In all of Hawthorne’s tales and sketches, almost no respectable female characters work outside the home. For an antebellum writer, male or female, that’s not surprising. Yet *The Marble Faun* (1860) features two young women who work enthusiastically as artists, far from their families, and seemingly without much narrative recrimination until near the end of the narrative. Here, as in many of his earlier writings, Hawthorne uses moral allegory and occasional demonizations to contain his anxious fascination with independent women, particularly with Miriam’s volatile energies. His allegorical restraints don’t quite work, in part because Miriam remains Hawthorne’s most sustained creative double.

This essay sketches various representations of strong women in Hawthorne’s stories and *The Marble Faun*. These characterizations sometimes express male constructedness and often challenge male control, even narrative control in the later texts. Throughout, Hawthorne struggles with contemporary norms of manhood, especially his shame at not being a provider for his family in the 1840s and his fear of his daughter’s independence in the 1850s. Perhaps his greater receptivity to Miriam’s creativity responds to the public women he encountered in the 1840s and 1850s. More profoundly, it signals a yearning to recapture the artistic energy that he knew he was losing. *The Marble Faun* is suffused with a quietly bilious sense of aging, sometimes projected onto Rome’s oppressive fragmentation and decay.
The skimpy spectrum of working women in Hawthorne’s tales shows his early and very conventional assiduousness in restricting women’s activities to the home. As Brenda Wineapple (2003) notes in her fine recent biography, the women in his tales usually function as “cardboard props[.]” Nonetheless, from the beginning of his career, a few of his writings betray his ambivalent fascination with vigorously public women. Hawthorne’s first major sketch, “Mrs. Hutchinson” (1830), admires Anne Hutchinson’s complexity and courage even as it dismisses her unseemly ambition. With more dramatic tension between mothering and public ambition, “The Gentle Boy” introduces a muffled woman who ascends to a Puritan pulpit, where she passionately denounces her audience. An abandoned little boy, Ilbrahim, then identifies her as his mother, who has been banished to the wilderness after a long European and American career as an inspired public speaker. Born in Turkey, her child was given that strange oriental name in gratitude for the Sultan’s favor. At the end, Catherine suddenly appears again at her son’s deathbed. Though the narrative takes considerable pains to disparage her public appearance and angry words, her despairing yearning to love her child helps to give the story its sympathetic climax.

The only early tale that depicts an American woman working respectably outside the home, even peripherally, is “Mr. Higginbotham’s Catastrophe” (1834). Here the trader’s niece provides the one element of calm good sense in a grotesquely racist and anti–Irish story. While countering rumors that her uncle has been murdered and that she has had hysterical fainting fits, she mentions that “I contribute to my own support by teaching a school” (IX 115). Yet at the end, after the murder story turns out to have been true but anticipatory, Miss Higginbotham shrinks into the expected role of wife and mother, and her “pretty school-mistress” identity recedes to a momentary blip. In the last sentence, which gives her husband all the agency for the family’s move, she becomes a feme covert.

Otherwise, Hawthorne’s tales tend to group women as domestic angels or, more rarely, prostitutes, along the lines of “the lady of the scarlet petticoat” (XI 217, 229) in “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” (1831–1832). The taints of business and darkness, the fraudulence of the young woman’s praise for Robin’s worn clothes, and the ambiguity of her claim that his kinsman “dwells” rather than “lives” here suggest that Major Molineux has already enjoyed her sexual services. In a later tale, “John Inglefield’s Thanksgiving” (1840), a young woman returns from the “many months of her absence in guilt and infamy” (XI 180) to regain temporary innocence at her family’s Thanksgiving dinner before she departs again, presumably to resume her life of prostitution. Neither of these tales presents women's
outside work as more than an immoral foil to enhance or enforce the sanctity of women in the home.

The missing third term in Hawthorne’s stereotypical dichotomy of domestic angel versus prostitute is men’s fears of women’s independence and ambition. Most memorably, in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844), Professor Baglioni sees Beatrice as a professional threat. But his fear of Beatrice’s scientific ambition turns out to be a male hallucination. As her spirit at last escapes patriarchal controls, the ending presents Baglioni, Giovanni, and Rappaccini as equally complicit in the male rivalry that has doomed her body. Another, less well-known story touches with heavy-handed comedy on a domesticated version of women’s resourceful independence. In “Mrs. Bullfrog” (1837), the narrator mournfully recounts that he married a woman who turns out to be what a coach driver calls “a witch” and “a she-tiger” (X 134). To his horror, he learns that she has already sued another man for breach of promise. When he discovers that she has been awarded $5,000, Mr. Bullfrog is suddenly content with his wife’s strength of temper.

A surprising association of artistic creativity with an angry, talented woman occurs in “Edward Randolph’s Portrait” (1838), the second of the “Legends of the Province-House.” Alice Vane, an “ethereal” young woman who has learned to paint in Italy, has “genius” as an artist (IX 259), and anticipates Miriam in The Marble Faun. At the story’s climax, to confront Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson, she unveils a portrait that she has retouched to display the evil in a former governor’s actions against the American people. When Hutchinson dies, “choking with the blood of the Boston Massacre” (IX 269), his face resembles that portrait’s horror. The narrative makes Alice an allegorical embodiment of New England’s spirit of rebellion as well as a more generalized figure for the spiritualized artist.

That exhausts the possibilities for independent women as creative doubles in Hawthorne’s tales. In “Edward Fane’s Rosebud” (1837), the Widow Toothaker is “a nurse of great repute” (IX 464), but only because she nursed her sick husband, whom she married for revenge and came to love, and even nurses the former lover who jilted her. Vanished with the Indians is the possibility of a woman with power in the public sphere. “Main-Street” (1849) begins its procession of historical figures with “the great Squaw Sachem, whose rule, with that of her sons, extends from Mystic to Agawam” (XI 51). She has disappeared as completely as the “bold” Quaker woman who dared to challenge male authority (69).

More intriguingly, before his romances, Hawthorne contains the threat of strong, autonomous women by casting them as witches, particularly in his first and last tales, “The Hollow of the Three Hills” (1830) and “Feathertop” (1852). These oddly comic stories gain some measure of complexity
because the manipulative old crones also function as demonized creative doubles. In these tales Hawthorne begins to reach beyond the bounds of his own conflicted allegiances to conventions of middle-class American manhood.

“The Hollow of the Three Hills” introduces a woman insistently described as old and ugly as well as malicious. She ostensibly counsels a young woman who has sharply deviated from her expected roles of dutiful daughter, wife, and mother. As a daughter, she had brought “dishonor” and “shame” to her parents (IX 202); as a wife, she had committed adultery; as a mother, she had “left her child to die” (IX 204). Now the witch conjures up the voices of the young woman’s parents and her now insane husband, and makes the lady hear the funeral of the child she had abandoned. As the ghostly sounds recede, the witch discovers that the kneeling lady is dead. “‘Here has been a sweet hour’s sport!’ said the withered crone, chuckling to herself” (204). Both sides of Hawthorne’s dichotomy between young lady and old witch indict women who deviate from the norms of true womanhood. Yet the witch’s malevolent power bears some analogy to the artist’s potentially destructive power in conjuring up visions. Only Hawthorne’s early sketch of “Mrs. Hutchinson” flirts with similar possibilities.

“Feathertop” explores that creative doubling with more bite and dash. Here Mother Rigby creates a lifelike scarecrow out of a pumpkin, a broomstick, a flail, a hoe-handle, and a stick, and stuffs it with straw. Once she has clothed and bewigged the figure, she gazes at it “with almost motherly affection” (X 226) and decides, “I’ll make a man of my scarecrow, were it only for the joke’s sake!” (X 227). Curiously, at the moment that Feathertop comes to life, the narrator inserts himself: “Shall I confess the truth? At its present point of vivification, the scarecrow reminds me of some of the lukewarm and abortive characters, composed of heterogeneous materials, used for the thousandth time, and never worth using, with which romance-writers (and myself, no doubt, among the rest) have so over-peopled the world of fiction.” The explicit creative doubling of himself with a “strong-willed old beldam” seems oddly comfortable to this narrator, whose self-reflectiveness slides easily back into the “diabolic nature” of the “fierce old hag” (X 229–30).

The rest of the story plays out Feathertop’s human progress as a fashionable, foppish gentleman who impresses almost everyone in the village with his pipe-smoking, his aristocratic clothes, and his mysterious reserve. Only a dog’s howl, a child’s cry, and a merchant’s private skepticism dissent from his enthusiastic reception. Eventually Feathertop’s appearance charms the merchant’s young and pretty daughter, Polly Gookin, whose attentions to herself in the mirror make her almost “as complete an artifice
as the illustrious Feathertop himself” (X 240). At last, as Polly happens to see him in the mirror, she too shrieks. If “Polly” evokes a parrot, Feathertop’s “ scarecrow” features can scare a human bird.

More fatally, when he looks in the mirror, Feathertop sees “a picture of the sordid patchwork of his real composition, stript of all witchcraft” (X 244). The emphasis on “composition” at that climactic moment links the narrator and Mother Rigby, who has “rigged” the whole affair. Her name connotes artistry as well as a somewhat ludicrous attire, a carriage, or a playful trick. Despairing at his own emptiness under the artifice, Feathertop returns home. There Mother Rigby decides to make a scarecrow of him after all, since her creation “seems to have too much heart to bustle for his own advantage, in such an empty and heartless world” (X 246).

Hawthorne’s farewell to the short story genre inverts the drama of Poe’s “The Man That Was Used Up” (1839), which similarly satirizes society’s adulation of manly surfaces but reverses the process. Where Feathertop disintegrates into disparate, lifeless elements, Poe’s story ends with a truculent black servant building Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith out of artificial parts. Previously, various adoring onlookers have built up Smith’s reputation by repeating his passing remarks about the age of invention, and by rhapsodizing about his alleged courage in the Bugaboo and Kickapoo Indian Wars, which gave him his wounds. He exists almost entirely through rumors about him. “He’s the man,” almost everyone says, including the narrator, until he finally finds the great man at home and sees him being put together.

Both stories expose manliness as a social performance that depends on the audience’s gaze to cover its emptiness.2 In that respect they anticipate Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble (1990b) by 140 years or more. Poe goes further in his satire of manhood as a social construction, by dramatizing how this generic man—“John Smith” plus “A. B. C.”—appeals to onlookers because he can be recirculated as public fragments, from his incomplete sound bites to his image as a former warrior. The story also satirizes consumerism through the mechanical man’s inventory of the name-brand products that constitute his legs, eyes, shoulders, teeth, palate, and the rest of what enables his social identity.

Yet one moment in “Feathertop” goes further than Poe in evoking a man’s sudden consciousness of his constructedness, and the author’s self-consciousness about the fraudulence of his fictions. “The wretched simulacrum!” the narrator muses. “We almost pity him. . . . For per chance the only time, since this so often empty and deceptive life of mortals began its course, an Illusion had seen and fully recognized itself” (X 244). The story’s relatively easy satire of the emptiness inherent in formulaic social behavior
yields momentarily to a more unsettling self-reflection. Just as Mother Rigby’s created gentleman sees his own illusoriness, so Hawthorne’s created story sees its own fictionality, as if it too had a temporary life of its own. Though his creative double remains complacent about her powers, Hawthorne leaves his readers uneasy about whether the illusion can be contained in fictions of manhood, or whether it extends to his and our own selves.

Perhaps in mid-life, Hawthorne had found a little distance from the emptiness of what we now would call performative manhood. In any case, some degree of self-reflection helped to spring loose his major romances of the 1850s, in ways that I can’t do more than touch on here. Not coincidentally, these romances explore the threat of women’s potential independence with much more capacious ambivalence. The Scarlet Letter (1850) presents Hester literalizing “cottage industry” by working for pay as a seamstress at home, before she also becomes an unpaid counselor to unhappy Puritan women. The House of the Seven Gables (1851) opens with a patronizing account of Hepzibah gaining the courage to open a cent shop in her home. More flamboyantly, The Blithedale Romance (1852) depicts several possibilities for women in the public sphere. Yet the story ultimately reclaims Priscilla, a working-class seamstress, from Westervelt’s mesmeric exhibitions of her as a spiritualist, while drowning Zenobia, a formidably complex feminist reformer.

The onset of what might be called Hawthorne’s censorious receptivity might have been prompted by his various relations with ambitious public women. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, Hawthorne not only encountered many vigorously independent women, but made some of them his friends, especially Elizabeth Peabody, Margaret Fuller—with whom Sophia studied—and more privately his forceful sister Ebe. Then, even while fulminating against women writers and trying to prevent his daughters from writing, he expressed admiration for Fanny Fern, whose Ruth Hall (1855) audaciously narrates the trials and triumph of a woman writer. He had cordial relations with other women writers, including Elizabeth Barrett Browning in Florence and, with private disdain, Grace Greenwood. In England in the early 1850s, he inexplicably took up the cause of Delia Bacon, an American writer who had written a book arguing that Francis Bacon (no relation) had actually written the plays attributed to Shakespeare. Even though he disagreed with her, Hawthorne got her a publisher, wrote a preface, and admiringly called her a “prophetess,” in part because what he called her “Bedlamite” behavior gave him a role as protector. Eventually he arranged passage for her back to America. Even after she was put in a private sanitarium, Hawthorne praised her “sensitive and tumultuous character.”
In Rome, Hawthorne’s circle included Maria Mitchell, an astronomer; Harriet Hosmer, a sculptor who liked to wear men’s clothing; and more notoriously, Louisa Lander, who sculpted a fine bust of Hawthorne, then was cut socially when the Hawthornes heard rumors that she had posed nude as a model and perhaps lived with a man. Their oldest daughter, Una, who dismayed the Hawthornes by hoping to be a writer or artist, caught Roman Fever when sketching in the Coliseum with her governess. Sophia also sketched in public, and was astonished to find Italians congregating to admire her work. The variety of these relationships probably helped Hawthorne gain more creative access to the ambivalences about strong women that flourish in his romances.

Reverberating with Hawthorne’s Italian experiences, *The Marble Faun* (1860) develops working women as creative doubles with the most sustained complexity. In this romance, two young women painters in Rome don’t consider their self-employment as an interim period between home and marriage, or as a detour in a young woman’s conventional passage from daughter to wife and mother. Miriam, from an ambiguously Italian and English background, and her American friend Hilda have moved to Rome to further their dreams of artistic success. To contain their threat as potential career women, Hawthorne insistently frames Miriam and Hilda with a traditional moral allegory. Yet Miriam’s passionate subjectivity exceeds the bounds of Hawthorne’s moral critique.

With an initial bow to convention, the romance presents Miriam and Hilda as classically light and dark women. Whereas Hilda is a blonde Protestant New Englander “not overflowing with animal spirits” (IV 63), Miriam is a foreigner of seemingly cosmopolitan European origins, Italian and Catholic, with hints of Jewish antecedents. Only near the end do readers learn that Miriam’s mother was an Englishwoman with a “vein . . . of Jewish blood,” who died when Miriam was a child, while her father is a “princely” southern Italian with a name that remains hidden (IV 429–30). Hawthorne’s Gothic variation on the father-daughter theme portrays Miriam as enraged and enthralled by her “Model,” whose pursuit traps her in a mysterious family history she is trying to escape. Until the end, readers know only that Miriam’s mother died when she was young, leaving her father and this mysteriously father-like pursuer. Readers know even less about Hilda, who seems to have had no childhood at all. Once, glancingly, the narrator mentions her mother (IV 357). Emerging from these skimpy and contrasting backgrounds, each woman has chosen a life of “liberty” and artistic ambition, without “the shackles of our present conventional rules” about female propriety (IV 54–55).

Hawthorne’s narration first constrains their threat by tilting the moral
scales toward Hilda. Early in the romance, Hilda gives up the dangerously unfeminine dreams of originality that impel Miriam’s creativity. Instead, she becomes “the best copyist in Rome” through her capacity for “sacrificing herself” as she “religiously” reproduces the paintings of the Old Masters (IV 59–60). More complexly, Hawthorne repeatedly contrasts Hilda’s calm and virginal purity of soul with Miriam’s eruptively changeable intensities, while intimating ambiguous taints in Miriam’s background. When the two contemplate Hilda’s copy of what was then thought to be Guido Reni’s portrait of Beatrice Cenci, the woman in Renaissance Rome who allegedly killed her father after he raped her, Hilda sees “character” while Miriam sees “history,” perhaps her own (IV 66). As Miriam contemplates the possibility of sin and evil in herself, she wonders if Hilda’s character will remain so pure that the Catholics would “make a Saint of you, like your namesake of old” (IV 53). At the end, after the American sculptor Kenyon does it instead, she returns to America, where she is “worshipped as a household Saint, in the light of her husband’s fireside” (IV 461).

Miriam’s creative ambitions can’t be contained so easily. Alive with fancies, Miriam frequently seems “between” states of feeling, much as the faun-man Donatello wavers between animal and human. The allure of her embodied ethnic amalgamation makes people conjecture various fictions about her background. Is she Jewish? Does she have “one burning drop of African blood” (IV 23)? Is she an English lady? Whatever her mixture is, it gives her “magnetism” (IV 36) as well as mutability. As Hawthorne’s creative shadow, Miriam gains a considerable degree of narrative empathy, before she is finally scapegoated, called a “hysteric” (IV 429), and imprisoned for murder. “[T]here was something in Miriam’s blood, in her mixed race . . . which had given her freedom of thought, and force of will” (IV 430) to resist a life like her mother’s. Even Hilda doesn’t remain immune from Miriam’s influence. While copying a portrait of Beatrice Cenci, she sees Beatrice in her own face (IV 205), and she, too, has a “hysteric” flirtation with Catholicism (IV 357).

Miriam’s art and life enact a contradictory fusion of anti-patriarchal rage and involuntary patriarchal submission. The rage first manifests itself as an internalized preoccupation with her guilt and sin. More directly, if ambivalently, her rage and yearning surface in her contradictory relation to the Model. In one aspect he seems to be a slavish follower, like Donatello; in another aspect he seems to be an enslaver. It’s disappointing when the mystery fades into the light of common patriarchal day: Miriam has fled from the prospect of an arranged marriage, only to be shadowed by the man her father has chosen for her husband. Despite his death, he becomes the primary narrative device for chaining her subjectivity to her mysterious history.
Until then, the narrative invites speculations that the Model is Miriam’s father, perhaps an incestuous father such as Dr. Rappaccini may well have been. Or he might be an allegorical embodiment of generic maleness. Or he might be a male version of Miriam’s in-betweenness, half man and half demon, even her demon-lover. After Miriam’s gaze induces Donatello to kill the Model, the corpse undergoes still another transformation to become the corpse of a Capuchin monk. Beyond or because of his oscillating identities, the Model holds her in some kind of “thralldom” from her girlhood onwards (IV 93). He is Miriam’s constant “Shadow.” Yet he is also her double, as she is Hawthorne’s “model” of the original artist. As she says to him, “I am your evil genius, as you mine!” (IV 95).

Hawthorne’s narration shares that contradictory energy. Throughout, the novel simultaneously attempts to impose and resist patriarchal closures. The patriarchal turns are rather obvious, particularly the progress of Donatello and Miriam toward the statue of Pope Julius III, where they confess their guilty bond. Later Hilda seeks out a father-confessor, and at the end, by voluntarily relinquishing her artistic ambitions to become Kenyon’s wife, she accepts the traditional expectations that Miriam tries to resist. But Miriam’s fate is more complex. After inducing the Model’s fall from the Tarpeian Rock, Miriam continues to be shadowed, this time by several kinds of guilt. Not only has she failed to fulfill her family’s traditional expectation that she will marry her betrothed, but she has murdered him instead. She is also shadowed by her narrator’s insistent expectations for a woman’s proper domestic role. In Hawthorne’s allegory at least, a woman can’t escape that historical fate, nor should she try, however strong her character. Yet what’s best in his narrative returns again and again to Miriam’s contradictory passions of in-betweenness, like an allegorical moth to a psychological flame.

To stabilize his narrative, Hawthorne tries to move Miriam and Hilda toward male-identified subjectivities. The second half of the romance arrests their friendship as well as their independence, though with ongoing sympathy for how women get imprisoned by men. Even Kenyon, who serves as a tame and tepid male double for Hawthorne, resolves to take Hilda “captivate, and imprison her in his heart” (IV 395). Wavering between sympathy and censure, the narrator half endorses and half recoils from young women’s rage against oppressive, incestuous fathers, figured in the recurrent motif of the Beatrice Cenci painting. Not coincidentally, Hawthorne began writing *The Marble Faun* just after his daughter Una became desperately sick, in part because of her conflicts between asserting and submitting. Tensions between a controlling father and a sexually maturing daughter seeking achievement and autonomy pervade this romance.
As in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne is fascinated with dangerously transgressive heroines. Though Hawthorne can be gratuitously snide about other working women, Miriam remains his most complex artistic shadow, except perhaps for Hester Prynne. But Hawthorne is also shadowed by Spenserian thoughts of his own death in the offing, the ultimate loss of control. Hawthorne usually displaces his nervousness about mutability into snorts of disgust—at Rome, beggars, trickeries, Jewish tenement dwellers, laboring women, even Italian towns and frescoes. Yet the hysteria he occasionally lodges in Hilda and Miriam more appropriately describes his own sudden outbursts. As Hawthorne’s rages erupt with no clear object, Italy’s aging becomes an unwanted mirror.

Sometimes the narrator can be quite funny, as when his characters look at “the yellow Tiber, a mud-puddle in strenuous motion” (IV 370). More frequently, he inveighs against Italy, seemingly in his own voice, with barely controlled anger. Aging has not been good for Italy, he says in a great many ways. Ubiquitous yellow bricks show that the country “has done its best to ruin the very ruins” (IV 165). He fulminates against Jewish “maggots” that “overpopulate a decaying cheese” (IV 388). He sees Italy’s decline from glory and greatness in the washerwomen who typify Rome’s decay (IV 6), or the “manlike” women laboring in the fields (IV 290). The ridiculous modern spectacle of “feminine achievements in literature” (IV 61) also suggests cultural decay and decline. Sometimes Hawthorne melodramatically exaggerates his disgust, as when he rails against Italy’s countryside towns and old frescoes. All towns should be burned every fifty years, he says (IV 301), and ruined frescoes should be covered with “white-wash!” (IV 303).

Hawthorne’s biliousness against a great culture in decline climaxes in his lengthy tirade against modern Rome. The city is “a long decaying corpse . . . with accumulated dust and a fungous growth overspreading all its more admirable features . . . indescribably ugly[.]” Moreover, every night he meets with “a ravenous little populace” of bugs “feasting with our own substance” as he tries to sleep in a Roman bed. And yet, “hating her with all our might,” cursing her “crimes” and trickeries, he finds himself “attached . . . to the Eternal City” despite himself (IV 325–26). Much as he felt about Salem, one might say. And, I suggest, much as he felt about his own mutable body. At these points, thoughts of young working women as creative doubles or dangers seem far away. A preoccupation with aging begins to overwhelm the wary receptivity to vivid and public women that generated much of Hawthorne’s best writing in the 1850s.

As I’ve been arguing, *The Marble Faun* gains much of its narrative energy from covertly doubling a dangerously creative female character.
and the not quite controlling male narrator. In depicting young women’s complex mixtures of accommodation and resistance to fathers and father-figures, Hawthorne intimates the discontents and the precariousness in middle-aged men’s desires. From Spenser’s Mutability Cantos through *The Marble Faun*, Anglo-American male writers have tried to use allegory to bring their representations of independent women toward patriarchal closure. Yet their attempts at containment betray male instability and lack.8 These issues raise larger questions, both biographically and culturally. What has been so threatening to American middle-class men about the specter of respectable women working?

Biographically, we can trace some of Hawthorne’s anxieties to his precarious financial condition as a short story writer. He wasn’t measuring up to the manly norm of successful businessman and domestic provider. Put more bluntly, as his letters toward the end of the 1840s suggest, he hadn’t made it, and he was broke. If mad Ireland hurt Yeats into poetry, as W. H. Auden said in his elegy, the New England marketplace hurt Hawthorne into romances. But not before he fled writing almost entirely for $1,200 a year in the Salem Custom-House. The 1842–1845 period “marks his last sustained creativity in short fiction,” John Crowley concludes in his excellent notes to the Centenary Edition of *Mosses from an Old Manse* (X 504). Thereafter, Hawthorne wrote and published only five other short pieces, the last of which was “Feathertop.”

“I have written with pretty commendable diligence, averaging from two to four hours a day,” Hawthorne wrote in his journal for March 31, 1843 (X 504). But for what? A year later he writes to George Hillard, “It will never do for me to continue merely a writer of stories for the magazines—the most unprofitable business in the world; . . . If I am to support myself by literature, it must be by what is called drudgery, but which is incomparably less irksome, as a business, than imaginative writing” (X 509). The key word is his twice-emphasized “business.” Hawthorne thinks of himself as a man now, not the adolescent boy-man who wants to match “the scribbling sons of John Bull,” as he says in an 1821 letter to his mother.9 He is married, with family responsibilities, and his “diligence” hasn’t born fruit. Worse, he has had to borrow money, and he will again. Economic dependence for Hawthorne signifies “failure,” he repeats in a letter of gratitude to Hillard for a loan that made *The Scarlet Letter* possible. And “ill-success in life is really and justly a matter of shame.”10

Equally shameful to his manhood, as Edwin Miller (1991) notes, Sophia had to work “at least three hours a day” as a lampshade decorator while her husband was writing *The Scarlet Letter*. “My Hyperion is cook & maid,” Sophia wrote to a friend.11 During the Old Manse years Hawthorne sued
George Ripley for evicting his family, borrowed $150 from Horatio Bridge, and had to wait ages for a $100 check from John O’Sullivan, the editor of the Democratic Review and Una’s godfather. A letter from Hawthorne to Evert Duyckinck concludes that his writing “turns out a sad business indeed” (X 516), and in another letter to Duyckinck he metaphorically condemns himself as an unfruitful father as well as a failed businessman. “I ... will set about collecting my vagrant progeny forthwith,” Hawthorne agrees. But

I never mean to write any more stories (the one now in embryo excepted). ... As the first essays and tentatives of a young author, they would be well enough—but it seems to me absurd to look upon them as conveying any claim to a settled literary reputation. ... If they were merely spring blossoms, we might look for good fruit hereafter; but I have done nothing but blossom all through the summer. I am ashamed—and there’s an end. (X 517)

He has been birthing his “vagrant progeny,” “embryo,” and “spring blossoms” while Sophia has been miscarrying and then birthing Una. Yet they have not brought him the manliness of “a settled literary reputation.”

The subtext of these letters could be paraphrased as envious domestic rivalry: my creativity has not fathered a reputation, while Sophia’s creativity has made her a full woman and mother. And worse, she has to work to support his authorship, too. As with many middle-class American men, until at least the 1970s, a wife working outside the home shows the husband’s inadequacy as a man, especially to the husband. If the immediate context for Hawthorne’s preoccupation with independent women in The Marble Faun was his daughter’s mercurial temperament, her severe sickness, and her wish to develop her artistic skills, two more long-running issues impel his complex mix of feelings about seemingly willful young women. In the 1840s he had lived a felt lack of manliness, in trying to make it as an author in America. Now, in the late 1850s, he was living that lack in a different way: he was a famous author who couldn’t quite live up to his fame.12 Already he felt the onset of failing powers, domestically as well as in his writing. Imagining a vividly artistic young woman may have restored a vicarious sense of his own creativity, whereas subduing a wayward daughter or a wayward female character helped to explore and alleviate his sense of once and future lack.

These biographical issues have a cultural context that hasn’t been sufficiently emphasized, at least for antebellum New England writers. The pressures of honor and shame helped to shape middle-class norms of American manhood, and women remained prime signifiers of honor for
male-dominated families. In Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), for instance, Tom’s wife Chloe asks Mrs. Shelby if she can leave home and her children to work for four years in Louisville, so that she can earn enough money to buy Tom back. Mrs. Shelby immediately assents. But they also agree that Mrs. Shelby shouldn’t go to work. “I wouldn’t hear to Missis’ givin lessons nor nothing[,]” Chloe says. “Mas’r’s quite right in dat ar;—’t wouldn’t do, no ways. I hope none our family ever be brought to dat ar, while I’s got hands.” Mrs. Shelby translates that into white terms of honor and shame: “Don’t fear, Chloe; I’ll take care of the honor of the family” (X 238). Ironically, after Mr. Shelby dies, she proves to be much more adept at handling his business affairs. But a leisured white wife must symbolize the honor of the extended “family,” including their slaves, at least while her husband is the prime provider.

The term hovering here is honor, manifested through control of one’s women, and intertwined with the “feme couvert” common law implied in the disappearance of young Miss Higginbotham at the end of “Mr. Higginbotham’s Catastrophe.” Along with contemporary New England expectations that manhood should be demonstrated through self-reliance, success in business, moral character, and property ownership, the honor of a white middle-class man such as Mr. Shelby or Hawthorne depends on the widely shared presumption that a wife’s or daughter’s identity should be subsumed in the husband’s paternal authority.

By recurrently turning to the specter and prospect of independent women, Hawthorne exposes the growing fragility of that traditional code. As “Feathertop” briefly suggests, and as *The Marble Faun* explores at length, without women to provide for and take care of and control, men may start to see honor and manhood as illusions, or self-delusions. Hawthorne’s romances take fire when that prospect partially escapes his narrative controls. Confronted with the new prospect of his aging, he lets the fire die.

**Notes**


5. The romance was first published in England as *The Transformation*, a week before its American publication (Wineapple 318). As Millicent Bell notes in “The Marble Faun and the Waste of History,” it was the only one of Hawthorne’s romances to sell well during his lifetime. Though Miriam’s card prints “Schaefer” as her last name (Bell 1999, 39), the narrator always calls both young women only by their first names, either patronizingly or intimately, or both.

6. According to Richard Brodhead’s note in the Penguin ed., Beatrice Cenci probably lied about the incest, Guido Reni didn’t paint the portrait, and Beatrice is probably not its subject (Brodhead 1990, 473).


Recent criticism has focused on tourism, class contexts, and religious contexts. On tourism, see Brodhead’s introduction to the Penguin ed.; also Richard Millington’s “Where is Hawthorne’s Rome” (1992) and William Stowe’s *Going Abroad* (1994). Robert Levine’s “Antebellum Rome’ in *The Marble Faun*” suggests that Miriam and the Model may have participated in a political assassination (Levine 1990, 27). Critics who focus on Miriam and Hilda include Frederick C. Crews, whose *Sins of the Fathers* presents Miriam as a “scapegoat for a sexual nausea” (Crews 1966, 222). Nina Baym’s *Shape of Hawthorne’s Career*, surprisingly sympathetic to Kenyon, sees Miriam as “less developed” than the others (Baym 1976, 235). In *Roads to Rome*, 350–58, Jenny Franchot emphasizes the unintegrated and evasive narration; for her, Hilda centers the romance’s failed Protestant effort to comprehend Catholicism (Franchot 1994, 350). Richard Millington’s *Practicing Romance*, 177–206, finds Miriam’s romance of transgression slowly yielding to Hilda’s sentimental fiction of conscience and suppression, with a
fatigued and disaffected voice speaking from the margins (Millington 1992, 178–80, 195, 203). A “careful” reader will become Miriam’s uncomfortable partisan (Millington 1992, 201). Millicent Bell’s “The Marble Faun and the Waste of History” argues that the narrative identifies with Miriam’s sense of history as a meaningless composite of fragments and debris. Drawing on Bell’s essay, Wineapple notes that the narrative’s fragmentation is “like the body parts strewn throughout the novel” (Wineapple, 327, also 319–21).

8. For a more ample analysis of these historical tensions, see David Leverenz, *Paternalism Incorporated* (2003), ch. 2.


10. For Hawthorne’s response to Hillard’s letter of 17 January 1850, see Edwin Haviland Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place*, 275–76. As Miller notes, the letter evokes Dimmesdale’s painful ending, which Hawthorne was writing at the time (Miller 1991, 276).


12. In *School of Hawthorne*, Richard Brodhead astutely suggests that Hawthorne was the first victim of his own anxiety of influence (Brodhead 1986, 70; also 72–81 on Hilda as an enforcer of reverence for the newly emerging cultural category of high culture).