'" and that Donatello "'will re-create the world by the new eyes with which he will regard it'" (284).

Miriam and Kenyon plan to meet in the ancient city of Perugia in a fortnight beneath the bronze statue of Pope Julius because Miriam has a superstitution about the statue. The last time she saw it, she fancied that it bestowed a blessing upon her. Now she wants to complete the circle in time, believing that a good event will come to her in her reconciliation with Donatello. Kenyon wants to hand his charge over to Miriam, thinking that Donatello's completion depends upon the "'heart-sustenance'" of a woman (285). Consequently, Miriam answers that Beauty is the instrument she will employ "'to educate and elevate'" him (286).
Therefore, the efficacy of art in the form of the marble saloon, in the living statue of Pope Julius, and in the form of Beauty embodied in the artist Miriam is once more portrayed by Hawthorne as a life-giving source.

During Kenyon and Donatello's ramble in the countryside, images in nature and old ancient cities emphasize the life-in-death theme of this novel: the vine embracing the ancient tree and "letting him live no life but such as it bestows" (292); the fountain gushing into "a marble basin that resembles an antique sarcophagus"—the source of life as the town well (294). In addition, the Black Cross shrine to the Madonna provides Donatello a hope for life in its death and resurrection image. In the Gothic architecture of ancient buildings and churches, life and death interpenetrate. The painted windows of Gothic churches, in particular, have a profound effect on Kenyon, "being an earnest student and critic of Art": "the special excellence of pictured glass" is that the light "interfused throughout the work . . . illuminates the design, and invests it with a living radiance" and the unfading colors "transmute the common daylight into a miracle of richness and glory, in its passage through the heavenly substance of the blessed and angelic shapes." Kenyon exclaims, "'There is no other such true symbol of the glories of the better world'" (304). Hawthorne's novel, then, is his Gothic cathedral with painted windows, for in it he has transmuted
the light of this mortal world into the sublime expression of immortality. His design illuminates the shape of his belief and its dependency upon the processes of Art to produce the miracle of insight into matters of life and death.

Hawthorne again follows the hermeneutical path into the city of Perugia, as Kenyon and Donatello wander "to-and-fro," losing themselves "among the strange, precipitate passages . . . some of them are like caverns, being arched all over, and plunging down abruptly towards an unknown darkness, which, when you have fathomed its depths, admits you to a daylight that you scarcely hoped to behold again" (310). All of this description, of course, symbolizes the descent of Miriam and Donatello into the chasm of death and their eventual ascent to a higher level on the hermeneutical spiral of Time.

Hawthorne leaves another clue in the text of this chapter, explaining why he continues to repeat in image after image the story of Miriam and Donatello: in essence he tells us that he has constructed a Gothic artifice, this novel, which is analogous to the architecture of this ancient city and of the cathedral "where the imagination of a Gothic architect had long ago flowered out indestructibly, achieving, in the first place, a grand design, and then covering it with such abundant detail of ornament, that the magnitude of the work seemed less a miracle than its
minuteness" and that "he must have softened the stone into wax, until his most delicate fancies were modelled in the pliant material, and then had hardened it to stone again." The Cathedral is described as "a vast black-letter page of the richest and quaintest poetry" (312). Clearly, this description reflects the three-fold process of sculpture and its illumination of the processes of transformation occurring in Donatello, and, undoubtedly describes the nature of Hawthorne's crafting of this novel, while at the same time revealing (though beneath the surface) himself in the act of its creation. Hawthorne is, indeed, crafty.

Just as the bronze statue of Pope Julius portrays Art as possessing divinity and life, so, too, does Hawthorne's *Marble Faun*. Art, in many guises, bestows a blessing upon Miriam and Donatello. When they meet beneath the bronze statue, they are healed of the mortal wound inflicted upon them by the serpent model. The allusion to the bronze serpent made by Moses in the wilderness to heal the Israelites of their mortal wounds clearly uses Art to transform the evil meaning of the serpent or devil into a symbol of goodness and divinity. Hawthorne, here, continues his view, which he expressed in his earliest stories, that Art can fall into the hands of artists or wizards who are free to use it for either good or evil. The "Devil in Manuscript," which Hawthorne uses as a symbol for the alchemy of Art and its essential, hidden or occult
processes, lives in The Marble Faun in the guise of Hawthorne's surrogate wizard Miriam and her creation of Donatello, the Faun. In the benediction of the Pope, Hawthorne speaks his approval of Miriam and Donatello's transformation. And the caduceus completes another

Hawthorne again, in a self-reflexive though camouflaged manner, tells us that Donatello's unfinished marble bust is a reflection of his own Marble Faun, which Hawthorne did not "finish" according to many readers' expectations. Later he added the caudal chapter as a joke on such readers, a chapter that becomes even more ambiguous and unending. Moreover, he anticipates how most readers will respond to it:

And, accordingly, Donatello's bust (like that rude, rough mass of the head of Brutus, by Michael Angelo, at Florence) has ever since remained in an unfinished state. Most spectators mistake it for an unsuccessful attempt towards copying the features of the Faun of Praxiteles. One observer in a thousand is conscious of something more, and lingers long over this mysterious face, departing from it, reluctantly, and with many a glance thrown backward. What perplexes him is the riddle that he sees propounded there; the riddle of the Soul's growth, taking its first impulse amid remorse and pain, and struggling through the incrustations of the senses. (381)
This novel cannot be "read off" any more easily than the pre-conversion realist Holgrave can read Phoebe. Only after being caught up in the fictional process itself could Holgrave be transformed into the kind of reader/writer Hawthorne desires.⁹

At this point in the narrative, we discover Hawthorne's narrator (whom I have been calling Hawthorne) intruding to tell us how this whole magnificent Gothic structure, this novel, began: "It was the contemplation of this imperfect portrait of Donatello that originally interested us in his history, and impelled us to elicit from Kenyon what he knew of his friend's adventures" (381). So, almost at the end of the story, we come full circle to the beginning, once more observing Hawthorne's emphasis of the interpenetration of Time and the continuity of existence.

The final chapters of the novel reveal Kenyon's inability to continue along the hermeneutical spiral with Miriam and Donatello. In their last time together in the Campagna, Miriam and Donatello appear in festive peasant garb, demonstrating their ability to allow Art to have full sway in their continuing transformations. Miriam is a self-begetting artist and Donatello, who symbolizes her artistry, reflects his creator. Kenyon, on the contrary, has been so affected by Hilda that the new life symbolized by the spring day and the resurrection of the fragmented marble of Venus he finds among the ruins do very little for him in
stimulating the artistic muse. His affections are now too deeply rooted in Hilda's Puritanism for the relative paganism of Art to claim him: "He could hardly, we fear, be reckoned a consummate artist, because there was something dearer to him than his art" (424). This description unequivocally removes him from the circle of Ivory Tower artists who forsake all preconceived constructs of the world, those who prefer to create their own.

Kenyon, Miriam, and Donatello say their final farewell at The Carnival on the Corso. Miriam tells him where to find Hilda, forfeiting her and Donatello's freedom in the process. Days later, as Kenyon and Hilda "were straying together through the streets of Rome," they "found themselves" near the "majestic, pillared portico and huge, black rotundity of the Pantheon," which is located "almost at the central point of the labyrinthine intricacies of the modern city, and often presents itself before the bewildered stranger, when he is in search of other objects" (456).

The Pantheion is "read" by Kenyon and Hilda as "heathenish," as they stand in "the free space of the great circle, around which are ranged the arched recesses and stately altars, formerly dedicated to heathen gods, but now Christianized through twelve centuries gone by" (456-57). The narrator (Hawthorne), however, says that "the world has nothing else like the Pantheon." Clearly, Hawthorne sees this structure as the architectural reflection of his
essentially hermeneutical vision of life and art, for his
description of it includes images of great intricacy as well
as unlimited possibilities for life's movement and
evolution:

The pavement, with its great squares and rounds of
porphyry and granite, cracked crosswise and in a
hundred directions . . . the gray Dome above, with its
opening to the sky, as if Heaven were looking down into
the interior of this place of worship, left unimpeded
for prayers to ascend the more freely.

Kenyon, in contrast, reads the great Eye of the dome as
heathenish, directing Hilda's attention to the circle
beneath it, which is "'green with small, fine moss, such as
grows over tombstones in a damp English churchyard.'" Hilda
once more refuses to look at anything resembling death and
says that she likes "'better to look at the bright, blue
sky, roofing the edifice where the builders left it open'"
(457). Even though Kenyon suggests that the only place he
and Hilda could pray in the Pantheon is "'beneath the
central aperture . . . face to face with the Deity,'" rather
than at a shrine where Catholics pray for earthly wants, he
still avoids looking at the circle of tombstone moss and
directs their eyes upward, as Hilda has suggested (458).

Hilda and Kenyon are unable to "read" the circle of green
moss on which Miriam kneels as anything more than death, on
which both have refused to look throughout the events of
novel. Miriam knows, however, that the green moss represents new life, which can only be achieved by means of looking straight into the face of death. As she kneels upon the green moss, she simultaneously submits to both death and life.

At this point, Hilda turns and sees a veiled figure kneeling beneath the great Eye, and they both believe it to be Miriam, "in the very spot which Kenyon had designated as the only one whence prayers should ascend" (459). They are surprised to find Miriam kneeling in the circle beneath the circular, open dome, with nothing between her and heaven above: "They suffered her to glide out of the portal, however, without a greeting; for those extended hands, even while they blessed, seemed to repel, as if Miriam stood on the other side of a fathomless abyss, and warned them from its verge" (461). Hilda and Kenyon may read her benediction as a warning; however, it may be that Miriam simply knows that she is rejected by her friends. Furthermore, she knows that she and Donatello (who is in prison) have moved on in Time to a higher level of existence, and she does not choose to regress on the spiral by continuing her relations with these self-aborting artists who read her position as an "ending," an imprisonment. Miriam and Donatello, like Hawthorne, have been "dreaming on the edge of a precipice" and have moved beyond the chasm into an immortality of life and freedom.  

Maurice Beebe's definition of spiritual
romanticism seems particularly illuminating when focused on this last scene of Miriam as she kneels beneath the open dome of the Pantheon: "There are no real barriers between heaven and earth . . . all is one . . . an organic growth developing and circling outward from itself" (115).

Miriam and Donatello's immortality—symbolized by the higher level on the spiral—not only suggests Hawthorne's eschatology and belief in life after death, but also the immortality achieved by artists such as them and Hawthorne himself, in contrast to Hilda, a copyist, and Kenyon, who loses it all because he compromises himself to the genteel artistry of the likes of Hilda. Significantly, the narration has moved Miriam from the underground Christian catacombs and their sacred sphere, from which she vanishes (if she was ever there?) into the darkness with the serpent model.

Now the narration ends with Miriam in the very center of the spiral of Rome, the Eternal City, the City of Art, All time, All places. The roof is open to the sky above, and this time, Hilda and Kenyon are not admitted to this sacred sphere, nor does Miriam want to return to them. Her artistry, a deliberate choice, places her in solitude and alienation equivalent to what Hawthorne experienced. Allegiance and fidelity to his art are reflected in Miriam's love for Donatello, and while it seems that her art is locked up, imprisoned, dead to the world, the contrary is
actually the case. For Hawthorne's art is indeed immortal—especially to those who discover the key to his hidden hieroglyphic. His audience must ironically be the one Hilda can describe but cannot be.

Hawthorne knew, however, that Hilda and Kenyon represent the kind of audience and artist that were more readily accepted in his native land. Hilda may have led Kenyon "home," but Hawthorne clearly remained, in spirit, in Rome. Nevertheless, his longing to be included in the domestic circle of his own America created a sorrow like that reflected in Miriam's paintings of domestic bliss—with herself always looking on the scene with great longing from an excluded position of isolation. Hawthorne, like Miriam, remained, despite everything, "true" to his vision of existence—a vision that required great courage for someone of Hawthorne's humane sensibilities and strong desire to establish an intercourse with the great chain of humanity.

Hilda can "read" and "copy," but not create great art. She marries Kenyon; Miriam marries Art (Donatello) in a union between Artist and Art. Miriam leaves the Etruscan bracelet made of "seven ancient gems, dug out of seven sepulchers" (462) as a wedding gift—a piece of art representing the mysteries of art and the continuity of existence. This is an action similar to Owen Warland's making a gift of his beautiful butterfly as a wedding present to Annie and Peter Hovenden. What will Hilda do
with Miriam's gift? Simply remember the stories Miriam could create from looking at it. She can only repeat Miriam's contrivances and imagined tales. This bracelet ultimately symbolizes Miriam as artist, so she leaves behind not just an object but also her very self. Similarly, in her guise, Hawthorne leaves his Etruscan bracelet, this novel, symbol of his marriage to his artistry, to those who can accept it and are willing to look at it over and over again, as he indicates we must, in his description of St. Peter's, a type of his artistry. It says to all who approach:

"LOOK AT ME!"—and if you still murmur for the loss of your shadowy perspective, there comes no reply, save, "LOOK AT ME!"—in endless repetition, as the one thing to be said. And after looking many times, with long intervals between, you discover that the Cathedral has gradually extended itself over the whole compass of your idea; it covers all the sight of your visionary temple, and has room for its cloudy pinnacles beneath the dome (350).

Indeed, Hawthorne's art is a Cathedral, where readers may dream new dreams each time they gaze upon it and never exhaust its immensity of genius.
Notes

'Of course, other readers have opposing views about *The Marble Faun*. Millicent Bell, in *Hawthorne's View of the Artist*, says that "there are so many art-objects in *The Marble Faun*, so many discussions on matters of aesthetic taste, and so many artists in background and foreground, that one would expect Hawthorne's view of the artist to receive profoundest expression here. This is not quite the case" (165). Roy R. Male, in *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision*, calls the novel an "almost complete failure as novel" and thinks it "must finally be reckoned the least successful of Hawthorne's finished works" (158).

²All quotations are from *The Marble Faun: or, The Romance of Monte Beni* in the Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, IV.

³Leland Schubert, in *Hawthorne, the Artist: Fine-Art Devices in Fiction*, says that "the less said about the structure of *The Marble Faun* the better! It is not a well organized book" (37). For a positive view of the structure of *The Marble Faun*, see Charles R. Smith, Jr., in "The Structural Principle of *The Marble Faun*" and Sheldon W. Liebman in "The Design of *The Marble Faun*." Both argue for a structured form. Smith says, "The novel's content is complex, and so, necessarily, is its form. The structure is complex, but it is a structure and not the chaos it has so often been called" (43). Liebman says that the novel is
held together by "a single 'structural' motif: a complex but total pattern of symbols, metaphors, images, and symbolic actions; a pattern which recurs frequently and regularly in the novel, and which provides a framework and unity for the action." He identifies "the most obvious motif as the Fall myth" (44).

4Rita K. Gollin's excellent book Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Truth of Dreams provides a detailed study of the role of dreams in Hawthorne's fiction: "Through dreams and their threshold, reverie, he would enter the interior life and encounter its demons in fictions asserting that the adventure is crucial to human understanding" (1).

5Robert H. Fossum, in Hawthorne's Inviolable Circle: The Problem of Time, provides a thorough discussion of time in Hawthorne's work.

6Milton R. Stern, in Contexts for Hawthorne: The Marble Faun, attributes much of the failure, as he sees it, of The Marble Faun to what he thinks is Hawthorne's attempt to satisfy the demands of the marketplace, which causes Hawthorne to fill the book with superfluous description, as in a travel book. Missing the ironic subterfuge and metafictional significance of Hawthorne's detailed descriptions of Rome and its art, as well as his authorial intrusions that seem to say he is not concerned with these details, Stern states, "These authorial intrusions, whether on behalf of the utopia or, as is much more often the case,
on behalf of marketplace ideology, always undercut the narrative's own reality" (116). Stern continues, "Hawthorne's vocational irresolution functions exactly as Henry James complained it did: it generates the impression that because the author will not commit his ultimate dedication to the fiction's own reality, neither need the reader" (117).

7See Prophetic Pictures: Nathaniel Hawthorne's Knowledge and Uses of the Visual Arts by Rita K. Gollin and John L. Idol, Jr., for a thorough study of Hawthorne's knowledge of and responses to the fine arts.

8F. O. Mathiessen, in "The Context of 'The Fortunate Fall,'" argues that Miriam's speculations about the fortunate fall do not represent Hawthorne's beliefs: "Hawthorne declares that Kenyon 'rightly felt' them to be too perilous" (59). Sacvan Bercovitch, in "Of Wise and Foolish Virgins," states that Hilda's assessment of Miriam's spiritual state receives a "tentative affirmation" from Hawthorne (82).

9Hawthorne's friend John Lothrop Motley wrote to him on March 29, 1860, after reading The Marble Faun: "I like the misty way in which the story is indicated rather than revealed. The outlines are quite definite enough from the beginning to the end, to those who have imagination enough to follow you in your airy flights--and to those who complain, I suppose nothing less than an illustrated
edition, with a large gallows on the last page, with Donatello in the most pensive of attitudes,—with his ears revealed at last thro' a white nightcap—would be satisfactory" (XVIII 258). Hawthorne responded to Motley on April 1, 1860, "You are certainly that Gentle Reader for whom all my books were exclusively written . . . for you take the book precisely as I meant it" (XVIII 256). Hawthorne wrote his publisher James T. Fields on April 26, 1860, "The book has done better than I thought it would; for you will have discovered, by this time, that it is an audacious attempt to impose a tissue of absurdities upon the public by the mere act of style and narrative. I hardly hoped it would go down with John Bull" (XVIII 271). In a letter to William D. Ticknor on April 19, 1860, Hawthorne refers to a review in the Times of April 7, which particularly pleased him: "So we recognize the power of an artistic Prospero over the cloudy forms and hues of dreamland; while there is so much originality in the shapes into which he attempts to mould them that, though the effect is incomplete, the effort is a work of genius!" (XVIII 266-67).

R. W. B. Lewis presents an excellent study of Hawthorne's view of time in The American Adam. Lewis says that Hawthorne had not been "concerned with the ontological status of time, but with its contents and effects" (123). He sees Miriam and Donatello's fall as fortunate (125),
saying that Miriam's perception "controls the action at last
and rounds out the novel," effecting for both "an upward
step—an entrance into that true reality, which for
Hawthorne, is measured by time" (126). Hyatt Waggoner also
discusses Hawthorne's treatment of time in *Hawthorne: A
Critical Study*. For a detailed discussion, see Robert
H. Fossum in *Hawthorne's Inviolable Circle: The Problem of
Time*. 
CHAPTER SEVEN

HAWTHORNE'S HERMENEUTICAL EpITAPH

Ended, ere it begun--
The Title was scarcely told
When the Preface perished from Consciousness
The Story, unrevealed--
Had it been mine, to print!
Had it been yours, to read!
That it was not Our privilege
The interdict of God.

(Emily Dickinson 1088)

In Septimus Felton, one of Hawthorne's unfinished versions of the English romance he was never able to complete, Septimus wears a path along the ridge, high above his house and village, where he has buried the soldier he killed (unknown to his neighbors) and from whom he received the recipe for the elixir of life.¹ He is surprised one day in his treading back and forth beside the grave, which has become his habit as he ponders the question of immortality, "to find this track and exemplification of his own secret thoughts, and plans, and emotions, this writing of the body, impelled by the struggle and movement of his soul" (XIII 61).² Septimus reads the text of the natural
world from an hermeneutical perspective, looking for insights and revelations into the riddle of existence. For Septimius, natural objects carry supernatural purport, and he attempts to decipher the hieroglyphic of the universe in order to penetrate the mystery of death and immortality. Septimius's desire for immortality is described in sympathetic terms by the narrator, who says that "the feeling was not peculiar to Septimius"; rather, it is "an instinct" that Septimius misinterprets because he applies it to physical immortality. The strong "sense of an undying principle" should be interpreted "truly as the promise of spiritual immortality" (13). Later in the story, Septimius tells Sibil that "dying is a mistake" (90).

Hawthorne has created a story that symbolizes his own quest for immortality; however, Hawthorne's quest is for spiritual immortality. In this artistic construct, he symbolizes his idea in the alchemy of Septimius as he searches for clues to the formula for the elixir of life in old dusty manuscripts written in cryptic codes and bits and pieces of Latin and Greek. The formula is finally decoded by his hermeneutical mode of reading the manuscript:

But that sentence of mystic meaning, shone out before him, like a transparency, illuminated in the darkness of his mind; he determined to take it for his motto, until he should be victorious in his quest . . . in the hope that some other illuminated sentence might gleam
out upon him as the first had done, and shed a light on the context around it; and that then another world would be discovered, with similar effect, until the whole document would thus be illuminated with separate stars of light, converging and congruing in one radiance that should make the whole visible. (51)

Even in his sleep, Septimius's imagination acts upon the fragmentary glimpse of insight he has experienced, and he is impressed by "the lucid way in which it [his dream] evolved the mode in which man might be restored to his undying state" (52). Moreover, when he reads the manuscript after his revelatory dream, he finds the line that he had glimpsed and then lost the previous day. Now it stands out "in strong relief" as a "certain arrangement of stars in the same relation as before," which can be lost and then found again by looking "in a different way"; Septimius suddenly sees the fragment of sentence and can make out its purport, finding the key, or as he took it, "the mode of producing something essential to the thing to be concocted" (58). He concludes that the moral and physical truth "go hand in hand" (52). Furthermore, after his mind has "a flash of light upon it," he is able to read the recipe for the elixer and everything else in the document "in a way he had never thought of before," as he discerns that "it was not to be taken literally and simply, but had a hidden process" (163).
In this fragmentary novel, Hawthorne unequivocally spotlights himself through his surrogate artist Septimius in the act of trying to find, through the processes of the creative imagination, the answer to the riddle of existence. He also affirms that meaning will reveal itself to an intuitive mind only in brief, fragmentary illuminations, and only to those who return over and over again to read the text of the physical universe. Similarly, readers of Hawthorne's texts must look many times if they expect to see what his hidden processes of fiction have produced—and continue to produce. If there is any one message or key to his readers, it is that his purport cannot be "read off" easily from the surface of his page.

Perhaps Hawthorne's metafictional way of seeing and re-creating the world was fortuitous, because his mind and heart were to a large degree "ajar" with the society in which he found himself, and he needed to disguise much of what he believed. More likely, though, is his inability to write in any other mode, for this hermeneutical way of perceiving life reflects the mind of Hawthorne—and to himself he was true. When he said that he wanted to establish an intercourse with the world through his writing, he meant far more than a polite introduction of himself to his readers. Perhaps, he knew that his dreaming mind was so real that he feared getting lost in his fictions and might not be able to contrive a way home (as we are warned about
in "The Man of Genius"). Therefore, his writing made concrete his inner world and established a connection with the outer world, making his text and the world one—the visible path of his unseen inner journeying.

As Septimius reads the manuscripts, the narrator says that "by what he could pick out, he would have thought the whole essay was upon the moral conduct . . . these topics [of behaviour] being repeated and insisted on everywhere, although without any discoverable reference to religious or moral motives"; however, the author would always take "refuge in his cypher" when he seemed "verging towards a definite purpose" (66). Hawthorne's works also follow this pattern of ambiguity, which he has demonstrated in the unsatisfactory (to many critics) endings of many of his fictions. Just perhaps, Hawthorne's obscure techniques are deliberate reconstructions of the world as he saw it and of his underlying, undying concern with the question of immortality, which he explored over and over again in many guises as his life progressed through its various stages. The unending endings of his works are entirely appropriate for someone who reads existence as always open-ended.

Moreover, in this last fragmentary work, Hawthorne sets forth almost blatantly his hermeneutical approach to knowledge. Hawthorne's metafictional artistry underscores the fluidity of his epistemology—and this spiraling, circular path is the one he has worn throughout his fiction-
making from the earliest stories, such as "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe," to the very last fragment novels. These lines describe Hawthorne as they describe his surrogate artist Septimius:

   But what strange interest there is, in tracing out the first steps by which we enter on a course that influences our life; and this deep worn pathway on the hill-top, passing and repassing by a grave, seemed to symbolize it in Septimius's case. (45)

The question of death and immortality has certainly appeared and reappeared in Hawthorne's works as he has passed and repassed a "grave" in many of the short tales and in all of the major novels.

Hawthorne's self-reflexive, self-begetting fiction dramatizes "the writing of his body, impelled by the struggle and movement of his soul," as he meditated on the abstract philosophical questions of good and evil, death and immortality. His works follow the hermeneutical pattern, for in the beginning is the end, only moved upward on the spiral of time to a higher level of intellectual and artistic complexity. In the manuscript Septimius Felton, Hawthorne writes a manuscript containing other manuscripts and stories-within-the story of Septimius, all of which tell older versions of the story of the elixer of life. This metafictional Chinese box of stories continues time in an unending, spiraling form, as events double back
repetitiously on themselves in such a way that all of existence merges into itself. In the words of Dr. Portsoaken, "past, present, and future is all one" (74).

In these ponderings about the riddle of existence, Hawthorne's fiction follows the natural progression of the various stages in his personal life, from a young man to an old man facing his own mortality. In each stage, Hawthorne's artistry seems perfectly matched to his level of maturity, the perfect symbol for the idea of his mind.

As a young man, Hawthorne experimented with his fictional process in the seclusion of his mother's home. During this gestational period, he looked deeply into his inner being as well as outward to the world of affairs. Always he saw the world as an hieroglyphic to be deciphered; the riddle of existence occupied his thoughts, in particular, his own existence. Short tales like "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment," "The Birthmark," and "Rappaccini's Daughter" are but a few of the stories that explore the possibilities of human manipulation of natural resources to bring about "transformations" of human experience. Hawthorne's particular alchemy distilled itself in a fictional form that in itself represents a continuing transformation of life. By the time Hawthorne writes The Scarlet Letter, he has completed his gestation. Perhaps the term metamorphosis best describes the shape of Hawthorne's artistic self-creation, for his is always a self-begetting,
transformational artistry.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne emerges in the guise of his surrogate artist Hester Prynne. She is associated with the Eleusian mysteries of an earlier Heterai Phrynne, a prostitute in the sacred service of Artemis. Thus, she is reflective of a way of life radically in opposition to her Puritan community. Significantly, Hester is associated with beauty, love, and, above all, nature. The rose by the prison door is the key given to us by Hawthorne to unlock the hidden processes and meanings in his story. In addition, to Hawthorne's pointing to nature as the authoritative text, he also uses another hermeneutical device—the old, dusty manuscript he finds in the upper room of the Custom House. Clearly, the magical alchemy that occurs in Hawthorne's brain when he touches the fragment of a red burning letter A demonstrates his mode of reading objects in a highly suggestive way, one that reflects such Greek precursors as Heliodorus. An object has an infinite text. Hawthorne's epistemology, of course, like Hester's, was in serious conflict with that of his milieu, so his metafictional art provided him with the perfect vehicle to express his vision—a vision he says he shares with those few who are of a like-mind with him. In this first (he never wanted to acknowledge *Fanshawe*) novel, then, we see Hawthorne as newly-born artist, of his own making, stepping over the threshold of the prison door, or womb, to announce
his unique American fiction (he clearly portrays himself in the role of the messiah of a new American fiction in "The Man of Genius").

His American fiction, however, is one that cannot ever totally affirm its society, as much as Hawthorne wanted to feel connected to his birthplace. He seeks in *The Scarlet Letter* to become "a citizen of somewhere else," and that place will be in his art. Significantly, he writes this "hell-fired" novel in the weeks after he leaves Boston and after his mother's death, suggesting some type of freedom from various restraints experienced in his gestational period. He is, in reality, free. In every novel, a death occurs that illustrates Hawthorne's deepening understanding of the complexities of the human heart, and in some sense each is necessary to emphasize the dangers inherent in art itself when it is misused by evil wizards. Pearl is freed from the evil alchemy her father has practiced for seven years, after he acknowledges her as his daughter moments before his death. His deceptive art has hindered Pearl's growth in relation to the magnetic chain of humanity. Once free from the strictures of Puritan Boston, however, Hawthorne sends Pearl to Europe. He is in many ways one of the first in a long line of America's "Lost Generation," because his vision was "ajar" with that of his contemporary America, especially during the Civil War, as well as that of his inherited Past.
Although Hawthorne felt uneasy with much of America's and his inherited past, he comes to a kind of truce or accommodation with it in *The House of the Seven Gables*. This novel moves Hawthorne from a position on the hermeneutical spiral of time located in the self primarily, in his moment of birth, as illustrated in *The Scarlet Letter*, to the wider circle of marriage and domestic life. Hester's life as an artist must be lived in relative exclusion from her community as a direct consequence of that community's moral codes and its condemnation of her adultery. She must, indeed, carry the dead corpse of the past, as Holgrave calls it in *Seven Gables*, and live a life of near isolation. Her art, significantly, becomes her lifeline and the means by which she creates an identity that eventually undermines the Puritan judgement of her.

In *Seven Gables*, Hawthorne portrays himself in the guise of Holgrave, who is able by the efficacy of the creative process itself to come to the realization that the history of the past is nothing more than a fiction, just as his own history of the Maule and Pyncheon feud turns out to be. Holgrave's story-within-the-story, which he has gotten from hearsay accounts, emphasizes the impossibility of ever finding absolute certainty. Furthermore, the role of the reader is brought into play in a central way in this work, as Hawthorne portrays Phoebe as the ideal reader because she enters the fiction as a "writer" also and thus affects how
Holgrave reads and "rewrites" his now moving text. Consequently, Holgrave and Phoebe achieve a marriage of minds as they allow the mysteries of fiction to transform them in the same ways that fiction itself is transformed by other fictions. Holgrave's epiphany frees him to love Phoebe and to join himself to the wider sphere of the hearth and home. Hawthorne's own marriage to Sophia Peabody no doubt brings him to the position he recreates in his surrogate Holgrave. A death occurs in this novel also, that of the evil Judge Pyncheon, which directly affects the freedom of Holgrave, Phoebe, Hepzibah, Clifford, and their adopted family member, Uncle Venner.

The evil wizardry of the Pyncheons ends with the death of the Judge. Now Holgrave is not so eager to raze the past and even suggests that each generation should live in a house of stone and be free to furnish it according to its own tastes. Hawthorne indicates here a growing need to connect to others, not only emotionally, as the surface story suggests, but, perhaps even more importantly, he wants to connect to his readers and is asking for a new kind of fiction with which to interpret the text of the universe. Knowing that his text lies indestructible in nature, he is now concerned with the hidden meaning of the riddle it presents to his imagination, a riddle he continues to explore in his next novel *The Blithedale Romance*.

Coverdale is Hawthorne's surrogate artist in The
Blithedale Romance. As his name suggests, he is an artist of the hidden. When he attempts to solve the riddle of his three friends Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla, to lift the veil of the mystery they represent to him, his methodology for uncovering meaning or reading the clues of his text demonstrates his affinity with the Hermetic tradition. His frequent retreats to his tree bower allow him to look at the page of Blithedale spread out below him. From this metafictional distance, he can try to piece together the individual fragments of information, the hints and innuendoes he has received as a part of the inner workings of the group. Time after time, Coverdale reviews the story he has thus far puzzled out.

The Blithedale Romance is truly riddled with all manner of devices to conceal, to disguise what, I think, is the main subject of Hawthorne's novel—which is, once again, his exploring the nature of reality as a fictional creation. His circle of human involvement has moved upward and outward again, this time to encompass a larger society than the more limited one of hearth and home. In addition, this society is an artificial construct of a reality. In his preface to this work, he says that he wants to construct a "faery" land, where reality and fancy can exist together in a "neutral territory." Therefore, in this work Hawthorne's artistry progresses to a more overt statement of an epistemology shaped by his fictional processes acting on his
external world. The Veiled Lady show, Zenobia's reenactment of the veiled lady story with Priscilla, the Masquerades, the many stories-within-the-story retelling the story, the "acting" of roles assigned at Blithedale, Coverdale's profession as a poet, Zenobia's profession as an actress whose real name we never know—all underscore the artificiality of the construct of the world as Hawthorne sees it. He knows that gaps exist in the story he observes, and he tells us directly that he makes up parts of the story intuitively to fill those gaps in his text.

Priscilla is, indeed, Hawthorne's Veiled Lady, just as this very novel is his veiled lady, for what is veiled is Hawthorne's artistic process itself and Priscilla symbolizes Art for Hawthorne. In this novel, Hawthorne marries Art. When Coverdale stammers out that he loves Priscilla, he is really speaking in a kind of unknown tongue, according to Hermetic tradition, which we can interpret as Hawthorne's covert confession that what he is in love with above all else is his art. Furthermore, Hawthorne once again tells his readers how to uncover his hidden process in his description of the intricacies of Priscilla's purse-making. In true Hermetic fashion, readers must find the aperture into the maze-like construct by somehow attaining an intuitive understanding of how it is made. This knowledge cannot be seized by roughly renting the veil, but by looking repeatedly at the work in a meditative mode. The
revelation, according to Hermetic thought, will come as a kind of epiphany. Coverdale's stammering confession illuminates his riddle for us, if we are reading beneath the surface of Hawthorne's riddle.

Hawthorne wrote *The Marble Faun* after his consular appointment to England and his sojourn in Italy. Finally, he joins Pearl as he actually becomes a citizen of somewhere else, at least for a time. Rome, the city of Art, of all Time, and all Places provided Hawthorne with the most comprehensive symbol for his creative sensibilities and his vision of existence. Not only does this novel allow him to extend his circle of existence to include all of human history, but it also represents his virtuoso performance of artistic playing, for he employs and extends every fictional device he has previously used to create a symphony of amazing complexity and delight for his readers. Moreover, he includes all of the questions he has pondered throughout his life. All of these elements he has embodied in the marble statue of Donatello, who represents Hawthorne's art form, the riddle of the soul in its struggle with good and evil, and, further, it symbolizes the hermeneutical approach to knowledge and to the question of death and immortality.

In fact, in this statue of Donatello Hawthorne has embodied himself. We are able to watch him as he chips away the surface of the mortal Hawthorne in order to reveal himself in the form of this novel, a herm created by words,
which stands in an analogous relation to the marble faun of Praxiteles. Consequently, Hawthorne takes his self-reflexive, self-begetting art full circle, from his first beginnings in the form of Pearl, whose name suggests an immortal substance like marble. Significantly, in his first novel, Hawthorne's surrogate artist is female and now in this last completed novel he once again creates a female surrogate in Miriam. Seven Gables and Blithedale portray Hawthorne in the male surrogates as he progresses through the middle stages in his life and career when he is more involved in efforts to be a man of affairs in the world. Now he returns to the maternal surrogates: Hester brings him into the world and Miriam bears him into an immortal state as he faces death. Both women bring life to their respective offspring (Pearl and Donatello) by experiencing a fortunate fall from innocence into knowledge of evil (evil as defined by their societies, never by them). Thus, Hawthorne indicates in the hidden texts of his novels that death is often a means of ushering in a new life, only in a transformed state.

The Marble Faun, too, seems a perfect textbook example of the hermeneutical tradition, as its collage of repeating images in various forms and modes repeats the story of Donatello. Its form is highly metafictional in its use of stories being retold in the mirroring of paintings, frescoes, sculpture, myths and legends. In addition, its
narrative form follows the unending, winding path that weaves the universe into a riddle. Hawthorne has been criticized for repeating over and over the same story in all of his fiction. But what more appropriate progression in the corpus of his work than to allow his metafictional mirror to be turned and turned in a neverending spiral of time and complexity?

In the Preface to *The Snow Image*, written in 1852, Hawthorne, looking back over his writing career, says that his early sketches "come so nearly up to the standard that I can achieve now" and that "the ripened autumnal fruit tastes but little better than the early windfalls." However, he does not seem disturbed by his observation, for he continues, "In youth, men are apt to write more wisely than they really know or feel; and the remainder of life may be not idly spent in realizing and convincing themselves of the wisdom they uttered long ago. The truth that was only in the infancy then may have since become a substance in the mind and heart" (XI 6). While this kind of mind may seem limited to some readers, Hawthorne's vision is a continuing reflection of the world, a world that reveals different yet similar versions of reality in its hidden subtext, a text that is inherently moving, inexhaustible, and immortal.
Notes

1 Two major studies of Hawthorne's last phase are *Hawthorne's Last Phase* by Edward Hutchins Davidson and *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Tradition and Revolution* by Charles Swann. Also Nina Baym's *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career*.


3 Michael D. Bell, in "Arts of Deception: Hawthorne, 'Romance,' and *The Scarlet Letter,*" gives an historical reading of Hawthorne's relationship to his milieu and his romance form as a subtle means of undermining conventional assumptions.

4 Earl R. Hutchinson, Sr., in "Antiquity and Mythology in *The Scarlet Letter*: The Primary Sources," argues that the American and English sources for Hester are of "secondary importance," used by Hawthorne as "necessary veils" to conceal his primary sources in Greek antiquity and mythology from an audience strongly influenced by Puritan morals. According to Hutchinson, Hawthorne's readers have failed to note "a major theme" in the novel—"paganism and an earthy, healthy love of life," of which Hawthorne approved. Luther S. Luedtke, in *Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Romance of the Orient*, presents a thorough study of Hawthorne's connections to Oriental influences and argues convincingly that these influences formed a major part of his overall vision, both morally and aesthetically. Most critics, Luedtke says, have
shown no interest in Eastern influence on Hawthorne:

"Belittling the importance, formal or thematic, of the story cycles and apologues of the East, they have hurried to situate Hawthorne in the tradition of the great English allegorists" (XVI-XVII). In his chapter "Hawthorne's Reading," he draws on work done by Marion L. Kesselring and Alfred Weber and claims that over half of Hawthorne's reading during his twelve years of self-exile pertained to the Orient. Luedtke also demonstrates that during Hawthorne's six-year editorship of the American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge "his six issues contain, in all, sixty-nine items dealing chiefly with Eastern matters, not including items on sub-Saharan Africa or Oceania or general pieces in which the East makes only minor appearances." While the majority of these articles were written from Hawthorne's general knowledge, without indicating his sources, he does refer to "at least twenty travel commentaries, histories, and fictions that were wholly or largely concerned with the cultures extending eastward from the Barbary States to China" (40).

Norman Holmes Pearson says that Hawthorne's repetition of themes in his works is a strength rather than a weakness, that "in the larger, somewhat accidental synthesis of the body of his writing there is something of a repetition of the function and the more conscious beauty of the symbolism which integrates the individual works" (xiii).
Chapter 8

EPILOGUE

Ourself behind ourself, concealed--
Should startle most--
(Emily Dickinson 670)

Hawthorne says of his version of Surveyor Pue's manuscript of the Hester Prynne story, "'What I contend for is the authenticity of the outline'" (I 1). Similarly, in one of his last fragment novels, Septimius Felton, his surrogate Septimius, projecting himself into his immortal future, says, "'In a century, I shall partially have seen the earth, and known at least its boundaries--have got myself the outline, to be filled up hereafter'" (XIII 170-71). These statements coming from the early writings and continuing to his last works indicate Hawthorne's attempt to look at the larger picture, knowing all along that all he could ever realize about the riddle of existence would be a kind of outline, a rough sketch of the universe. Hawthorne's view of the world as a text that only provides fragments and glimpses of hidden realities implicitly suggests his refusal to claim certitude about the natural or supernatural world. Perhaps his epistemology explains his lack of emphasis on plot in his fiction, for although plot
may have a certain kind of beauty, it has no truth. A plot implies an ending, and Hawthorne knew that life does not have an ending that can be stated, as Hester's "'I know not! I know not!'" attests in her reply to Dimmesdale's certitude.

Hawthorne's metafictional art simultaneously reflects his epistemology and provides a mask or disguise for his view of life as a riddle. Among his contemporaries, the world was a place of relative certainty, and for Hawthorne to survive and create any kind of connection with the "magnetic chain of humanity" he needed to veil himself in his art. Rita K. Gollin correctly points out Hawthorne's worry about "enacting the devil's role, ensnaring the reader and drawing him away from reality into a world of illusions, even delusions" (80). Hawthorne need not have worried, however, about his "sympathetic readers," those who, like Gollin, can separate the dream from its process. Precisely because his fiction-making exposes him in the process of creation and allows his readers to be clearly aware of his sleight-of-hand artistry, they can know that his art claims only the truth that truths about the human condition are multiple, ambiguous, and ephemeral.

Hawthorne's fiction, then, undoubtedly is a precursor to postmodern metafiction writers. Perhaps the greatest difference between Hawthorne and his descendants is that he was playing the game on an empty field. Today writers are
able to reflect each other in their art as well as themselves, to carry on a conversation instead of talking to a solitary reflection in a mirror. Although most metafiction exposes the lies we tell each other and in many ways creates a pessimistic view of life, the very act of writing itself indicates a measure of hope, however limited it may be. Robert Scholes says, "And surely the energy and inventiveness of Barth, the obsessive ingenuity of Pynchon, and the shame and anger of Coover are themselves signs of faith in something" (209). Fabulation helped Hawthorne face his present without the old lies, for he was able to undermine and recreate much of the restrictive vision he inherited from his ancestors. For that same reason, fabulation or metafiction is important today, causing us to be self-conscious of our tendency to deceive ourselves and others and thereby helping us to avoid the practice of a kind of wizardry that is evil. Moreover, being aware of fabulation, we can shy away from dogmatic "truth" that cannot lead us into any kind of truth at all.

Although most critics have not recognized that Hawthorne was practicing an early form of metafiction, other writers have made an hermeneutical spiral of association with their ancestor. Borges says of Kafka's similarity to Hawthorne, "'Wakefield' prefigures Franz Kafka, but Kafka modifies and refines the reading of 'Wakefield.' The debt is mutual; a great writer creates his precursors" (Nathaniel
Cynthia Ozick states the same belief in the importance of precursors and continues the link to Hawthorne by claiming, "You cannot have Philip Roth without Franz Kafka; you cannot have Kafka without Joseph the dreamer" (Metaphor and Memory 110). And Roth completes the circle by acknowledging Hawthorne as his precursor in the Prologue of his Great American Novel. In the section called "My Precursor, My Kinsman," he discusses The Scarlet Letter and says, "Students of Literatoor (as Hem was wont to mispronounce it) will have recognized the debt that I owe to Mr. Hawthorne of Massassachusetts. Yes, this prologue partly derives from reading that lengthy intro to his novel wherein he tells us who he is and how he comes to be writing a great book" (36).

Hawthorne's affinity with his literary descendants might best be illustrated by allowing Nathaniel Hawthorne and John Barth to continue the hermeneutical narrative by having the last words of this study: Hawthorne's come from his journals; Barth's through a novel that reads like a journal--

To make one's own reflection in a mirror the subject of a story. (Hawthorne XIII 15)

The only way to get out of a mirror-image is to close your eyes and hold out your hands and be carried away
by a valiant metaphor, I suppose, like a simile. (Barth
Lost in the Funhouse 111)

Letters in the shape of figures of men, etc. At a
distance, the words composed by the letters are alone
distinguishable. Close at hand, the figures alone are
seen, and not distinguished as letters. Thus things may
have a positive, a relative, and a composite meaning,
according to the point of view. (Hawthorne 183)

Ambrose wandered, languished, dozed. Now and then he
fell into his habit of rehearsing to himself the
unadventurous story of his life . . . . Its principal
events, on this telling would appear to have been A, B,
C, and D. (Barth 96)

A person to be writing a tale, and to find that it
shapes itself against his intentions . . . he having
made himself one of the personages. (Hawthorne 16)

Yet it was a fact that in the corpus of his fiction as
far as he knew no fictional character had become
convinced as he had that he was a character in a work
of fiction. (Barth 129)
To write a dream, which shall resemble the real course of a dream, with all its inconsistency, its strange transformations . . . Up to this age of the world, no such thing ever has been written. (Hawthorne 240)

One way or another, no matter which theory of our journey is correct, it's myself I address. . . . Is the journey my invention? Do the night, the sea, exist at all, I ask myself, apart from my experience of them? Do I myself exist, or is this a dream? Sometimes I wonder. And if I am, who am I? The Heritage I supposedly transport? But how can I be both vessel and contents? Such are the questions that beset my intervals of rest." (Barth 3)
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