Perceiving the motion of some object behind a thick veil of undergrowth, he fired, with the instinct of a hunter and the aim of a practiced marksman. A low moan, which told his success, and by which even animals can express their dying agony, was unheeded by Reuben Bourne. What were the recollections now breaking upon him?

(“Roger Malvin’s Burial,” X 356)

This essay originated in my puzzling over the narrative break that occurs in “Roger Malvin’s Burial” right after the passage quoted above—a gap between the moment that Reuben Bourne fires his gun and the moment we and Dorcas Bourne discover that he has killed their son Cyrus. Hawthorne postpones discovery of Cyrus’s body for two lengthy paragraphs not only to create and maintain readerly suspense. The content of the two paragraphs suggests other motives. In the first, he presents Reuben’s recognition that he has found his way—compulsively, in Frederick Crews’s well-known view—to the spot where he had left Roger Malvin eighteen years before. In the second, longer paragraph, he suddenly switches point of view and breaks chronology to focus on Dorcas as she makes preparations for supper. Little do she and the first-time reader realize that the spectacle they will soon have to consume is the dead body of her son.

Even though the reader witnesses Reuben’s gunshot and thus wonders what he has hit, by moving the narrative backward in time coincident with
the shift to Dorcas’s viewpoint, Hawthorne opens ironic distance between his readers and his female character. This distance widens, of course, upon a second reading because we know that Cyrus is dead by his father’s hand all the while Dorcas prepares a supper he will never eat. But even on a first reading we suspect the worst. The shift to Dorcas raises our suspicions, just as such a shift does today in a horror movie. We know something awful is going to happen—in part, because Dorcas, an innocent woman, has been so blissfully preoccupied with domestic business.

In its manipulation of readers’ emotions, “Roger Malvin’s Burial” offers an appropriate entry point for examining Hawthorne’s earliest efforts to define himself as a male writer in relation to an imagined audience. His treatment of Dorcas Bourne shows his willingness to manipulate female characters, as well as readers who identified with them, in order to prove his authorial power over texts and reader responses. The first decade of Hawthorne’s career, the period between the publication of Fanshawe in 1828 and the publication of Twice-Told Tales in 1837, offers fertile ground for such a study, because Hawthorne struggled so remarkably to write a male self into being. His material conditions—his living and working arrangements, as well as the situation of the literary marketplace—did not align themselves with his desire for success.

When Hawthorne wrote to his mother from Bowdoin in 1821, announcing his interest in “becoming an Author, and relying for support upon my pen” (XV 139), he targeted a career path that was just then opening. “The profession of authorship in the United States began in the 1820s,” William Charvat observes, “when Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper discovered that they could turn out regularly books which readers were willing to buy regularly” (Charvat 1968, 29). Lawrence Buell adds that “before 1830 none in New England but the independently rich could pursue belles lettres as a primary vocation,” but “by the 1850s Longfellow could earn a living from his poetry” (Buell 1986, 57). Hawthorne enjoyed considerable success in his own right after the publication of The Scarlet Letter in 1850, but he began his career on the cusp of the transition Buell remarks. Contributing stories to Samuel Goodrich’s gift books, such as The Token, he earned very little—and he published anonymously. If not quite the “obscurest man of letters in America,” as Hawthorne would later style himself (IX, 3), he enjoyed little public reputation before 1837. Publication of Twice-Told Tales, therefore, marked a watershed moment in Hawthorne’s career. With his name finally on the cover of a book, he had reason to think that his pen might support him and that his writing might be “praised by the reviewers, as equal to the proudest productions of the scribbling sons of John Bull” (XV 139).
Not only did Hawthorne struggle within a literary marketplace to discover any “regularity” of success. During the decade in which he wrote his earliest fiction, he lived with and depended upon his mother and sisters. He would later tell his wife, Sophia, exaggerating for effect, that he had sat in his room “a long, long time, waiting patiently for the world to know me, and sometimes wondering why it did not know me sooner, or whether it would ever know me at all” (XV 494). He “plugged away” for years, in Millicent Bell’s words, “at writings which he hoped might make a book of connected tales” (Bell 1993, 1). Hawthorne published *Fanshawe* in 1828 at his own expense, but then quickly suppressed the novel, which did not bear his name. However, he attempted to promote at least three different collections of linked tales: *Seven Tales of My Native Land*, *Provincial Tales*, and *The Story Teller*. By the time he published *Twice-Told Tales*, Hawthorne had a lot of experience negotiating the vagaries of the literary marketplace. He must have felt frustrated, furthermore, for, as Bell observes, he had “allowed these projects to be cannibalized as he was forced to sell off their intended components one by one to periodicals, in which they were printed anonymously” (2). As his letters make clear, Hawthorne understood how this domestic situation and relative lack of writerly success reflected on his manhood, so it is not surprising that he represents the domestic sphere of marriage and family in a negative light. He was trying to write himself out of house and home both inside and outside of the fictional worlds he created.

Richard Brodhead considers Hawthorne “the most perfectly domestic of all American writers, the one most devoted to the family as the scene of fulfilling relation” (Brodhead 1986, 48). In Douglass Anderson’s similar view, Hawthorne’s work was “perfectly consistent” with the “sentimental domestic spirit” of his day and “helps to establish its complexity, value, and durability” (Anderson 1990, 5). Situating Hawthorne within a domestic frame of reference proves vexing in light of his early tales, for I think many of those works play off the “perfect” spirit of domesticity that Brodhead and Anderson note. In this respect, David Leverenz’s view that “story after story presents conventional manliness as aggressive, insensitive, and murderously dominant” is more consistent with my own. Hawthorne’s “fascination with marketplace humiliation,” Leverenz concludes, “reflects a profound quarrel with the manhood he feels inside himself, so narcissistically needy for self-empowering through malice and cruelty” (Leverenz 1989, 231). Bringing that profound quarrel into the home, Hawthorne waged a campaign against the domestic sphere of marriage and family and repeatedly represented women’s homemaking failures. He also played with female readers by manipulating their emotions, violently disrupting the
domestic order with which they identified, and deliberately causing them pain through their identification with the female characters he disappointed or shocked. Whether Hawthorne was rebelling against his own domestic situation or against constraints that an increasingly female audience placed on his writing, his tenuous circumstances in the late 1820s and early 1830s must have influenced his conception of himself as a writer and his conception of his fictional project.

With changes in American publishing came changes in readership. The American audience changed dramatically in the nineteenth century, as women formed an increasingly important part of the reading public. Nina Baym argues that Hawthorne “could not possibly foresee the evolution of both popular and critical taste away from the gothic, romantic, and historical toward the domestic, realistic, and contemporary.” “Nor could he realize that the American readership as it grew and acquired character between 1830 and 1850 would come to be composed chiefly of women, and therefore responsive to concerns different from his” (Baym 1976, 17–18). My analysis of Hawthorne’s early fiction reveals a clearer sense of audience than Baym’s assessment allows. In making this argument, of course, I am speculating that Hawthorne positions female readers in strategically conceived relationship to his fictional materials—that he deliberately creates characters and stages scenes designed to manipulate reader, especially female reader, responses. In positing an audience for Hawthorne’s early fiction, furthermore, I am following Stephen Railton’s contention that an audience is “‘there’ in the real world” an author inhabits but, more importantly, is “‘there’ in the author’s mind as his or her sense of the people to whom the text is addressed” (Railton 1991, 8). In other words, I am inferring an internalized sense of audience from Hawthorne’s fictional materials, especially from the patterns I see in many of his early tales.

Although Hawthorne had failed in his first efforts to make a book, he had learned valuable lessons about the type of collection he should not put together. Donald Crowley suggests that Hawthorne “deliberately included something for everyone—children, delicate ladies, hardheaded businessmen.” He carefully edited the tales he included in *Twice-Told Tales* with his audience in mind, deleting passages from “The Vision of the Fountain,” for example, “that parodied his readers’ favorite gift-book form.” Subduing a “strong urge to satirize the sentimental bent of his audience,” his “strategy was to minister to rather than exploit the needs of the wide audience he was always hoping to attract” (Crowley 1973, 50). He made “numerous changes which reveal his sensitivity to current, often prudish, standards of taste,” Crowley observes (IX 503). Wanting to “avoid any matter his audience might consider prurient,” Hawthorne demonstrated that “his acute
sense of the limitations of his readers made him unwilling to risk printing in acknowledged tales some words and attitudes he had felt free to publish anonymously” (IX 504). Hawthorne’s “acute sense” of his readers and their limitations must also have governed his decisions about the volume as a whole. By the time the first collection was published, after all, he had published about four dozen tales and sketches. Twice-Told Tales included eighteen, so Hawthorne excluded more than two dozen tales from the book. Many of those tales, including “Roger Malvin’s Burial,” feature domestic violence, if not “prurience,” and thus reveal a lot about his efforts to negotiate with the literary marketplace and with the potential audience for his writing.

Arguably, the most important single reader response Hawthorne received was not Melville’s belated notice of Mosses from an Old Manse in 1850, but Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s review of the 1837 Twice-Told Tales. In Peter Balakian’s words, Longfellow gave to Hawthorne “the same kind of unofficial confirmation that Emerson would later give to Whitman upon the publication of Leaves of Grass” (Balakian 1983, 429). When Hawthorne wrote his old classmate that the American Stationers Company would be sending him a copy of Twice-Told Tales (XV 249), Longfellow promptly replied, surmising that he had probably already read most of the tales and commenting that “what most delighted me in them is the simple representation of what may be called small-life” (Balakian 1983, 431). Longfellow’s review follows in the same vein. These tales and sketches, he assures his readers, “have been gathered fresh from the secret places of a peaceful and gentle heart....The book, though in prose, is written nevertheless by a poet. He looks upon all things in the spirit of love, and with lively sympathies” (Longfellow 1837, 60). Longfellow considers Twice-Told Tales a “‘sweet, sweet book,’” and he concludes by quoting lengthy passages from “The Vision of the Fountain,” “Sunday at Home,” and “A Rill from the Town Pump.” If his Hawthorne does not much resemble our own, or the “dark” Hawthorne whom Melville would praise a decade and a half later, the reason lies in the choices Hawthorne himself made for Twice-Told Tales. As much as anything else, I think, Hawthorne made those choices on the basis of audience—an early version of focus group analysis. I think he recognized that his attack on domesticity in “Roger Malvin’s Burial” and other tales would not attract an audience, so he excluded those tales in favor of the gentle-hearted pieces for which Longfellow and others would praise him.

Negative representations of marriage, family, and the whole domestic sphere—what James Mellow calls Hawthorne’s “theme of dark nuptials” (Mellow 1980, 68)—haunt so many of these early tales that they constitute
a leitmotif of gothic fear and horror. The idea of marrying Ellen Langton causes such inner turmoil in the eponymous hero of *Fanshawe*, for example, that he becomes a study in twisted psychology that anticipates male characters such as Parson Hooper, Richard Digby, and Wakefield, as well as Arthur Dimmesdale and Miles Coverdale. When Ellen “extended her hand to Fanshawe,” Hawthorne notes, “to refuse it was like turning from an angel, who would have guided him to Heaven. But, had he been capable of making the woman he loved a sacrifice to her own generosity, that act would have rendered him unworthy of her” (III 458). According to this logic, Fanshawe cannot marry Ellen because he loves her and has (indirectly) saved her from a villain’s clutches. He tells her, therefore, that they must “part now and forever,” and he immediately resumes his studies with “absorbing ardour” (III 459). Given the other domestic situations that Hawthorne describes in *Fanshawe*, his hero’s resistance to marriage seems less idiosyncratic. Doctor Melmoth, for example, has borne the “matrimonial yoke” nearly twenty years (III 336) and has endured the “shrewishness of woman” (III 337) in the person of his wife. The villainy of Hawthorne’s antagonist (Butler) has its origins in the home. “A harsh father, and his own untameable disposition, had driven him from home in his boyhood” (III 453), and he has spent his life estranged from the mother who dies at the moment he returns home. Hawthorne’s description of Mrs. Butler’s body through Fanshawe’s point of view, moreover, suggests a pathological view of marriage: “How frightful it seemed!—that fixed countenance of ashy paleness, amid its decorations of muslin and fine linen—as if a bride were decked for the marriage chamber—as if death were a bridegroom, and the coffin a bridal bed” (III 446). In Mellow’s terms, Fanshawe’s fate reflects the “unwritten prohibition against love and marriage that thwarts many of Hawthorne’s heroes” (Mellow 1980, 43). The frightening, necrophiliac vision magnifies the fears that Hawthorne implicitly lodges in other male characters who resist or sabotage marriages.

Published just two years after *Fanshawe*, “The Hollow of the Three Hills” (1830) sketches out a similarly chilling paradigm of domestic trouble in the auditory “visions” an old crone grants an estranged woman. Her mother and father speak of a daughter “bearing dishonor along with her, and leaving shame and affliction to bring their gray heads to the grave” (IX 202). Her husband talks of “woman’s perfidy, of a wife who had broken her holiest vows, of a home and heart made desolate” (IX 203). Finally, she witnesses her own funeral procession and hears the “revilings and anathemas, whispered but distinct, from women and from men, breathed against the daughter who had wrung the aged hearts of her parents,—the wife who had betrayed the trusting fondness of her husband,—the mother who had
sinned against natural affection, and left her child to die” (IX 204). In varying degrees, Hawthorne’s early fiction repeats such visions of estrangement, betrayal, bad parenting, and other domestic evils.

In particular, Hawthorne imagines women’s roles far removed from the “cult of true womanhood” then emerging in the nineteenth century and founded on “four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” (Welter 1976, 21). In Nancy Cott’s words, in the “canon of domesticity, the home contrasted to the restless and competitive world because its ‘presiding spirit’ was woman, who was ‘removed from the area of pecuniary excitement and ambitious competition.’ Woman inhabited the ‘shady green lanes of domestic life,’ where she found ‘pure enjoyment and hallowed sympathies’ in her ‘peaceful offices’” (Cott 1977, 67).

Although the notion of separate male and female spheres has been subject to recent revisions (for example, in essay collections edited by Cathy Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher [2002] and by Monika Elbert [2000]), Hawthorne’s early writing seems to reinforce and exploit such differences, even if his own life situation did not. In one of his earliest sketches, “Mrs. Hutchinson” (1830), and twenty-five years before his infamous complaint about “a d—d mob of scribbling women,” Hawthorne noted the “changes gradually taking place in the habits and feelings of the gentle sex, which seem to threaten our posterity with many of those public women, whereof one was a burthen too grievous for our fathers” (XXIII 66). If such a statement acknowledges the blurring of gender lines and spheres that the most recent scholarship has noted, Hawthorne’s response is to slam the door on such border crossings. “A false liberality which mistakes the strong division lines of Nature for arbitrary distinctions, and a courtesy, which might polish criticism but should never soften it,” he concludes, “have done their best to add a girlish feebleness to the tottering infancy of our literature” (XXIII 66–67). Not content simply to remand women to the domestic sphere, Hawthorne took the battle to them in the home. Insofar as he was aiming his tales at women readers, he subverted, often violently so, their power to hold homes and families together. Hawthorne does not simply represent lapsed female characters, however. He uses them to work out a special relationship within his fiction between narrator and character.

“The Hollow of the Three Hills” offers this paradigm, too: the artist (in the guise of the old crone) sadistically tormenting a woman with visions of domestic disorder and dishonor—her criminal failure to fulfill her familial duties as daughter, wife, and mother. But there is pleasure represented here as well—even sadomasochistic pleasure, in Richard Thompson’s view (Thompson 1993, 62)—for the artist figure who wields the power to represent, judge, and punish a woman. Whether the old crone conjures up
“real” events or simply reveals the lady’s worst fears, she proves the artist’s power over reader response. “Here has been a sweet hour’s sport!” she chuckles, in the tale’s concluding line (IX 204).

“The Wives of the Dead” (1832) offers another example of Hawthorne’s playing with female characters in order to manipulate readers and their feelings. Although Hawthorne purports to describe “simple and domestic incidents,” he stages an emotionally wrenching story in which he holds women’s feelings in suspense. The tale begins shortly after two “recent brides,” habitants of the same household, have received news of their husbands’ deaths (XI 192). On the night in question, however, each woman receives news that her husband lives. Although joy “flashed” into Margaret’s heart when Goodman Parker, an obvious authorial delegate, informs her that her husband has survived, she hesitates to share the good news with Mary: “Shall I waken her, to feel her sorrow sharpened by my happiness?” she asks herself. “No; I will keep it within my bosom till the morrow” (XI 196). Even as he highlights the women’s feelings, Hawthorne plays with them deliberately, self-consciously, much as he does in “Roger Malvin’s Burial”—as if calling attention to his power to kill and then resurrect their loved ones. Ingeniously, he places the women in tortuous positions of abjection—waiting for him to decide their emotional fate in the process of determining the plot. Thus, when Mary learns that her own husband still lives, she faces the same quandary as Margaret. Discovering Margaret sleeping peacefully, she feels reluctant to awaken her. “My poor sister!” she says to herself; “you will waken too soon from that happy dream” (XI 199). Instead, she arranges the bedclothes, and as “her hand trembled against Margaret’s neck, a tear also fell upon her cheek, and she suddenly awoke” (XI 67). Hawthorne creates some confusion in this concluding sentence because the referent of “she” remains unclear—leaving open the possibility that the sisters have only dreamed the news of their husbands’ survival—but the falling tear realizes one of the tale’s purposes. That is, Hawthorne plays, sadistically, with his characters’ emotions by leaving them and the readers who identify with their emotionally wrenching experience in a state of suspense and thus at the mercy of an author who enjoys a “sweet hour’s sport” in prolonging it.

Whether the wives of the now-living will live out their days in happy marriages or end up like the estranged woman in “The Hollow of the Three Hills,” Hawthorne gives no hint. If they had spent their lonely nights reading such tales as “The Canterbury Pilgrims” and “Young Goodman Brown,” the two wives might have developed mixed feelings about their husbands’ return from the dead. In “The Canterbury Pilgrims” (1833) Hawthorne tells the story of a young Shaker couple, Josiah and Miriam, who flee the
Shaker Village with the intention of living and marrying in the larger world. Hawthorne confronts the young couple with a group of travelers, the pilgrims of the title, who offer them a cautionary preview of life that includes a forbidding vision of married life. In the wife's obviously self-referential words:

If you and your sweetheart marry, you'll be kind and pleasant to each other for a year or two, and while that's the case, you never will repent; but by-and-by, he'll grow gloomy, rough, and hard to please; and you'll be peevish, and full of little angry fits, and apt to be complaining by the fireside, when he comes to rest himself from his troubles out of doors; so your love will wear away by little and little, and leave you miserable at last. It has been so with us; and yet my husband and I were true lovers once, if ever two young folks were. (XI 130)

Miriam and Josiah continue on their journey without being dissuaded from their purpose and convinced that the “world never can be dark to us, for we will always love one another” (XI 131). Thus the tale can be read as testimony to the power of romantic optimism in the face of cynical world weariness. The lengthy passage I quoted, however, offers additional evidence that Hawthorne imagined the domestic world of marriage and family in negative terms. However cynical its view of marriage, the prophetic vision Hawthorne attributes to the wife in “The Canterbury Pilgrims” pales in comparison to the apocalyptic account of family values that young Goodman Brown hears from the satanic figure in the forest:

This night it shall be granted you to know their secret deeds; how hoary-bearded elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their households; how many a woman, eager for widow's weeds, has given her husband a drink at bed-time and let him sleep his last sleep in her bosom; how beardless youths have made haste to inherit their fathers' wealth; and how fair damsels—blush not, sweet ones!—have dug little graves in the garden, and bidden me, the sole guest, to an infant's funeral. (X 87)

Brown proves unable to resist the force of the devil's vision, especially when the devil commands him to look at his wife, Faith, in the light of this horrific vision of family life. Whatever else it depicts, “Young Goodman Brown” (1835) is the tale of a man who journeys into the wilderness to learn the worst about his wife. He returns to town and to his marriage, but he returns a cynical and gloomy man whose domestic world feels blighted.
For evidence that Hawthorne was calculating his relationship to his female readers, we have only to look closely at “Alice Doane’s Appeal,” one of the tales apparently left over from the first collection he destroyed. Hawthorne dramatizes his rhetorical relationship to female readers in the relationship between his narrator and the two women he escorts to Gallows Hill in Salem, and he attends carefully to his narrator’s success and failure in controlling the responses of these two female listeners. With its heightened self-consciousness and intrusive narrative frame, the tale offers a metafictional workshop for experimenting with author-audience relations and especially with the male artist’s power over female response. As R. McClure Smith suggests, “It appears that the audience that the narrator chooses to detain has been carefully targeted, and his assumptions (or presumptions) about them reveal a particular interest in the perlocutionary effectiveness of his performance” (Smith 1991, 75). After leading his “two young ladies” (XI 266) to the top of Gallows Hill, the narrator hopes to exploit their “feminine susceptibility,” the tendency of their emotions to come and go with “quick vicissitude” (XI 268). As Christopher Packard cogently argues, the two young women “represent readers of ‘light’ sentimental magazines like the Token—females susceptible to innocent laughter and sympathetic tears” (Packard 1996, 3). Through the relationship he stages between these two female “readers” and his male narrator, Hawthorne could analyze the writing process dynamically—as if measuring the impact of every word on a focus group of two. “The ladies, in consideration that I had never before intruded my performances on them, by any but the legitimate medium, through the press, consented to hear me read,” the narrator modestly says (XI 269); but this is a false modesty, for he masks an aggressive impulse. As Packard observes, the tale begins with the “staples of the sentimental genre, particularly the qualities of purity and its opposite,” but within “this familiar territory Hawthorne works with decidedly anti-sentimental themes” (Packard 1996, 5). Indeed, he “subverts the domestic literary conventions by grounding a murder in its sphere” (6).

Theme seems subordinate in this metafictional tale to effect—a means for this male narrator to measure his narratorial power over women. “Their bright eyes were fixed on me; their lips apart,” he observes with obvious relish as he nears the end of his narrative. “I took courage, and led the fated pair to a new made grave, where for a few moments, in the bright and silent midnight, they stood alone. But suddenly, there was a multitude of people among the graves” (XI 275). Since Hawthorne actually situates his narrator and readers within the tale’s fictional world, he can represent every author’s fantasy of controlling his readers’ responses so completely that he feels as if he were leading them by the hand. Ironically, however, the
male narrator only partially succeeds in capturing and controlling his female listeners’ attention. Narrating the tale of Leonard and Alice Doane and Walter Brome does cause the young women to fall into his power—to fix their eyes on him, part their lips, and allow him to lead them to the new-made grave. But when he proceeds, in the company of the dead, to finish the tale of Alice Doane’s appeal by revealing that the Wizard who has maliciously orchestrated this tale of murder lies buried “close beside” them, the ladies laugh (XI 277). They have been resisting readers, in some degree, able to thwart the narrator’s designs on their feelings. Perhaps, as Michael Colacurcio suggests, the young women simply cannot apply the “moral” of this metaphorical tale to their own situations (Colacurcio 1984, 81). Perhaps they see through the narrative frame the narrator has erected, recognizing that the true wizard is the narrator himself. He is the one who decided to defuse the Doane-Brome story by attributing all responsibility for its outcomes—metafictionally—to the wizard. They laugh, in other words, because they recognize how the narrator has manipulated their responses. In either case, the breakdown of the narrative relationship highlights what Hawthorne has placed at stake.

The tale, of course, does not end with the ladies’ laughter—or with them in control of the narrator-auditor relationship. “With such eloquence as my share of feeling and fancy could supply,” the male narrator conjures up the moment of the Salem witches’ executions. He describes the witches one by one as they walk up Gallows Hill and, presumably at the climax of his narrative, he describes himself plunging “into my imagination for a blacker horror, and a deeper woe” (XI 279). He will describe the scaffold and the executions themselves. “But here my companions seized an arm on each side,” he notes triumphantly; “their nerves were trembling, and sweeter victory still, I had reached the seldom trodden places of their hearts, and found the wellspring of their tears” (XI 279–80). As many scholars have noted, Hawthorne illustrates a distinction between truth and fiction in the two tales his narrator tells, and he gives the nod to truth telling, or history, when it comes to exerting a powerful effect on readers.6 The invented gothic tale of incest and murder turns out to be less compelling than the historical narration of “real” events from the past. But this theoretical distinction tells only half the story, for Hawthorne still emphasizes the question of what will move ladies to tears. Arguably sexual in its sense of penetration, the narrator’s “victory” fulfills a desire for power over women and women’s emotions through the medium of storytelling. Mary Ventura even accuses the narrator of being a “sexual provocateur” and “rapist.” The young women cry at the end of the story, she argues, “because they are tired, hungry, and frightened. And because they
have been violated” (Ventura 1996, 29). Insofar as Hawthorne was testing author-audience relations, he emphasizes the goal of finding narrative ways to penetrate young women’s hearts and release a flood of emotion and tears.

Hawthorne never collected “Alice Doane’s Appeal.” After being published in the Token in 1835, the tale was not reprinted in Hawthorne’s lifetime. Perhaps, as Colacurcio hints, the tale reveals too clearly the connections between the “passionate young author who could not find a publisher for ‘Alice Doane’” and the “disillusioned persona who takes a sort of vengeance on the audience those publishers imagined they were protecting” (Colacurcio 1984, 87). Perhaps the tale too obviously anatomizes the purpose and method Hawthorne was still using—the manipulative affective relationship he was still testing out with his audience.

None of Hawthorne’s early tales fulfills the affective goal he marked out in “Alice Doane’s Appeal” better than “Roger Malvin’s Burial,” for the tale shows Hawthorne ambushing the domestic project of women’s fiction in the process of toying sadistically with women’s maternal sympathies. The tale opens, however, in a manner that recalls one of James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales—as a frontier romance of Indian warfare. The story seems designed—metafictionally—to mark out the terms and conditions of manhood not only for its protagonist, but also for its author. In the complicated discussion of ethical responsibility with which the tale begins, Hawthorne limns the terms of a manly alternative to an emerging sentimental model of witness and emotional response. Leaving Roger Malvin to die alone in the wilderness, Reuben Bourne gets on with the business of life—a business that includes, even subsumes, the domestic order. So, too, does Hawthorne in denying his readers the death scene and the chance to mourn and memorialize Malvin emotionally. He saves the death scene for later—with a twist that brings the domestic sphere into violent emotional collision with the manly forest world with which he begins. “Roger Malvin’s Burial” is a brilliant tale of moral quandaries—one of Hawthorne’s best examinations of ethical complexities, as Colacurcio brilliantly demonstrates, rooted in the recognition that we cannot be sure of our own motives (ibid., 109). But the tale’s hard-headed elucidation of mixed and mysterious motives belies one of its aims. To be sure, Roger Malvin employs an emotional, even sentimental, appeal in his efforts to convince Reuben to leave him. We do not imagine that Hawthorne is setting us up for a violent intervention—the annihilation of domestic tranquility and order. As Reuben discusses his options with Roger Malvin, both men remain aware of how Reuben’s decisions will affect Dorcas. We little suspect the experience Dorcas has in store for her.
Reuben finally leaves Malvin, Hawthorne says, because the “desire of existence and the hope of happiness had strengthened in his heart, and he was unable to resist them” (X 345). Reuben’s compromised heroism circulates (ironically) through Dorcas. His understanding with the paternal Malvin is already compromised at its inception because of their appeal to Dorcas and to the prospect of domestic happiness associated with her. Hawthorne then wages a subtle campaign, more subtle than Washington Irving’s in “Rip Van Winkle,” against domestic happiness as he describes the slow but steady deterioration of the farm Reuben has inherited with his marriage. Like Rip, Reuben becomes a “neglectful husbandman” and winds up a “ruined man” (X 350, 351).

The young Cyrus Bourne, as Ann Ronald notes, embodies the promise of frontier manhood in the manner of Cooper’s Natty Bumppo, who had appeared in three of the five Leatherstocking Tales by the time Hawthorne wrote “Roger Malvin’s Burial.” Reuben loves his son precisely because he embodies those qualities and way of life that Reuben himself surrendered when he married Dorcas. Arguably, Hawthorne occupies a similar position as he domesticates his writing, and he idealizes Cyrus’s thoughts of the “adventurous pleasures of the un trodden forest”:

In youth, his free and exulting step would know no barrier but the rolling ocean or the snow-topt mountains; calmer manhood would choose a home, where Nature had strewn a double wealth, in the vale of some transparent stream; and when hoary age, after long, long years of that pure life, stole on and found him there, it would find him the father of a race, the patriarch of a people, the founder of a mighty nation yet to be. (X 352)

Hawthorne even suggests that “the men of future generations would call him godlike” (X 352). At the same time, the “supernatural voice” that directs Reuben’s actions in the moments before he kills his godlike son suggests, metafictionally, the author’s superior hand. Indeed, Hawthorne’s language ironically comments upon his character’s inability to direct his own actions—his dependency upon external agency: “Unable to penetrate to the secret place of his soul, where his motives lay hidden, he believed that a supernatural voice had called him onward, and that a supernatural power had obstructed his retreat” (X 356). Hawthorne arrogates to himself that god-like power, snuffing out Cyrus’s fantasy of “godhood” with his own “supernatural” power.

Meanwhile, back at the camp. In a perverse shift in point of view, the jump cut with which I began this essay, Hawthorne arrests his own narrative movement and thus postpones our discovery of Cyrus’s body. By bringing Dorcas center stage, Hawthorne carries the story forward to his female
readers—as if clicking (in contemporary terms) on the window he has opened but minimized in favor of his male narrative. In a lengthy paragraph describing her “preparations for their evening repast,” he writes an apostrophe to domestic ideals—a veritable fairy tale of domesticity transported to the heart of the wilderness. The “snow-white cloth” and “bright pewter vessels” make this “one little spot of homely comfort, in the desolate heart of Nature.” Dorcas even sings while she works. Her “voice danced through the gloomy forest” (X 357), while Hawthorne emphasizes that “four continually-recurring lines shone out from the rest, like the blaze of the hearth whose joys they celebrated. Into them, working magic with a few simple words, the poet had instilled the very essence of domestic love and household happiness, and they were poetry and picture joined in one” (X 358).

This excerpt from a lengthy passage illustrates the rhetorical lengths to which Hawthorne went in interpolating a spirit of domestic security and harmony. But I want to emphasize again that this paragraph occupies a space between the moment when Reuben fires his gun and Dorcas hears the shot. Hawthorne follows the passage I quoted with the following sentence: “She was aroused by the report of a gun, in the vicinity of the encampment; and either the sudden sound, or her loneliness by the glowing fire, caused her to tremble violently. The next moment, she laughed in the pride of a mother’s heart.” “My beautiful young hunter!” she exclaims; “my boy has slain a deer!” (X 358).

With that ironic line, Hawthorne keeps up the suspense and feeds—sadistically, it seems to me—the hope that Cyrus really has killed a deer, despite the violent trembling that the shot evokes in Dorcas. That is, Hawthorne deliberately plays with Dorcas’s subjectivity—her fantasies and emotions—by allowing her to feel pride in Cyrus even as he lies dead on the ground just out of view. The emotional “high” of her mother’s pride sets Dorcas (and the female reader) up for an even greater emotional “fall.” Hawthorne then follows Dorcas into the woods and, from her point of view, finally shows the expectant reader the result of Reuben’s shot:

Oh! there lay the boy, asleep, but dreamless, upon the fallen forest-leaves! his cheek rested upon his arm, his curled locks were thrown back from his brow, his limbs were slightly relaxed. Had a sudden weariness overcome the youthful hunter? Would his mother’s voice arouse him? She knew that it was death. (X 360)

Even at this moment, Hawthorne mocks sentimental tropes of death as sleep—raising the brief hope that Cyrus only sleeps before confirming his death and mocking, with his rhetorical question, the impotence of the
“mother’s voice.” Dorcas’s subjectivity can express itself only in a “wild shriek” (X 360). It has no other power. In interrupting his frontier narrative with the gunshot and extended domestic scene, Hawthorne might seem to be making a concession to female readers. Dorcas’s scene, however, is little more than a commercial interruption—frontier narrative featuring violence and filicide, brought to us by Woman’s Day magazine. Hawthorne’s intuition—creating suspense with a gunshot and then filling the interval with a scene of homemaking—at once advertises his sentimental powers and turns them against the readers whose attention he has captured. Dorcas’s homemaking enables more than it interrupts Hawthorne’s frontier plot-making. She leaves her frontier hearth and home ready for a homecoming she will never enjoy.

We can better understand Hawthorne’s strategies and the relationship he establishes with female readers in “Roger Malvin’s Burial” by examining “The Gentle Boy,” a tale that he revised for the 1837 Twice-Told Tales. Like “Roger Malvin’s Burial,” “The Gentle Boy” features bad or careless parenting that leads to a child’s death, but Hawthorne’s treatments of the death scenes differ dramatically.

In January 1839, at the beginning of his courtship of Sophia Peabody and at virtually the same moment he accepted his first real job as measurer at the Boston Custom-House, Hawthorne published “The Gentle Boy” by itself as a “Thrice Told Tale”—with “An Original Illustration” by Sophia. One of Hawthorne’s most popular tales during his lifetime, “The Gentle Boy” also epitomized his “feminine” qualities. Margaret Fuller praised the tale for having “so much grace and delicacy of feeling, that I am desirous to know the author, whom I take to be a lady” (Fuller [1834] 1983, 198). Longfellow cited the “strength and beauty of a mother’s love” that Hawthorne had “poured over” the story and concluded that his “genius” was “characterized by a large proportion of feminine elements” (Longfellow 1842, 10). Sophia’s presence on the title page—a deft courtship gesture—might also have helped Hawthorne enhance the tale’s appeal to women. This thrice-published tale served as a sounding board on which he could negotiate the gendered terms of his relationship with Sophia and mark out the parameters of his male identity. It also represented another opportunity to come to terms with his female readers.

While Ilbrahim’s Quaker mother (Catharine) exemplifies the bad or careless parenting Hawthorne had described in such tales as “Young Goodman Brown” and “The Hollow of the Three Hills,” Tobias and Dorothy Pearson represent a more positive model. As initially depicted, Tobias is a failed husband and father, who has “found it difficult to provide for a wife and increasing family.” All his children have died. “They had left
their native country blooming like roses,” Hawthorne notes, “and like roses they had perished in a foreign soil” (IX 76). Adopting Ilbrahim, however, offers Pearson a second chance at successful manhood and fatherhood. For an author still struggling to prove his manhood—on the verge of employment and romance—representing such a second chance must have resonated powerfully. In effect, Hawthorne could put a man in the role and in the home the fanatical Catharine had vacated. And with Sophia as his most important reader-collaborator, he was offering up an exemplar of fatherhood, as if auditioning for the role he himself might one day play.

Treated gently by his new parents, Ilbrahim’s demeanor “lost a premature manliness” (IX 88), and he becomes a “domesticated sunbeam” (IX 89), but his re-education as a gentle—feminized—boy has unfortunate consequences. Befriending a boy who was injured near the Pearson home, he has “seized upon” and “clung” to the other boy in a strong homosocial bond (IX 90). Nothing could “arrest” the progress of Ilbrahim’s affection, Hawthorne notes, “and there were many proofs that it met with a response from the dark and stubborn nature on which it was lavished” (IX 91). But when Ilbrahim attempts to lavish his affection upon the other Puritan children, “all at once the devil of their fathers entered into the unbreeched fanatics,” who, like “a brood of baby-fiends,” beat him with sticks and stones with “an instinct of destruction, far more loathsome than the blood-thirstiness of manhood.” The very boy Ilbrahim befriended leads the charge and strikes Ilbrahim on the mouth “so forcibly that the blood issued in a stream” (IX 92). Frederick Crews argues that in “this surprisingly lurid scene—a sado-masochistic nightmare if there ever was one—Hawthorne has heaped on Ilbrahim all the accumulated cruelty of his plot. For the reader who has accepted the implied invitation to put himself in Ilbrahim’s place, the episode is calculated to trigger a helpless rage against the unearned malice of mankind” (Crews 1966, 69). This psychoanalytic (Oedipal) reading of the tale works partly because Crews characterizes “the reader” as male (“himself”). He downplays the emotional opportunity that Ilbrahim’s suffering and death afford an author interested in engaging his female readers.

If the attack on Ilbrahim is bloodier and more violent than Cyrus Bourne’s death off stage in “Roger Malvin’s Burial,” Hawthorne’s treatment of the two deaths illustrates the different relationships he established with his audience. He may still manipulate reader responses, but the use of suspense and shock, coupled with the sadistic apostrophe to domestic bliss, gives way in “The Gentle Boy” to straightforward sentimentality in which author and reader are on the same emotional page. Staging Ilbrahim’s death as an occasion for emotional witness and sympathy anticipates the
way Harriet Beecher Stowe uses Eva’s death in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) or the way Charles Dickens depicts Nelly Trent’s death in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841). Like those later divine children, Ilbrahim takes center stage on his deathbed and brings characters and readers alike into his emotional orbit. Indeed, Hawthorne doubles the pleasure this deathbed scene affords by bringing not one, but two mothers into the room. First he focuses on Dorothy Pearson’s feelings, as the dying Ilbrahim takes her hand. She “almost imagined that she could discern the near, though dim delightfulness, of the home he was about to reach; she would not have enticed the little wanderer back, though she bemoaned herself that she must leave him and return” (IX 103). Heaven as superior to earth, a martyr’s death superior to life in a demonic Puritan stronghold—these are the same terms that Stowe employs in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and they are designed to bring author, characters, and readers into a state of emotional communion, to make sure that, in Stowe’s terms, “they feel right” (Stowe 1994, 385). Then, when Catharine enters the room, “she drew Ilbrahim to her bosom, and he nestled there, with no violence of joy, but contentedly as if he were hushing himself to sleep. He looked into her face, and reading its agony, said, with feeble earnestness, ‘Mourn not, dearest mother. I am happy now. ’ And with these words, the gentle boy was dead” (IX 103–4). Restoring the estranged Catharine to her role as his “dear mother,” Ilbrahim heals and blesses fractured family relationships. The happiness of his death contrasts with the perverse catharsis that attends Cyrus Bourne’s—catharsis for his father, if not for his mother, whose “wild shriek” registers emotional violence far exceeding the quiet “agonies” that Ilbrahim assuages.

“The Gentle Boy,” even in its thrice-told form, did not fully assuage the doubts that Hawthorne had about the manly persona he was presenting to his readers. The promise of gentle manhood that collaborative republication of the tale seemed to inaugurate went by the wayside after the wedding. Some two years into the marriage, Sophia confided to her sister Mary: “He cannot bear to have woman come out of the shade, far less his wife, & never has forgiven himself for dedicating his Gentle Boy to me” (qtd. in Miller 1991, 213). Hawthorne also fretted about himself and about the public persona tales like “The Gentle Boy” presented to their readers—readers like Fuller and Longfellow and Sophia. Although he notes at the beginning of his Preface to the 1851 edition of *Twice-Told Tales* that the stories were written during the ten- or twelve-year period of his “young manhood” (IX 3), he worries that the author of those 1837 *Tales* has come “to be regarded as a mild, shy, gentle, melancholic, exceedingly sensitive, and not very forcible man, hiding his blushes under an assumed name.” He cannot be sure, he admits, that he hasn’t filled up “so amiable an outline or
acted in “consonance with the character assigned to him” (IX 7). In other words, he worries, even at the age of forty-seven, that “The Gentle Boy” has inscribed a gentle man.

The 1828–37 decade of Hawthorne’s career produced many of the tales we now consider his best and most characteristic work, so in setting them aside in favor of sunnier tales and sketches for Twice-Told Tales, Hawthorne was taking a break like the one he creates in the narrative of “Roger Malvin’s Burial”—interrupting the darker, more masculine story line of his career in order to publish a more domestically friendly collection of his brighter work. Hawthorne’s selections, and especially his exclusions, for Twice-Told Tales represent the subtlest manipulation of all, as if he were clicking on the domestic window he had framed in “Roger Malvin’s Burial,” while keeping some of his most domestically violent tales in the background. Once he had his audience hooked—trapped within the domestic sphere of fiction—he could introduce the violence he had waiting in the wings. With help from Longfellow, of course, who had brought Hawthorne out of his closet—as a writer of “womanly knowledge” (Longfellow 1842, 10)—both editions of Twice-Told Tales began to establish Hawthorne as a public writer. If pleased to come before the public in the guise that Long fellow recognized, Hawthorne also saw himself in a different, antithetical way. He had surprises in store for those who wanted more feminine touches from his hand. Those readers would be like Dorcas Bourne, singing while they worked away within the blissful home, going to see the result of the gunshot they heard just outside the door. If they still didn’t get it after comparing Hawthorne’s twice-told tales with those he had published only once, they could wait for Melville’s review of Mosses from an Old Manse, which of course included “Roger Malvin’s Burial.”

Notes

1. Crews argues that Reuben identifies with Cyrus and the “sacrificial murder” is “dictated by Reuben’s unconscious charge of patricide and by his inability to bring the charge directly against himself” (Crews 1966, 88).


4. Famously in his review of *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Melville would declare that “the world is mistaken in this Nathaniel Hawthorne” (“Hawthorne and His Mosses,” IX 243–44). “For spite of all the Indian-summer sunlight on the hither side of Hawthorne’s soul, the other side—like the dark half of the physical sphere—is shrouded in a blackness, ten times black” (IX 243).

5. David S. Reynolds links “Young Goodman Brown” to nineteenth-century “dark reform” literature. When Hawthorne “mentions outwardly good women who kill their babies or husbands,” Reynolds concludes, “he is tapping ironies that surrounded fallen women and women criminals in several popular works of the 1830s” (Reynolds 1989, 369).

6. G. Richard Thompson analyzes the narrative as a “remarkable nineteenth-century metafictional treatment, part tale, part sketch, of authorship and the relation between the created fictive world and the historical record of the ‘real’ world” (Thompson 1993, 160). Colacurcio, on the other hand, points out that the “narrator is not so much substituting a true story for a wild romance as he is merely literalizing psychohistory for an audience which obviously lacks the literary sophistication to discern the historical truth of a metaphorical fiction” (Colacurcio 1984, 87).

7. Hawthorne destroys another happy home in “The Ambitious Guest” (1835). He extols the virtue of hearth and home before annihilating the family that exemplifies that domestic ideal. In a cruel parodic twist, moreover, he has the family flee the home to seek shelter—only to have the avalanche destroy the shelter and leave the house intact. The fire on the hearth continues to burn with no family to be warmed by it, “as if the inhabitants had but gone forth to view the devastation of the Slide, and would shortly return, to thank Heaven for their miraculous escape” (IX 333).