Preface

1. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 107. As Nina Baym recently has shown, the critical focus on a specifically American genre is an expression of the persistent desire of scholars and critics to identify the national characteristics of our literature. Indeed, according to Baym, the idea of romance as a specifically American genre is a critical invention designed to mediate "between a conviction that literature and the works comprising it are valuable in themselves . . . and a simultaneous rejection of merely formalist, aesthetic, or affective modes of assessment and analysis" ("Concepts of Romance in Hawthorne's America," *NCF* 38 [March 1984]: 426). Baym's revisionary essay seeks to put into question the historical validity of the concept that has played such a major role in constructing the accepted canon of American literature by showing that the "term romance" was "used so broadly and so inconsistently" (430) in Hawthorne's America that any attempt to fix its meaning is a creative rather than a descriptive activity. Indeed, she insists that Hawthorne himself was seen by his contemporaries "neither as the romance writer he claimed to be, nor as the essentially representative writer he has come to be" (443). The implications of Baym's argument here are more fully expressed in her earlier compelling essay, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors," *AQ* 33 (Summer 1981): 123-39. While my readings do not address Baym's arguments directly, they do, I believe, suggest that the exclusions she describes may be less the result of particular critical theories than of a set of problems inherent in the relation between genealogy and genericity.
Evan Carton’s recent study raises once again Baym’s skepticism regarding the usefulness of romance as a critical concept (The Rhetoric of American Romance: Dialectic and Identity in Emerson, Dickinson, Poe, and Hawthorne [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985]). He proposes a “revisionary approach to American romance” (265) because he believes that its worth as a critical concept has been devalued by its “formalistic application to a species of extended prose narrative” (i). After citing Baym’s observation that the category American romance as previously applied has little “historical authority or explanatory force” (266) he sets out to “vitalize” the term by “reconceiving it as a specific and urgent kind of rhetorical performance” (i) that transgresses formal generic boundaries and “interconnects the diverse literary productions of the American Renaissance” (21): Emerson’s essays, Poe’s stories, Dickinson’s lyrics, and Hawthorne’s novels. Uniting these four genres is a set of common structures and strategies that the four writers share. And by naming the common features in texts by Emerson, Poe, Dickinson, and Hawthorne, Carton, presumably, will undermine the formalistic understanding of romance and open up the canon by connecting a number of diverse literary works.


Notes to Pages 2–3

ONE The Thematics of a Form: Waverley and American Romance


4. The fact that *Don Quixote* is written against the chivalric romances no doubt partially accounts for the distinction made in the eighteenth century between romance and novel. Sir Walter Scott defines romance as a “fictitious narrative in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvelous and uncommon incidents” and novel as a “fictitious narrative, differing from the Romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society” (“Essay on Romance” in *Essays on Chivalry, Romance and the Drama* [1834; reprint, Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1972], 129). But as Scott often observes, all novels carry elements of romance within them with the result that the “word romance” is widely used as “synonymous with fictitious composition” (Ioan Williams, ed., *Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fiction* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968], 314).

5. Note, for example, the following passage written in 1754:

The error I mean is putting romances into the hands of young ladies; which being a sort of writing that abounds in characters no where to be found, can, at best, be but a useless employment, even supposing the readers of them to have neither relish nor understanding for superior concerns. But as this is by no means the case, and as the happiness of mankind is deeply interested in the sentiments and conduct of the ladies, why do we contribute to the filling their heads with fancies, which render them incapable either of enjoying or communicating that happiness? Why do we suffer those hearts, which ought to be appropriated to the various affections of social life, to be alienated by the mere creatures of the imagination? In short, why do we suffer those who were born for the purpose of living in society with men endowed with passions and frailties like their own, to be bred up in daily expectation of living out of it with such men as never existed . . . ? I know several unmarried ladies, who in all probability had been long ago good wives and good mothers, if their imagina-
tions had not been early perverted with the chimerical ideas of romantic love . . . by the hopes of that ideal happiness, which is no where to be found but in romance.


7. “The pain of suspense, and the irresistible desire of satisfying the curiosity, when once raised, will account for our eagerness to go quite through an adventure, though we suffer actual pain during the whole course of it,” J. and A. L. Aiken wrote in 1773. “We rather chuse,” they continued, “to suffer the smart pang of a violent emotion than the uneasy craving of an unsatisfied desire. . . . This is the impulse which renders the poorest and most insipid narrative interesting when we once get fairly into it. . . . When children, therefore, listen with pale and mute attention to the frightful stories of apparitions, we are not, perhaps, to imagine that they are in a state of enjoyment, any more than the poor bird which is dropping into the mouth of the rattlesnake—they are chained by the ears and fascinated by curiosity” (Three essays from “Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Verse, 1773,” in Williams, *Novel and Romance*, 284).

Worth noting here is the central role that curiosity and suspense have for Roland Barthes. He attempts in *S/Z* to disrupt the “flowing discourse of narration, the naturalness of ordinary language” (13) by man-handling and interrupting (15) the text of Balzac’s story is an effort to undermine the operations of suspense, “artifices more spectacular than persuasive” (16), by situating his reading “behind the transparency of suspense” which is “placed on the text by the first avid and ignorant reader” (165). *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1974).


9. This is an idea that has persisted in the criticism of fiction. One thinks of Wayne Booth’s attacks on Joyce’s ambiguity and Stephen Heath’s defense of the politics of the nouveau roman, but more revealing, perhaps, is Wolfgang Iser’s assertion that “if reading were to consist of nothing but an uninterrupted building up of illusions, it would be a suspect, if not downright dangerous, process: instead of bringing
us into contact with reality, it would wean us away from realities. Of course, there is an element of ‘escapism’ in all literature, resulting from this very creation of illusion, but there are some texts which offer nothing but a harmonious world, purified of all contradictions and deliberately excluding anything that might disturb the illusion once established, and these are the texts that we generally do not like to classify as literary. Women’s magazines and the brasher forms of detective story might be cited as examples” (“The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,” NLH 3 [1972]: 289).


12. Ibid., 73.

13. The remarkable influence of Scott on subsequent novelists is well documented. George Levine writes that Scott “transformed the history of narrative in Western Europe” (*The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981], 81–82), and Perry Miller describes his influence in America as follows: “A generation had grown up breathing the atmosphere of Romance as naturally as they breathed the air of America. And there can be little doubt that the intermingling of the literary form with the consciousness of the nation was wrought in the early decades of the century, not by an American, but by the Wizard of the North, ‘the Author of Waverley’” (*Nature’s Nation* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967], 243).


16. Ibid., 299.

17. Ibid., 230.

18. Ibid., 235.

19. Ibid., 231.


21. Compare Barthes’ assertion that “narrative is determined not by a desire to narrate but by a desire to exchange: it is a medium of exchange, an agent, a currency, a gold standard” (*S/Z*, 90).
22. Compare Barthes' description of the way we are led to read a classic text:

a rhythm is established, casual, unconcerned with the integrity of the text; our very avidity for knowledge impels us to skim or to skip certain passages (anticipated as "boring") in order to get more quickly to the warmer parts of the anecdote ... we boldly skip (no one is watching) descriptions, explanations, analyses, conversations; doing so, we resemble a spectator in a nightclub who climbs onto the stage and speeds up the dancer's striptease, tearing off her clothing, but in the same order, that is: on the one hand respecting and on the other hastening the episodes of the ritual (like a priest gulping down his Mass). (The Pleasure of the Text, trans. Richard Miller [New York: Hill & Wang, 1975], 10-11)

23. Scott, in Williams, Sir Walter Scott, 90.

24. Ibid., 117.


27. The relation between questions of genealogy, inherited authority, and narrative authority is a concern of contemporary criticism. Edward Said writes that the "generic plot situation of the novel is to repeat through variation the family scene by which human beings engender human duration in their action" (The World, the Text, the Critic [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983], 117). See also his Beginnings: Intention and Method (New York: Basic Books, 1975; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 81-188. Peter Brooks, echoing Said, argues that "paternity is a dominant issue within the great tradition of the nineteenth-century novel ... a principal embodiment of its concern with authority, legitimacy, the conflict of generations, and the transmission of wisdom" (Reading for Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984], 63). See also Homer Brown's
discussion of the implications of the genealogical pattern in his essay "Tom Jones."

28. George Levine argues that the painting makes possible a comfortable relationship between past and present by transforming the past into an image (The Realistic Imagination, 105). In my discussion of the painting I am indebted to Levine for his reading.

29. Scott, "Essay on Romance," 134. Until indicated otherwise parenthetical in-text page citations refer to this essay.

30. See Said, Beginnings, 84.

31. Scott, in Williams, Sir Walter Scott, 226. Compare his observation that the worst evil to be apprehended from the perusal of novels is, that the habit is like to generate an indisposition to real history, and useful literature; and that the best which can be hoped is, that they may sometimes instruct the youthful mind by real pictures of life, and sometimes awaken their better feelings and sympathies. . . . Beyond this they are a mere elegance, a luxury contrived for the amusement of polished life . . . and are read much more for amusement, than with the least hope of deriving instruction from them. (54)

32. Ibid., 274.
33. Ibid., 89.
34. Ibid., 317.
35. Ibid., 117.

36. Levine, The Realistic Imagination, 94. Levine argues that Scott establishes the precedent for the realistic fiction that follows him by setting fact against dream.


44. Kermode, *The Art of Telling*, 73.
51. John Barth, “Tales within Tales,” in *The Friday Book*, 236.

TWO The Limits of Romance: A Reading of The Marble Faun

3. Hawthorne did not decide on a final title until the book was in press, but several of the ones that he considered raise the problem of the relation between art and life. See Claude M. Simpson’s “Introduction” to the Ohio State edition of *The Marble Faun*, pp. xxv–xxvii.
5. For two related discussions of Miriam’s model see Jonathan Auerbach, “Executing the Model: Painting, Sculpture, and Romance-Writing


9. In *The French and Italian Notebooks* Hawthorne writes: "My wife and I went yesterday to the Pantheon, which stands in the central intricacy and nastiness of Roman lanes" (60).

THREE  *The Entangled Text: Pierre and the Romance of Reading*


9. H. Bruce Franklin focuses on this process in his admirable analy-


17. Hegel’s remarks on the pyramid are worth quoting at length:

Here we have before us a double architecture, one above ground, the other subterranean: labyrinths under the soil, magnificent vast excavations, passages half a mile long, chambers adorned with hieroglyphics, everything worked out with the maximum of care; then above ground there are built in addition to those amazing constructions amongst which the Pyramids are to be counted the chief. On the purpose and meaning of the Pyramids all sorts of hypotheses have been tried for centuries, yet it now seems beyond doubt that they are enclosures for the graves of kings or of sacred animals. . . . In this way the Pyramids put before our eyes the simple prototype of symbolical art itself; they are prodigious crystals which conceal in themselves an inner meaning and, as external shapes produced by art, they so envelop that meaning that it is obvious that they are there for this inner meaning separated from pure nature and only in relation to this meaning. But this realm of death and the invisible, which here constitutes the meaning, possesses only one side, and that a formal

18. Pierre, as he reads Isabel's note, is subject to "two antagonistic agencies within him. . . . One bade him finish the selfish destruction of the note; for in some dark way the reading of it would irretrievably entangle his fate. The other bade him dismiss all misgivings . . . Read, Pierre, though by reading thou may'st entangle thyself, yet may'st thou thereby disentangle others" (P, 63).

FOUR The Image in the Mirror: James's Portrait and the Economy of Romance


4. Ibid., 96-97.

5. Ibid., 96.


9. Ibid., 345.

10. James, preface to The American, 26, 25, 34.


13. James, preface to The American, 31. Subsequent quotations from this preface in this paragraph are cited in the text.
15. James, preface to *Roderick Hudson*, 4.
23. Ibid., 212–16.
30. Ibid., 54.
34. Ibid., 92.
35. James, “Emile Zola,” in *Notes on Novelists*, 60.
38. James, preface to The Princess Casamassima, 64–65.
40. I am indebted here to Geoffrey H. Hartman for his discussion of this problem in “Christopher Smart's ‘Magnificat’: Toward a Theory of Representation,” in The Fate of Reading and Other Essays (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 74–75.
42. James, Hawthorne, 57.
43. James, preface to The Princess Casamassima, 64.
44. Lubbock, Letters, 1: 142.
45. James, preface to The Spoils of Poynton, 120.
47. James, “The Art of Fiction,” 53.
48. James, preface to The Awkward Age, in Blackmur, The Art of the Novel, 106.
49. Lubbock, Letters, 1:325.
53. James, preface to The Princess Casamassima, 65.
55. James, preface to The Ambassadors, 317.
58. James, “The Future of the Novel,” 188.

FIVE  Faulkner and the Sepulcher of Romance:  
The Voices of Absalom, Absalom!

2. Meriwether and Millgate, Lion in the Garden, 181, 243, 125, 239.


5. Ibid., 284.


8. Ibid. Minter’s admirable study is particularly good in suggesting subtle connections between Faulkner’s life and work. See especially the chapter, “The Faces of Fame,” 220–31.


18. For some interesting comments on the meaning of the myth of Narcissus in Faulkner see Irwin, *Doubling and Incest*, 33, 35, 36, 41, 163,


20. This is an aspect of the novel that is also discussed by Arthur F. Kinney in *Faulkner's Narrative Poetics: Style as Vision* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), 194–215.

21. These words are from J. Hillis Miller's admirable essay on *Wuthering Heights* in *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 71. My understanding of *Absalom, Absalom!* has benefited immeasurably from Miller's suggestive essay. Faulkner's novel seems remarkably similar to Bronte's.


26. A similar passage occurs on page 275: “His remark was not intended for flippancy nor even derogation. It was born (if from any source) of that incorrigible unsentimental sentimentality of the young
which takes the form of hard crass levity—to which, by the way, Quent-
tin paid no attention whatever, resuming as if he had never been inter-
rupted, his face still lowered, still brooding apparently on the open let-
ter upon the open book between his hands."

27. For a brilliant discussion of this aspect of writing see Hartman, *Saving the Text*, 118–57.


29. "Attenuate" is used in a similar way in *Pylon*, the novel Faulkner wrote while he was having difficulties with the *Absalom, Absalom!* manuscript. "As soon as he closed them [his eyes] he would find him-
self, out of some attenuation of weariness, sleeplessness, confusing both
the living and the dead without concern now, with profound convic-
tion of the complete unimportance of either or of the confusion itself,
trying with that mindless and unflagging optimism to explain to some-
one that she did not understand now without bothering to decide or
care whether or not and why or not he was asleep" (*Pylon* [New York:


**Six** The Romance of the Word: John Barth’s Letters

1. Ellen Coughlin, “John Barth Takes Inventory,” *Books and Art* 1

2. John Barth, “Some Reasons Why I Tell the Stories the Way I Tell
Them Rather Than Some Other Sort of Stories Some Other Way,”


York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1979), 255. Tanner’s reading of Barth is an
especially suggestive one.

5. See Tanner, *City of Words*, 253.


8. Ibid., 5.


12. In this letter, dated August 24, 1969, the Author writes to Ambrose concerning the “house I once helped you build” (655), a structure that obviously anticipates and forms a part of the “house” of Letters.
15. Ibid., 91–92.
16. I am indebted here to J. Hillis Miller for his discussion of a similar concern in Thackeray. See Fiction and Repetition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 74–76.
23. There is evidence, however, in Barth’s most recent novel, The Tide-water Tales (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1987), that Todd does not die in 1968 and is alive and well in 1980. Peter Sagamore, sailing with his wife in the Chesapeake, reports that “a dignified elderly gentleman in a three piece summer seersucker sails by, necktie and all, apparently singlehanding a skipjack impeccably converted for cruising” (235).
25. Ibid.
Conclusion


14. I am indebted here to Fredric Jameson for his discussion of

26. Ibid., 247.
27. Ibid., 154.