The Fragility of Manhood

Greven, David

Published by The Ohio State University Press

Greven, David.
The Ohio State University Press, 2012.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/24241.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/24241

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=858905
With its erotic themes, obsession with law and conformity, and fascination with their psychic effects, Hawthorne’s work provides an interesting opportunity to consider the ways in which narcissism and voyeurism imbricate one another. In Hawthorne’s 1852 novel *The Blithedale Romance*, both modes coalesce in Blithedale’s “amorous New World,” a realm of apparent sexual license in which each member of the utopian community is seemingly given free rein to act on his or her desires. Wielded by Hawthorne’s famously first-person protagonist Miles Coverdale, the male gaze of this novel indexes a range of Hawthorne’s concerns: narcissism and voyeurism, autoeroticism and onanism, sexual tourism and self-display, sadism and masochism, self-pleasure and shame, and the established codes of sexual appreciation, the heterosexual, the homoerotic, the bisexual, even the pansexual. But the gaze of *The Blithedale Romance* is varied and multiple: female as well as male, homoerotic as well as hetererotic, nonhuman as well as human, and Coverdale just as much its object as its subject, as my discussion of “the returned gaze” will demonstrate.

One could argue that Coverdale transforms his fellow denizens of a Brook Farm–like reformers’ community into the actors of a pornographic film, which he believes he can watch from afar, maintaining an illusion of mastery through his visual desire. In a discussion with a surprising relevance to this novel, Berkeley Kaite uses pornography as an opportunity to discuss the similarities between narcissism and voyeurism.1 Kaite helps us to understand the narcissistic core of voyeurism. While the voyeur seems compelled
by an aching need to see the other and possess the other by seeing, he chiefly
longs for a sight of the self, longings that are also illuminated by Lacanian
theory. Pornography emerges as a site in which the plangency and the sadism
of this narcissistic voyeurism has full reign. While it endows the spectator
with the sustaining, heady illusion of autoerotic plenitude, it proceeds from
the logic of prohibition: homoerotic desire is banned, and femininity must
conform to the demands of the male gaze. When voyeurism is understood as
a kind of narcissism, we can fully appreciate the ways in which an obsession
with looking at others reveals a profound ambivalence over how one looks
at oneself. Indeed, The Blithedale Romance may be said to be one of the first
American literary satires of the genre of pornography. In an extraordinarily
modern manner that anticipates the films of Alfred Hitchcock and Brian De
Palma, and films such as Michael Powell’s Peeping Tom (1960) and Martin
Scorsese’s Taxi Driver (1976), the novel rigorously interrogates the fantasies
of male mastery inherent in voyeurism.

HAWTHORNE AND THE GAZE

The young Ellen Langton stares at Fanshawe, the eponymous protagonist of
Hawthorne’s first novel, marveling at his beauty; the Minister Hooper pre-
vents anyone from seeing his face, hidden behind a black veil; Feathertop,
believing he cuts a dashing figure, stares at himself in the mirror, discov-
ering, to his horror, that he is merely the mirage of a man, a witch’s illu-
sion; Giovanni stares at lush, poisonous Beatrice Rappaccini in her equally
beautiful and deadly garden, little realizing that her father is all the while
staring at him as he stares at her, or that Rappaccini’s own scientific rival,
Baglioni, is spying on them all; Chillingworth triumphantly stares at the
exposed flesh of sleeping, guilt-ridden Dimmesdale: these examples of the
function of the gaze in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s work metonymically symbol-
ize numerous important issues that inform his oeuvre. Hawthorne’s intensely,
provocatively visual literary work invites cinematic comparisons. Through-
out the book so far, I have been evoking Laura Mulvey’s well-known theory
of the male gaze. While her theory remains crucial to my understanding of
male visual desire, I also challenge her work here, as have numerous critics
in the field of film studies, using Hawthorne’s cinematic novel as an example
of representation that complicates gendered subject positions vis-à-vis the
gaze. In his work, Hawthorne makes it impossible to assign clear positions
of dominance and submission. In so doing, he offers valuable contributions
to our understanding of the construction and organization of gender and
sexuality in the antebellum United States. By rendering male subjects just as often the objects as the wielders of the gaze, Hawthorne insists that we view men as possible objects of erotic contemplation, thereby beckoning queer and feminist analysis.

If I am arguing that the radical nature of Hawthorne’s work lies, in part, in his insistence on rendering male figures the object of multiple gazes, *The Blithedale Romance* poses a theoretical dilemma, since its protagonist, the cynical poet Miles Coverdale, clearly wields the gaze: one might even say his chief agenda is eluding the gaze of others by gazing at them first. In this chapter, I examine the psychic costs of wielding the gaze, arguing that Hawthorne demonstrates the considerable potential personal risks involved in the avid desire to look, which he never treats as an act or symbol of power but, instead, as the very evidence of the debilitated fragility of the gazer. To be clear, I am not arguing that Hawthorne depicts the phallic gazer as a victim who should be pitied for the patriarchal power he must embody and enact through gazing; this chapter eschews any special pleading for the anxious condition of aggrieved American manhood. As Suzanne R. Stewart, in a study of late-nineteenth-century masochism and manhood, writes, “The problem with so many postmodern theories of the subject is the elevation of the failure of subjectivity into a general condition of all subjectivity, a failure that is then celebrated as subversive.” The subversive energy of the novel lies in the manner whereby Hawthorne exposes Coverdale’s act of seeming masculine dominance—wielding the gaze, voyeuristically devouring what he sees—as indicative of a hopelessly unsuccessful embodiment of male power. In so doing, I argue that *The Blithedale Romance* can be read as a critique of developing antebellum forms and theories of American masculinity; an evocation of queer threats to it; and as a phobically defensive treatment of the issues of effeminacy that personally plagued Hawthorne. Moreover, and more pressingly, I will argue that *The Blithedale Romance* provides a particular theorization of heteronormative masculinity’s relationship to the male gaze.

As I established earlier, while I am influenced by Lacan’s theory of the gaze as a visual field in which the subject is only one figure and the object looks back at the subject, but at a position from which the subject cannot see itself being looked at by the object, I follow Mulvey in seeing the gaze as an act with real effects on those who look and those who are looked at. In other words, I accept and find useful for my own purposes—though I am not in agreement with many of Mulvey’s claims in her 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”—her literalization of the Lacanian theory of the gaze. Mulvey theorizes the gaze as *the male gaze,* the act of looking at
others on the part of the male subject. While I disagree with her reading of the classical Hollywood cinema as being dominated by this male gaze and of the consistent effects of its power as she describes them, and while I aim to show that Hawthorne’s work destabilizes her views, I nevertheless orient my own thinking around Mulvey’s argument.

Mulvey argues that the male protagonist of the classical Hollywood film as well as the spectator, gendered male, have two strategies for avoiding a defining fear of castration: voyeurism and fetishism. (As an example of my disagreement with Mulvey, I believe that many of the artists she discusses as exemplary of the defensive uses of these strategies actually depict the strategies in a critical way, exposing them as urgent and destructive defenses. Hitchcock’s 1958 *Vertigo*, which Mulvey reads an example of these effects, is a rigorous analysis of them.) Along these lines, I compare constructions and theorizations of the voyeuristic gaze in Hawthorne, Freud, Lacan, and Hitchcock, artists and thinkers who all use the voyeuristic male gaze as a means of both establishing and deconstructing normative models of patriarchal power. These psychoanalytic and cinematic perspectives illuminate the ways in which Hawthorne’s ineluctable conservatism competes with a potential radicalism—his phobic demonizations of male deviance with a genuinely probing inquiry into the nature of male dominance, especially as organized around vision. I argue that the voyeuristic male gaze allows Hawthorne first to spy on and then to confront normative forms of manhood and masculinity. While I focus on the queer implications of Hawthorne’s work, especially in terms of the gaze, this focus hardly exhausts the potentialities of Hawthorne gaze-theory.

The feminist implications of the desiring gaze in Hawthorne’s work are just as rich, complex, and tantalizing, and demand further analysis than I can provide in this chapter. In chapter 6, I will turn to issues of female sexuality within the context of the gaze. For now, let me establish that these issues are deeply embedded within the core themes of Hawthorne’s work. Ellen Langton’s desiring appraisal of Fanshawe’s troubled beauty; Hester’s ardent desire for Dimmesdale; seemingly meek, wan, sweet Alice Pyncheon’s frank physical appraisal of Matthew Maule are among the many examples of the female desiring gaze in Hawthorne’s work. As I argue in my book *Men Beyond Desire*, the figure of the inviolate male (such as Fanshawe, Natty Bumppo, Dimmesdale, Stowe’s Tom, Billy Budd), opposed to both female and homosocial/homoerotic desire, recurs throughout nineteenth-century texts. This man beyond desire, in his emotional, physical, and sexual unavailability, transforms fictional worlds into fields of erotic play in which female and queer desirers both discover opportunities to gaze, a surprising agency
to roam the inhospitable expanse of beautiful and undesiring men. In this chapter, I am considering the implications for queer theory of the complex version of male subjectivity we find in Hawthorne, one that oscillates between spectator and object positions. But the fuller understanding of these questions can only come through further work on the implications for feminist literary theory of Hawthorne’s representation of masculinity, femininity, sexual difference, and the gaze.

Nina Baym writes that “gay/queer criticism is male-centered by definition. Homosocial and homoerotic moments are excavated and attributed either to Hawthorne’s own suppressed sexual inclinations or to the sublimated, affect-laden idealizations of male–male relationships in antebellum culture.” Baym’s description may be an accurate one for most queer readings of Hawthorne’s work, and the present chapter does indeed focus on Hawthorne and manhood, largely because any queer reading of any author’s work that does not contextualize itself within the larger question of gender construction is, in my view, unintelligible. But certainly a queer approach to Hawthorne can and should include a consideration of his representation of active female desire. Certainly, one could at the very least read the transgressive desire of his fiery heroines such as Hester Prynne, Zenobia, and Miriam Schaeffer as allegories for transgressive desire of all kinds; moreover, the issue of queer male identification with the desiring woman is crucial though often overlooked.

In her important study *Domestic Individualism*, Gillian Brown discusses voyeurism in the novel and Freudian theory in relation to it. Brown places, however, more emphasis on fetishism, particularly in terms of Coverdale’s misogynistic reduction of women, such as the fiery Zenobia, to literal objects, such as her shoe, discovered separately when the drowned Zenobia’s dead body is dragged from the water at the climax. One could establish, then, that both Brown’s and my readings proceed from the basis of Mulvey’s argument, with my own reading emphasizing voyeurism, hers fetishism. For Brown, fetishism, when seen itself as a form of visual pleasure, defends against homoerotic attraction here. It also allows, through a series of displacements, Coverdale to remain safely a consumer—of objects, of women, of men. “In the consumerist pleasures and anxieties of looking that Hawthorne explores,” she writes, “homophobia and misogyny proscribe not specific sexes and sexualities, but the visibility of specificity: they prohibit the possibility of the spectator being static enough to be seen.”

I discuss fetishism at length in the next chapter, and specifically in relationship to femininity and female sexuality. Here, however, my interest is in the ways in which the spectator is, actually, constantly in the act of being seen.
within his presumed scenes of invisible visual mastery. Hence my focus on the returned gaze. I share Brown’s feminist concern for the treatment of the female characters as fetishistic objects, and am in agreement with her reading that Coverdale uses his voyeurism and also his fetishistic regard for people-as-objects in an effort to avoid spectatorial exposure himself. And, though it is not my focus, I also agree with her reading of Coverdale as a nineteenth-century consumer and the importance of the novel to middle-class consumer culture generally, especially in its fantasies of consumerist visual impunity. But in my view the novel more directly engages with Coverdale’s “strategies for safe spectatorship,” as Brown puts it, in part to expose the homosexual panic, to use an anachronistic, perhaps, but nevertheless irresistible term, at its core. The novel itself incorporates homophobic anxiety into its representation of Coverdale’s gaze, but at the same time, it exposes and critiques it as such. Moreover, the women, transformed into fetish objects, at times return Coverdale’s gaze, and with a saucy, derisive aplomb at that.

A GREAT DEAL OF EYE-SHOT

Unlike Fanshawe, Minister Hooper, Feathertop, and Dimmesdale, Miles Coverdale, Blithedale’s cryptic first-person narrator, occupies the position of watcher, the bachelor onlooker, or “third man,” who observes male–female love triangles. Alternatively, he also represents the “fourth side,” as writer, reader, and also participant in the dramatic action. Characters such as Fanshawe and Dimmesdale occupy the position of being the object of the desiring gaze, recalling classical figures such as Endymion, a young man so beautiful that the moon goddess Selene insisted that Zeus cast a perpetual sleep over him so that she could forever gaze upon and caress him. But in contrast, Coverdale wields the gaze, albeit surreptitiously, almost as hidden a voyeuristic viewer as James Stewart’s Jeffries (“Jeff”) in Hitchcock’s Rear Window (1954).

Coverdale enjoys a “rare seclusion” in his “hermitage,” a “leafy cave” high up in the branches of a pine tree. The “decay” of branches “lovingly strangled” by “vine” forms this “hollow chamber.” Within his little bower, Coverdale counts “the innumerable clusters of my vine,” and forereckons “the abundance of my vintage.” Like Fanshawe, the protagonist of Hawthorne’s first novel, he is a ruler in an autoerotic world of his own. “This hermitage,” reveals Coverdale, “symbolized my individuality, and aided me in keeping it inviolate” (3: 98–99). Coverdale’s declaration firmly establishes that, while he fantasizes about Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla, his
first thoughts tend toward his own “vine” and “vintage,” and the hermitage merely extrudes the interior inviolate individuality into which Coverdale burrows. And from this vantage point, Coverdale “peeps,” for his position is “loft enough to serve as an observatory,” from where he can observe Hollingsworth, Priscilla, the Blithedale goings-on. Coverdale transforms his inviolate sanctuary into a theater in which his scopophilic spectatorship has full voyeuristic reign and range—the self as Panopticon (3: 99).

If Coverdale fetishistically gazes at those around him, the way he looks at Zenobia triggers her to call him on it: “I have been exposed to a great deal of eye-shot . . . but never, I think, to precisely such glances as you are in the habit of favoring me with” (3: 47). If, in Mulvey fashion, Coverdale objectifies women through the power of his vision, Zenobia unflinchingly returns his gaze, a topic to which we will return. Coverdale’s anguished appreciation of Hollingsworth’s beauty—coming, as it does, along with a sense that Hollingsworth is neither terribly kind nor trustworthy—appears to translate into onanistic fantasy with self-flagellating (shades of Dimmesdale) repercussions, “exemplifying the kind of error into which my mode of observation was calculated to lead me”:

In my recollection of his dark and impressive countenance, the features grew more sternly prominent than the reality, duskier in their depth and shadow, and more lurid in their light. . . . On meeting him again, I was often filled with remorse, when his deep eyes beamed kindly on me. . . .” He is a man after all!” thought I—“his Maker’s own truest image . . . not that steel engine of the Devil’s own contrivance, a philanthropic man!” But, in my wood-walks, and in my silent chamber, the dark face frowned at me again. (3: 71).

One is reminded of the fiendish figure of the young man’s “Shame” who stands before him between consciousness and sleep in the tale “The Haunted Mind.” Sophia Hawthorne knew very well that when Hawthorne referred to a solitary chamber, he evoked onanistic pleasure, one reason why she obliterated references to such “filthiness” in her husband’s writing. Like the onanist of antebellum health and sexual reformer Sylvester Graham’s perfervid imaginings, Coverdale feverishly retreats into private “recollection” in his “silent,” secret chamber, where reproduced images of Hollingsworth take on a lurid luster of almost explicitly onanistic and homoerotic fantasy, solidified even in negation by the phallicized quality of what Hollingsworth supposedly is not, a “steel engine.” It is little wonder that when Coverdale sees Hollingsworth after his solitary imaginings, he feels remorse—even less won-
der that this paragraph precedes both Coverdale’s declaration that he finds Hollingsworth beautiful and the description of Blithedale as a Golden Age that promotes polyamorous amativeness, that authorizes “any individual, of either sex, to fall in love with any other, regardless of what would elsewhere be judged suitable and prudent” (3: 72).

The inviolate male in Hawthorne (and other authors’ works) overlaps with the construction of the onanist in the theories of myriad antebellum sexual and health reformers such as Sylvester Graham, John Todd, and Mary Gove Nichols. In this chapter, my focus will be not on onanism as a discursive category, but on Hawthorne’s fusing of an onanistic with a voyeuristic persona in Coverdale, and the various effects such a fusion has on the novel. Contemporary critics have linked Hawthorne’s concerns in *The Blithedale Romance* to the science-fiction author and literary theorist Samuel Delany’s in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, a study on peep shows, pornographic theaters, and social regulation in New York City. I take these claims to their logical conclusion, seeing Coverdale as an onanistic Peeping Tom in the ever-illuminated pornographic theater of the Blithedale community. If Coverdale is a Peeping Tom, it is a subject position that implies onanistic sensibility. Admiring the beauty of both men and women at Blithedale, Coverdale roams this utopian space as onanistic voyeur, tourist of erotic possibilities.

In chapter 1 we outlined Lacan’s theory of the gaze, which has elicited many critical treatments. Focusing specifically on forms of the gaze most relevant to *Blithedale*—the voyeuristic and the returned gaze—we come to some suggestive points toward our fuller understanding of the gaze in Hawthorne. I will first consider the voyeuristic gaze. Because of the sadomasochistic quality of Coverdale’s simultaneously anguished and merciless voyeurism, I find Freud’s treatment of voyeurism particularly illuminating. Archeologically excavating “the early history of the sexual instinct,” Freud observes that infantile sexuality “from the very first involves other people as sexual objects.” Scopophilia, exhibitionism, and cruelty, linked “instincts,” exist somewhat “independently” from erotogenic sexual activity, dominating the early lives of children. In Freud’s view very young children are, crucially, not plagued by shame, and because of this they exude a great “satisfaction” in exhibiting their own bodies before others. (As I suggested in chapter 2, however, children are hardly immune to shame.) Onanistic children, fascinated by their own genitals, also develop an interest in the genitals of others. Such children most often develop into “voyeurs, eager spectators of the processes of micturition and defecation,” activities likeliest to satisfy eyes hungering for a glimpse of hidden genitals. After repression sets in, this desire to see
others’ genitals becomes a “tormenting compulsion.” Even more independent an impulse than scopophilia, cruelty comes easily to the child, for the affect of pity, like shame, develops late (SE 7: 191–92).21

In his conflation of scopophilia, exhibitionism, and cruelty, Freud appears to suggest that these drives, rather than depending on sexual identity or feeling, manifest themselves as forces with their own agency, onerous demands, power. Moreover, these drives’ interrelated qualities hinge on pitilessly attempting to exert dominance over the entire exhibitionistic spectacle. Voyeurism curdles into a desperate sorrow, forever attempting to outwit more powerful repressive forces, while never relinquishing its essentially pitiless agenda to force the gaze-object to submit to the gazing subject. In terms of Coverdale’s gaze, the masochism of his own onanistic voyeurism never mitigates the cruelty inherent in his own relentless desire to possess through his ravenous eyes.

Important valences unite Blithedale and Freud’s Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. Both works relentlessly assign zoological “types” to sexual and gendered categories while perpetually insisting on the fundamental cruelty of desire’s self-propagating exertions. Both works also insist that, far from signifying mere isolate self-regard verging on solipsism, onanistic activity only incites desire for the incorporation, through scopophilia, of the desired other; in fact, onanistic voyeurism becomes an ingenious strategy not only for connecting to others but for possessing and memorializing them, pressing them permanently on the mind’s unblinking “inward eye,” to lift from Wordsworth’s poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” (written in 1804, first published in 1807, and published in revised form in 1815), where they can be made to “flash” at will. The chief relevance in Freud’s work here for the present inquiry lies in its insistence on seeing cruelty and torment as inherent aspects of scopophilia generally, voyeurism specifically.

The curious gendered politics of Lacan’s theory of the gaze demand some attention. Lacan’s theoretical formulations of the gaze are as redolent of gendered anxieties as they are insightful about them. For Lacan, writes Robert Samuels in a Lacanian reading of Hitchcock films, the “ego is pure nothingness. . . . the subject is narcissistically invested in all of its external representations . . . the subject represses any awareness of its own nothingness or its own lack of representation.” Desperately attempting to avoid any confrontation with its own lack, the ego projects it “into the place of the Other,” then using “this nothingness, or what Lacan called the ‘object’ (a), as a cause of its own desire or anxiety. In our current civilization and social structure, this dialectic between the Imaginary state of consciousness and the projected object of nothingness is most often played out in gendered and
racial terms.”22 Like Jefferies in Hitchcock’s 1954 film Rear Window, Coverdale perpetually seeks to elude knowledge of his own insubstantiality by forever busying himself with the “external representations” of his own narcissism, that is, the other Blithedalers, who also conveniently provide him with an external cause for his own marginalization (“How little did these two women care for me . . . !” [124]). But rather than projecting his own nothingness exclusively on female characters, who can then conveniently embody the fearsome lack/castration he disavows in himself, Coverdale projects his own nothingness onto male characters as well, most strikingly the mesmerist Westervelt, who embodies Coverdale’s “lack” in a vividly homophobic manner. Inadvertently or otherwise, slippages between homoeroticism and homophobia characterize Lacan’s treatment of the gaze, in a manner, as we shall see, similar to Hawthorne’s. The subject of the gaze seeks to see the “object as absence.”23

As Lacan himself writes,

> What the voyeur is looking for and finds is merely a shadow, a shadow behind the curtain. There he will phantasize any magic of presence, the most graceful of girls, for example, even if on the other side there is only a hairy athlete. What he is looking for is not, as one says, the phallus—but precisely its absence, hence the pre-eminence of certain forms as the objects of his search.24

Lacan’s formulation excludes potential feminine and/or queer voyeuristic desire. Continuing to keep our focus on queer desire for the purposes of this study, we may wonder what would happen if this voyeuristic subject were queer. If the queer voyeuristic subject seeks a literal phallus rather than a phantasmatic ideal, symbolic one, the phallus of the hairy athlete who is no goofy, farcical booby prize but the actual focus of the male subject’s fantasy (by making him hirsute, athletic, Lacan makes this masculine object especially homoerotic), what might he find on “the other side”? If Lacan is unable here to imagine actual male fantasy for another male, he nevertheless provides a means whereby homoerotic voyeuristic fantasy may be considered. If Coverdale, as moved by Hollingsworth’s as he is by Zenobia’s or Priscilla’s beauty (perhaps even more so), projects his own nothingness upon Hollingsworth, and upon Westervelt, does he find merely the shadow he seeks, the absence in which his own nothingness may be projected?

In the provocative relays among subject, gaze, gender, and otherness that organize The Blithedale Romance, Hawthorne parleys his own gendered and sexual anxieties into the only first-person narrator of his novels, who then
projects his own anxieties into the beckoning void of the other characters whom Coverdale voyeuristically fetishizes. In Lacanian terms, Hawthorne may be said to project his own sense of gendered nothingness into Coverdale, who then projects his own onto Hollingsworth and Westervelt, freeing himself of it, even more successfully freeing Hawthorne—now at an even greater, safer remove—of it. Yet the uncannily unexpected occurs: the text—the void, the shadow that ostensibly marks an absence—will swerve about to reveal another set of eyes, its own; they look back on the subject desperately attempting to escape its own insubstantiality through its projected gaze.25

**MEDUSAN MANHOOD**

If Coverdale describes himself in a manner that suggests the self as Panopticon, or figures his mind as a pornographic theater in which he can play recorded erotic images, the novel’s interest in evoking images of the Medusa take on a special relevance. The head of the panoptical self, the head-as-pornographic theater: Medusan references corroborate the head as a site of danger and excitement but also one of pollution and contagion. If thine head offend thee, cut it off.

Hawthorne referred to himself as the “Decapitated Surveyor” in “The Custom House,” thus associating himself with both Perseus, slayer of the Gorgon, and with Medusa herself (as Joel Pfister also argues), a mythological story he retells in his 1852 *A Wonder Book*, a work of children’s literature.26 (In chapter 28 of *Moby-Dick*, Melville makes reference to Cellini’s famous statue of Perseus holding the decapitated head of Medusa, comparing Perseus to Ahab. Elsewhere, he associates the Whale with Medusa.) Hawthorne explicitly uses Medusa—a spectacular subject of the gaze, the ultimate example of the terrible effects of looking, a prime example of male gazing with potentially fatal results—as a symbol in *Blithedale*. Coverdale obliquely associates Zenobia with Medusa and himself with Perseus, who can see the Gorgon only in a mirror (reflected in his shield) lest he be turned to stone: “Zenobia had turned aside. But I caught the reflection of her face in the mirror” (3: 167). When she, as raconteur, entertains the Blithedalers, Zenobia likens the Veiled Lady to Medusa (3: 110). Given Freud’s eloquently shocking formulation of the Medusa myth as representative of the terror of the primal scene, these references to Medusa clearly associate Zenobia with a threateningly vivid, voracious female sexuality.27

But what are we to make of Westervelt’s equally Medusan manhood? Coverdale also associates the mustachioed, bearded, and odious Westervelt
with the Green Man, “hirsute and cinctured with a leafy girdle,” whom Marjorie Garber, in a different context, has described as a Male Medusa (91). Zenobia, the Medusan harlot, Westervelt, the Male Medusa, and Coverdale, the onanistic voyeur—these three conform to the triptych of Victorian social monsters, as Jonathan Ned Katz puts it, the prostitute, the sodomite, and the onanist, all enemies of the properly reproductive and normative family.

The Veiled Lady and the Coverdale–Westervelt episodes are exemplary and complementary scenes of spectatorial ambivalence centered in gendered and sexual anxiety. With the Veiled Lady, the veiling of a woman’s face functions as a metaphor for the sexual mystery of Woman, and emphasizes vision as the key to this mystery: unveiling her may reveal the face of beauty and sexual desirability or the Medusan face of ugliness and death. (As Richard Brodhead has persuasively shown, the Veiled Lady is an acute metaphor for the paradoxical possibilities of the “public woman” in antebellum culture.) The Coverdale–Westervelt episode stages an encounter with masculinity’s sexual mystery. Unveiled, male sexuality is both desirable and horrifying, and, again, vision functions as key to all sexual mysteries.

Coverdale immediately, instinctively despises Westervelt, who presumptuously hails Coverdale as “friend” (3: 90). Coverdale’s appraisal of Westervelt significantly relates to several themes in our discussion of Hawthorne: Westervelt is “young,” “well-developed,” “as handsome a man as ever I beheld.” Coverdale, however, does not like Westervelt’s style of beauty, “though a masculine” one (my emphasis). The problem with it? “He had no fineness of nature . . . [in his eyes was] the naked exposure of something that ought not to be left prominent” (3: 92). Coverdale hates him, he thinks, because Westervelt’s “foppish” garb outdoes his own “homely” one (3: 92). But this revelation clinches Coverdale’s appalled appraisal:

In the excess of his delight, he opened his mouth wide, and disclosed a gold band around the upper part of his teeth; thereby making it apparent that every one of his brilliant grinders and incisors was a sham. . . . I felt as if the whole man were a moral and physical humbug; his wonderful beauty of face, for aught I knew, might be removeable [sic] like a mask; . . . [there was] nothing genuine about him. . . .” (3: 95)

If Hawthorne ambivalently regards Fanshawe and Dimmesdale as beautiful young men blighted by onanism, no ambivalence, only a complete hatred, characterizes his response, through Coverdale, to Westervelt. In a provocative essay, Benjamin Scott Grossberg discusses the chief impasse between Coverdale and Hollingsworth as the incompatibility between Hollingsworth’s
homoerotic desire and Coverdale’s queer desire, which encompasses all of the Blithedale community, male and female alike. Yet Grossberg does not grapple with the intensely phobic manner in which Coverdale describes Westervelt—surely, a disruption of a marvelously omnivorous queer sensibility.32

When unveiled, Westervelt’s monstrous, artificially constructed mouth yawns open like a technologically engineered *vagina dentata*, with mechanized teeth and drawbridge flexibility. Through his representation of Westervelt as all mouth, and by making this somatic zone the prime feature of his Medusan manhood, Hawthorne equates effeminate males such as the “foppish” Westervelt with an alarming artificiality that suggests the consistent Hawthorne theme of physical blight, moral depravity, and “contagion.” If Hawthorne previously treated the effeminate male with a certain degree of sympathy, in Westervelt he throws him to the wolves. (Coverdale continues to see Westervelt-types—at the hotel, he spies on a “young man in a dressing-gown, standing before the glass and brushing his hair, for a quarter-of-an-hour together” [150].) From a critical psychoanalytic perspective—which critiques psychoanalytic theory’s ideological conservatism while also appreciating psychoanalysis for its value and making use of its insights—Hawthorne may be said, however anachronistically, to return the “homosexual” to the oral stage, the first stage of human psychosexual development, as Freud theorizes it in *Three Essays*. Such a return has homophobic implications, associating the nonnormative male with a regressive, stunted, “primitive” stage of human sexuality.

Not only does Hawthorne’s depiction of Westervelt homophobically correspond to Jacksonian mythologies and cultural dictates about European dandyish, effeminate artificiality versus sturdy American naturalism—Coverdale fears “the contagion of his strange mirth”—but it also reveals a great deal about Hawthorne’s own anxieties about his manhood, under constant threat from those in his circle.33 Hawthorne frustrated people who associated him with feminine qualities. “Oliver Wendell Holmes complained that trying to talk to Hawthorne was like ‘love-making.’ Hawthorne’s ‘shy, beautiful soul had to be wooed from its bashful pudency like an unschooled maiden.”34 Emerson’s relationship to Hawthorne is also suggestive. Hawthorne and Sophia lived in the Old Manse, the home in Concord, Massachusetts, that had been built for Emerson’s grandfather and in which Emerson wrote his famous chapter, *Nature*.35 Though often in close proximity to each other, the men appeared to regard each other with suspicion and maintained a strange, jangly relationship.36 Emerson, for his part, once remarked (in an 1838 journal entry) that Bronson Alcott and Hawthorne together would make one man.37 Much more paradoxically, Hawthorne suffered the slings and arrows
of charges of effeminacy after his marriage to Sophia. Sophia—not only as Hawthorne’s wife but also as a fellow artist (she created a memorable illustration for Hawthorne’s tale “The Gentle Boy”) who appreciated Hawthorne’s sensitive, “feminine” qualities—was forced to defend her husband against charges of “womanish weakness” from her own family after their marriage in the summer of 1842.38

Hawthorne imbues Westervelt with the calumniating qualities lobbed against the writer himself—foppishness, artificiality, effeminacy. A scapegoat, Westervelt bears these socially undesirable, deviant traits with a smirking gruesomeness that physically manifests his inner depravity.39 Hawthorne therefore presents himself as an ornery subject for a queer theorist to handle. His repulsion at effeminacy and at male–male bonds—while potentially antipatriarchal—carries a deeply homophobic charge as well.40 Yet his idealization of male beauty—which amounts to a refracted narcissism, an autoerotic/homoerotic relay between author, fictive mirror-image, and, if present, a spectator (usually, but not always, a woman) who acts as conduit—charges his work with considerable homoerotic power. As Robert K. Martin and Scott Derrick have each observed, Coverdale seems as drawn to as he is freaked out by Westervelt’s disconcerting erotic spectacle.41 (In this chapter I am also only focusing on one aspect of the continuum of sexual modes represented by Westervelt’s almost ectoplasmically multivalent sexuality. Westervelt as dandy would be one place to start examining numerous ricocheting sexual valences of his character: Westervelt is both the dandy as effeminate fop and the womanizing “diabolical dandy,” who leaves ruined women in his Valmont-like wake. The misogynistic and predatory aspects of Westervelt must not be forgotten and need further analysis.)

Coverdale’s loathing of Westervelt can be read as a specific feature of a general erotophobia that seemed to characterize Hawthorne’s reactions to Fourierianism. Hawthorne left Brook Farm, the famous, failed utopian communal experiment, before it adopted Fourierian philosophy in 1843; The Blithedale Romance is, of course, Hawthorne’s roman à clef depiction of his Brook Farm experiences. Despite considerable efforts on the part of Albert Brisbane, an American who tried to reimagine and reshape the Fourierian phalanstery system to make it more palatable to American tastes, Fourierian projects, such as Brook Farm ultimately became, received stinging criticisms that centered around the beliefs that Fourierian communities abolished marriage and promoted polyamorous relations.42 Certainly, Fourier’s own theories provided a deeply radical alternative to conventional middle-class morality. Hawthorne and his wife Sophia both read Fourier’s writing and expressed disdain; Hawthorne, reported Sophia, was left “thoroughly disgusted” by
what he read. Reading deeply in Fourier himself before writing the novel—Sophia quite adamantly insisted that they both read Fourier in his original French—Hawthorne reacted, in *Blithedale*, to the unadulterated, un-Americanized version of Fourierian utopianism, which promised polyamorous potentialities ranging from “vestalic’ virginity” to “complete promiscuity, both heterosexual and homosexual.” In other words, Hawthorne cringed at the possibilities suggested by the seemingly imminent realization of Fourier’s “New Amorous World.”

Another factor may account for the homophobic depiction of Westervelt. A great deal has been written about Hawthorne’s relationship with Herman Melville. Meeting Melville set the stage for writing *The Blithedale Romance*. While the history of commentary on the relationship between these wounded men is too complex to address in this chapter, it is fair to say that *The Blithedale Romance*’s extraordinarily push–pull relationship to male–male desire eerily resembles the dynamics of the Hawthorne–Melville relationship. Certainly, Hawthorne’s own feelings toward same-sex intimacies deepened over time—into a genuine disgust. In his first experiences visiting the Shaker communities, Hawthorne found them odd but rather quaint. But, visiting them again—significantly, with Melville—in the period in which *The Blithedale Romance* was written, Hawthorne expressed contempt, and a genuine revulsion, for same-sex Shaker sleeping arrangements. In chapter 7, I will return to a comparative analysis of both authors’ treatment of masculinity and male beauty in terms of their distinct reactions to classical sculpture and in the larger context of Melville’s late masterpiece *Billy Budd*.

While Hawthorne’s depiction of Westervelt as a bionic fop reeks of homophobic disgust, as a whole the novel’s depiction of manhood radically critiques national enforcements of masculine identity which were themselves founded on homophobic ideologies. The fears about his effeminacy surrounding Hawthorne especially around the time and the site of his marriage were one dimension of homo-threat in Hawthorne’s life. Others came from national currents in the construction of American manhood. The 1850s are a significant decade in the conflation of masculine character and physical strength. “In the three quarters of a century after the American Revolution, bourgeois Northerners showed the deepest concern for manhood in its moral, social, and political meanings, while placing a lesser emphasis on the male body,” writes E. Anthony Rotundo. “Then, in the second half of the nineteenth century, this relative emphasis began to change.” Middle-class men began paying “assiduous attention to their bodies.” Beginning in the 1850s, a “vogue of physical culture” became a mania that would be a fully entrenched aspect of American masculinity by the end of the decade.
novel’s critique of this newly hypermasculinist model of American manhood involves two seemingly unrelated yet, upon reflection, perfectly overlapping metaphorical themes: zoological allusions and the male/tourist/voituristic gaze.

The dangers of the gaze perpetually confront Coverdale. Interrupting their Comus-like masque in the forest, Coverdale gazes at the Blithedalers garbed as Indians, Arcadian shepherds, Shakers, the goddess Diana, and other oddly assorted figures, suggestive of the hellish forest orgy of “Young Goodman Brown” in its decadence. When these revelers spot Coverdale, they give chase, making him feel alternately like Actaeon, the young hunter who accidentally spied on the naked goddess Diana bathing in a pool (after she turns him into a stag, his own dogs kill him), and a “mad poet hunted by chimaeras (3: 211) (inverting the usual order of people chasing chimeras). The forest frolic in which Coverdale observes the Blithedale masque suggests another—Pentheus spying, in Euripides’ The Bacchae, on his mother reveling orgiastically among her fellow Maenads, female worshippers of Dionysius who become wildly drunk and tear animals apart with their hands. Discovering Pentheus, they decapitate him; his own mother, still in a mad bacchic haze, walks around with his head on a stick. Unmentioned yet suggested by the episode, the Pentheus story corresponds to the Medusan theme of castration/decapitation.

The Blithedalers’ retaliatory chase after Coverdale opens up an extremely important theme in this work: the returned gaze. No mere passive spectacle, the Blithedalers look back at Coverdale—at us—violently forcing us to account for the spying sacrilege of our gaze, much as the murdered Marion Crane’s eye in Hitchcock’s 1960 Psycho unflinchingly looks back at us for having so long looked at her. I borrow the term “the returned gaze” from Wheeler Winston Dixon’s study It Looks at You. Drawing on the work of Marc Vernet and Paul Willemen, this study covers such topics as the returned gaze, surveillance, and the trans/gendered gaze as “seen” in a very wide-ranging array of classically mainstream and independent films. Dixon is primarily interested in the process whereby a film “acts upon us, addressing us, viewing us as we view it, until the film itself becomes a gaze, rather than an object to be gazed upon.” 48 The returned gaze can produce moments in which “film structure watches us,” when we “feel the look of the image being turned against us, surveilling us, subjecting us to the ‘look back’ of the
Discussing the films of Wesley E. Barry and Andy Warhol, Dixon argues that

the film itself constitutes a body, a living being . . . that . . . views its potential audience, holds them in its gaze, subjects them to the same sort of reciprocal surveillance that is experienced between prisoners and guards [a nod to the Foucauldian Panopticon], a state that leads the viewer, inevitably, to look with her/himself. The returned gaze is a highly ambivalent phenomenon, capable of both radical effects and reactionary forms of discipline. It is a perfect device, then, for an analysis of Hawthorne’s work. Surprisingly, Dixon does not engage with Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze. Instead, his primary focus is on the ways in which the camera’s own “chorascular” purview over the image becomes a gaze directed at—returned to—the audience. Taking his argument in a different direction, I argue that the returned gaze can be a moment of radical resistance to the domination of the patriarchal male gaze, as theorized by Mulvey, in that the objects—women, sexual deviants, the racial other—at times squashed beneath it return the subject’s gaze, occasionally with a defiance that can be read as counterattack. Admittedly, this is a rare occurrence—but that makes instances of it all the more noteworthy. When Zenobia calls upon Coverdale’s voracious gazing of him—his excessive “eye-shot”—she is both questioning and undermining the structure of patriarchal power that enables Coverdale to believe he can gaze unabashedly. I am interested in the returned gaze’s capacity to function as a form of the gaze within narrative forms such as novels and films.

In terms of Hawthorne’s critique of 1850s hypermasculinity, the gaze, specifically the returned gaze, makes a surprising intervention. In order to understand the manifestation of the returned gaze in terms of the novel’s gendered project, we must link it to another aspect of this project, Coverdale’s zoologies of gender and Hawthorne’s parodistic treatment of gendered stereotypes.

Throughout the novel, Coverdale, a zoological categorizer of people by sex, relentlessly “pegs” his fellow fictive figures—and by implication, us—with broad essentialist generalizations. These generalizations crucially relate to conservative impulses in Hawthorne, especially regarding constructions of gender. But they have a radical side, too—through them, Hawthorne critiques, intentionally, consciously, or otherwise, American hypermasculinity and its concomitant misogyny. Though Coverdale likens Blithedale to the
in a Pig’s eye

“Golden Age,” the first age in Greek myth and a time before women were created (3: 72), he bristles at and buckles against male dominion.

“I hate to be ruled by my own sex,” reveals Coverdale, for it “excites my jealousy and wounds my pride” (3: 121). Young or old, man is “prone to be a brute” (3: 73). Men with an “over-ruling purpose” such as Hollingsworth have “no heart, no sympathy, no reason, no conscience,” are “not altogether human” (3: 70). Perhaps this is the fault of the male species itself—“we really have no tenderness” (3: 42). Again, confirming what men “are” through negation, Coverdale observes that men naturally contemn those weak, diseased unfortunates who “falter and faint” in the “rude jostle of our selfish existence” (3: 41). Coverdale suspects that Hollingsworth has come among them only because, having no “real” sympathy, he is as estranged from life as they now are (3: 54). While girls, despite their Pearl-like wildness, play with a “harmonious propriety,” boys play “old, traditionary games,” “according to recognized law”—this may not sound so very terribly ominous, but Coverdale concludes: “young or old, in play or in earnest, man is prone to be a brute” (3: 73). (I am reminded of the ad campaign for Anthony Minghella’s 1999 film version of Patricia Highsmith’s novel The Talented Mr. Ripley: “Why is it that when men play they always play at killing each other?”)

Though highly conventional markers of femininity bestrew the novel—Zenobia’s hothouse flower, associating her with Beatrice, Rappaccini’s ill-fated daughter (3: 44); Priscilla’s purse (intriguingly, Coverdale reveals that he, too, possesses one) (3: 35)—especially sharp spikes line the markers of manhood.

Though a seeming radical, Hollingsworth reveals himself to be a traditional male in the worst sense. Hollingsworth emerges as a great spokesman for domestic violence. Violently aghast at Zenobia’s suffragist philosophy, Hollingsworth, all but explicitly assigning them a sapphic identity, deems women who strive for equal rights “poor, miserable, abortive creatures,” “petticoated monstrosities.” “I would call upon my sex,” rails Hollingsworth, “to use its physical force, that unmistakeable [sic] evidence of sovereignty, to scourge them back within their proper bounds!” (3: 123). Hollingsworth decries women for failing to adhere to normative gendered stereotypes while fully adhering to those of his own sex. Crucially, Hawthorne puts a strident testimonial to “physical force” as the chief evidence of natural male “sovereignty” in the mouth of an increasingly contemptible, misogynistic character.

Coverdale’s sympathies seem firmly in the women’s camp—after Hollingsworth threatens Zenobia, Coverdale shares in what he presumes to be her rage at this “outrageous affirmation of . . . the intensity of masculine ego-
Chapter 5

tism” (3: 123). Self-pityingly wounded Coverdale transmutes his empathy, though, into rancor at the women for failing to care for him, while brutal Hollingsworth, “by some necromancy of his horrible injustice, seemed to have brought them both to his feet” (3: 124), leaving Coverdale “to shiver in outer seclusion” (3: 126).

Given Coverdale’s nearly misandrist contempt for masculinity, certain passages reek of an especially redolent Hawthornean irony: “After a reasonable training, the yeoman-life throve well with us. Our faces took the sun-burn kindly; our chests gained in compass, and our shoulders in breadth and squareness; our great brown fists looked as if they had never been capable of kid gloves” (3: 64). Given the emergent antebellum cult of hypermasculinity, and the critical drubbing that Hawthorne’s own performance of masculinity received, this description throbs with satirical and political significance.

Coverdale conjectures that Hollingsworth views mankind as “but another yoke of oxen, as stubborn, sluggish, and stupid” (3: 100), and yet his own theories of manhood correspond symmetrically to Hollingsworth’s. The apotheosis of the novel’s demythologization of male power—achieved precisely by associating it primarily with “brute” strength—is the passage on the pigs.

Sadly yet bitterly leaving Blithedale after his refusal of Hollingsworth’s hand in friendship, Coverdale passes Hollingsworth, as if both were “mutually invisible.” What follows is perhaps the most coarsely, palpably visual image in the novel, when Coverdale visits the pigsty before his departure:

There they lay, buried as deeply among the straw as they could burrow, four huge black grunters, the very symbols of slothful ease and sensual comfort. They were asleep, drawing short and heavy breaths, which heaved their big sides up and down. Unclosing their eyes, however, at my approach, they looked dimly forth at the outer world. . . . They were involved, and almost stifled, and buried alive, in their own corporeal substance. The very unreadiness and oppression, wherewith these greasy citizens gained breath enough to keep their life-machinery in sluggish movement, appeared to make them only the more sensible of the ponderous and fat satisfaction of their existence. Peeping at me, an instant, out of their small, red, hardly perceptible eyes, they dropt asleep again; yet not so far asleep but that their unctuous bliss was still present to them, betwixt dream and reality. (3: 143–44)

The authentically masculine farmer Silas Foster impresses upon Coverdale that he must return to dine on spareribs—“I shall have these fat fellows hanging up by the heels, heads downward, pretty soon, I tell you!” Appalled,
Coverdale responds that only these “four porkers” are happy in Blithedale, and that it would be better “for the general comfort to let them eat us; and bitter and sour morsels should we be!” (3: 144). Hawthorne’s dark humor comes through forcefully in such moments—and the joke is entirely on Coverdale.

While some critics might argue that this brief moment in the text does not deserve sustained attention, and that, moreover, the pigs merely peep at Coverdale for an instant, thereby largely constituting slothful sleep rather than assaultive looking, I argue that this passage with the pigs is one of the novel’s most significant, especially because it foregrounds by thematizing the issues of gender, voyeurism, zoological typing, and the returned gaze in the work. The pig-passage reveals that, despite his efforts at sadistic voyeuristic mastery, Coverdale’s own subject position is resolutely one of enforced, abiding masochism, one that is no match for the pigs’ “unctuous bliss.” As I suggested in chapter 2, theories of masochism are relevant to Hawthorne’s work, and never more so than in this novel.

FLYING THE BOAR

Confirming their allegorical significance as males, these almost oneiric beasts are called “fellows.” “Fellows” echoes Coverdale’s earlier analogy between the pigs—who need to be acquired shortly after Coverdale arrives in Blithedale—and “the swinish multitude,” the masculine world of commerce and industry, the “greedy, struggling, self-seeking world” that Blithedale ostensibly rejects and defies (3: 20).

In his 1853 Tanglewood Tales, another collection of classical myths retold for children, Hawthorne recounts the tale from Homer’s Odyssey of Circe and the pigs. The powerful sorceress Circe turns Odysseus’s men into pigs, just as she has transformed other hapless male victims into the various animals that pace around her haunted palace. Admittedly, Homer often depicts Odysseus’s hungry men, who make the fatal error of eating the sun god Helios’s cattle (Book 12), as stupid and foolish. But Hawthorne extravagantly emphasizes the men’s innate beastliness to a degree that bears closer investigation.

As Ulysses’ (as Hawthorne Victorianizes “Odysseus”) men marvel at their luck at being in the beautiful Circe’s beautiful palace and their impending feast, they whisper and “wink” at each other, little realizing Circe’s contemptuous plans for them. “It would really have made you ashamed to see how they swilled down the liquor and gobbled up the food,” the narrator sighs.
“They sat on golden thrones, to be sure; but they behaved like pigs in a sty.” The squeamish narrator remarks, too, that it “brings a blush into my face to reckon up, in my own mind, what mountains of meat and pudding, and what gallons of wine, these two and twenty guzzlers and gormandizers ate and drank” (7: 281).

Disgusted by the men’s behavior—which she has herself enabled and orchestrated—Circe calls them “wretches,” saying it will take little magic to transform them into the pigs they have already emulated.

They would have wrung their hands in despair, but, attempting to do so, grew all the more desperate for seeing themselves squatted on their hams, and pawing the air with their fore trotters. Dear me! what pendulous ears they had! what little red eyes, half buried in fat! and what long snouts, instead of Grecian noses! (7: 283)

The descriptions of the men as pigs, “buried in fat,” seeing “red” as the Blithedale pigs do, corroborates and extends the metaphorical implications of the peeping pigs in Blithedale. In the 1852 novel, the pigs gaze at Coverdale with an oddly, uncomfortably serene and uncanny knowingness; though being prepared for slaughter, these pigs look out from a zone of almost godlike imperturbability. By “Circe’s Palace,” however, the metaphorical pigs have lost any authority, power, indifference—their association with men and manhood takes on a cursed quality, an air of desperation and despair as these pigs now see themselves for what they are, a particularly hideous example of what I called, in the previous chapter, self-overseeing. What is metaphorical in one text becomes literal in the next: pigs that resemble men become pigs as men.

As suggested by the knowing looks exchanged among Circe and her staff as they supply the men with fodder for their porcine obscenities, Circe already views the men as pigs before using her magic to make them actual pigs. Her own avidity for transforming men into beasts, these beasts in particular, symbolically extends Zenobia’s appalled disappointment at Hollingsworth’s animalistically brutish behavior. But Hawthorne’s Circe adds what vulnerable Zenobia did not, a retaliatory, indeed a vengeful, campaign against mankind. Tanglewood’s Circe acts as Zenobia’s avenging sorceress-angel. And if “Circe’s Palace” functions as sequel to Blithedale, as I argue it does, it is significant that Hawthorne must reach into the recesses of classical literature to “solve” the modern erotic problems of this antebellum utopian community and of antebellum feminism. Rather than using mythic reference
to underscore contemporary issues, Hawthorne infuses a retold myth with topical gendered anxieties.

Lee Edelman, writing about W. E. B. Du Bois and African American manhood, thusly critiques Du Bois’s statement that he “simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American”:

the self-consciousness of the “manhood” he envisions as the fulfillment of that wish suggests that such a manhood must be the enactment of a masculinity whose distinguishing characteristic is its power . . . to occupy the place of . . . master of the gaze. If the fantasy of masculinity . . . is the fantasy of a non-self-conscious selfhood endowed with absolute control of a gaze whose directionality is irreversible, the enacted—or self-conscious—“manhood” . . . is itself a performance for the gaze of the Other . . . always the paradoxical display of a masculinity that defines itself through its capacity to put others on display while resisting the bodily captation involved in being put on display itself.54

Flawed and flagrantly theatrical, Coverdale’s performance flails about in its desperate attempts to convince us, himself, the Blithedalers that he is indeed master of his gaze. Coverdale’s fantasy of masculine control never convinces, being always transparent as such. Directly challenging any attempt to prove that he controls the directionality of his pseudo-masterful gaze, the pigs return his gaze, stopping his eyes dead in their tracks with their porcine own. They put him on display.

Discussing the returned gaze of Andy Warhol films, Dixon notes, “When watching Vinyl one gets the continual and uneasy feeling that one is being watched, being judged, by Warhol’s returned gaze, a gaze that is almost solely a product of the performance space of the film, rather than the ‘look’ of the actors. . . . [Vinyl leaves] the viewer viewed, the gaze returned.”55 Just as Warhol’s films seem to look back at the viewer with a life of their own, with a strange air of judgment, the pigs return Coverdale’s gaze and our own, resisting any facile notion of pity. If we recall Coverdale’s seeming concern for their imminent fates, their returned gaze suggests that it is Coverdale who should be worried. A faint undertow of hysteria marks Coverdale’s words to Silas Foster as he half-mockingly offers himself and his fellow Blithedalers in their place. The pigs, comfortable in their “unctuous bliss,” seem to respond with their eyes, “I’d worry about myself if I were you.” Dreamily returning his gaze, the blissful pigs reject Coverdale’s feeble offer of pity, the only means whereby he might have been able to achieve even a fleeting sense
of mastery. With their eyes, they mock Coverdale, just as his own eyes mock themselves.16

Moreover, the pigs, in debunking any notion of Coverdale’s mastery of the gaze, also debunk any notion of a masculine power out there, somewhere, that Coverdale can tap into, exploit. It is worth remembering that, on a symbolic level, the pig has been closely tied to cultural fantasies of fascist masculinity.57 If these porcine “fellows” are clearly representative of manhood in Hawthorne’s work, the male power they symbolize is also truly and terrifyingly other. Freighted with their own gendered typing, Hawthorne’s pigs represent a primordial, chthonic form of manhood and masculinity. When Coverdale stares at them and they look back at him, the authority they wield would appear to depend upon their tie to some form of essential, gendered knowledge, an essential masculinity both base and debased. To reformulate the theories of the Kristeian film theorist Barbara Creed, the pigs embody the monstrous-masculine.58 When they look back, they are not so much a Greek chorus of eyes, sorrowfully reflecting back Coverdale’s own inadequacy and desperation, as they are the godlike power of “gender” itself, a sort of oozing pool of “original,” essentialist masculinity. Within their perverse psychic and corporeal plenitude, the pigs need only peep at Coverdale, a mockery through diminution of his large-scale attempt to overmaster by sustained looking.

**SHAKESPEARE’S PLAY** *Richard III* held a strong fascination for the young Hawthorne, who was prone to quote the line “My Lord, stand back, and let the coffin pass.”59 *Richard III* provides the antecedent for Hawthorne’s symbolic imagery of men-as-pigs. In *Richard III*, the misshapen, murderous king is likened to a hedgehog and a boar. (In the 1996 film version, directed by Richard Loncraine and set in a fascist state, Ian McKellen’s Richard, in terrifying boar-face, stares and snarls directly at us.) Hastings, who will soon be beheaded at Richard’s behest, scoffs at Lord Stanley’s dream of a boar—that is, Richard—pursuing him, saying,

To fly the boar before the boar pursues
Were to incense the boar to follow us,
And make pursuit where he did mean no chase. (III.2. 28–30)

Hastings fails to heed the warning of Stanley’s dream, ending up beheaded. Coverdale similarly flees the boar, albeit one always on the chase and eternally incensed to follow him.
If, in this peeping-pigs passage, Hawthorne is rewriting the Odyssey episode in which Circe turns Odysseus’s men into pigs, this writer normally as interested in the plight and the power of women erases Woman in Melvilllean fashion. Hawthorne rarely paints a nakedly homoerotic tableau; rather, he suffuses his work with an erotic awareness of the intense beauty of both men and women, a sensibility that anticipates Freudian bisexuality. Yet, as Coverdale stares at these hypermasculine pigs, Hawthorne erases Circe and her role as avenging enemy of male power. It’s as if Odysseus were forced to confront the actual animality of his men without the exculpatory hex of an erotomaniacal sorceress. What Hawthorne constructs here, then, surprisingly resembles Marlowe’s queer retelling of the Diana–Actaeon myth in Edward II, which homoeroticizes the story and removes Diana, transformed instead into “a louelie boye in Dians shape.” It is of interest that Hawthorne also includes a retelling of this myth in the novel.

In Hawthorne, myth becomes a means of metaphorizing manhood and male anxieties. Coverdale confronts his own anxieties about being a man in this polyamorous setting, which includes his homoerotic attraction to and disgust toward Hollingsworth and Westervelt, not to mention the effeminate young man he sees from his city window. Beautiful, desirable young men haunt his fiction alongside lushly beautiful women such as Georgiana (with her high-fashion flaw/mole) and Beatrice Rappaccini. Removing the equally pressing beauty of women from this passage, Hawthorne stages a confrontation between a man and maleness—with all of its attendant complexities—itself. If homoerotic desire and homophobic disgust equally influence Coverdale’s relations with men, which culminate in or are synthesized by the pigs, the novel suggests that homosexuality causes a breakdown of all conventional standards that maintain identity, down to the level of species. Coverdale likens Hollingsworth to a “polar bear” (3: 26). Mingling his desire and disgust, Coverdale says, “I loved Hollingsworth,” Coverdale confesses. “But...[h]e was not altogether human” (3: 70). In this manner, Hawthorne anticipates Hocquenghem.

HAWTHORNE’S HITCHCOCKIAN GAZE

In my view, both Hitchcock and Hawthorne consider similar material, especially two interrelated themes—the plight of the independent, headstrong, sexually aware woman in patriarchy and the often murderous rivalry between men within patriarchal capitalism. Both Hawthorne and Hitchcock—in a manner concomitant with their misogyny—express a romantic, anguished
interest in and identification with the wronged woman. Hester Prynne, Zenobia, and *The Marble Faun’s* Miriam resemble Hitchcock’s embattled, troubled, and determined heroines such as *Notorious*’s Alicia Huberman, *Psycho*’s Marion Crane, and *Marnie*’s titular protagonist. Much like Coverdale, Cary Grant’s Devlin in *Notorious* (1946) treats the “bad woman” Alicia Huberman (Ingrid Bergman) with contempt, yet maintains a hidden sympathy for her—he is in love with her, a secret he assiduously hides, until the climax. And his sympathy toward her manifests itself in his contempt for the bureaucratic men who put her to work as a government spy infiltrating a Nazi stronghold in Brazil. In a meeting with his fellow government men, Devlin defends Alicia’s honor to one odious man who calls her a “woman like that.” Yet toward Alicia Devlin remains aloof, until it is almost too late. At odds with the homosocial, treating women with an ambivalence that borders on sadism, Devlin resembles many Hawthorne men, especially Coverdale.

*Rear Window* also circulates and examines many of the same tensions and themes in *The Blithedale Romance*. James Stewart’s “Jeff,” an incapacitated photographer with a broken leg, temporarily wheelchair-bound and peeping on his neighbors, suffers and wounds in Coverdale fashion. Jeff wrangles with his war buddy the detective Tom (Wendell Corey), who refuses to believe that Jeff has uncovered the murder of Mrs. Thorwald by her husband Lars (Raymond Burr) and mercilessly satirizes Jeff’s sleuthing. “How did we stand each other in that plane for three years?” Tom asks Jeff, referencing their former intimacy as war comrades while also articulating the essential enmity that defines male–male relationships in patriarchy in modern America no less than in the antebellum period. Much as Hawthorne does, Hitchcock also thematizes heterosexual ambivalence. Jeff’s girlfriend Lisa Fremont (Grace Kelly), who works in the fashion industry, is introduced through an overwhelming, denaturing close-up of her face, which casts an ominous shadow over the sleeping Jeff’s. “There’s only one problem,” Jeff says as she plants strategic kisses on his lips. “Who are you?” Jeff’s sadism toward Lisa and her wounded responses to it provide a good deal of the film’s drama; much like Hawthorne, Hitchcock, though not without ambivalence, maintains a sympathetic identification with Lisa, whose pain we are made to share as Jeff repeatedly rejects her. In the closest parallel to *Blithedale*, Jeff’s apartment is his inviolate bower, the murders and other perversities of his neighbors his questionably distilled vintage. The song that permeates the film (sung by Bing Crosby) could also be applied to Blithedale’s world, albeit with severe qualifications, such as the violent tensions the sentiment evokes: “To See You (Is to Love You).”
There is a famous sequence in *Rear Window* that corresponds to the peeping-pig episode in *The Blithedale Romance*, of particular relevance to the issue of masculinity and the returned gaze. Desperate to impress the reticent, cynical, sexually reluctant Jeff, who claims they’ve no future together, Lisa boldly—a bit maniacally—ventures into Lars Thorwald’s apartment to find incriminating evidence, Mrs. Thorwald’s wedding ring especially, the logic being she would never have, as her husband claims, gone off on a trip without it. As Jeff and hard-bitten nurse and masseuse Stella (Thelma Ritter) watch, Lisa makes her way through Thorwald’s apartment, Jeff on the verge of calling the police and getting Lisa out of there. Jeff and Stella are suddenly distracted by the imminent suicide of the sad woman in a first-floor apartment whom Jeff has dubbed Miss Lonelyhearts. (Stella recognizes the pills she is about to take as lethal in large doses.) But Jeff’s phone call to the police to report Miss Lonelyhearts’s suicide attempt transforms into his frantic call to rescue Lisa. “The music’s stopped her!” cries Stella, discovering that the musical efforts of the equally lonely composer above have stalled Miss Lonelyhearts’s desperate act. As Jeff and Stella stare at the transfixed Miss Lonelyhearts, Thorwald returns to his apartment. Shortly afterward, he discovers Lisa, who attempts to convince him that there’s a perfectly good reason why she’s in his apartment. Thorwald grabs her, they struggle, and then—in one of the most terrifying and precisely engineered suspense moments in Hitchcock’s considerable arsenal—the lights are knocked out, and darkness fills the screen, as Jeff, his face contorted in helplessness and guilty despair, says, “Oh, Stella, what am I going to do?” In a moment no Foucauldian could love, the police arrive and restore order. (With Hitchcock’s established phobia about the police, one wonders how he could, either.) The lights come back on. Triumphantly, the now rescued Lisa, her back to all of us, taps her finger, upon which glints in merry light Mrs. Thorwald’s wedding ring.

As the finger taps and the ring flashes, Thorwald realizes that he is being watched. He stares back at Jeff staring at him, returning Jeff’s gaze. It is little wonder that guilty Jeff frantically attempts to elude Thorwald’s gaze, which penetrates him with shared knowledge, complicity, understanding, recognition, and that curious air of judgment. “You’re no different from me,” Thorwald seems to be saying to Jeff. “I may have killed my wife, but since you sent your girlfriend to my apartment, where I could have easily killed her and nearly did, you have no right to judge me.” In my view, in these distinct yet thematically linked episodes, Hawthorne and Hitchcock both use the gaze as a means of recording male anxiety about masculinity itself, as a means of looking at masculinity through male eyes, truly a sight hateful, sight tormenting. Thorwald invades Jeff’s apartment; Jeff, in self-defense,
attempts to blind him with camera flashes that suffuse the screen with a red glow. This confrontation between deeply ambiguous men fuses the homoerotic with homophobic violence, an eerie complement to the Coverdale–Westervelt encounter. Both Hitchcock, as the expressionistic red suffusions and Jeff’s phallic telephoto-lens camera evince, and Hawthorne mark the visual as the field for these fierce exchanges between desperate and devious mirror men.

It is precisely within the returned gaze of The Blithedale Romance that Hawthorne’s conservatism and radicalism coalesce. Clearly, Hawthorne describes in phobic fashion ambiguous male sexuality: his Westervelt is a triumph of sodomitical/effeminate typing. Yet his analysis of normative forms of masculinity—all of those asides about the essentially brutish natures and increasingly regularized bodies of men, not to mention the possibility that what Coverdale seeks is in fact Lacan’s hairy athlete; and Coverdale’s uncanny confrontation with a terrifyingly chthonic form of manhood in the peeping pigs, peeping back at him; tinged with the author’s own anxieties about his gendered identity and how it was perceived—does provide an important critique of the construction of gender in Hawthorne’s America.64