The Fragility of Manhood
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IN CHAPTER 2, I suggested that Hawthorne identified with the gentle boy, an identification that stems from his experience of shame. It is important to establish the cultural as well as psychological contexts for why Hawthorne may have associated shame with the feminine beauty of his Narcissus-like males, a quality that he personally embodied. Hawthorne’s gentle boy provides an enduring template for his representations of masculinity. His friendship with Franklin Pierce, his best friend since their college days together at Bowdoin, is a good place to start in thinking about the ways that larger cultural forces intersected with representations of masculinity and homosocial relations. Written shortly before Franklin Pierce’s 1852 election and just after Hawthorne wrote The Blithedale Romance, Hawthorne’s campaign biography The Life of Franklin Pierce is certainly not one of his several masterpieces of the 1850s. Nevertheless, it remains a fascinating document in the history of American letters. Part of its fascination, as many scholars have shown, lies in its naked exposure of Hawthorne’s agonizingly ignorant view of slavery. Another part lies in its naked exposure of the ways in which white male homosocial relations in this period conducted all of the major ideological, social, and cultural questions of its moment. Indubitably, Hawthorne and Pierce were on the wrong side of the slavery question; Northerners who were surrounded by people who campaigned against the Southern slavocracy should have known better. Pierce, born in New Hampshire in 1804, accommodated Southern interests at every turn, infuriating Northern abolitionists. Despite his best efforts
to assuage and accommodate proslavery forces, Pierce may be said to have mobilized the gathering momentum of abolitionist rage against the continuing and expanding might and means of the Southern slavocracy.

Less attention has been paid, however, to the gendered and sexual implications of Hawthorne's campaign biography. In a welcome and revelatory essay, Leland S. Person has argued that Hawthorne endows Pierce with a "physical appeal" that recalls Hawthorne's "ambiguous gendered male characters." Person reminds us that Harry Truman considered Pierce the best-looking of all U.S. Presidents, noting that Hawthorne would probably have agreed.1 For Person, that Hawthorne wrote this campaign biography after *The Blithedale Romance* and its exploration of same-sex love and gender ambiguity is significant; Hawthorne, notes Person, evokes his gender-liminal male characters Ilbrahim and Own Warland in his depiction of Pierce at various points as "beautiful boy," "sweet," "delicate," "cordial," "soft." Person argues that "the delicate challenge for Hawthorne is marketing such a 'delightful' boy to the 'whole country'—to arouse desire for the 'boy' without transgressing normative boundaries of adult male relationships."2 Person also helpfully alerts us to the anxious machismo of Pierce's political climate. He discusses a series of political cartoons that depict Pierce in an inferior, unmanly position to his Whig opponent for the presidency, Winfield Scott.

Finally, in a coup de grace, Pierce and Winfield Scott appear together, with Pierce riding a goose and Scott riding a gamecock. "What's the matter, Pierce?" the caption reads, "feel faint? Ha! Ha! Ha! Lord what a 'goose!' Don't you wish you had my 'Cock'?" Political attacks on a candidate's manhood do not get more political than that.3

Though I will not have the opportunity to explore *The Life of Franklin Pierce* further in this book, it is instructive to consider this largely overlooked work as yet another example of Hawthorne's interest in gender liminality, perhaps especially in males, within a context of masculinist standards of gender that emphasized, in the Jacksonian era and beyond, competitiveness, self-sufficiency, and a lockdown on feeling, while also confusingly insisting that men as well as women feel "properly." Homoerotic explorations of male sexuality were especially challenging in this era of homoeroticized homophobia (a description one could apply to all subsequent eras of American life, of course). Moreover, Hawthorne's love for Pierce, with its homoerotic overtones (emphasized by the fact that both men were exceptionally attractive), suffuses his evocation of Pierce's physical appeal, one that sometimes daringly blurs gendered lines. The gentle boy who endures within adult men solicits
Hawthorne’s imaginative engagement, leading him to draw out the phantom presence of the feminine boy within his depictions of adult men, who are often youthful. But this phantom presence also provokes fear and even horror. Thinking through the forces that shaped and the implications suggested by this simultaneous desire and repulsion in Hawthorne’s depictions of masculinity will be the chief aim of this chapter, in which I move from personal and cultural contexts to psychoanalytic theories of narcissism, shame, vision, and the “fear of looking.”

PERSONAL BEAUTY

Though biographical readings are not without their dangers, in Hawthorne’s case some elements of his personal history seem not only relevant to his work’s central themes but indistinguishable from them, the sources of shame in his life and work chief among them. As an author whose sex appeal became a legendary aspect of his celebrity, Hawthorne could be called the American Byron, though in this regard he certainly pales in comparison to his Romantic predecessor, not only famously handsome but also sexually infamous, linked in his lifetime to both homosexuality and incest. Yet references to Hawthorne’s beauty on the part of both female and male commentators recur throughout myriad accounts of him and convey an atmosphere of heightened awareness of beauty as part of the Hawthorne package. His son Julian Hawthorne’s description of him, synecdochic of many such appraisals, is perhaps the most sustained:

He was the handsomest young man of his day . . . His limbs were beautifully formed, and the moulding of his neck and throat was as fine as anything in antique sculpture. His hair, which had a long, curving wave in it, approached blackness in color; his head was large and grandly developed; his eyebrows were dark and heavy, with a superb arch and space beneath. His nose was straight, but the contour of his chin was Roman. . . . His eyes were large, dark, blue, and brilliant, and full of varied expression.

There’s a good deal more to this lengthy description, including the tale (most probably apocryphal, but no less suggestive for being that) of an old gypsy woman stopping the young Hawthorne in the forest to ask whether he were “a man or an angel,” for seldom was a man so beautiful. Hawthorne’s physical beauty is another dimension of the unsettling of gendered norms presented for many people by his writing; it physically evinced the same qualities
inherent in his “gentle,” “sweet” literary efforts, which many assumed had to be written by a woman. Given the transformation of American masculinity in the Jacksonian era, with its enforcement of codes of frontier toughness and policing of effeminacy, is it possible that Hawthorne’s notorious shyness resulted from his anticipation of being a magnet for the eye of the spectator?

If we recall from chapter 2 the incidents of Hawthorne’s experience of the desiring gaze noted by both George Lathrop and Henry James, this would have been an anticipation corroborated by frequent and predictable favorable response. These responses could be experienced as pleasurable, a filling up of the libidinal tanks, and therefore no mean achievement for the self-critical Hawthorne. But they would also have been threatening, a public exposure of his own socially unstable gendered identity. I speculate that Hawthorne used writing to negotiate anxieties about his own personal appearance and its incitement of the gaze, anxieties that are one node in a network of far broader, related social and cultural ones. Writing also allowed him to negotiate a wide range of responses to beauty in both women and other men, and in himself.

“The self-doubts, the uncertainty, the sense that even his best gifts were not entirely admirable did little to enhance Hawthorne’s confidence in his own masculinity,” writes Gloria Erlich in her psychobiographical study of the author. Hawthorne’s gendered intermixture was both deeply appealing and vexing for many, including himself. Moreover, male beauty, to the extent that it was thought to effeminate manhood, would have been a quality Jacksonian America deemed decadent. Given Hawthorne’s conflictual, simultaneous embrace of his feminine qualities and the very codes of Jacksonian toughness that routed them out, the recognition of his own beauty may have triggered in him the antithetical yet entirely coextensive responses of pleasure and scorn at male beauty that also characterize the fictions.

Hawthorne’s physical description of Robin Molineux—his “brown, curly hair, well-shaped features, and bright, cheerful eyes, were nature’s gifts” (11: 209)—is remarkably similar to that given by his lifelong friend Horatio Bridge of the young Hawthorne himself. As Bridge described the Hawthorne he knew as a classmate and chum at Bowdoin College in the 1820s, “Hawthorne was a slender lad, having a massive head, with dark, brilliant, and most expressive eyes, heavy eyebrows, and a profusion of dark hair.”

Richard Millington’s splendid 2011 Norton Critical Edition of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s 1852 The Blithedale Romance includes several new supplementary materials. One of the freshest and most telling of these is the excerpt from an essay by Ora Gannett Sedgwick, who lived at Brook Farm when she was a teenager. (Brook Farm, which lasted from 1841 to 1847, was a
utopian experiment in communal and self-sustaining living that took place in West Roxbury, near Boston. Hawthorne participated in this experiment, famously failing to recoup his financial investment in the project; despite his demurrals, Hawthorne clearly draws on his experiences there in *Blithedale.*

“A Girl of Sixteen at Brook Farm,” which Sedgwick published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1900, contains several highly interesting firsthand impressions of the real-life Hawthorne, whom the shrewdly observant Sedgwick presents as simultaneously enigmatic and slyly knowing, aloof and genially playful. Her delightful and oddly poignant portrait of Hawthorne confirms the sense that develops in other accounts of Hawthorne as someone who maintained a certain social distance but was also capable of being wooed into sociality (no doubt a quality that appealed to Herman Melville, whose own efforts to woo Hawthorne into intimate friendship are not only a legendary ante-bellum myth but also widely considered a crucial biographical intertext for *Blithedale*).

Sedgwick adds to the widely documented portrait of Hawthorne as physically arresting:

One evening he was alone in the hall, sitting on a chair at the farther end, when my roommate, Ellen Slade, and myself were going upstairs. She whispered to me, “Let’s throw the sofa pillows at Mr. Hawthorne.” Reaching over the banisters, we each took a cushion and threw it. Quick as a flash he put out his hand, seized a broom that was hanging near him, warded off our cushions, and threw them back with sure aim. . . . Through it all not a word was spoken. We laughed and laughed, and his eyes shone and twinkled like stars. Wonderful eyes they were, and when anything witty was said I always looked quickly at Mr. Hawthorne; for his dark eyes lighted up as if flames were suddenly kindled behind them, and then the smile came down to his lips and over his grave face.11

Whether it was his dark good looks, the starry shine in his eyes, or simply his very imperturbability, Hawthorne seemed to provoke the attention of others, and their desire to provoke him. Throwing the pillows at Hawthorne, it would appear, was a means for these girls to express their own increasing fascination with this unusual older man, but their impudence also appears to have appealed to Hawthorne. One wonders if he saw in their antic enthusiasm something of the charm that Coverdale reports that he sees in Priscilla, who nevertheless remains one of Hawthorne’s most pallid creations (though pointedly so, I think). The ways in which Hawthorne’s enigmatic, aloof, reserved beauty provoked the troublesome and tantalizing desires of others,
especially young women and other men, while also leading Hawthorne to attempt to control and manage not only these provoked desires but also his own responses to them, which ranged from fear to revulsion to pleasure—these dynamics inform his fiction repeatedly and with increasing intensity.

**THE WRETCHED SIMULACRUM**

**SIGHT AND SELF**

If we take Horatio Bridge’s description as an accurate one, Hawthorne gives characters such as Robin versions of his own physical traits. He makes sure that we understand that they are beautiful. But he also makes us understand that they are just as morally dim. Beatrice Rappaccini’s question to handsome and callow Giovanni goes to the heart of the matter: “O, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?” (10: 91). Given the moral ambiguity that recurs in Hawthorne’s young men along with their beauty, we can posit that they reflect not only Hawthorne’s own self-awareness of his attractiveness and his investment in it, an investment that would be the natural result of the constant recognition of his own beauty that Hawthorne experienced throughout his life, even into his later years (in which it admittedly underwent a significant erosion), but also a skeptical view of this surface attractiveness. (That the cult of Hawthorne’s handsomeness continues to thrive is amply reflected in the “Hawthorne is a Hottie” T-shirts on sale in gift shops in Concord, Massachusetts, and elsewhere.)

I argue further that Hawthorne’s responses to the young men he created went beyond moral skepticism. He views the beautiful young man with an empathetic fearfulness at the power of the gaze—not an avaricious desire to wield it but rather a desire to avoid falling under it. As “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” reveals, for Hawthorne narcissism is a welter of anxieties that revolve around the figure of the young man, anxieties that become especially intense if the young man is also pleasing visually. The disjunct between exterior and interior self Hawthorne consistently thematizes extends the Narcissus myth and its phobic, cautionary associations with the disparity between surface and depth. Hawthorne further intensifies the implications of the Narcissus theme by combining it with his ongoing concern with vision. This concern leads, in turn, to Hawthorne’s development of shame. Shame is a crucial component of Hawthorne’s work, perhaps because it is the affect that he chiefly associates with vision, the sense he most exhaustively examines in all of its psychological and aesthetic complexity. The shame that proceeds in Hawthorne from vision relates, in my
view, to the gendered anxieties at work in the Narcissus myth, which renders vision such a vexed and troubling phenomenon. Vision in Hawthorne can signify either shame or an attempt at sadistic visual mastery, such as, if we follow Freud, voyeurism and other forms of visual violation. In the figure of the young man, Hawthorne collapses shameful and sadistic forms of looking: the young man experiences shame at both looking and being looked at, but also sadistically exerts power over the other characters through his eyes.

Hawthorne’s work abounds with sight metaphors and visual media—paintings, portraits, mirrors, miniatures, sculptures, carvings—and with lookers, most often ambiguous male figures, whose desire to see others invasively crosses the line into voyeurism. In addition to those already mentioned, such figures include the titular protagonist of “Wakefield,” who installs himself as a perpetual watcher of his own life in his absence; Chillingworth, who spies on Dimmesdale, just as Coverdale spies on his fellow Blithedalers from his “inviolate bower” up in a tree; and the Model, who spies on Miriam in *The Marble Faun*. These fictional males participate in voyeuristic schemes that are illuminated by Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze, in which she argues that the male protagonist in classical Hollywood cinema dominates the woman through vision, either voyeuristically (investigating the woman and solving her mystery) or fetishistically (breaking her up into idealized components, eyes, faces, and so forth). Moreover, Mulvey argues that the spectator, also gendered male, joins in with the screen protagonist in a shared experience of narcissistic omnipotence.

Yet in Hawthorne’s work the male figure, as we have discovered, is as likely to be the object of the gaze as its subject—for example, spying on Beatrice Rappaccini, Giovanni Guasconti fails to realize that he himself is the object of her scientist father’s spying eyes, as well as Baglioni’s, Rappaccini’s rival in more ways than one. Moreover, the sight of the male, perhaps especially when he is a handsome figure, causes pain. When the heroine Ellen Langton first gazes at Fanshawe, the doomed, young titular protagonist of Hawthorne’s first novel, the “result of her scrutiny [is] favorable, yet very painful” (3: 346). When his fiancée, Elizabeth, finally as overcome by the maddening horror of the black veil as the agitated townspeople in one of Hawthorne’s most famous tales, stops to give one last look at his darkly obscured form, Minister Hooper mournfully asks her, “And do you feel it then at last?” (9: 47). The question urgently communicates the gendered and perceptual anxieties Hawthorne fuses in his representation of masculinity. In the midst of hellish visions in the nighttime forest of Satanic seduction, visions that strip away the false appearances of his seemingly pious but secretly evil townspeople, Young Goodman Brown must acknowledge that
“he was himself the chief horror of the scene” (10: 83). Learning of the horrifying hypocrisy of others seems to trigger in Brown a much deeper revulsion toward himself, as if they function as outward manifestations of his own depravity. Brown’s recognition reveals the essential conflict at the core of Hawthorne’s representation of masculinity, a conflict between the self and itself that is then endlessly outwardly projected to all social relations. For Hawthorne, anti-relation begins with the self; self-regard generates anxiety and dread; and vision is inherently painful and wounding, indicative of the problematic nature of male sexuality.

Psychoanalytic theory helps us to develop a richer understanding of these patterns in Hawthorne’s fiction, its tripartite monster of narcissism, shame, and tormenting sight. Shame has come to be a key topic in psychoanalytic Hawthorne studies. Joseph Adamson has written eloquently on the subject, and Benjamin Kilborne’s essay “Shame Conflicts and Tragedy in The Scarlet Letter” admirably illustrates the multivalent levels on which shame informs this novel. Clearly, I am in agreement that shame is of great importance to Hawthorne’s work, in which so many characters must endure the tyranny of another’s, or several others’, vision. Following Andrew Morrison, however, I see shame as “the underside of narcissism,” a component of it. Shame stems from what I term the narcissistic crisis at the heart of Hawthorne’s fiction, in which young men endlessly confront the desiring looks of others. These visual intrusions intersect painfully with the young man’s opposing and equally fervent desires to see and not to be seen. As I develop below, Hawthorne’s works foreground the fear of looking, or, to use the psychoanalytic term, scopophobia.

Narcissism functions in Hawthorne as a crisis on several levels. Being looked at, held by the mastery of another’s vision, threatens normative masculine identity because it puts the male in the feminized passive position of not only being under another’s power but also of being the object of the look. Looking at oneself, especially if that self-regard provokes pleasurable feelings, crosses the lines of seemingly gendered identity and moral standing at once, in that to look desiringly at oneself suggests, on the one hand, either a regressive sexual preoccupation with one’s own body or a sexual interest in one’s own gender, and, on the other hand, pride, one of the seven deadly sins, and its synonym, vanity. Both of these highly charged signs of the self run amok were culturally scorned in Hawthorne’s era, and hardly in his era alone.

Historically, the Narcissus-like male has been considered the effeminate male. “We find,” writes Shadi Bartsch in her study The Mirror of the Self, “the self-indulgent male gaze demonstrated in artistic representations of Narcis-
sus, who, as he gazes winsomely at his image in the water in” several classical representations “sprouts small but feminine breasts.” Hawthorne falls within the continuum of representations of Narcissus as effeminated that extends to Freudian psychoanalytic paradigms of narcissism as principally characteristic of female sexuality. In this regard, Freud follows longstanding tradition. “One of the major motifs through which [the] construction of the feminine has been transmitted in art is the woman holding, or standing in front of, a mirror. What happens to gender identity—and to cultural authority—” asks Thaïs E. Morgan, “when a man poses before and looks at himself in a mirror”?

Sarah Rose Cole writes that in Thackeray’s novel *Vanity Fair*, a relevant Victorian intertext for Hawthorne, the “most obvious provocation offered by male vanity is the transgression of gender boundaries; the very act of coupling the words ‘male’ and ‘vanity’ implies a gender reversal, ‘turn[ing] the tables’ on the stereotype of female vanity.” For Cole, Thackeray plays with gender stereotypes as a means of negotiating class anxieties. Considering the character of Captain George Osborne, whom she describes as “that paragon of military glamour,” Cole writes that “his apparently happy self-objectification—his concentration on his own remarkable good looks—takes on an anxious, even desperate quality when he solicits the gaze that is supposed to certify his class status.”

Hawthorne deepens these themes, reaching a level of feeling that far exceeds any specific kind of anxiety—or, to put it another way, that questions the very meaning of identity, which cannot be distinguished from appearances. For example, when his character Feathertop—literally a construction of masculinity, having been assembled from random scraps by the witch Mother Rigby—presents himself as a dandified nobleman and solicits the gaze of the girl he attempts to woo, Hawthorne creates an arresting scene of visual desire with implications for female as well as male sexuality.

By and by, Feathertop paused, and throwing himself into an imposing attitude, seemed to summon the fair girl to survey his figure, and resist him longer, if she could. His star, his embroidery, his buckles, glowed, at that instant, with unutterable splendor . . . The maiden raised her eyes, and suffered them to linger upon her companion with a bashful and admiring gaze. Then, as if desirous of judging what her own simple comeliness might have, side by side with so much brilliancy, she cast a glance towards the full-length looking-glass, in front of which they happened to be standing. It was one of the truest plates in the world, and incapable of flattery. No sooner did the images, therein reflected, meet Polly’s gaze, then she
shrieked, shrank from the stranger’s side, gazed at him, for a moment, in
the wildest dismay, and sank insensible upon the floor.

What impels Polly Gookin’s solicited gaze is a desire to survey her own
attractiveness as much as Feathertop’s apparently splendid figure: his narciss-
sism and self-objectification goads her own, though hers is more tentatively
sought. His own gaze solicited by the gaze he solicited in Polly, Feathertop
follows the track of Polly’s vision and also looks into the mirror. What he
sees in the mirror—here not a deceptive surface but a properly cleansed door
of perception—is not the “glittering mockery of his outside show, but a pic-
ture of the sordid patchwork of his real composition, stript of all witchcraft”

“The wretched simulacrum!” the narrator laments. “We almost pity him.”
In a vivid depiction of male anguish with an undertone of dark comedy that
depens the anguish, Hawthorne describes Feathertop’s reaction to his own
image: “He threw up his arms, with an expression of despair, that went far-
ther than any of his previous manifestations, towards vindicating his claims
to be reckoned human. For perchance the only time, since this so often
empty and deceptive life of mortals began its course, an Illusion had seen
and fully recognized itself” (10: 244). Feathertop’s self-recognition exem-
plifies such encounters in Hawthorne, in which self-perception is fraught
with danger and filled with despair. But even if it is in no way redemptive,
this experience also defines the human, as it does for Feathertop, whose
anguish vindicates his humanity. If looking at oneself causes disturbance,
a psychic torment with physical manifestations, what does that say about
the self that regards itself—what levels of self-disgust or personal awareness
of moral turpitude make the experience of self-regard so loathsome? Can
looking at the self lead to self-knowledge, or does it, as in the writings of
the Latin Stoic philosopher Seneca, actually function as “an impediment to
self-knowledge”?

In Ovid’s version of the Narcissus myth, the seer Tiresias cautions that
Narcissus will be happy so long as he never knows himself. In the myth, to
know oneself is to see oneself, to recognize that the person one desires is,
in fact, an image of oneself. In the myth, this recognition does nothing to
reduce the maddening nature of Narcissus’s absurd and heartbreaking pre-
dicament. In Hawthorne, the sight of one’s self provokes deep anxiety, if not
horror. As Shernaz Mollinger wrote in a 1983 study of narcissism in Haw-
thorne and Emerson, “When Ethan Brand sees in himself the sin that he has
been looking diligently for in everyone else, he kills himself.” As Mollinger
concludes, “the underlying self is experienced as overwhelmingly negative—
wretched, sinful, mean, and empty.” Yet the paradox here is that very often this cataclysmic revelation of the ugly actual self occurs within the spectacle of male beauty. One of the questions demanded by the fusion of ugly depth and beautiful surface—the formula for so many cautionary narcissistic tales, from Ovid to Wilde’s Portrait of Dorian Gray to Anthony Minghella’s film version of Patricia Highsmith’s novel The Talented Mr. Ripley (1999)—is why it mattered so much to Hawthorne. If in the Narcissus myth self-recognition is self-knowledge, but a self-knowledge that brings one neither relief nor sexual fulfillment, in Hawthorne the Narcissus theme conveys the ambiguity of identity and of desire as well as the terrifying potentialities of both.

Hawthorne’s males maintain an attitude of deflection, the chief components of which are averted vision (refusing the eye of others, deferring any encounter with the gaze) and a demurral of physical authority (an abashed, circumspect stance, a bent gait). They refuse or forfeit conventionally masculine attitudes: directness, forthrightness, boldness, in other words, the hallmarks of male authority. Abashed male attitudes form a pattern that extends into Hawthorne’s late work, as this description of Septimius Felton evinces: “As for Septimius, let him alone a moment or two, and then you would see him, with his head bent down, brooding, brooding, with his eyes fixed on some chip, some stone, some common plant, any commonest thing, as if it were the clue and index to some mystery; and when, by chance startled out of these meditations, he lifted his eyes, there would be a kind of perplexity, a dissatisfied, wild look in them, as if, of his speculations, he found no end” (8: 6). This attitude of deflection is, I argue, a manifestation of the shame that informs Hawthorne’s narcissistically drawn male characters. (In Septimius Felton, as I discuss in the last chapter, this shame is tied to anxieties over racial identity.) Cynosures of desire, they deflect, avoid, elude, and refuse the appetites of the eye they have themselves incited.

The deceptively light-hearted “Little Annie’s Ramble” (1835) is no longer a well-known story but, as Jane Tompkins points out, was one of the most critically acclaimed of the author’s own day. Despite its frolicsome tone, it is a tale of a young man who abducts a little girl in order to take her on that titular ramble. Hawthorne depicts the first-person narrator as a man who “walks in black attire, with a measured step, and a heavy brow, and his thoughtful eyes bent down,” here alongside “a gay little girl.” The pedophilic relationship suggested in this story is deeply unsettling. What makes Hawthorne’s depiction of the narrator particularly jarring is that he assumes these attitudes of submission, but is nevertheless in a position of undeniable masculine dominance. In the famous story “The Minister’s Black Veil” (1837), “good Mr. Hooper walk[s] onward” through the gathering crowd gawking
at his appearance, “at a slow and quiet pace, stooping somewhat and looking on the ground” (my emphasis, 9: 38). As will be increasingly clear, these attitudes of abashed masculinity relate, at once, to an alienation from the conventional codes of heteromasculinity—embodied in Hawthorne’s work by characters such as the rival who gets the girl in “The Artist of the Beautiful,” the pitiless father of the crying boy in “Ethan Brand,” and the most conventional aspects of Hollingsworth in The Blithedale Romance—and an ambivalence over heterosexual relationships generally.

In life, Hawthorne himself wore “conservative garb,” “a long black jacket, shawl-colored vest, and a black silk bow-tied stock worn with a high-collared white shirt,” evincing both his frugality and his propriety. Not only the darkness of his clothing but his “indifference to style” (he requested a friend to buy him “stout dark” cloth from a “cheap clothing establishment”) may have signaled Hawthorne’s desire to deflect attention from his appearance.21 Wearing Hawthorne’s own customary attire, these dubious young men avert their eyes from the gaze in a manner also reminiscent of the author’s. As Horatio Bridge describes Hawthorne’s deportment, “Hawthorne’s figure was somewhat singular, owing to his carrying his head a little on one side; but his walk was square and firm, and his manner self-respecting and reserved.”22 The anxious conjunctive reassurance of Bridge’s “but” may reveal a truth about Hawthorne’s relationship to looking: the singular quality of the way Hawthorne looked, keeping his head to one side, troubles Bridge to the extent that he must reassure us that Hawthorne walked with and maintained an air of personal dignity and manliness (“square and firm”). Something slightly abashed—feminine—in Hawthorne’s deportment caused, to whatever extent, alarm. The possibility that Hawthorne anticipated his ability to incite the gaze and that this anticipation—and the results that confirmed it, as so many favorable accounts of Hawthorne’s appearance attest—caused Hawthorne alarm and discomfort, leading him to protect himself against the looks of others, but also a certain degree of pleasurable self-fascination, finds textual support in his work, which also suggests that he possessed an awareness of the visual compulsions he promoted. Given the moral ambiguity that recurs in Hawthorne’s young men along with their beauty, we can speculate that they reflect Hawthorne’s own self-awareness of his attractiveness and his investment in it, an investment that would be the natural result of the constant recognition of his own beauty that Hawthorne experienced throughout his life, even into his later years (in which it underwent a significant erosion).

All of these thematic fictional concerns as well as elements of Hawthorne’s own life and the ways he was perceived by others have a relevance for the larger question of masculinity and what haunts it, homosexuality, and
what haunts homosexuality and masculinity both, homophobia. Hawthorne lived the bulk of his adult life as a man married to a woman with whom he had children, and certainly there is little evidence to suggest that he did all of this under duress at the level of sexual premise. I make no claim about Hawthorne’s sexuality in terms of same-sex desire. The claim I do make is that narcissism was a way for Hawthorne to negotiate whatever sexual interests he had and in whatever capacity. The concepts of sexuality and sexual desire in Hawthorne’s own cultural era were undeniably distinct from our own; we are no longer dominated, for instance, by a pervasive anxiety about the destructive effects of onanism. Yet, in my view, overlaps do exist between the antebellum period and our own era in terms of sexual matters. In particular, Jacksonian ideologies of gender—man-on-the-make male aggressiveness and self-reliance; the ideal of “true womanhood”; an abhorrence of weakness in men and toughness in women—have lost little of their binding power, though a great deal of their presumed accuracy. Hawthorne’s depiction of a shame-informed, narcissistic masculinity has deep relevance for the study of American masculinity, for homosexuality, and for homophobia, which Hawthorne’s critical view of normative masculinity can greatly assist us in dismantling.

As T. Walter Herbert observes,

Homophobia imagines that men animated by same-sex desire are themselves not “real men,” but embody an opposite of manhood all the more loathsome because secretly alluring. Hawthorne himself was prominently characterized by such “non-manly” traits. His notable shyness and preference for solitude resulted in good measure from that fact that his emotional life, like that of Arthur Dimmesdale, was exceptionally turbulent, so that he found routine interactions difficult. Talking to Hawthorne, said his college friend Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, was “like talking to a woman.”

Hawthorne was also a man of extraordinary physical beauty, who was well aware—and uneasily aware—of awakening sexual desire, both in women and in men. Even if Hawthorne had not been artistically inclined, to say nothing of leading the life of a writer, his familiar social relations would have made his manhood “suspect.” The factors that converged to give Hawthorne a “feminine” identity had a paradoxical result: they led him to insist all the more compulsively on his commitment to the conventional ideal of masculine self direction.23

Though in agreement with Herbert here generally, I demur on one point: while certainly it is true that in life Hawthorne did insist on proclaiming his
allegiance to such commitments, it is also true that his work, far from promoting this allegiance, actively, consistently, emphatically, movingly, angrily contests it. While there were many aspects of Hawthorne’s own life and personal views that demonstrate a commitment to the conservative values that found outward form in conventional, female-phobic, queer-phobic masculinity, it is also true that his work evinces a remarkable capacity for empathy for shunned sexual others as well as a penchant for stringent analysis of the foundations of masculinist power. In this respect, Hawthorne’s work makes for an interesting point of comparison with Martha Nussbaum’s, equally committed to a study of the effects of shaming, especially in public form, on abnegated others, emotions, and bodies.24

Moreover, in his book *Devils and Rebels: The Making of Hawthorne’s Damned Politics*, Larry J. Reynolds has also done a salutary job of reframing the personal Hawthorne’s dispositions toward the political issues of his time—which we generally view as ideologically suspect today—as an unconventional, if often misguided, pacifist politics. Indeed, the term that most of Hawthorne’s critics most frequently employ when disparaging his politics, “passivity,” emerges in Reynolds as a valiant attribute of this pacifism. Admirably, Reynolds does not overlook the racism in Hawthorne’s views, but in his reframing of pacifism and passivity in Hawthorne, he does a heroic job of restoring proper cultural contexts to Hawthorne’s thought while alerting readers to the gender biases of their own critiques, such as the easy recourse to passivity as a term of abuse in criticism since the late 1980s.25

I would argue that Hawthorne’s passivity is an aspect of the shame he incorporates into his depictions of masculinity. (If Reynolds’s astute work has a weakness, it is his insufficient attention to matters of gender and sexuality that impinge directly on his project.) Hawthorne’s passivity is a response to many things, such as the activist furor he abhorred in abolitionist campaigns against slavery; I would argue it was also his attitude toward the Judge Pyncheons of the world, males in power who exert their wills upon the less fortunate, including those whose gendered performance was seen as faltering, not fully realized, suspect, much like Hawthorne’s own at times (he did, it should be noted, always have his champions). Passivity in Hawthorne’s case is a political stance derived from shame, though distinct from it; if shame is the result of social relations that have proven injurious, passivity can be seen as an attempt to keep potentially injurious social relations—such as those between Hawthorne and New England abolitionists, many of whom were eager for a direct confrontation with a man whose views infuriated them—at bay. Which is to say that shame—the product of relation, the sign of social relation’s impact on the individual—
when reformulated as passivity can have a surprisingly useful capacity as self-protection.

EYES OF SHAME
FREUDIAN THEORIES OF VISION AND THE FEAR OF LOOKING

Despite the undeniable difficulties presented by Freud’s treatment of the subject, difficulties to which we attend throughout this book, the psychoanalytic thinking on narcissism that I have found to be most suggestive for reconsideration of Hawthorne’s writing proceeds directly from Freud. Theoretical treatments that, expanding and revising Freudian paradigms, link narcissism to shame and drive theory, specifically the focus on, in Léon Würnser’s description, “the two major sexual drives of exhibitionism and Schaulust, the wish to look (curiosity, voyeurism, or—using the Greek word stem scop- for ‘spying, watching’—scopophilia),” shed especially illuminating light on Hawthorne’s gendered themes and visual sensibility. Hawthorne shares with other Romantic authors such as “Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats” (and I would add Shelley) “an abnormal fascination with and fear of the eye as an instrument of public self-confirmation and definition.”

At this point, we should refine our understanding of the role shame plays within Hawthorne’s narcissism. In his study of shame in Hawthorne’s work, Joseph Adamson writes of what is perhaps the “ultimate wish of all human beings perhaps: to be recognized for what one is, by a loving eye from which the need to hide or cover oneself, with all of one’s flaws or defects, imagined or otherwise, is absent, without the fear of judgment or shame. . . . One of the signs of psychological and emotional health is to be capable of intimacy, and one of Hawthorne’s central themes is the barrier that shame puts up between the self and the other, thus estranging us not only from other human beings, but from our genuine selves.” In Hawthorne, this barrier of shame becomes the extruded essence of his characters—their black veils, black clothing, slow and ponderous gait, circumspection, and distrustful looks.

As Andrew Morrison has described it, shame is the “underside of narcissism.” In a valuable study that considers numerous psychoanalytic treatments of both concepts, Morrison, noting the lack of consensus about the nature of the relationship between shame and narcissism, points out that while some “maintain that shame functions ultimately to remind the self of its failure to meet perfectionistic demands for worthiness to attain fantasied merger with its” ego ideal, others view shame as “a response to the wish for
merger itself”: if what the self wants is autonomy, separateness, independence, “any suggestion that it falls short,” through a dependence on others, a dependence experienced as regressive, “generates shame. ‘To need,’ itself, is frequently experienced as shameful.”

Intervening in these debates, Morisson suggests “that both of these positions are correct—that there is an ongoing, tension-generating dialectic between narcissistic grandiosity and desire for perfection. . . . Thus, shame and narcissism inform each other, as the self is experienced, first, alone, separate, and small, and, again, grandiosely, striving to be perfect and reunited with its ideal.”

Léon Wurmser argues that the “perceptual functions affected by shame are predominantly visual”: the drives to look (scopophilia) and to be seen (exhibitionism). The “combination of aggression and libido in these component drives manifests itself particularly and most typically in [a] power struggle” alternately marked by “feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and passivity or a triumphant sense of power or at least of mastery.” Wurmser expands here on Freud’s influential and provocative theorization of the roles of these component drives in sexual desire in his Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, which Freud wrote in 1905 but continued to expand until 1924. Freud observed that infantile sexuality “from the very first involves other people as sexual objects.” Scopophilia, exhibitionism, and cruelty, linked “instincts,” dominate the early lives of children, who exhibit a great “satisfaction” in exhibiting their own bodies before others. Children can revel in both exhibitionism and in acts of cruelty because they do not yet experience shame (SE 7: 157–60).

As a fraught, resistant object of this gaze who nevertheless perpetually solicits it, and as a textual figure who experiences traumatic pain within spectacles of seeing and being seen, the male of Hawthorne’s fiction represents neither scopophilia nor exhibitionism but, most consistently, a psychic response that fuses them: scopophobia, or the fear of looking or being looked at. Considering the ways in which this densely complex fear may inspire creativity, David W. Allen theorizes that it may have root causes in “hidden emotional injuries, such as early object loss, with consequent attempts to repair the ruptured union.” Allen emphasizes that “the attempt at repair of self-image or repair of the lost relationship takes place within the looking-showing modalities. The repair of the self-image also involves an attempt at repair of the image being exhibited to others. ‘You see that I am all right or worthwhile’ is an unconscious step in the progression to ‘I see that I am all right and unimpaired.’” If we consider Hawthorne’s depiction of masculinity as both scopophobic and scopophilic in nature, we can theorize that the intertwined conflicts of narcissistic self-valuing, male beauty, and anguished
seeing in his work emerge from a project of self-repair with no attainable success, only capable of producing, at most, a partial, momentary respite from anxiety, and that all of these efforts are heightened and rendered more arduous by the equally incessant desire to look while avoiding being seen—precisely Coverdale’s conflictual aim in *The Blithedale Romance*. 

In Hawthorne’s work, the desire to see and be seen is concomitant with a fervent desire to avoid being seen, either by the self or another person. In every way, desire is balked; whichever way the eyes turn, they seize upon a prohibited, unsatisfactory, or retributively assaultive vision. The self seeking to know and to fulfill itself through the eye is itself subsumed by the power of the other’s eye; the self enthralled by self is also subject to the thrall-dom of the other’s gaze, with potentially disastrous consequences and even murderous intent. The traumatic narcissism of Hawthorne’s male characters enmeshes them in the gears of their own desires but also those of the other characters. Drawn to others whom they watch, they primarily crave the sight of their own image, powerfully alluring but also potentially deeply dangerous. For all encounters with looking, whether from the position of one’s own desire or from that of the other, are profoundly fraught, linked to the potential annihilation of the self and the crucial divide between self and other.

Scopophobia informs several aspects of Hawthorne’s fiction. Though not Hawthorne’s most famous work, the “Oberon” stories are among Hawthorne’s most explicitly autobiographical (Oberon was the nickname Hawthorne used in his post-college correspondence with Horatio Bridge), and they provide telling insights into some of Hawthorne’s concerns about himself as an author, his appearance, and his appearance as an author. In “Fragments from the Journal of a Solitary Man” (1837), the faithful friend (suggestive of Bridge) who reads, with mingled feelings of interest and guilt, the dead Oberon’s journal comes across this record of one of Oberon’s dreams:

“I dreamed that one bright forenoon I was walking through Broadway. . . . By degrees, too, I perceived myself the object of universal attention, and, as it seemed, of horror and affright. Every face grew pale; the laugh was hushed, and the voices died away in broken syllables; the people in the shops crowded to the doors with a ghastly stare, and the passers on all sides fled as from an embodied pestilence. The horses reared and snorted. An old beggar woman sat before St. Paul’s church, with her withered palm stretched out to all, but drew it back from me, and pointed to the graves and monuments in that populous church-yard. Three lovely girls, whom I had formerly known, ran shrieking across the street. A personage in black, whom I was about to overtake, suddenly turned his head,
and showed the features of a long-lost friend. He gave me a look of hor-
ror and was gone."

Oberon then notes that he stopped moving and “threw my eyes on a look-
ing-glass . . . At the first glimpse of my own figure I awoke, with a horrible sen-
sation of self-terror and self-loathing.” Little wonder, Oberon notes, that he
caused the town to flee in fright: “I had been promenading Broadway in my
shroud!” (my emphasis, 11: 317–18).

Hawthorne extends the shock effect of this Poe-like ejaculation for the
duration of “The Minister’s Black Veil,” in which the enshrouded minister
of a Puritan-era New England town provokes fear and wonder, “just by hid-
ing his face.” “The Minister’s Black Veil,” a voluminously critiqued story,
might seem an odd example of narcissistic themes. After all, its protagonist
veils his face, not wanting his face ever again to be seen on earth, and suc-
cedes at his goal, though not without cost. Yet this story perhaps most reso-
nantly communicates the anguished heart of Hawthorne’s visual and sexual
themes. “The veil is the type and symbol of the fact that all signs are poten-
tially unreadable, or that the reading of them is unverifiable,” writes J. Hillis
Miller.37 The veil exposes and thematizes the hermeneutical problem of read-
ing: “In order to demystify, ‘unmask,’ I must forget that I am using as the
‘tool’ of unmasking the thing I am unmasking, the trope of personification.”
The story foregrounds the “stubborn presupposition that behind every mask
there is a face, and behind every face, as behind every sign or configuration
of signs, there is somewhere a personality, a self, a subject, a transcendental
go.”38

Though I agree that the tale exposes our utter dependence on the “figure
of prosopopeia,” or personification, I would pull back from the philosophi-
cal broadness of Miller’s eloquent reading and focus in on the specificity of
the particular mask upon which the story fixates. “The Minister’s Black Veil”
certainly lends itself to many interpretations, but it is also quite simply a
work about an ambiguous young man who decides to veil his face from his
community and even from his “plighted wife.” Much more adamantly than
other Hawthorne characters, Hooper, both phobic site and cultic goad of
the visual, refuses inclusion in the gaze by barring his face from others; but
he thereby simultaneously makes himself a perpetual incitement of the gaze.
Struck by the mask, the story’s townspeople shudder and quake in Hooper’s
presence even as they endlessly peer at his cordoned-off visage. Even at the
end of his life, Hooper adamantly fends off demands that he take off his veil,
at last; his veil provokes an unending desire to see him unveiled. His refusal
to take off the veil even on his deathbed—and even after death, as the narra-
tor shudders to imagine his body rotting beneath his eternal veil—emerges as a strategy for control of the visual field, both acquiescence and resistance to the ravenous public glare.39

In the work this tale most closely prefigures, *The Scarlet Letter*, another young minister, his “tremulous” beauty vividly described, endures even more strenuous bouts with his own reflection, and his desirability as a visual object. Adulterer Arthur Dimmesdale’s nightly self-flagellation rituals include terrifying encounters with a “looking-glass” in which he sees images that torment him. In one of the most famous episodes of the novel, Dimmesdale’s exposed chest, upon which the dread titular symbol may or may not be engraved, emerges as a site of visual wonder for the villain, the cuckolded and vengeful old physician Roger Chillingworth.40

Other works also fuse visual ardor and dread within narcissistic self-mesmerization. In Hawthorne’s final tale “Feathertop,” discussed earlier in this chapter, a handsome young dandy, who is in reality nothing more than a heap of rubbish given the illusory appearance of a young man by Mother Rigby, a salty-tongued, salaciously lively old witch, enraptures a young woman with his apparently handsome form. But when this Adonis in feathers looks at himself in the mirror, initially as enraptured by the spectacle of his own beauty as she, he discovers the traumatic truth behind his sham surface handsomeness, almost literally crumbling at the sight of his revealed self. He discovers that, once it is shorn of artifice and nakedly revealed, his true self is unbearably hideous. “Feathertop” vividly depicts self-recognition as traumatic; I can think of no more acutely affecting depiction of spectrophobia, the fear of looking at oneself in the mirror, in literature. In *The Blithedale Romance*, which we examine closely in the next chapter, Coverdale finds the odious mesmerist Westervelt both the handsomest man he has ever seen and a humbug whose handsomeness hides a true and abiding ugliness. It is in *The Blithedale Romance* that the narcissistic gaze—in the form of voyeurism—most vividly emerges as a strategy for negotiating homoerotic feelings that verge on explosive crisis. The meeting between Coverdale and Westervelt indexes the homoerotic and homophobic themes linked throughout Hawthorne’s work.

**SELF-OVERSEEING**

To make the sense of vision the central topic of our discussion of Hawthorne threatens to impose this most imperialistic of senses—imperialistic and often critiqued as such—on Hawthorne’s work. That is certainly not
my intention; rather, I am attempting to respond to the pervasive scenes of looking and being looked at, of vision enacted, that he makes central, and to think through their implications. There are numerous senses at work in Hawthorne (think of those overpoweringly odiferous flowers in “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” which are also such tactile objects; the resplendent visual beauty but also the tactility of Hester’s embroidered A; the stone flesh of his faun). Nevertheless, it is the visual that is privileged. One of the effects Hawthorne derives from his privileging of the visual, in terms of his equally insistent preoccupation with masculinity, is that the visual becomes the key to male subjectivity, the rubric through which it makes sense of itself. If this claim has any validity, we have to acknowledge that men in Hawthorne don’t like what they see. But more importantly, they learn something about themselves that they otherwise may not have—or, more properly, we learn something about them.

To begin with, we learn that men attempt to control others through their eyes. Men’s eyes, however, betray them. Agents with the power to turn back the gaze upon the viewer, men’s ocular organs reflect the inner darkness of men. At a wedding for a young couple, the black-veiled Minister Hooper catches “a glimpse of his own figure in the looking-glass,” and when he does, “the black veil involved his own spirit in the horror with which it overwhelmed all others” (9: 43–44). What makes this scene chilling is that Hooper has, before his donning of the veil, been especially beloved for his shyly sweet presence at such gatherings. Now, he is an emblem of fear and a source of unease. A potential terror lurks within the genial and the unassuming; the veil is this potentiality made literal, tangible, visual.

Though Michael J. Colacurcio’s approach is quite different from my own, his observation is apt: “The terrifying discovery, just as everywhere recorded and predicted, is that no human self will . . . bear very much looking into.” Colacurcio links Hooper’s traumatic self-encounter in the looking-glass to Puritan theology as it followed Saint Paul and what these theologians referred to as the “looking-glass of the law.” As I will have further occasion to discuss in the last chapter, this moment alerts us as well to the thematic of race that gains in intensity and preoccupation in Hawthorne’s late work. Hawthorne’s creation of a dark white identity, “ten times black,” to wax Melvillean, in figures such as the black-veiled young man Hooper has relevance for masculinity and increasing relevance for race, especially in that this darkness connotes sexual anxiety and ambivalence, gender disturbance, and racial anxiety at once.

In one of the most penetrating points he makes in The Western Canon, Harold Bloom, characteristically reading Freud through Shakespeare,
observes, “When [Shakespeare’s] characters change, or will themselves to change on self-overhearing, they prophesy the psychoanalytic situation in which patients are compelled to overhear themselves in the context of their transferences to their analysts.” I suggest that Hawthorne’s males have the same gift for prophecy. They also possess the analogous potential to be self-overseeing. Just as Bloom’s self-overhearing Shakespearean characters, such as Edmund in *King Lear*, do not often absorb the perceptions into their own conflicted psyches that they have themselves uttered but only do so on rare occasions of self-insightfulness, Hawthorne’s males, catching on rare but piercing occasions the “true” sight of their own conflicted, divided, tormented natures, for a moment glimpse their interior darkness and confront the harrowing knowledge of their own fragility.

These shocks of self-recognition, however, occur infrequently and are actively avoided: “he never willingly passed before a mirror,” the narrator tells us of Minister Hooper’s subsequent strategies of avoidance, “lest . . . he should be affrighted by himself.” Little wonder, then, that “love or sympathy could never reach him” (9: 48). The last time that his faithful though forever excluded fiancée Elizabeth saw Hooper was in “the comeliness of manhood”; implicitly, Hawthorne suggests, the sight of Hooper unveiled was enough to keep Elizabeth loyal to him (9: 51). This detail comes late in the story, but the confirmation of the male’s beauty must be there, somewhere, like an artist’s artfully camouflaged but always discoverable signature. (Similarly, very late in *The Blithedale Romance*, Zenobia calls Coverdale “much the handsomest man,” and ruefully wonders why she didn’t just take up with him instead of pursuing the emotionally unavailable Hollingsworth.) Hooper’s self-veiling is the most extreme form of scopophobia in Hawthorne, but it is a strategy also marked by scopophilia, the ravenous desire to look. By donning the veil, Hooper paradoxically both deflects the gaze and endlessly incites it, one of the many predicaments of Hawthorne’s visually obsessed and obsession-inducing men. Hooper’s eerie, almost malevolent smile, a trope that attends the conclusion of his breakup scene with Elizabeth and other moments, suggests an erotic self-satisfaction in his refusal of the gaze, a desire to be seen which, in donning the veil, he has himself so skillfully incited and which his apparent self-camouflaging would appear so adamantly to negate.

HAWTHORNE’S VOYEURISM

If many of Hawthorne’s males avoid the gaze, many of his males also attempt to wield it. Their ravenous looking leads not to self-confrontation but to
more avid attempts to look at others, a voyeuristic quest that is, ironically, motivated by a hunger to see the self, albeit one that can never be acknowledged as such. Vision becomes an increasingly, even obsessively, important theme in Hawthorne’s mature work. Though the visual preoccupations have many different implications and components, even thinking of them in terms of masculinity alone is revealing. The obsessive spying of “Rappaccini’s Daughter” transforms into the onanistic voyeurism of The Blithedale Romance; the Narcissus-like young men of the tales transform into the once beautiful, now ruined Clifford of The House of the Seven Gables, a character who is a veritable index of traumatic narcissism in that his ruined beauty is linked to his failed promise, his having been entombed in a prison right at the moment of his blooming into adulthood (which continues the theme from Fanshawe onward of youthful male promise destroyed by blight), his oppression by patriarchal power; moreover, the novel foregrounds an interest in the ethics of the visual (the Pyncheon portrait, uncannily lifelike, with its strange power to extend the patriarchal gaze; Holgrave’s role as daguerreotypist, treated ambivalently). In House of the Seven Gables, Alice Pyncheon’s startlingly speculative, desiring gaze at Matthew Maule unnerves his masculine subjectivity to the extent that he feels he must punish her, using his sorcerer’s skills to turn her into a zombie and eventually destroying her, to his later horror. When the woman looks at male bodies, as she often does in Hawthorne, the results can be harrowing. The Marble Faun makes masculinity and the visual a central theme right from the first chapter, in which the titular sculpture is presented and discussed and the character of Donatello is depicted as both sexually desirable and as someone who conceals a visual wonder, his purportedly faunlike ears. The feral but feminized Donatello is the object of the collective gaze, threatened with exposure of his hidden attributes, whatever they may be. In his late, unfinished manuscripts, Hawthorne’s career-long interest in a masculinity that blurs the lines of gender and sexuality expands to include increasingly urgent concerns over race, concerns implicitly present throughout Hawthorne but now made much more explicit. These topics will be the focus of the last chapter. As I will develop in chapter 7, Hawthorne’s thematization of what I call “visual identity” reaches a new level of mature development in The Marble Faun, in which the narcissistic crisis in his work achieves a kind of closure. Hawthorne’s responses to classical male beauty recorded in his French and Italian notebooks, specifically to the homoerotic cult icon Antinous, open up the question anew of Hawthorne’s fundamentally conflicted relationship to male beauty.

Tied to male subjectivity, vision in Hawthorne emerges, finally, as invasive and injurious, in other words, as voyeurism. In turn, voyeurism
emerges as the default mode of male subjectivity. Hawthorne’s work teems with obsessive male lookers, ambiguous figures whose desire to see others crosses the line into perversity: the titular protagonist of “Wakefield” installs himself as a perpetual watcher of his own life in his absence; Chillingworth spies on Dimmesdale, just as Coverdale spies on his fellow Blithedalers from his “inviolate bower” up in a tree; the Model spies on Miriam in *The Marble Faun*. Spying becomes the way males coordinate social relations, however one-sided such relations must necessarily be. The relationship of narcissism and shame to voyeurism opens up our discussion considerably. In his depiction of voyeurism, Hawthorne evokes the narcissistic and shame-filled nature of the voyeuristic gaze. Moreover, he ties these affective responses to the appeal and the fear of same-sex desire. These themes will be our central focus in the next chapter.