The Fragility of Manhood
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... all these marble ghosts. Why should not each statue grow warm with life! Antinous might lift his brow, and tell us why he is forever sad. ... Bacchus, too, a rosy flush diffusing itself over his time-stained surface, could come down from his pedestal, and offer a cluster of purple grapes to Donatello’s lips; because the god recognizes him as the woodland elf who so often shared his revels. And here, in this sarcophagus, the exquisitely carved figures might assume life, and chase one another round its verge with that wild merriment which is so strangely represented on those old burial coffers: though still with some subtle allusion to death, carefully veiled, but forever peeping forth amid emblems of mirth and riot.

—The Marble Faun, chapter 2 (14: 17)

In the previous chapter, I began to explore homoerotic Hellenism and its significance to Hawthorne’s work. This topic will be central to chapter 7 along with a comparison that has been hovering, with a certain persistence, as a possibility over my critical narrative. More than any other writer of the antebellum period with the exception of Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville shares Hawthorne’s preoccupations. Their themes significantly overlap: each author obsessively treats the central idea of the duplicity of appearances; in their work, reality is but a “pasteboard mask” that we must “strike through.” Yet, for both, surfaces have depth; they brood upon the beguiling allure of appearances, puzzling out their irresistible and maddening appeal.

While the heady, agonized, enigmatic relationship between Hawthorne and Melville has occupied the minds of scholars for decades well into the present, what I wish to consider is each artist’s treatment of Narcissus. In
terms of these authors’ uses of the myth of Narcissus, I refer not just to this
specific myth figure but also to what we can call Narcissus-discourse or a Nar-
cissus-continuum, youthful male figures that evoke qualities associated with
Narcissus: great beauty, a tragic early death, flower imagery, and homoerotic
associations. These characteristics all inhere in the classical figure of Antinous,
whom I treat here as an extension or double of Narcissus.

While the entire premise of this book is that Hawthorne frequently
evokes the figure of Narcissus, it is also true that he never names him explic-
itly. Melville, in contrast, does name him in Moby-Dick and makes the figure
in all of its explicitness the “key” to his greatest work.

Why is almost every robust healthy boy with a robust healthy soul in him,
at some time or other crazy to go to sea? Why upon your first voyage as a
passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration, when first told
that you and your ship were now out of sight of land? Why did the old
Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and
own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper
the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the
tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was
drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It
is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all.1

In characteristically haunting and provocative fashion, Melville jams together
two thoroughly unlike adjectives—tormenting, mild—to evoke Narcissus
and his fundamentally perplexing nature. Melville seizes upon classical myth’s
iconic power. In his hands, the myth is sent out to float like a phantom of
the sea, as if the pool that captured the face of the mythic youth had widened
into all of the waters of the world. In Melville’s pointed contrast between “the
robust healthy” and presumably American youth, even whose soul has similar
qualities, and the phantomlike Narcissus, he offers a telling commentary on
the gulf between a typical image of youthful masculinity and one associated
with the classical world; the latter is inevitably imbued with haunting and
uncanny qualities.

I will not attempt to decode the meanings of Narcissus in Melville’s epic
novel here. Rather, my focus is more disparate. By considering some instances
of the reception of classical male beauty in Hawthorne’s and Melville’s writ-
ings, specifically regarding the figure of Antinous, I believe that we can get at
something significant about what role classical culture and myth played for
antebellum male authors who explored homoerotic themes in an era in which
the sexual content of classical literature was generally expurgated. I proceed,
after the comparative discussion of Melville and Hawthorne’s travel writing and Melville’s last major work, *Billy Budd, Sailor*, to a consideration of the titular figure in Hawthorne’s 1860 *The Marble Faun*.

While there is much to consider within this extraordinarily dense and rich novel, my focus is on the relevance of the faun to the narcissistic crisis that Hawthorne consistently thematizes and the significance of Hellenism, spectacularly referenced in the ekphrastic appreciation of the faun, to this crisis. Forecasting the concerns of the last chapter, I will also address here the problematic of race and racism. I do so through a critique of the charges of racism that have been leveled not only at nineteenth-century Hellenism generally but also at Hawthorne’s deployment of the technique in his uses of the faun. One of my concerns here is the diminishment of issues related to gender, sexuality, and, specifically, queer sexuality that sometimes occurs in critiques of nineteenth-century literary racism. Neither eclipsed nor displaced by these discussions, Freud is alive within them in his study of the homosexual artist *par excellence*, Leonardo da Vinci.

**VEXED QUESTIONS**

**NINETEENTH-CENTURY HELLENISM AND SEXUAL HISTORY**

While it is important to note that Hawthorne does not mention Narcissus in print, it is also worth noting that he was not the only antebellum writer working in a mythohistorical context who kept Narcissus and similar kinds of figures unmentioned. Samuel Griswold Goodrich, the editor of the illustrated annual *The Token* (1828–42), which published the younger Hawthorne, and the creator, with his brother, of the *Peter Parley* children’s book series, does not mention Narcissus at all in his 1832 *A Book of Mythology for Youth*. And when he does discuss similar figures, he makes no note of their beauty. For example, in a passage from the entry on Venus, Goodrich discusses Adonis, another beautiful youth in the Narcissus tradition who is doomed to an early death and associated with flower imagery. Goodrich makes no mention of Adonis’s famed physical splendor, saying only that he is “the son of the King of Cyprus . . . slain by a wild boar. Venus bewailed his death with much sorrow, and changed his blood which was shed on the ground, into the flower *anemone*.“ Similarly, the figure Endymion receives a nonerotic reception. A youth so beautiful that Selene (or Diana) the moon goddess rendered him perpetually asleep so that she could contemplate and caress him as he slumbered, Endymion is described simply as “an astrono-
mer.” Diana’s effort to keep him in eternal amorous captivity is described with similar opacity as “Diana, or the moon, descending from Heaven to visit the shepherd Endymion.”

When the specific subject of homosexuality comes up, coded language prevails. On the subject of the Thracian women’s destruction of the poet-musician Orpheus—triggered by his embrace of homosexual practices and rejection of sex with the women, as described in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in one of the key instances of same-sex desire in his heterosexually oriented epic—Goodrich writes: “Orpheus fled for ever from mankind. His lyre was silent. The Thracian women, enraged because he avoided their society, attacked and killed him during the feast of Bacchus. They threw his head into the Hebrus . . .”

As still holds true in American culture, violence (the Thracian women’s decapitation of Orpheus) remains more safely representable than sexuality. (One recalls the reaction of the late French director Louis Malle to the news that one of his American films would be given an “X” rating: “You can show a breast being cut off and get an ‘R’ rating, but if you show this breast being kissed or fondled you get an ‘X.’”)

Goodrich, it should be repeated, is repurposing the classical myths for children, as Hawthorne would in the 1850s. At the same time, his reluctance even to describe the most famously beautiful males from the classical corpus as such reveals tensions within the strictures on content in the antebellum period that exceed the category of children’s literature. Writing in the 1850s in this genre, Hawthorne also makes no mention of Narcissus, signifying that a shared reticence about the subject was evident two decades after Goodrich’s mythology book appeared. At the same time, Hawthorne does frequently evoke male beauty in his work generally. The point is not so much that the sexual content of classical mythology was being expurgated in children’s literature, but, rather, that children’s literature was being chosen as the venue in which to present classical material in order to keep its content sexually expurgated.

The homoerotic uses of Hellenism must be understood within the complex relay between the coded and the explicit about sexual matters generally within the period, but especially in terms of classical themes and allusions. Hawthorne’s decorum accords with that of his era, as his retelling of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, “The Pomegranate Seeds,” in his 1853 *Tanglewood Tales* (7: 296–330) evinces. In the Greek myth, Persephone is a maiden, daughter of the seasonal goddess Demeter, who is abducted by Hades and forced to be his bride. Hawthorne makes Persephone a young girl rather than a maiden, mitigating the force of rape imagery and sexual
conquest in the myth. Yet (perhaps unconsciously, but also perhaps not) Hawthorne’s representational choices here link his work to the homoerotic tradition from which it emerged: the girl in Hawthorne’s retelling evokes the boy, or eromenos, of classical pederastic tradition, whose adult male mentor, or erastes, initiates him into both intellectual and sexual knowledge, as works such as Plato’s dialogue the *Phaedrus* evoke so palpably. This is not to suggest that accurate or even widely available translations of works by Plato were available to Hawthorne; such translations would emerge in print only in the later nineteenth century. But it is also true that the wider reference world of classical reception contained frequent instances of and allusions to homoerotic practices, in addition to other taboo sexual references, in the ancient world. As Louis Crompton observes in his masterly *Byron and Greek Love*, “if Plato was a closed book, the gardens of poetry were open. The classical curriculum in England, as John Stuart Mill was to complain, ignored history and philosophy in favor of philology and poetry. . . . It was a paradox that an age that would have rejected formal sex education as shocking should have prescribed amorous Latin and Greek poetry as a staple of education.” Considerable overlaps existed in both the educational practices and the cultural discords of classical reception in England and the United States. As Caroline Winterer writes, mid-nineteenth-century Americans “wrestled with the problem of representing timeless ideals of transcendent beauty in forms unacceptable to standards of modern social propriety”; the “suspect morality of the ancients became more problematic as the physical and textual remains of antiquity became more numerous.” While a fuller consideration of this complex set of historical questions exceeds the scope of this chapter, we can establish that sexual matters related to classical culture were riddled with epistemological inconsistencies, asymmetries, and discordances—in other words, were metonymic of the larger problem of the representation and understanding of sexuality and sexual history in transatlantic nineteenth-century cultural practices. While he observes literary proprieties that were his own as well as his culture’s, Hawthorne also at times resists antebellum cultural codes by highlighting the erotic dimensions of classical literature, and sometimes in a homoerotic context, such as in his descriptions of the glorious physicality of the young Cyrus in “Roger Malvin’s Burial” and Giovanni’s “Grecian beauty” in “Rappaccini’s Daughter.”

In emphasizing the homoerotic potentialities of Hellenism and classical beauty, I am bringing into clearer focus an underlying theme in this study, though one I have also repeatedly attempted to problematize: the relevance of Hawthorne’s work to the question of the presence of same-sex desire in
nineteenth-century texts. The determinability of same-sex desire in nineteenth-century texts has been a vexed historical question since the 1980s at least, though one that has been innovated in the past decade. The widespread adoption of the findings of the gay French social historian Michel Foucault, particularly in his influential book *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, dramatically reshaped the attempt to recover a homosexual past (the very term homosexual being seen as anachronistic by some) in the 1980s. In *History*, Foucault famously argued that, at a key moment in the second half of the nineteenth century, the homosexual became “a species.” The homosexual was a new kind of person, one whose sexual acts were now tied to subjectivity. This new taxonomical identity-category of the homosexual replaced the former category of “sodomite.”

What has prevailed since the 1980s, until very recently, is the view that there is no correspondence whatsoever between sexual acts and sexual identities before this taxonomical emergence, identities being the result of classifications such as the naming of the homosexual and the attendant pathologization, in legal, medical, psychiatric, criminal, and religious discourses, of those so named. Significant challenges from certain quarters to the Foucauldian model have been offered in the past decade, however, and as a result debates over nineteenth-century same-sex desire have undergone a remarkable transformation. Even one of the major earlier voices of the Foucauldian positions about matters of sexual history, David M. Halperin, has attempted to challenge the standard view of a sharp distinction between acts and identities before the latter half of the nineteenth century, seeking to reorient Foucault’s reception in sexuality studies. My work on Hawthorne reflects my engagement with these more recent approaches to the question of same-sex desire in nineteenth-century texts.

Through the scenes of contemplation of images from the ancient archive within Melville’s and Hawthorne’s private writings, we can learn more about the meanings that the classical world held for antebellum Americans, an era that was fascinated by simultaneously suggestive and decorous works such as Hiram Powers’s sculpture *The Greek Slave*. (It was sculpted by Powers in several versions between 1844 and 1869.) Specifically for our purposes, a historical same-sex desiring presence as well as different styles of masculinity charge these scenes of contemplation with homoerotic and gendered significance for the authors. Comparing Melville’s and Hawthorne’s reactions to representations of the homoerotic cult icon Antinous reveals some key aspects of the attitudes toward sexuality maintained in their culture and of each author’s sensibility.
In the course of his travels to England, the Middle East, and Europe in 1856–57, Herman Melville saw a statue of Antinous, the famous young beloved of the Roman emperor Hadrian, in the Capitoline Museum. (The statue is now considered to be of Hermes.) As he wrote in response to it in his journal entry of Thursday, February 26, 1857: “Antinous, beautiful.—Walked to the Pincian hill.—gardens and statuary—overlooking Piazza del Popolo.—(Music on the Pincian) Fashion & Rank—Preposterous posturing within stone’s throw of Antinous. How little influence has truth on the world!” He goes on to note that fashion is ridiculous everywhere, but especially in Rome. He also writes here that “No place where lonely man will feel more lonely than in Rome,” adding parenthetically “or Jerusalem.”

Two days later that week, he stopped off at the Villa Albani in Rome, where he saw the celebrated bas-relief of Antinous, which had been found in Hadrian’s Tivoli villa. In his journal, Melville described the bas-relief this way: “—along the walls—Antinous—head like moss-rose with curls and buds—rest all simplicity—end of fillet on shoulder—drapery, shoulder in the mantle—hand full of flowers and eyeing them—the profile &c. . . .” This entry ends with the line that seems to be a recurring motif: “Silence and loneliness of long streets of blank garden walls.” Interestingly placed between Melville’s two discussions of representations of Antinous is his report in the Journals of visiting the graves of Shelley and Keats. Shelley, in particular, was famed for his feminine handsomeness, and these poets who died young add to the atmosphere of Antinousian melancholy, of beautiful youth cut down in the prime of life and reverentially immortalized. The cult of Antinous is a variant, one might argue, of the Narcissus myth: both concern the premature death of a beautiful youth whose image galvanizes the spectator.

As Gail Coffler observes in her superb essay “Classical Iconography in the Aesthetics of Billy Budd, Sailor,” Antinous was “often assimilated to the fertility god Dionysius, or to his Egyptian counterpart, the underworld deity Osiris, god of the regenerative Nile. Indeed, the erotic, Dionysian impulse informs the identifying facial characteristics of Antinous: the full mouth with curved upper lip; the large, ‘melting’ eyes; and the distinctive curls extending around his forehead.” Coffler proceeds to compare the iconic figure of Antinous to Billy Budd. As Coffler describes, “Billy Budd as a type of the Antinous is clearly adumbrated in that journal description. The rose bud iconography, identifying Antinous with the fertility god Dionysus, also links this journal passage with a Greek youth who anticipates Billy Budd:
the gay Cypriote, whose image appears twice in Melville’s poetry. All three figures (Antinous, the Cypriote[s], Billy Budd) are physically alluring and seductively dangerous, like the ‘rose’ in Melville’s ‘Naples in the Time of Bomba’ . . . For Melville the rose is an emblem of earthly beauty, a reminder that art based on beauty, without the strengthening fiber of transcendent truth, cannot last.”

Antinous’s backstory, given in Royston Lambert’s standard account, bears mentioning. Hadrian reigned for twenty years, from the years 117 to 138. Antinous was a Bithynian slave, Bithynia now being northwest Turkey. While the circumstances of the emperor and Antinous’s meeting remain unknown, most sources have described the relationship between the emperor and the famously beautiful youth as a sexual one. It is said that Hadrian wept bitterly and mourned deeply for Antinous after his death in October of the year 130. (Antinous was born in the year 111.) While some reported that Antinous was murdered, it is more generally supported that Antinous committed suicide by jumping into the Nile because of a prophecy that the emperor would die unless someone close to him died in his stead—a voluntary religious sacrifice on Antinous’s part. In any event, Hadrian immortalized the young man as the ideal of Greek beauty through all manner of iconography after having Antinous deified, an honor usually reserved for members of the ruling family. While it has been suggested that Hadrian had political motivations for the creation of the Antinous cult—as a means of securing the allegiance of the Greek-speaking East to Roman rule—the lavishness of his tributes to the dead youth suggest that his passion was as heartfelt as his politics were canny. As the cult of Antinous, worshipped as a god, spread throughout the Roman empire, busts of him were rife, and the beautiful young man’s face adorned coins, medallions, cut gems and cameos, and even “small collapsible busts” were made for well-off folk to carry with them on their travels. In his honor, Hadrian also founded the Egyptian city of Antinopolis. To flash forward to the period we are examining, busts of Antinous were prominent decorations in the Hellenism-saturated households of the nineteenth century. Hawthorne had a bust of Antinous, kept “in the parlor of his little red house in Lenox, where Melville surely would have noticed it,” and Melville kept a bust of the youth in his own home in his later years.

What specifically concerns me here is the way in which same-sex desire and love informed the relationship writers maintained with the classical past. One way or another, many writers, Melville and Hawthorne prominent among them, contributed to the development of a nineteenth-century transatlantic homoerotic aesthetic culture. While many studies have focused on this culture’s efflorescence in late-Victorian England, cultivated by figures
such as Pater, Wilde, and John Addington Symonds, among others, less work has been done on American artists’ participation in this aesthetic culture’s development, Henry James being co-opted, as often happens, into English literary traditions for these purposes.

By aesthetic culture, I mean a series of intersections among literary and visual art traditions, with the specific form of Hellenism as their foundation, that together emerged as a language and a tradition, a shared set of references and an index of representations, of homoerotic desire across temporal and geographical spaces. One of the most highly charged precedents for homoerotic aesthetic culture’s nineteenth-century manifestation was the writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68), a German art historian and archaeologist who pioneered a new interest in classical art, one that focused on the beautiful male body, albeit as a rejection of the sensual and an embrace of the meditative. Famously, Winckelmann maintained that the Apollo Belvedere, the Laocoön, and the Villa Albani bas-relief of Antinous represented the art of the ancient world at its most glorious. Indeed, by the time Melville and Hawthorne were traveling in Europe in the 1850s, Winckelmann’s triumvirate of classical male beauty had become quite thoroughly a cliché, passages in which he extolled these figures’ beauty cut and pasted, as it were, into guidebooks for the educated traveler and connoisseur.17

From the earliest days of the American republic, a fixation with the classical world was prominent. By the antebellum period, a decisive shift from Rome to Greece (the “Greek Revival”) had occurred. During the 1850s, it had become de rigueur for educated Americans to embark on an improving voyage to Europe in order to contemplate its endless array of art history treasures. This “Grand Tour” was a central experience of transatlantic nineteenth-century middle-class society. Of chief interest to us here are the possibilities afforded the male viewer of art to register, record, and explore the male form.

The nineteenth century, in terms of the possibilities for the expression of homoerotic desire, was a period in flux. As we have noted, scholars have generally framed the century as a movement from more liquid, amorphous forms of same-sex affiliation to a more rigid, sexually stratified period of modern sexual taxonomies that flowed from the medical and legal discourses that reframed sexualities at the end of the century. This critical narrative has framed the late-nineteenth-century birth of psychoanalysis as the death of free-flowing, unclassified homoerotic relations.18 While this narrative has its uses, especially for rhetorical purposes, I believe that the question of when and how same-sex desire was regulated—either policed against or allowed a range of public, open, visible expressions—continues to remain an unsettled
and enigmatic one. While more strictures were indeed placed on same-sex desire, or more specifically desirers, by the late nineteenth century, it is also true that prohibitive codes of conduct that prevented the public expression of unseemly gendered as well as sexual behavior were well in place in the early nineteenth century. One of the ways of subverting these codes was through coded discourse itself, and nineteenth-century Hellenism was chief among such coded discourses, allowing for the expression of homoerotic appreciation while still within acceptable social parameters of taste and decorum.

From Winckelmann well into the late nineteenth century, classical art, particularly that of ancient Greece as synecdochically embodied by the marble statue, provided a discourse for the male discussion of male beauty with considerable potential for the expression of homoerotic desire. Under the guise of Hellenic art-appreciation, nonthreatening because it was presumed divorced from the sexual and firmly situated on the higher plane of the rational, socially unsanctioned desires, such as same-sex desire, found expressive vent. Though it has come under considerable fire as racist rhetoric from a number of critics who associate it with the promulgation of a white racial ideal, Hellenism had subversive uses within this register. I return to the question of Hellenism and race below.

At the same time, as Hawthorne’s responses to the classical representations of Antinous made clear, these responses were in no way predictable or uniform in their effects. In his Italian notebook, Hawthorne described visiting the Villa Albani on May 10, 1858. As he noted,

I do not recall any of the sculpture, except a colossal bas-relief of Antinoüs, crowned with flowers, and holding flowers in his hand, which was found in the ruins of Hadrian’s Villa. This is said to be the finest relic of antiquity next to the Apollo and the Laocoön; but I could not feel it to be so, partly, I suppose, because the features of Antinoüs do not seem to me beautiful in themselves; and that heavy, downward look is repeated till I am more weary of it than of anything else in sculpture. (14: 214)

The narrator of The Marble Faun asks why Antinous is “forever sad.” But here, the “real” Hawthorne addresses the question with less empathy, focusing on why the statue makes him, as spectator, “weary.” Hawthorne’s Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks was posthumously published in two volumes in February of 1872, edited (and often expurgated) by Sophia Hawthorne before her death in the February of 1871. The 1872 Passages included this passage on the weary-making Antinous; Melville, who lived for most of the latter half of the nineteenth century, therefore had access to this and
related passages. I will return to Hawthorne’s response to Antinous in terms of the larger themes of his work. Before doing so, I want to consider some of the most immediate implications of Melville’s encounters with Hellenic art.

Melville’s 1857 lecture “Statues in Rome” survives today in reconstructed form. As the editors of the *Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces* write, “During his first season as a lecturer, beginning in Lawrence, Massachusetts, on November 23, 1857, and concluding in New Bedford, Massachusetts, on February 23, 1858, Melville discussed the subject of Roman statuary in sixteen cities and towns east of the Mississippi River. He did not publish his lecture in a magazine or book, and no manuscript is known to survive, but contemporary newspapers gave fairly full accounts of the content and even of the organization and style of the lecture” (*Piazza Tales* 723). The consensus of Melville scholars is that he did not attempt to publish his lectures himself; indeed, surprisingly few nineteenth-century authors pursued this option, despite the prominence of the public lecture and the lyceum in the nineteenth century.21

In “Statues in Rome,” Melville discusses the Apollo Belvedere in the Vatican Museum, for Winckelmann the height of classical Greek art and beauty. He had read Winckelmann’s famous *History of Ancient Art* in 1852, and would have been familiar with the high esteem in which the German art historian held the statue.22 Echoing the German writer, Melville writes of the Apollo Belvedere as the “statue which most of all in the Vatican excites the admiration of all visitors . . . the crowning glory.”23 Further echoing Winckelmann, Melville notes that, in its “divinity,” the statue “lifts the imagination of the beholder above ‘things rank and gross in nature,’ and makes ordinary criticism impossible.” He continues: “it gives a kind of visible response to that class of human aspirations of beauty and perfection” that can only be fully experienced, as “Faith” tells us, in the next life.24 On the dazzling beauty of the Apollo Belvedere, Hawthorne was in agreement. As he wrote in his Italian notebook when in Rome in March of 1858, “I saw the Apollo Belvidere as something ethereal and godlike; only for a flitting moment, however, and as if he had alighted from heaven, or shone suddenly out of the sunlight, and then had withdrawn himself again” (14: 125). Hawthorne goes on to praise the other sculpture that, along with the Apollo Belvedere and the Antinous, represented the height of classical art and beauty for Winckelmann. “I felt the Laocoon, too, very powerfully, though very quietly; an immortal agony, with a strange calmness diffused through it, so that it resembles the vast rage of the sea, calm on account of its immensity, or the tumult of Niagara, which does not seem to be tumult because it keeps pouring on, forever and ever” (14: 125).
Melville’s sense of a beautiful art object as *visible* evidence of some kind of divinely perfect beauty—“it gives a kind of visible response to that class of human aspirations of beauty and perfection”—is, in my view, important here for a consideration of the function of art, especially in the context of the ancient archive. Considered by so many, even to this day but especially in the nineteenth century, to be the epitome of human civilization and aesthetics, ancient Greek culture served the role in Victorian America, as it did in Europe at the time, of making aesthetic as well as philosophical, cultural, and social ideals *visible*. While many aspects of this externalization of ideals are important, what interests me specifically is the way in which homoerotic desire could be made visible without being threatening or inordinately obvious. At the same time that Melville could evoke, in his public lectures, the beauty of male forms such as the Apollo Belvedere, the Greek and Roman myths and histories were being expurgated of their sexual content in print, as emblematized by the work of writers such as Goodrich, Thomas Bulfinch, and Hawthorne, who very specifically rewrote the myths as stories for children.

Melville notes that the Apollo Belvedere embodies “the attributes, physical and intellectual, which Milton bestowed on one of his angels, ‘Severe in youthful beauty.’” From May 1638 to July or August 1639, Milton went on his own Grand Tour of France and Italy. Melville goes on to call *Paradise Lost* a “great Vatican done into verse.” I considered the valences between Milton and Hawthorne in the chapter on “Rappaccini’s Daughter.” If one thinks of the varieties of male beauty on display in this poem, but specifically the way in which Milton registers Satan’s devolution from beautiful near-divine being to fallen angel through highly visualized descriptions of Satan’s physical ruination as well as Milton’s obsessive plumbing of signifiers from the ancient archive, Milton’s work becomes a suggestive intertext for homoerotic aesthetic culture as well.

Hawthorne implicitly registers a kind of discomfort with the visual spectacle of the Apollo Belvedere that I think is also quite suggestive. While he can praise the figure as “ethereal and godlike,” he also notes that he only saw it for a “flitting moment.” The way the figure shines “suddenly out of the sunlight” suggests a momentary blinding. In contrast, the more reassuringly masculine and patriarchal, however indescribably tormented, Laocoön strikes Hawthorne as, at once, powerful and suffused with a “strange calmness” (14: 125). In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Laocoön, a Trojan priest, is divinely punished for having warned his countrymen against the Greek gift of the Trojan Horse, which is, of course, no gift at all but contains within it Greeks waiting to invade the stronghold of their enemy. The famous Vatican Laocoön—
“Laocoön and His Sons,” also known as the “Laocoön Group,” a Roman copy, discovered in Rome in 1506, of an ancient Greek sculpture that dates back to 200 B.C.E.—depicts Laocoön and his two sons being squeezed to death by two giant sea serpents. His body horribly twisted into a contorted position, Laocoön cries out, along with his similarly afflicted sons, in silent but palpable anguish. Powerless despite his outsize physical form, Laocoön can do nothing to save either his sons or himself. Laocoön, his sons, and the serpents that intertwine and lock them all together form an exquisite tableau of sorrow, suffering, menace, and helpless human acquiescence to a greater might. For Melville, the Laocoön “expresses the doubt and the dark groping of speculation in that age when the old mythology was passing away and men’s minds had not yet reposed in the new faith”; for him, Laocoön, “the symbol of human misfortune,” “represents the tragic side of humanity.” In psychoanalytic terms, the sculpture thematizes anew what Freud found in the image of Medusa’s Head: the Laocoön both evokes castration (male powerlessness and violation) and defends against it with a phallic plenitude (the limbs of the male figures, the invincible, long, coiling serpents).

Hawthorne echoes Winckelmann’s famously counterintuitive interpretation, representative of the German art historian’s view of classical Greek sculpture generally, of the Laocoön as a serene, harmonious work, a view that was famously challenged by Lessing. Even in his “tumult,” Hawthorne observes, Laocoön maintains a strange, quiet placidity, one that reassures the spectator. I would argue that a crucial distinction between the youthful male figures Hawthorne discusses and the Laocoön is that the latter is, however tormented, finally a father figure, an older and more authoritarian presence. In contrast, the figures of youthful male beauty, whether Hawthorne disputes or praises their beauty, embody (Antinous’s “heavy, downward look”) and provoke (the Apollo Belvedere’s sudden, blinding brightness) visual disturbance and spectatorial ambivalence. Melville’s godlike youth Billy Budd will embody similar qualities and provoke similar effects.

Melville also makes note of a very different kind of male form in the Farnese Hercules who, “leaning on his club,” embodies “simplicity and bovine good nature”; indeed, Hercules evokes the “lazy ox, confident of his own strength but loth to use it.” Melville’s Billy Budd will be compared to Hercules; indeed, in his mixture of both “meltingly” beautiful attributes and animalistic qualities, Billy Budd is a fusion of Antinous and Hercules. One of the most interesting aspects of Melville’s literary fusion-technique in his description of the Handsome Sailor is the way it recalls one of Winckelmann’s central arguments.
The art historian Whitney Davis, in his 2010 book *Queer Beauty*, discusses Winckelmann’s formal doctrine of ideal beauty, achieved when the artist “combines the beauty of many discrete things (or parts of things) judged by him to be beautiful.” As Davis describes,

Winckelmann’s implausible doctrine of ideal beauty . . . echoed familiar, banal legends about the practice of ancient artists such as Zeuxis, who supposedly collated the various beautiful aspects (as it were beautiful body parts) of five maidens of Croton in order to compile his depiction of the supremely beautiful Helen of Troy. In this respect Winckelmann’s doctrine could hardly have been the radical—the radically modern—element of [his method that came to be described by thinkers such as Hegel as “an entirely new organ”].29

Davis, parsing late-nineteenth-century critics such as Bernard Bosanquet and Benedetto Croce, writes that Winckelmann’s radical modernity and value must lie elsewhere, “in his historical account of the psychosocial dynamics and specifically the cultural erotics of beautiful artworks, overlaid with his description of their sensible reception on our own part and in this very respect—an eroticized cultural reception that absorbs the original affect and responds to it.”30 Davis’s emphasized terms correspond to the kind of approach I have pursued in this study and to the questions I am raising about antebellum authors’ apprehension of the classical image.

Near the end of “Statues in Rome,” Melville recalls his visit to the Villa Albani. His description of Antinous, at least insofar as the lecture has been reconstructed, is comparatively austere when his description in the *Journals* is recalled. In “Statues in Rome,” Melville makes note only of “Antinous with his eye reposing on a lotus of admirable design which he holds in his hand.” Melville sandwiches his brief description of the beautiful Antinous, whose beauty would not be guessed, however, from this essay, between descriptions of statues of Minerva, “a creature as purely and serenely sublime as it is possible for human hands to form,” and Aesop, “the dwarfed and deformed.”31

The austerely registered homoerotic icon is contrasted against the phallic woman of virginal rectitude (who will play such a key role in Melville’s poem “After the Pleasure Party,” also written very late in life) and a figure of miskshapen manhood who is here also, significantly, a figure of the artist. As I have had occasion to note, Hawthorne frequently contrasts his beautiful youths against grim and unappetizing older figures. And as I noted in the last chapter, Athena, or Minerva, the “unapproachable” goddess, merges with “fatal” woman Medusa, whose image Athena wears as her aegis. What
I want to suggest is not only that a continuum of images, both variously and similarly deployed, runs throughout the works of Hawthorne, Melville, and other nineteenth-century writers, but that this continuum reflects the usefulness of classical iconography for the representation and exploration of otherwise taboo gendered and sexual subjects, precisely because the classical could function as code.

A detail recorded in the editorial notes to the Journals regarding Melville’s description of Antinous here proves oddly appropriate and suggestive. “The one newspaper report of ‘Statues in Rome’ to mention this work is obviously garbled: the ‘medallion of Antinous,’ according to the Montreal Daily Transcript and Commercial Advertiser (#8), represents a ‘female of crystalline countenance with her eye reposing on a lotus of admirable design, which she holds in her hand.’” Part of the homoerotic threat of Antinous lies precisely in his feminine nature, the “melting” beauty he embodies, the same gender-bending threat associated with Narcissus. The misunderstanding here, the report that Melville was describing a female character, seems to me telling, speaking, as it does, to Antinous’s gender indeterminacy. Yet part of that indeterminacy is also Antinous’s associations with a striking masculinism, connoted by his large, powerful chest. Antinous’s strength is emphasized along with his feminine softness. It is this duality in an icon of male beauty that arrests Melville and which he treats as an endlessly perplexing puzzle.

While, to turn now to Billy Budd, left unfinished at his death in 1891 and not published until 1924, many critics have focused on the mystery of the villain Claggart, who embodies the irresolvable conundrum of “Natural depravity, or depravity according to nature?” the short novel’s titular figure is no less a mystery. While Coffler links Billy Budd’s Hercules-like simplicity of mind and nature back to Antinous, seen as a figure of sensual lassitude and therefore a kind of serene mindlessness, I think the disjunction of both figures within one literary character is a more salient issue. For what Billy Budd represents at once is a stereotypically strong, hardy, and murderously powerful form of masculinity and a soft, feminized, and feminizing form of masculinity. Billy Budd’s ability to feminize the male gaze—in other words, to elicit responses from other male lookers in a manner customarily associated with the way men look at women—is a key part of the pattern of problems associated with his character.

To switch mythic gears, Margaret Walters’s discussion of Michelangelo’s David in her study The Nude Male speaks most directly to the issues at work in Melville’s portrait of Billy Budd. As the latest incarnation of the Handsome Sailor, the cynosure who galvanizes male visual appraisal and appreciation, Billy Budd is a figure who embodies the gaze, which as Lacan has
famously described is not reducible to the eye or the look of one individual but, instead, encompasses the entire visual field in which the person looking and what is being looked at are only included elements. (Indeed, for Lacan, the gaze is indifferent to the individual subject.) Melville likens Billy Budd to the “comely young David” (78) and also evokes the naked male subject of the sculptor, being a figure “who in the nude might have posed for a statue of young Adam before the Fall” (94). As Walters notes of Michelangelo’s famous work, “despite David’s size and his defiant nudity—he is stripped for action, and his nakedness is the sign that he is God’s warrior—he is not altogether confident. From the front, he looks proudly relaxed; from any other angle, his pose seems more uncertain. . . . The hero is shown, not in his moment of triumph, as is more common, but tensed before the fight. His energy remains petrified, forever unreleased and unrealized.”

Melville creates in Billy Budd a figure who represents a similar set of dualities, and it is fair to say, I believe, an idealized self-image on the part of a once hale, handsome author in his final years. What is analogous in Billy to David’s uncertainty, as Walters puts it, is Billy’s vulnerability, metaphorically registered in his stutter, which further links him to the uncouthness of the stammering barbarian. Indeed, Billy Budd’s dualities include his being both David and his foe, the Philistine barbarian Goliath. What I find to be the most telling valence between the David of Walters’s description and Melville’s beautiful youth is the idea of a banked and potent power—“petrified, forever unreleased and unrealized.” He could be a man frozen by Medusa’s gaze, frozen, that is, to follow Freud, in phallic rectitude. If this is the case, Melville explodes it—he gives Billy Budd the power to unleash his power. As I argue in *Men Beyond Desire*, Billy Budd transitions from the object of the homoerotic gaze to the disciplinary force that prohibits it—indeed, a murderous force that annihilates it. If Billy Budd is the literary homoerotic icon *par excellence*, his destruction of the queer Claggart (not, to be sure, an innocent character) also makes Billy the icon of homophobic defensiveness.

Billy’s ability, as an object of desire, to affect the viewer speaks to the volatility of the work of classical art as a subject of “safe” viewing for the homoerotically gazing spectator. One of Winckelmann’s most ingenious strategies for allowing scores of spectators to savor images of beautiful young men was his decisive separation, like the yolk and the whites of an egg, of sexual desire from appreciation of the beautiful. The beauty of young men such as the Apollo and the Antinous could be appreciated, indeed, ecstatically inhabited, while the mantra of nonsexual and idealized response always safeguarded this appreciation against the threat of prurience. But looking at Billy, a kind of
living piece of Greek art, does not leave the spectator safe or unimplicated in sexual schemes, points hardly incidental to a work that is so fundamentally obsessed with knowledge and knowledgelessness.

Moving from the “simpler” sphere of the ship the Rights-of-Man to the “ampler and more knowing world of” the Bellipotent, Billy Budd fails to register the change in his circumstances that is grounded in the change from simplicity to greater knowingness (50). He is a kind of “rustic beauty transplanted from the provinces and brought into competition with the highborn dames of the court” (51), but does not notice this shift in intersubjective relations. “As little did he observe that something about him provoked an ambiguous smile in one or two harder faces” among the “bluejackets,” or common sailors, of the Bellipotent crew. “Nor less unaware was he of the peculiar favorable effect his person and demeanor had upon the more intelligent gentlemen of the quarter-deck” (51). It is on Claggart that Billy Budd has the greatest power to alter and transform the spectator. This is an effect that Melville produces at times through the alternative route of negation: talking, in a pre-Freudian manner, of Claggart’s homoerotic blend of “envy and antipathy,” conjoined in him like “Chang and Eng,” for Billy, the narrator notes that the envy in Claggart is no “vulgar form of the passion. Nor, as directed toward Billy Budd, did it partake of that streak of apprehensive jealousy that marred Saul’s visage perturbedly brooding on the comely young David. Claggart’s envy struck deeper” (78). By disputing an outcome that he has himself visualized for us, by telling us that Billy Budd does not mar Claggart’s visage in the way that the “comely young David” marred Saul’s, Melville is, of course, putting that very image of a desire-marred face in our minds, and therefore recalling not just the homoerotic tradition of Jonathan and David that, as Richard Godbeer has shown in The Overflowing of Male Friendship, was one of the central tropes for romantic male friendship in the early American republic, but also the beautiful-ruined face of the fallen Satan staring, with “jealousy, th’injur’d Lover’s Hell,” at the prelapsarian splendor of Adam and Eve. Perhaps the chief disfiguration that Claggart undergoes is the result of the melancholia that intermittently seizes him when he looks at Billy. Looking at the “cheerful sea Hyperion,” Claggart takes on a “settled meditative and melancholy expression, his eyes strangely suffused with incipient feverish tears. Then would Claggart look like the man of sorrows. Yes, and sometimes the melancholy expression would have in it a touch of soft yearning, as if Claggart could have even loved Billy but for fate and ban” (88).

I argue that in Billy Budd Melville brings the banned sexual elements in the discourse of Hellenism to a newly articulated and prominently visualized
level. While *Billy Budd* is famously unpublished, there is evidence that Melville did not intend it to remain so. In the responses to *Billy Budd*, especially Claggart’s, Melville registered mingled responses to the spectacle of male beauty: feelings of ambiguous regard, of mingled envy and antipathy, and of sorrow, a lingering melancholy. *Billy Budd* is Melville’s answer to Hawthorne’s question about why Antinous is forever sad. Or, perhaps more to the point, *Billy Budd* is a figure of the sad young man offered to Hawthorne, whose work teems with such figures, as a tribute from Melville, whose work also teems with such figures. The young man’s sadness would appear to be a reaction to the impossible demands of visual identity.

What needs to be disentangled—rethought and reimagined—are the phenomena of a homoerotic tradition coming into greater prominence and decidability and an ongoing fascination with the classical past. As scholars, we continue to ask where the banned homoerotic response begins, and the kind of weariness at looking at a beautiful work of art with unimpressed eyes, as Hawthorne did with the bas-relief of Antinous, ends; where the ecstatic love of the beautiful intersects with an enflamed sexual response; from which source the spectatorial ambivalence with which *Billy Budd* is regarded flows, homoerotic desire or an essential bewilderment over the unceasing repetition of classical forms in the present.

**HAWTHORNE’S ANTINOUS**

**VISUAL IDENTITY, HELLENISM, AND THE MASOCHISTIC GAZE**

Melville still had Hawthorne on his mind when he wrote *Billy Budd* in the late 1880s. “Though our Handsome Sailor had as much of masculine beauty as one can expect anywhere to see; nevertheless, like the beautiful woman in one of Hawthorne’s minor tales, there was just one thing amiss in him. No visible blemish indeed, as with the lady; no, but an occasional liability to vocal defect” (53). As he did with such perspicuity in “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” Melville isolates here something peculiarly and stubbornly powerful in Hawthorne’s writings, and a theme that Melville takes to new levels of complexity in *Billy Budd*: the relationship between men and their own image. The impossibility of “visual blemish” in Hawthorne’s beautiful young men ironically alerts us, through negation, to the fact that they are in every other way quite blemished indeed. For Melville, the blemish is located in the body even if it is not on its surface; stuttering Billy’s ruptured, impaired voice gives vent to the tensions in the story that are centered in the predicament of Billy’s beautiful, feminine form in a world that consists entirely of
other men. Hawthorne, generally, establishes a different kind of split: the outward beauty of his young men contrasts with their interior inadequacy, sometimes to the point of moral decay. At the same time, the older men who may be said to prey on these younger men are often described as physically as well as morally inferior, damaged, or downright ugly, like the misshapen Chillingworth, the menacing Model, or, to go back further, the tarred and feathered spectacle of Major Molineux.

In the introduction, I noted the valences between Hawthorne’s representation of the male’s conflict with his own image and Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage, which brilliantly revises Freud’s theories of narcissism in ways that dovetail with psychoanalytic film theory. What I want to suggest is that Hawthorne foregrounds a particular understanding of self, sexuality, and the body in his work. His work thematizes what I have called visual identity, the conceptualization of the self as a perceivable visual image, something extruded upon the surface of the world as a reflection of a private, interior self the existence of which can be affirmed only through this visualization. Which is to say, selves are known or knowable only through their outward manifestation in physical form. Visual identity is certainly not exclusive to males; indeed, the entire postclassical Western tradition has emphasized the visual aspects of beauty as a female domain. Hester Prynne is first introduced to us in *The Scarlet Letter* as a visual spectacle, the very outward show of her controversial sinfulness, a tableau vivant of her public identity as adulterous woman bearing her adulterously spawned child, a parody of the Christian icon of the Madonna and Child that adds what this icon refutes, a lush, Mary Magdalene–like carnality.

Highly responsive to the beauty of women and men in his work as a whole, Hawthorne reinserts masculinity into the continuum of visual desire and concepts of beauty. He extends Winckelmannian aesthetics, preserving their merger of homoerotic appreciation and desexualizing aesthetic distance and adding a fierce, psychologizing, secular-religious moral critique. If Hawthorne’s young men are Greek statues come to life, they actively comment on the disparity between a belief in classical perfection and modern forms of beauty, sexuality, and the body: they embody the split by denaturing outward shows of beauty with interior realms of moral depravity.

The distinctions between Hawthorne’s disdainful reaction to Antinous in Rome and Melville’s transported one make for an extremely telling commentary on how each author imagined “significant personal beauty” in males—and even more saliently why this would be an important issue in representation at all. While one could go in several directions here, and while the comparative discussion of Melville’s and Hawthorne’s representations of
masculinity demands a discrete study, what I want to consider is the disparity between what Hawthorne “said” he liked or disliked in his ostensibly private writing and what he consistently thematized in his fiction. At this point, I would like to introduce into the discussion a concept that I call the *masochistic gaze.*

Melville’s reaction to Antinous, though clipped in the manner of all of his journal writing, reflects his ability to respond to an image of aestheticized male beauty with appreciation and something approaching a lack of conflict. In other words, Melville’s homoerotic sensibility can come through on the page with greater explicitness and fewer restrictions than could Hawthorne’s. Immediately we recall all of the moments in Melville’s work in which young men are regarded dubiously (think, for example, of the burly sailors’ contemptuous regard of the too feminine and dandified young Englishman Harry Bolton in Melville’s underappreciated *Redburn*), none more powerfully in this regard than Billy Budd. But just as Melville can name and poetically evoke Narcissus in his published writing, he can behold Antinous and record his impressions of this beautiful doomed youth with appreciation. In contrast, Hawthorne can only see a drooping, dispiriting attitude in this figure. What makes Hawthorne’s response more than simply a matter of opinion, a question of differing tastes, is that Hawthorne continuously thematized in his fiction precisely what the “real” author Hawthorne recorded with disapproval or frustration: an attitude of discomfort on the part of the beautiful young man with male visual identity.

Hawthorne distances himself from received opinion, writing that despite the figure’s vaunted beauty, “the features of Antinoüs do not seem to me beautiful in themselves.” As he clarifies: “that heavy, downward look is repeated till I am more weary of it than of anything else in sculpture.” I call our attention to Hawthorne’s admission—or declaration—of “weariness” at beholding that frequently repeated “heavy, downward look.” The received opinion to which Hawthorne was aversively responding was Winckelmann’s appreciation for the beauty of the Antinous.

Notably well versed in issues of aesthetics and visual representation (as the thematic references to portraits, miniatures, daguerreotypes, statues, and other art objects in his work attest), Hawthorne read Winckelmann’s 1764 *The History of Ancient Art* shortly after having completed *The Scarlet Letter.* The English translation by G. Henry Lodge was the one that Hawthorne and Melville read before their trips to Europe in the 1850s. Both writers frequently echo Winckelmann’s focus on the classical beautiful male body, such as the famous Apollo Belvedere. Published in 1849, Lodge’s translation of the second volume, *Art Among the Greeks,* was the first to be published in
the United States, probably precisely because of the second volume’s Greek focus. The first volume, which focuses on Egyptians and Etruscans, was published in 1856. It was the first two volumes of Winckelmann’s History of Art, then, that were available to Hawthorne, since the subsequent two volumes did not come out until 1872–73 (Hawthorne died in 1864). Hawthorne’s immersion (along with that of his wife Sophia, a visual artist whose own career and aesthetic interest are finally receiving the scholarly attention they deserve, and his family) in the European art world produced the rich series of commentaries on European culture and aesthetics that are recorded in The French and Italian Notebooks as well as in The Marble Faun.

While nothing as predictable or rote as a one-to-one relationship between Hawthorne’s art and his personal responses exists—to the extent that we can ever really view a famous writer’s journal writing as “personal”; it is not difficult to believe that Hawthorne, who had achieved fame a decade earlier with The Scarlet Letter, was aware that his private prose might one day be published—what is nevertheless of undeniable interest is the central discrepancy here. As I have had frequent occasion to note, Hawthorne associates youthful male figures in his fiction with precisely the attitude of “heavy, downward” looking that he finds so unappetizing in the Villa Albani Antinous. Generally, the Antinous is associated with certain defining qualities: a sensual, daydreaming lassitude; detachment; a melancholy air; and downcast eyes. Stooping, head bent down, in attitudes that I have associated with shame, passivity, aggression and hostility, and, especially, the fear of looking, Hawthorne’s young men share with Antinous, and Antinous as Hawthorne perceived him, a melancholic disposition tied directly to ways of seeing and being seen.

As I have written in another context, masochistic male looking is indicative of the fragility, vulnerability, and powerlessness of the male eye. The masochistic gaze, which renders vision impaired, faulty, or in some other way damaged, is an expression of repressed homosexual voyeurism. What I want to suggest is that—at least to a certain extent—Hawthorne’s expression of detachment, skepticism, and disdain toward the highly regarded bas-relief of Antinous was a self-policing maneuver against the homoerotic potentialities of the figure, potentialities suggested within the fame that surrounded it as among the most beautiful of classical works and within Winckelmann’s idealization of such figures. (Some critics will inevitably solve the problem by offering that Hawthorne simply didn’t like this bas-relief. Based on Hawthorne’s consistent themes, I believe that there’s more to it than that.)

To speculate, perhaps what Hawthorne found so wearisome about the Antinous was precisely the way in which the attitude of downward-gazing
(looking upon the earth and recalling his premature death) thematizes the predicament of his young anguished men, forever caught in a paralytic bind within the gaze, their own desire to look and not to be looked at, their constant vulnerability to the assaultive and ravenous eyes of others. To speculate further, perhaps these afflictions are precisely what safeguard Hawthorne’s youthful male figures from a threatening homoerotic explicitness. Were their desirability presented without them, they might be too available as objects of erotic contemplation, too idealized. And yet, at the same time, their afflictions make them more vulnerable and therefore more accessible, as Billy Budd’s stutter does him. Sensually feminine and obdurately, stoically masculine at once, Billy Budd becomes an accessible figure through his somatic rupture. And much like Billy Budd, Antinous has the ability to affect the spectator, perhaps, against his will. As looking at Billy Budd on some level deforms Claggart, so, too, does looking upon the Antinous leave Hawthorne wearied—a response that blurs the somatic and the affective. And as the epigraph to this chapter shows, the more explicit the figuration of the young man’s melancholia becomes, the more amplified the homoerotic threat. The narrator’s question about Antinous’s perplexing sadness leads to an almost shockingly explicit homoerotic image of the androgynous wine-god Bacchus bringing grapes to the earthy young Italian man Donatello’s lips: “Bacchus, too, a rosy flush diffusing itself over his time-stained surface, could come down from his pedestal, and offer a cluster of purple grapes to Donatello’s lips; because the god recognizes him as the woodland elf who so often shared his revels” (14:17). What undergirds this encounter is a knowing, sexually charged kinship between louche god and feral man or “woodland elf,” a queer shock of recognition.

By transforming Hawthorne’s Georgiana in “The Birthmark,” the woman from one of Hawthorne’s “minor tales” with a blemish on her beauty, into Billy Budd, a young man without a visual blemish, but with a different kind of somatic flaw, Melville provocatively reorganizes Hawthorne’s thematic. The missing figure in Melville’s analogy—Hawthorne’s male characters—is abundantly supplied by Melville in his most overwhelmingly male-centered and homoerotic work. Melville, in other words, provides a dazzling riff on the beauty of Hawthorne’s males while safeguarding the dead author’s legacy through an evocation of a flawed female beauty in one of Hawthorne’s so-called minor tales. The levels of distancing and detachment at work here paradoxically make it possible for Melville to flood the Hawthorne oeuvre, by implication, with homoerotic valences, embodied in Billy Budd and his own maddening, even wearying incitement of the male gaze.
I want to suggest that Hawthorne’s last published novel, *The Marble Faun* (1860), represents a certain terminus point, a kind of closure, in Hawthorne’s development of his narcissistic themes. Certainly, it is the headiest aestheticization of them, in which Hawthorne offers perhaps the most telling account of his conflicted relationship to male beauty. If narcissism for Hawthorne was a means of both critiquing normative masculinity and mourning for a lost ideal, *The Marble Faun* functions as a kind of narcissistic catharsis, a way for Hawthorne to resolve the maddeningly conflicted anxieties that informed his understanding of masculinity, on a personal and social level. Moreover, Hawthorne’s deployment of the titular figure of this novel illuminates the homoerotic stakes in narcissistic self-representation, while also presaging Hawthorne’s treatment of racialized masculinity in the late, unfinished work.

As I have been arguing, Hawthorne conducts his inquiry into the anguished nature of gendered identity and issues of power and violation through symbolic reenactments of the Narcissus myth. Yet his aesthetics—as he discusses in “The Custom-House” essay, his view of art as a mirror in whose “haunted verge” can merge the polarities that inform the Narcissus myth, surface and depth, or, in Hawthorne’s reformulation, the imaginative and the actual—positively revalues Narcissus. (I turn to the question of Hawthorne’s aesthetics, as he presents them in the “The Custom-House,” in the epilogue.) I suggest that, towards the end of his career, Hawthorne found a way of resolving his narcissistic crisis, albeit only for a moment. Though *The Marble Faun* is Hawthorne’s last “complete” romance, he wrote a great deal after it, including the unfinished *Septimius Felton/Norton manuscripts*, which stage anew the narcissistic crisis at the center of Hawthorne’s work, as I will argue in the last chapter. Hawthorne’s momentary resolution of this narcissistic crisis in *The Marble Faun* is intimately tied to his anxieties over gender and homoerotic desire, and involves an attempt to mediate them as well as his conflicts over self and self-image. *The Marble Faun* also gives us a valuable opportunity to consider more generally the cultural anxieties over all of these conflicts within Hawthorne’s own era.

The spectacle of Praxiteles’ faun with which this novel opens is the culmination not only of major preoccupations in Hawthorne’s work but also of those in the culture he brought with him to Europe, in which he traveled after finishing his stint as American Consul in Liverpool, an appointment secured for him by his friend, President Franklin Pierce. As we have noted,
a decisive shift from Rome to Greece (the “Greek Revival”) had occurred in American culture by the antebellum period. The unceasing classical references throughout Hawthorne’s work convey the interest in the mythological past in American life, inherited from and cross-fertilized with European Romanticism: the national form of narcissistic relation, in which one nation makes sense of itself by negotiating the effects of its specular image in another.

Hawthorne’s interest in Praxiteles’ faun, while certainly inspired, flows from the trends Winckelmann set in motion. “The prominence Winckelmann gave to Praxiteles,” writes the art historian Alex Potts, along with Whitney Davis one of the key contemporary reinterpreters of Winckelmann, “has remained a feature in modern histories of Greek sculpture ever since.” In Winckelmann’s wake, a “rash of ascriptions of antique sculptures of beautiful little fauns and satyrs to Praxiteles” occurred, as modern “artists also became preoccupied with this sculptural ideal, and produced a number of interesting renderings of the boyish gracefulness and supposedly ‘innocent’ homoeroticism that had come to be associated with this great sculptor of antiquity.”

Freud illuminates what was at stake for Hawthorne in terms of the sexual relevance of aesthetics generally. In his enduringly controversial study of Leonardo da Vinci, Freud writes with fascination of the homosexual artist’s fusion of opposites, particularly of moral opposites:

Leonardo was notable for his quiet peaceableness and his avoidance of all antagonism and controversy. He was gentle and kindly to everyone . . . He condemned war and bloodshed and described man as not so much the king of the animal world but rather the worst of the wild beasts. But this feminine delicacy of feeling did not deter him from accompanying condemned criminals on their way to execution in order to study their features distorted by fear and to sketch them in his notebook. . . . He often gave the appearance of being indifferent to good and evil. (SE 11: 68–69)

Freud’s view of the homosexual artist remains as fascinating as it is problematic. For Freud, Leonardo is the homosexual male artist who sublimates his desires and occupies a strange, anomalous position between love and hate, sexuality and asexuality, good and evil. Morally and sexually ambivalent, he sublimates his sexuality, specifically his homosexuality, into aesthetic endeavor. The homosexual artist emerges in Freud and in popular culture as a beautiful monster, a figure of profound ambivalence. Writing, as he did, of male beauty and the figure of the artist in the period between Winckelmann
and Freud, between neoclassicism and psychoanalysis, between the myth-discourse of Narcissus and the classical psychoanalytic theory of narcissism, Hawthorne creates in his marble faun a portrait that combines Winckelmann’s aesthetic theory with an uncannily Freudian view of the work of art—and implicitly of the artist—as the merging of opposites.

Discussing the “homoerotic reflexivity operating between image and spectator” in Winckelmann’s theories, Alex Potts explains why Winckelmann could not locate the figure of a Zeus or a Hercules as his ideal form of masculine beauty. Only the boyish youth could fill this role, for his “ideal masculinity could be projected while effacing suggestions of any too categorically insistent a masculine identity.” Indeed, Winckelmann “suggests that the imperatives of ideal beauty lead ineluctably to the image of the hermaphrodite or castrated figure.” In contrast, Melville had no problem doing so, as suggested by his Billy Budd, who fuses Antinous- and David-like beauty with that of the strong man Hercules and with other “barbarian” typings of masculinity.

While a great deal needs to be said about Winckelmann’s establishment of a homosexual Hellenic tradition in the nineteenth century, Winckelmann’s elevation of a particular figure, “the purified image of the body as a cipher of ideal oneness,” most relevantly impinges upon our discussion. For Hawthorne, the faun is just such a unifying cipher, reconciling warring opposites, male and female, human and animal, culture and nature, beauty and horror. The novel’s original title (used in England) was Transformation: in the faun, the ambiguously beautiful young man in Hawthorne’s work transforms into a male figure of beautiful ambiguity. Permanently available to the gaze yet unblinkingly indifferent to it, the faun incites the gaze yet remains utterly invulnerable, the most successful version of a sexually inviolate male in a literary era that teems with such figures. The faun is truly a “man beyond desire,” aloof not only from sex but also from the messy complications of the human. Moreover, Hawthorne’s representation of the faun intersects with a series of critical controversies concerning race and Hellenism; briefly addressing these controversies will help us to contextualize Hawthorne’s more direct interrogation of race in his late work.

Nancy Bentley has reframed The Marble Faun, Hawthorne’s last complete fictional work, as indicative of Hawthorne’s white, imperial disposition toward racial, ethnic, and class otherness. Similarly, Arthur Riss has presented The Marble Faun as a chief example of Hawthorne’s aesthetics of “anti-black racism.” Kendall Johnson’s discussion of the racial as well as sexual politics of The Marble Faun draws on Bentley’s and usefully indexes several concerns relevant to the present discussion:
As Nancy Bentley notes, the faun first appears in Hawthorne’s notebook as a “bearded woman” and a link to humanity’s “lower tribes.” . . . The faun of the notebook seems the product of Hawthorne’s anxiety over possibly errant sexual sympathy. Recall [Joseph] Addison’s claim that our sense of beauty regulates sexual appetite, directing desire to maintain the proper boundaries between species. In changing the gender of the faun from a woman (in the notebook) to a man (for the novel), Hawthorne bristles the faun’s procreative potential with an American brand of impotence, figured through a grammar of noble savagery. . . . Whereas Bentley interprets the faun through Hawthorne’s characterization of fugitive slaves in “Chiefly About War Matters” (The Atlantic Monthly, 1862), Donatello’s story echoes the frame of savage “doom,” to recall the terms of George Catlin. . . . Donatello’s vexed masculinity reflects a logic of racial classification that assumes an impossibly pure ancestry rooted in a pre-national soil outside of history.

In foreclosing the possibility of union and generation between Donatello and Miriam Schaeffer, Johnson argues, Hawthorne echoes the “figurative impotence” of characters such as Chingachgook in The Last of the Mohicans (1826): “The exclusive logic of racial ancestry” dooms the Monte Beni family.45

Johnson brings many important cultural contexts into the discussion, particularly the legacy of George Catlin (July 26, 1796–December 23, 1872), a Pennsylvanian painter whose “Indian Gallery” was one of the chief antebellum foundations, along with Cooper’s novels, of the myth of the American Indian as a romantic figure of lawlessness and a vanished primitive American past. (Catlin used his experience of living among Indians to bolster his own personal mythology.) But Johnson errs, I think, in associating Hawthorne’s faun with “impotence”; not only is this a heteronormative argument, relying, as it does, on conventional standards of masculine potency and reproductivity, but it is also a misrepresentation of the faun’s properties. Casually teasing and placidly appealing, the faun evokes both the feminine and the masculine, an androgynous figure that synthesizes the kinds of gender-blurring beauty to which Hawthorne is drawn throughout his fiction. Oddly beautiful feminine males abound—Fanshawe, with his scholarly softness contrasted against his jock rival’s loping machismo; the gentle boy Ilbrahim; Minister Hooper, with his transvestic black veil; Dimmesdale, as tremulously emotional as he is pleasing to the eye. Oddly masculine while also sensually feminine beauties abound as well—Beatrice, as phallically potent as she is overriply gorgeous; Hester Prynne, a self-
reliant woman likened to “man-like Elizabeth” the Queen and the Renaissance Madonna both; Zenobia, with her arresting, Angelina Jolie–like erotic beauty and immense, masculine hands, between which she always threatens to pulverize Coverdale’s obtrusive head. The faun’s androgynous sexual élan specifically defies the hypermasculine new standards of virility and physical hardness that began to emerge in the 1850s, with the rise of the athletic male body-cult, and that Hawthorne had already satirized, as we have noted, in The Blithedale Romance. Far from being a diminution of the queer sexual charge of the “bearded woman,” the faun looms above us as a tantalizing queer mystery, one suggestive of an essentially enigmatic quality in Hawthorne’s own persona on several levels, the sexual included. None of this is to diminish the problems of race evoked by the figure. The genuinely troublesome issue here is the figure’s representativeness as an icon of nineteenth-century Hellenism, to which I now turn.

RACE AND HELLENISM

Sandra Zagarell describes Hellenism as “the celebration of the cultural superiority of Greece that flourished in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century and that, as Martin Bernal has shown, had strong racist overtones.” Martin Bernal’s influential and highly controversial Black Athena, a study that examines the erasure of the “Afroasiatic” roots of classical civilization, has had the effect of fixing transatlantic nineteenth-century Hellenism as racist practice. In a chapter titled, in a characteristically incendiary manner, “The Final Solution of the Phoenician Problem, 1885–1945,” Bernal examines the “consolidation of the Aryan model and the denial of both Egyptian and Phoenician influence on the formation of Greece.” By 1898, Bernal argues, the view that a “great mass of Semitic influence” shaped Aegean culture (as the denunciated scholar Robert Brown, who railed against the “Aryanists,” argued) “now seemed eccentric.”

Scholars who have drawn on Bernal’s study have, explicitly or implicitly, suggested that writers whose work deploys Hellenism were participating in the erasure of the knowledge of the Semitic and Asian influences on Greek culture and religion.

While a proper discussion of controversies over Hellenism cannot be undertaken in this chapter, it is worthwhile to note them in terms of thinking about the political potentialities of Hawthorne’s weird, unsettling meditation on the faun, which has elicited numerous considerations in the past two decades about race and ethnicity but not, however, nearly as many about sexuality.
What the faun represents, if considered from the perspective that Hellenism was racist practice, is idealized whiteness. Yet, and this is both to concur and disagree with Bentley and Johnson, if the faun does indeed embody a confluence of whiteness and otherness, signified by primitivism, it serves as a commentary on the influence and the undeniability of racial otherness, which, in an American context, would most pressingly impinge upon the presence of the Indian and the African. But the wild card in Hawthorne’s representation is the figure’s mysteriousness. With his vague smile and louche stance, the figure seems to be in on some sexual or cultural or racial joke that forever eludes us. Like the mystery of the faunlike Donatello’s hidden ears, the faun’s mystery trenches upon sex and race at once, caudal appendages and racial identity presented as similar, teasing questions. The faun simultaneously suggests a masculinity informed by homoeroticism and a whiteness marked by nonwhiteness, by racial difference. As such, it anticipates the intersection of homoeroticism and racial intermixture that so provocatively and disturbingly informs, as we will see, Septimius Felton.

Though I have not seen the figure read this way elsewhere, the faun bears a striking physical resemblance to Hawthorne, with his mop of “bright curly hair” and striking eyes and general air of sexual ambiguity, his feminine male beauty. As with Hawthorne, the faun provokes unsettling erotic responses precisely because, though clearly readable as male, he nevertheless infuses the feminine within the masculine form, in fact derives his exquisite beauty precisely from the fusion of masculine and feminine qualities. (Winckelmann was also fascinated by such gender-bending figures, especially hermaphrodites and eunuchs.) In his notebook description, Hawthorne writes of the faun’s “voluptuous mouth,” of “beautiful and agreeable features” nevertheless “rounded.” Much like Freud’s Leonardo, the faun has no “principle,” yet Hawthorne lays the stress on the faun’s truthful and honest “simplicity” rather than his moral ambiguity (14: 191–92). Overall, this bewitching spectacle of the androgynous or hermaphroditic male art object–artist positively rather than diabolically casts its unsettling spell.

In keeping with Winckelmannian theory, Hawthorne designates as his ideal figure a castrated creature: a fig leaf covers his genitals and Hawthorne never makes direct mention of either the leaf or what it covers. Yet Hawthorne carefully alerts us to the sexual potentialities of this teasingly ambiguous figure through his attention to the faun’s visible pointed ears and unseen tail, hidden beneath the lion skin slung over its right shoulder, diagonally across its chest, and over its backside. In his notebook, Hawthorne simply
states, “a tail is probably hidden beneath his garment,” but in the fiction the language becomes more cumbersomely and coyly Latinate: “a certain caudal appendage” would connote the faun’s animal nature, and, “if it exists at all,” be found under the garment (4: 10, my emphasis). If Hawthorne’s self-portrait of the artist eschews the monstrosity Freud added, it is like Freud’s in its desire to free the sexually ambiguous artist from the presence of the phalus—Freud’s Leonardo is the model of sexual sublimation, and Hawthorne’s faun probably lacks a tail.

As we have noted, a key feature of Hawthorne’s scopophobia, or fear of looking, is his rendering of vision as violation: masochistic suffering courses through Hawthorne’s depiction of narcissistic desire. The faun, looming above observers, fixes the gaze in a timeless frieze of spectatorship over which it presides, the object of the gaze but also its indifferent master. The faun is timelessly indifferent to the ravenous gaze, but the human male is not. Donatello, one of the party of four young people in the Capitoline Museum at the start of this gorgeous and difficult novel (in my view, Hawthorne’s greatest work), comes closest to resembling the mythic faun, and the other members of the party—all artists, the exotic, probably Jewish, European Miriam; the Americans Hilda and Kenyon—all tease this apparently peasant-class earthy Italian about his resemblance to the faun, Miriam most mercilessly of all, demanding to see if Donatello’s ears are, like the faun’s, pointed. (Donatello will later be revealed to be a Count of noble ancestry, exposing the class biases and faulty analytic powers of the group.)

This scene emblematizes our discussion of Hawthorne’s depiction of self, manhood, narcissistic desire, and fraught looking, as it stages the narcissistic gaze as desire to see manhood revealed and as the always imminent, inescapable threat of violation. Are Donatello’s ears really pointed? Will we see his caudal appendage? As arresting for not being seen as they are for their phallic potentiality, Donatello’s ears signify the secret of male sexuality, what lies beneath hair or other veils, what must remain hidden (to most) in order to provoke desire. The ideal male beauty may be castrated, but the human, even if the ambiguously human, male provokes desire by suggesting a lurking phallic potency hidden beneath the beautiful surface. Of most interest here is that Donatello provokes desire from both women and other men (and from androgynous gods), competing, merged desires that always carry with them the threat of violation.

The faun as sexual spectacle provokes a poignant human confrontation with the torments of desire. The faun itself, however, is never violated. In the faun, Hawthorne at last found a figure that could represent his complicity with the gaze and remain invulnerable in the face of it. The faun is a reso-
solution to Hawthorne’s crisis precisely because it bears no evidence of Antinous’s “heavy, downward” look—the faun looks ahead, and past us, but also at nothing and no one at all, and is thus able to enjoy, or at least to signal, a range of unfettered erotic and even emotional possibilities. The faun is the ultimate figure of the narcissist, the purest, indifferent to all and absolute in his self-regard. As I will demonstrate in the discussion of Septimius Felton, this momentary resolution of Hawthorne’s narcissistic crisis was, indeed, momentary: the ornery, indeed, the intractable, nature of this crisis would continue unabated. If the figure of the faun signals closure, the concept of closure is parodied from the beginning of The Marble Faun, which begins with an evocation of the faun’s qualities only to initiate an almost endless series of moral and narrative conflicts and perplexities that will spill out into the unfinished work.

If Billy Budd is a sight that wounds the spectator’s eye, inciting a desire that cannot be fulfilled, the faun also incites the spectator’s visual hunger, a desire to denude his human avatar, Donatello. But most resonantly of all, the faun is an apt symbol for the “frozen passionateness” that Hawthorne so eloquently thematizes in this novel. If Billy Budd is, in contrast, a somatic and messily human figure, there is also something nonhuman about him—the silent swiftness of his blow to Claggart’s head that suggests a robotic, automaton-response; the lack of any bodily emissions (semen, specifically) once he is hanged; indeed, the bestial quality of his innocence. Perhaps the chief result of so many associations with the classical world and other kinds of mythic parallels is that the human subject becomes indistinguishable from the classical icon. Winckelmann’s aesthetic may have allowed a discourse of sexual appraisal that would otherwise have been impossible, but it is also, at heart, an expression of a desire to be freed from sex, one consonant with many trends in nineteenth-century American literature, which often figured sex as violation, for men no less than women. The contemplation of the frozen, blank, beautiful classical form is the expression of a wish for a non-sexual appreciation and even more emphatically experience of the body, of one’s own and also that of another person. Stasis, nonbeing, is the only real respite from the maddening demands of desire. Yet the faun, in his sexual mystery, remains a perpetual goad to desire. The aging Hawthorne, in contemplating the faun, may have contemplated his own youthful beauty and its ability to incite the gaze; may have recalled the predicaments of his young men and their struggles with self-overseeing, but also, perhaps for the first time, may have imagined the greater possibilities of pleasure within the desiring gaze.