A Certain Dark Beauty

NARCISSISM, FORM, AND RACE IN
HAWTHORNE’S LATE WORK

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, I considered the overlaps between Hawthorne’s and Herman Melville’s treatments of classical male beauty. In this chapter, I will consider a theme that has lurked throughout this study as well as Hawthorne’s work. The darkness of Hawthorne’s young American men is a gender metaphor and a sexual metaphor. It is also a racial metaphor. Melville’s famous description of Hawthorne as “shrouded in a blackness, ten times black” blends unsettlingly into the dark white masculinity that Hawthorne himself imagined. Hawthorne’s simultaneously appealing and demonic men evoke the fears of the racial other that hovered around New England antebellum culture and became only increasingly more intense as the nation moved ever closer to civil war over slavery. Even as opposition to slavery grew exponentially more heated in the North, particularly in abolitionist centers such as Concord and Boston, fears of a racial other’s intrusion into the white homogeneity of antebellum New England intensified. I believe that Hawthorne absorbed and reflected these growing fears of an influx of black bodies. These fears animate his peculiar representation of that iconic American image of the young white man full of promise who is bizarrely afflicted by blight and whose darkness of character belies his pleasing outward show. More to the point, however, his depictions of masculinity reflected his own fears of these bodies and his own racism. That Hawthorne was an artist of supreme moral intelligence makes his racism more vexing, heartbreaking, and infuriating. Without any desire to exculpate Hawthorne for his racist attitudes—which can be summarized as a failure to respond to...
and empathize with the suffering of the slave—I do nevertheless believe that in his late career, Hawthorne confronted his own racism as well as his culture’s and attempted to theorize its psychosexual sources. From within his own aesthetic preoccupations as well as thematic ones, he crafted narratives, most of which remained unfinished, in which race began to play the worrisome, galvanizing near-explicit role that gender and sex had played throughout his work. This is in no way to suggest that racism and race anxiety are not everywhere present throughout Hawthorne’s work, but, rather, that in his late phase Hawthorne made these undercurrents something like a current.

In his late work, Hawthorne makes it impossible to distinguish race from sex, sex from race. He makes desire the basis from which any question about the self and identity proceeds. All of this makes psychoanalysis helpful to our understanding of the late work. To understand racism fully, we need to consider the sexual logic of all identity formations. Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks urges psychoanalysis to grant race “coevality” with sex: “not to do so,” she warns, “trivializes the effects of racial identification.” Such a critique could be applied to Hawthorne’s work generally, which tended to submerge questions of race beneath those of gender and sexuality. In his last phase, I argue, Hawthorne makes race coeval with gender and sexuality as thematic concerns.

LONG IGNORED by most critics, Hawthorne’s late, unfinished work, never published in his own lifetime, is now attracting some new critical interest, the challenge continuing to be the prevailing view of these works as not only uninteresting but also aesthetically inferior to Hawthorne’s published, “completed” output. In his superb 1991 study of Hawthorne, Charles Swann had already begun to call our attention to the late work’s significance. But only in recent years has it received anything like a sensitive treatment from criticism more broadly, with readings by critics such as Larry J. Reynolds, Rita Gollin, and Magnus Ullén, and, in a more mainstream vein, John Updike in a 2006 New Yorker essay. In addition to making a case for its aesthetic worth, I am interested in Hawthorne’s late work for its remarkably vivid continuation and revision of Hawthorne’s themes of narcissism and homoerotic desire (still underexplored in Hawthorne criticism), which remain deeply relevant and are now much more self-consciously tied to issues of racial identity.

Hawthorne’s stance on race and his attitudes toward the Civil War are major preoccupations of contemporary Hawthorne criticism. Belying the view that Hawthorne avoided race in his writing, critics have re-examined Hawthorne’s editorship of the 1845 Journal of an African Cruiser, written by
his friend Horatio Bridge, uncovering far greater contributions to this work than had been previously understood. Larry J. Reynolds’s magisterial *Devils and Rebels: The Making of Hawthorne’s Damned Politics* makes a concerted effort to contextualize Hawthorne’s views toward the Civil War and race as, in part, a pacifist stance against the potential terrors and terrorism of revolution.⁶ One of Reynolds’s most troubling and eye-opening contributions is his revelation of the extent to which Hawthorne’s racist attitudes were shared by many others in his abolitionist New England communities. But the majority of critics take a much more negative view of Hawthorne’s attitudes toward race, seeing his racism as indicative of his support of American empire-building.

As we noted in the previous chapter, scholars such as Nancy Bentley, Arthur Riss, and Kendall Johnson have reframed Hawthorne’s last complete fictional work, the 1860 novel-romance *The Marble Faun*, as indicative of Hawthorne’s white, imperial disposition toward racial, ethnic, and class otherness. In his essay “Nathaniel Hawthorne and Transnationality” in *Hawthorne and the Real*, a collection edited by Millicent Bell, John Carlos Rowe disputes Henry James’s assessment of Hawthorne as a provincial writer, but not in a celebratory manner: “Today we are interested in the history of our current global situation and the transnational forces that challenge the nation state and other traditional sociopolitical organizations. In order to understand these phenomena, we would do well to study Hawthorne’s fiction, which represents an older world transformed by the new forces of modernization, first announced by the industrial revolution in England and made more urgent and dangerous in the expansionist frenzy of Jacksonian America.”⁷ Rowe explicitly sees his work as an updating of Bercovitch’s influential 1991 study *The Office of The Scarlet Letter*. Bercovitch wrote about Hawthorne’s desire to create consensus through the reconciliation of opposing points of view, all of which bolster an ultimate affirmation of liberal individualism. Rowe not only extends the Bercovitchian position but also goes further, arguing that “the abstraction of liberal individualism from its historical and geopolitical possibility in nineteenth-century America is Hawthorne’s way of contributing to what today we recognize as cultural colonialism”; indeed, Hawthorne’s “romantic regionalism is a trick that serves expansionist political and cultural purposes.”⁸

While I certainly share these critics’ concerns, and, again, neither wish to exculpate Hawthorne for his racism nor explain away the considerable tensions in his writings related to race and empire, it is my contention that in his last phase the gaps in his thinking on race as well as the biases are precisely what Hawthorne submitted to analysis. This is not to suggest that
The late work is entirely antiracist in sensibility or that it thoroughly revises the stances toward otherness that characterize his oeuvre. Rather, I suggest that the late phase marks a new self-consciousness about these stances and a greater sensitivity toward these matters.

*The Marble Faun* demands a more sensitive treatment, in my view, than many critics have given it. In the previous chapter, I attempted to discuss the novel’s sexual radicalism, but clearly a great deal more work needs to be done on this novel. For now, let me establish that, rather than seeing it as the endpoint of his career, I would place *The Marble Faun* at the vanguard of a new direction taken by Hawthorne in which he turns his acute critical gaze upon matters only implicitly or glancingly scrutinized in his earlier work, such as race and racism. None of these critical assessments, for all of the necessary points they make, fairly frame Hawthorne’s attempt to make sense of race categories and racial difference in either *The Marble Faun* or the unfinished manuscripts as a new phase in his work.

If Hawthorne exudes a deep ambivalence regarding otherness and difference, on racial and ethnic as well as gender and sexual levels, *The Marble Faun* is a case in point of this ambivalence. It is a work with a Jewish heroine that clearly contains negative depictions of Judaism. It is also, at times, poignantly sympathetic toward the history of Jewish oppression. Certainly, it is a work that recognizes the centrality of Judaism to Western culture even within its most avowedly classical and Christian cultural underpinnings. Hawthorne appears to have used fiction as an occasion to work through his personal prejudices while also indulging in them. Donatello’s obsession with the dark mystery of Miriam Schaeffer carries over the obsession with Beatrice Rappaccini’s dark sexuality on Giovanni Guasconti’s part in a tale that many have examined as an allegory of racist fears of miscegenation. What unites both “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and *The Marble Faun* is that in these works the racial other becomes a figure of sympathy because embodied by a suffering and embattled female figure, always a figure with whom Hawthorne identifies.

Again, that Hawthorne identifies with the figure does not translate into an uncomplicated feminist portrait, especially in *The Marble Faun*. Resilient, intelligent, eloquent, and admirable a character though she is, Miriam Schaeffer is always highly ambivalently rendered. While it is commonly accepted that Hawthorne’s major female characters all proceed from the basis of the dark-lady archetype, it is perhaps more to the point that they each evoke the figure of the Jewess of Hawthorne’s 1856 description of Emma Abigail Montefiore Salomons, whom he met in London during his Consulship years.⁹ Raven-haired, passionate, darkly mysterious, as well as extremely
intelligent, Hawthorne’s great heroines Hester Prynne, Zenobia, and Miriam Schaeffer all share with Mrs. Salomons as Hawthorne perceived her an uncanny ability to provoke in the men who behold them simultaneous feelings of attraction and alienation, of desire and “repugnance.”

The unremittingly negative portrayal of “dark” masculinity in the depictions of Rappaccini and the Model of The Marble Faun make especially significant the fact that, in the Septimius manuscripts, the racial other is now the multiracial male protagonist who is also an identification figure meant to solicit at least a certain amount of sympathy from the reader. In that Septimius is such a figure, this late work represents an expansion and development of Hawthorne’s figure of the “dark young man,” treated here with more sympathy perhaps because of his very “darkness.”

The Septimius manuscripts, an uneven, often thrilling project, demand renewed critical attention for several reasons. First, they explode the myth that Hawthorne painstakingly avoided race in his fiction, making race not only a major concern but also a decisive theme in the founding of the nation. Second, they foreground same-sex desire, a theme that remains not only underexplored in Hawthorne criticism but also still deeply controversial within the study of nineteenth-century literature. Most importantly, in insisting on the intersection of desire and race, the Septimius project takes Hawthorne’s career-long concerns with male sexuality and its attendant terrors to unexpected places with myriad implications.

The issue of race in Hawthorne’s work alone, to say nothing of the antebellum literary period, is deeply vexed and complex. Let me make it clear at the outset, then, that this chapter has a very narrow focus: the relevance of theories of narcissism to an interpretation of the multiracial male subject’s relationship to white masculinity. Given that narcissism is so closely tied to male privilege for many—as embodied in Laura Mulvey’s treatment of the male gaze—one always raced as white, it is especially interesting to consider narcissism in terms of racialized gender politics. My interpretation of Hawthorne’s treatment of this dynamic is informed by the emerging field of whiteness studies, of which Nell Irvin Painter’s 2010 book The History of White People is exemplary. As we have noted, Hawthorne read some of Winckelmann’s The History of Ancient Art (1764) shortly after having completed The Scarlet Letter, and he applied the German art critic’s theories to his own experience of European art in the late 1850s. Winckelmann, as has been frequently discussed, was a pioneer not only in the popularization of Hellenism but in the development of a transatlantic homoerotic Hellenic aesthetic. As Painter elaborates in her book, this Hellenic ideal was also crucial to the cultivation and generalization of an ideal of white beauty.
Hawthorne’s previous male characters, such as the Grecian beauty Giovanni Guasconti, evoke this ideal in their Hellenic qualities. In contrast, Septimius Felton embodies the mixed-race mysteries that had been previously associated with Hawthorne’s women. In contrast to Septimius, the English soldier embodies the ideal of English-European white male beauty. Hawthorne creates a nationalistic and cultural divide through contrasting styles of masculinity, casting whiteness as the domain of English-European culture, racial tensions and intermixtures as a more distinctively American phenomenon. Lacan argues that the experience of the mirror stage is marked by aggressivity as well as suicidal despair, as we identify with a more perfect, apparently more coherent, miragelike image of ourselves. Hawthorne, in the culmination of his major themes, stages the encounter between Septimius and the English soldier as a confrontation with the specular self, one that produces an appositely violent result, except in real-world rather than psychic terms.

In this chapter, I explore the racial tensions within Hawthorne’s treatment of white masculinity while thinking about his depiction of white masculinity as an allegory for race. The linchpin figure in this regard is the multiracial Septimius Felton. I argue that Hawthorne brings an erotic dimension to his construction of racial otherness, one that intensifies the difficulties and the occasional daring in his exploration of race. That Hawthorne’s stance on race throughout his career is one of infuriating indifference makes his engagement with the topic in his late career all the more startling. One of the most moving aspects of Hawthorne’s career is that his late work—so long denigrated as inferior, evidence of his physical as well as mental and creative enfeeblement—is, in many ways, the most politically radical of his career, which is not to suggest that it is politically radical but, rather, that it represents not only Hawthorne’s attempt to grapple with issues of race in the glare of an impending and soon actively fought civil war but also some fresh and surprising thinking on these subjects.

The issue of race in Hawthorne raises an analogous question for psychoanalysis, namely what its relevance to such questions might be. Given how often psychoanalysis has historically ignored questions of race, it is especially important to address this lack in the methodology here. As I will show, Freud’s theories of the ego ideal and ideal ego, especially as revised by Lacan, can provide valuable insights into the homoerotic dynamics of race when race is considered in terms of visual identity—a making sense of oneself based on visual evidence. Of course, this evidence is so overdetermined by historically shifting and maintained cultural and social standards as to be unintelligible without the context they provide.
Perhaps surprisingly, Hawthorne’s late work also allows us a quite welcome opportunity to think about the related and equally vexed topics of Hawthorne’s representation of women and Freud’s theories of female sexuality. The *Septimius* manuscripts, *Septimius Felton* in particular, offer us a potent account of female agency that makes for a dynamic point of comparison to Freud’s frustrating but not entirely irrelevant theories of femininity. Before we can address any of these concerns, however, it is crucial that we establish the grounds for which we can appreciate the late work aesthetically as well as for its considerations of racial identity and sexual politics.

**INTERMIXTURES**  
**SEPTIMIUS FELTON**

En route to England, where he would be employed as American Consul in Liverpool courtesy of President Franklin Pierce, his best friend since their days as classmates at Bowdoin College, Hawthorne began to write a romance about an American attempting to claim an English estate (*The American Claimant* manuscripts), a project Hawthorne put aside in order to write *The Marble Faun*, his last published novel-romance. He was never able to complete the *Claimant* project; in his final years in Concord, Massachusetts, to which he returned after his years in Europe, Hawthorne took up, among other works, the romance *Septimius Felton*, in a later draft renamed *Septimius Norton*, a tale of a young, multiracial man on a quest for the secret of immortal life.

Betsy Erkkila points out that the America of James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking tales is “spooked by the prospect of a collapse in the distinctions of sexual, racial, and class blood in the America of the future.”

The irony is that the one boundary that remains open—the erotically charged cross-race and same-sex bond among Hawk-eye, Uncas, and, by extension, Chingachgook—is the bond that might seem least threatening by the normative sexual and racial standards of Cooper’s time. While the white man and the Indians might share in the phallic rites of guns and blood and sleep with each other in the forest, they would not reproduce a mixed-blood progeny: the love triangle of Hawk-eye, Uncas, and Chingachgook enables the fantasy of blood mixture—of sex and rank and color—without the threat of generation.¹²
What I will be suggesting throughout this chapter is that Hawthorne takes up and continues Cooper's subversive homoerotics of race and race anxiety in *Septimius Felton*. But what Hawthorne adds to Cooper is precisely the idea that “generation”—albeit, a generation of a different kind than biological human reproduction—can indeed result from the intermixture of differently raced male bloods.

*Septimius Felton* provides evidence that in Hawthorne race and sexuality face each other in a narcissistic relation, each mirroring the other. My claim that *Septimius Felton* is one of Hawthorne's most vibrant and intriguing achievements, which I am aware many readers will find dubious, depends on an even more problematic contention that the most animated and provocative section of a never completed work occurs early on: Septimius's encounter with the teasing, haughty, handsome young English soldier whom Septimius later kills in a duel. By exploring this episode in some depth, I aim to make the case that the fragmentary nature of Hawthorne's achievement in these final works both is essential to their special character and has a validity all its own. Moreover, I will use this incident as emblematic of the narcissistic themes that I consider to be a recurring interest in Hawthorne's work.

Prominent among the many links between the *American Claimant* and the *Septimius* manuscripts is the symbol of a bloody footprint. Left on the threshold of an ancestral English home, the bloody footprint marks the crime against innocence, an irremovable sign of indelible guilt. Beyond those familiar Hawthorne concerns, the bloody footprint serves as a poignant trace of Hawthorne's own persistent, painful attempts to craft a romance after his return from England, a return to a transformed America on the brink of fraternal war. Hawthorne wrote with an anguished sense that the romance form he perfected was no longer fashionable, that a new form was needed. As Terence Martin writes of *Septimius Felton*, one can find throughout it “scattered yet provocative evidence that for Hawthorne the literary genre which had served him for years was no longer a viable form.”13 The symbol conveys the somatic pain of Hawthorne's illness-ridden last days. At the same time, the bloody footprint marks the pages of these unfinished late romances with the blood of the slain Civil War soldiers populating Hawthorne's increasingly aggrieved mind. As he wrote, Hawthorne was pondering the human propensity for barbarism and bloodshed in a war he eventually supported but always despised. If a tremendous potential for violence inheres in all of Hawthorne's representations of human relations, especially between men, in *Septimius Felton* this violence erupts into actual murder. That murder might
seem justified during war is the very proposition that Hawthorne complicates and troubles.

Of Hawthorne’s late work, Charles Swann, among the most brilliant readers of Hawthorne, writes, “the struggles with his themes and materials is not evidence of imaginative failure but rather of Hawthorne’s intelligence, courage and ambition in facing remarkably complex issues at a time of great historical crisis which (had he lived longer) might well have produced a radically new kind of fiction.”

Swann’s 1991 argument, a view I share, was an anomalous one within Hawthorne criticism, which has historically framed these late works as sad indications of Hawthorne’s faltering powers. In one of the few earlier studies to consider them, Edward Davidson views the unfinished romances not only as signs of Hawthorne’s final ruin but also as evidence that “the seeds of his failure lay back in the years of success. He had at his disposal only a very limited number of plots and an even more limited number of scenes than we have ever suspected. In the short stories and in the earlier novels he had quite thoroughly exhausted his restricted budget.” “Old,” “miserably old,” Hawthorne was “senile,” a sad fact reflected in his late writings. Davidson’s own critical terminology betrays the sexual register of critical complaint—the supply of the seeds of Hawthorne’s art was exhausted by the end. This is a critical version of G. J. Barker-Benfield’s spermatic economy, the spermatic economy of imaginative production. Traditional criticism maintains masculinist standards of productivity that insist on closure as the end result of a literary work; little wonder, then, that the unfinished Hawthorne works have had such a hard time gaining recognition.

Hawthorne repeatedly writes of being unable to finish these romances, often with irritation, sometimes with despair. Yet the sheer persistence of his attempts conveys the urgency of his need to communicate something. One possibility that has not been raised in most critical accounts of late Hawthorne is that the impossibility of completion was aesthetically necessary to the nature of these late works, not in the reductive sense that their unfinished nature somehow reflects the impossible, unrealizable goals of the plots, for example the futile quest for the key to immortal life, but, rather, that the unfinishability itself serves as a response to the welter of conflictual, maddening pressures Hawthorne faced—national unrest; shifting literary tastes; his faltering, mutinous body—a statement about the impossibility of finding resolution, clarity, closure.

The major source of the opprobrium the late works have inspired in criticism would appear to be Hawthorne’s inability to find a workable plot or to carry a plot to its conclusion. It is part of my goal here to demon-
strate that, at least to a certain extent, Hawthorne self-consciously thematizes the “failed” nature of *Septimius Felton*, allegorizing the work’s very unfinishability through the work itself. Moreover, as I will show, this self-conscious textuality corresponds to and deepens the novel’s daring exploration of the intersection of desire and race in male–male relationships, which Hawthorne symbolically conducts through the figure of a maddening text passed from hand to hand from one male to another. If normative standards of male sexual performance appear to have dominated critical practice, these standards nevertheless appear very much to have been on Hawthorne’s mind as he wrote *Septimius Felton*. An obsession with potency courses through the *Septimius* manuscripts, as its hero attempts to transform the alternately crimson and purple flowers that flourish above the grave of the young English soldier he kills into the elixir of immortal life.

Ingeniously crafting a Civil War allegory that reminds its still largely undiscovered readers of the historical continuity of war and bloodshed, Hawthorne sets *Septimius Felton* in the Revolutionary War American past. In the Concord of 1775, Septimius Felton, of mixed English and native American stock (and possibly of African stock as well), lives with his fiery, witchlike Puritan-Indian Aunt Keziah (whose name changes throughout the manuscript, finally to Nashoba in the Norton version). As he ambivalently pursues the ministry, he commits himself to a life of scholarly toil, much like the titular protagonist of Hawthorne’s first romance, *Fanshawe*. His purported love interest, Rose Garland (in later drafts turned, not implausibly, into his sister, given the lack of any sexual ardor between the characters), and his boyhood friend, strapping Robert Hagburn, who joins the fighting, provide the makings of a romantic triangle that Hawthorne barely invests with any interest whatsoever, his concerns lying in quite different areas. The quest that Septimius undertakes for the creation of an elixir for immortal life was derived from a legend that Henry David Thoreau had told Hawthorne about one of his Concord homes, The Wayside: a generation ago, it had been inhabited by a man who believed that he would never die. If the inspiration for this novel was the product of an exchange between two artists, it is interesting to see how this male–male exchange becomes so complexly literalized in the unfinished romance. It is also an elaboration of a Revolutionary War tale that Hawthorne recounted in the preface to his 1846 collection of tales, *Mosses from an Old Manse*: on that famous April morning, a youth is chopping wood behind the Manse residence. He races to the scene of battle, axe in hand. He sees two English soldiers lying prostrate on the ground—one stirs and looks him in the face. Instantly, the boy raises his axe and buries it in the still-living soldier’s head. Hawthorne remarks that he frequently
wonders about the boy’s tortured soul after this wartime act. In the *Septimius* manuscripts, Hawthorne imagines his way through the psychological repercussions of wartime killing.

The sheer wastefulness of wartime carnage loomed large in Hawthorne’s mind as he wrote *Septimius*, as his letters, journals, and essays of the time evince. Hawthorne also wrestled with feelings of mingled contempt and longing for England upon his return, as evinced by the essays in *Our Old Home*, the only work after *The Marble Faun* that Hawthorne was able to complete. The English soldier of the early portion of the romance fuses all of these tensions in his surprisingly comely, flirtatious form, appearing as a harbinger of war and imperial menace, yet casually teasing Rose, upon whom he plants a kiss, and charming as much as angering Septimius. *Teasing* emerges as a quality of male sexual appeal in the later Hawthorne: the sexual suggestiveness and mysteriousness of the faun, the arch, playful, erotic mirth of the English soldier. Hawthorne appears to have finally begun to enjoy the appeal of his desirable young male figures in his later career and years.

If the figure of the beautiful young man recurs in Hawthorne’s work (Robin Molineux, Giovanni Guasconti, Dimmesdale, the young Clifford), and if he always regards this figure ambivalently, the beautiful, budding young English soldier carries with him the promise of beauty, death, and immortal life all at once. By investing the soldier with a sexual charisma and charm, Hawthorne intensifies our understanding of the pointlessness of his death.

“In an encounter,” as John Updike puts it, “that has strong narcissistic and homoerotic overtones,” Septimius kills the soldier and “finds on his body the formula for eternal life.” Kneeling by his “fallen foe’s side,” Septimius ponders, watching him die, the magnitude of what he has done and the nature of this loss:

> It seemed so dreadful to have reduced this gay, animated, beautiful being to a lump of dead flesh for the flies to settle upon, and which in a few hours would begin to decay; which must be put forthwith into the earth, lest it should be a horror to men’s eyes; that delicious beauty for woman to love; that strength and courage to make him famous among men,—all come to nothing[.] (12: 31)

The young English soldier’s allegorical functions are multivalent and substantial. He stands in for the otherness of the soldier on the other side—English or Southern—so alike yet so different; in his maddening appeal he signals secret sympathies and affiliations. Most pressingly, he represents in
his fullness the promise of art as well as, in his national identity, the origins of the art-making tradition Hawthorne would emulate. If Hawthorne struggled over the future of the form of the romance inherited from Walter Scott and other English forebears, the deeply appealing soldier who must be killed may be said to represent the form of the romance itself, Hawthorne's awareness of its continuing charms, and the impossibility of its survival. The soldier's scarcely justifiable death allegorizes the transition from one form to another, the transformation of the romance into something else, that something that Hawthorne kept trying to get at, possibly the realist novel his conflicted disciple Henry James would fashion as his own, possibly something else altogether.

The scene of the killing of this young English soldier also elegiacally mourns Hawthorne's own lost youth and impending death. As Septimius stares into the soldier's face, he broods upon the awful significance of the waste of youth, but, more specifically, the waste of the soldier's “delicious beauty.” Throughout Hawthorne's work, motifs of mirrors, reflections, doubles recur along with the equally consistent motif of the young man the sight of whom causes as much consternation as pleasure (Fanshawe, Minister Hooper, Feathertop, and several others).

A point to which we will return, Septimius is not unbeautiful; indeed, he himself possesses “a certain dark beauty” (40). What I have called Hawthorne's traumatic narcissism takes a spellbinding form here. Staring into the dying young soldier's face and lamenting the loss of the beauty it synecdochically signs, Septimius can be said, from a psychoanalytic perspective, to be mourning the loss of a prior state of perfection, specifically his ego ideal, the more attractive, more appealing, and inaccessible version of himself. This literally as well as symbolically traumatic loss suggests implications of all kinds: to begin with, the loss of the aforementioned allegorical notes of beautiful, unrealizable form. But most crucially, given the fraught racial dynamics of the novel, this loss suggests a longing for the apparently more perfect, more beautiful form of European whiteness, a “delicious” versus a “certain dark” beauty, a point which I expand in the next section.

“Sing, goddess”—if the Muse is conventionally gendered female, in the tradition that derives from classical Greek mythological origins of the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, in Septimius Felton Hawthorne devises the Muse in masculine terms; if we view Septimius as a figure of the artist, it is the slain young soldier who inspires his art. This inspiration takes literal shape in the form of the manuscript that provides in cipher-code the key to the immortality Septimius seeks. In addition, Septimius’s bullet shatters the miniature portrait of a woman on the soldier’s person. Recalling the myth of
Achilles and Penthesilea, the Amazon warrior-queen he slays, falling in love with her just as she dies on the battlefield, Septimius realizes his heart-stopping ardor for the soldier only when he annihilates him; in especially violent terms, their connection appears to obliterate any sign of conventional heterosexual love by literally smashing in the face of woman, obviously a horrifying implication.

Hawthorne would appear to suggest that art can be passed from one male to another only through the obliteration of woman. Beyond this, art, the search for immortal life, emerges from suffering and death; only the murder of something—a soldier, a literary form, the symbol of love—can bring forth the new life of art. It will be revealed, however, that the young woman of the photograph, Sybil Dacy, far from being dead, is alive and vying for narrative control, a development of great interest to this analysis.

The manuscript—“that weary, ugly, yellow, blurred, unintelligible, bewitched, mysterious, bullet-penetrated, blood-stained manuscript” (58)—becomes a simultaneously fetishistic and phobic object for Septimius. It combines somatic with material properties, turning the page into battered, hateful, yet also irresistible flesh. More than any other Hawthorne work, Septimius Felton reveals the wrenching pain Hawthorne experienced within the act of art-creation, suggesting that beneath the elegant, hypercontrolled Latinate prose has lurked a writhing sense of discomfort.

This work oscillates among several thematic concerns, some aesthetic, some psychosexual, and some political and historical. The duel synthesizes these last concerns. Harkening back to the bad old days of the early American republic, the duel symbolizes relations between men in patriarchy, seeking “satisfaction” from each other through the economy of violence. But Hawthorne in this scene returns to a much earlier time, the mythic-Edenic time of the prelapsarian. He returns the male body to nature and to origins; from a psychoanalytic view, he returns masculinity to its disavowed, rejected place in the pre-oedipal world of the mother. In the well-known paradigms of Jacques Lacan, there are three “orders” of human life: the Imaginary, dominated by the mirror stage and its imaginary identifications, specifically the incipient subject’s identification with an illusory image of wholeness in the mirror; the Symbolic, the father’s realm of language and law; and the Real, that which stands outside of signification and representation. Buried, the body of the soldier produces a field of crimson and purple flowers that will provide the final, decisive ingredient for Septimius’s recipe for immortality. As his own body faltered and failed him, Hawthorne fantasized about a generative and blooming, youthful and beautiful male body returned to the time before symbolic subjectivity. In a Lacanian elaboration, the English soldier—
in his whiteness and desirability on both racial and homoerotic levels—is the false but irresistible illusion of wholeness with which the mixed-race Septimius identifies, an image of desirable perfection shattered, along with the triangulated woman, by Septimius’s bullet.

Hawthorne’s characteristic concerns over the troubling form of masculinity continue to inform his late work. Given the metaphorical world of the novel, the depiction of writing as an extension of the male body, the somatic qualities of the manuscript signal the phobic dimension of Hawthorne’s view of this male body, so beautiful in one dimension, so hateful in another. If Hawthorne recalled his own youthful beauty in such stark contrast to his present state of infirmity in the body of the soldier with its multivalently life-giving properties, he also conveyed a sense of this body’s grotesque, unseemly physicality. The Elixir of Life recipe, once laboriously decoded by Septimius, reads like a tract written to young men by antebellum sexual reformers such as Sylvester Graham and John Todd exhorting them to practice rigid sexual continence. The yellowish quality of the manuscript links it to the color of the whale oil in the scandalous and joyous sperm-squeezing passage in Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, as it also recalls the Creature’s lurid flesh in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and the fluid into which M. Valdemar deliquesces at the climax of Poe’s story, notable for its particularly grotesque homoerotic tableaux. (In “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” published in 1845, a dying man, surrounded by a homosocial group of male scientists who have hypnotized him, lies suspended between life and death; his one quivering life-like organ is his tongue.) If yellow is the color of male sexual fluids, the written page is steeped in it here.

On the one hand, in the somatic economy of this work, writing suggests ejaculation, in terms that recall the Coen Brothers’ film about a maddened writer, *Barton Fink* (1991), with its trope of yellow fluids oozing out behind wallpaper, a failed orgasmic release that mocks the titular character’s writer’s block. On the other hand, it suggests the “flow” Hélène Cixous associated with women’s writing, which she links with blood and disengorgement, in stark contrast to masculine writing. Highly essentialist though they are as a schema of gendered writing, Cixous’s theories have a great relevance for considerations of the gender dynamics of literary production, especially given the masculinist critical standards that predominate. In his near-final phase, Hawthorne portrayed art-making as the release of fluids. Hawthorne recalls Coleridge’s famous description of the essential androgyny of the artist’s mind by associating the male body with conventional markers of both male and female sexuality while making the bloody male body generative in conventionally feminine terms.
Matching yellow as a heavily freighted symbolic color in this work, red—a particularly deep, “crimson,” red, evocative of the scarlet “A”—also connotes creativity as it emanates from the male form. Hawthorne’s use of winemaking metaphors to describe the manuscript recalls both Virgil’s Georgics and, as an intercalary note makes explicit, Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*. These metaphors liken writing to a vintner squeezing “viscid” juice from “the great accumulation of grapes that it had gathered from so many vineyards” (49). One and the same, the rich blood of writing and the rich blood of the fallen dead produce a “great abundance, a luxuriant harvest,” “as if the dead youth beneath had burst into a resurrection of many crimson flowers!” (109). This explosive image connotes a linkage between male sexuality and creativity.

In a very Cixousian way, then, *Septimius Felton* is a work that refuses to finish. If, in Cixous’s terms, feminine writing is about flow and disgorge-ment, *Septimius Felton* bleeds out its contents, its text bursting free of the confines of form and narrative. The finished product always remains willfully and intransigently uncontained. I do not mean to suggest that *Septimius Felton* is—in the manner suggested by Elizabeth Wanning Harries in her study of eighteenth-century fiction *The Unfinished Manner*—a work left deliberately unfinished, a statement of defiant incompleteness. Rather, what I wish to suggest is that Hawthorne found the form he was looking for, the elusive form of a work that could be neither completed nor finished, an immortal text that in its exasperating irresolvability refuses to die.

As I suggested earlier, in mourning the dying English soldier, Septimius may be said to be mourning the loss of his ego ideal. The difficulties of Hawthorne’s depiction of a narcissistic male sexuality with implications for both same-sex desire and race are encompassed by the juxtaposition the work makes of two forms of male beauty: the English soldier’s “delicious beauty” and that which characterizes Septimius, “a certain dark beauty.”

Hawthorne inserts Septimius’s desire for the soldier he kills into his fiction’s *topos* of male guilt, a killing in the forest, a crime that must be buried. *Septimius Felton* recalls Hawthorne’s superb early story “Roger Malvin’s Burial,” which we explored in chapter 3. Here, rather than beginning with a tense scene between a young man and an old one, we open, roughly speaking, with a traumatic encounter between two young men that revises the young man—old man split in Hawthorne’s work—at least until the enigmatic and creepy Doctor Portsoaken, associated with occult details such as a huge, knowing spider, makes his appearance. Constantly returning to the scene of his crime, the memory of which alternately revivifies and torments him, Septimius develops a much more sustained and passionate relationship with the
buried corpse of the soldier than he does with any of the other characters, with the possible exception of his Aunt Keziah, at once, like Mother Rigby in “Feathertop,” witchlike and motherly. As the dead soldier’s body decays, it paradoxically blooms with life, transforming into the lush field of flowers from which Septimius will extract the key ingredient to the elixir of immortal life.

Hawthorne’s own status as a white male writer can hardly be incidental to his depiction of a multiracial young man’s ambivalent desire for the “secret” of a comely white European youth. His decision to make Septimius a fusion of his own race and cultural ancestry and the fraught and contested racial identities of Indianness and blackness could not have been anything other than a highly self-conscious choice on Hawthorne’s part. If a thematic of narcissism with implications for both heterosexual and same-sex desire informs Hawthorne’s work, it is through this thematic that Hawthorne imagines race consciousness in Septimus Felton/Norton. The question that presents itself here is to what extent narcissism reflects Hawthorne’s own feelings toward race, in the sense of complicating, deepening, or scrambling the controversial record of Hawthorne’s own recorded views about race, slavery, and otherness. In other words, does Hawthorne view race, racism, and racial consciousness as a set of psychosexual, social, cultural, or historical dilemmas? (Clearly, the answer must be some combination of all of these, the salient question being on which factor Hawthorne places his emphasis.) Related to these concerns is the question of how psychoanalysis helps us to think through such matters, especially given the methodology’s historical indifference to them.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND RACE

In employing psychoanalytic theory to discuss authorial investments in race, I join in recent efforts to challenge psychoanalysis to extend its valuable findings about human subjectivity to theorizations of race as a lived experience. Psychoanalysis is not an end to itself, at least in my view, but an aid to understanding the emotional and psychic underpinnings of our culture and our art. When psychoanalysis, and any other theoretical apparatus for that matter, becomes an end in and of itself, the critic ends up mistaking the tool for the task. To make my intentions clear once again, my aim is to use psychoanalysis as a political maneuver against the prohibitive and silencing voices of our culture that impede understanding of its traumatic knowledges, past and present.
Of chief interest to me here are the valences between Hawthorne’s depiction of the Septimius-soldier episode and the psychoanalytic theories of the ego ideal and the ideal ego. In her application of Freudian theories of melancholia to race, Anne Anlin Cheng asks, “How is a racial identity secured? How does it continue to generate its seduction for both the dominant and the marginalized?” As Cheng notes, insufficient attention has been paid to “the ways in which individuals and communities remain invested in maintaining such categories, even when such identities prove to be prohibitive or debilitating.” As Cheng continues, racialization in America “may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a dominant, standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion yet retention of racialized others.”

It also, along these lines, seems to be sustained by the instantiation in these simultaneously excluded and retained racial others of investments in the national ideal that are as urgent psychically as they are outmoded and contestable socially.

In his study *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy*, Mason Stokes equates narcissism with white heterosexual privilege: “for my purposes I understand it as a way of being that requires a consideration of others solely for the purpose of articulating and buttressing the ego, the self. . . . Although Freud focuses most of his attention on ‘perverts and homosexuals,’ I want to add whiteness to that category of perversions (though not endorsing his views on the narcissism of homosexuals and women). Doing so allows us to see whiteness as a pathology, as an unhealthy way of living in the world.” By “making this leap” to contemporary psychiatric understandings of a “controversial psychological category,” Stokes claims that he is shedding light on “a larger ideological presence—whiteness, that ‘shadow of a reflected form [that] has no substance of its own,’ to borrow once again” from Ovid’s version of the Narcissus myth.

I am in ideological sympathy with Stokes’s effort to dismantle white heterosexist privilege. The process whereby he employs narcissism in this effort, however, unwittingly exposes a fundamental social and theoretical queasiness about narcissism. This queasiness must be considered if we are to appreciate narcissism’s value as a potentially radical sexual disposition that disrupts normative sexual categories. It is neither possible to extricate Freud’s view of the perversions from his theory of narcissism nor to apply perversion to a normative category, such as racial whiteness, without jeopardizing the entire structure of Freud’s argument. As Jonathan Dollimore points out, “Freud described homosexuality as the most important perversion of all,” “as well as the most repellent in the popular mind,” while also being “so pervasive to human psychology” that Freud made it “central to psychoanalytic the-
ory.” In terms of Freud’s theory of psychosexual development and perversity’s place in it, Dollimore writes, if the value of psychoanalysis lies in its exposure of the essential instability of identity, “then this is never more so than in Freud’s account of perversion. At every stage perversion is what problematizes the psychosexual identities upon which our culture depends.”

Stokes obscures the disruptive force of both perversion and narcissism in his conflation of hegemonic whiteness with both. This maneuver has the effect of rearming the categories as pathological diagnoses. Stokes retains the presumed pathological imperative of the Freudian diagnosis while losing the inherent instability within this diagnosis. It is this instability that is precisely what makes narcissism an excitingly weird way of thinking about sexuality. The central instability of narcissism is that, like homosexuality, it represents for Freud both a perversion and a universal human disposition.

Freud’s concepts of the ego ideal and the ideal ego, variations on the theme, allow us to take into further account the value of his theory of narcissism. Freud theorizes love in terms of idealization, a process that involves narcissism and the ego ideal. When we idealize the object of our desire, we treat the object as we do our own ego. When we are in love, Freud writes in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, “a considerable amount of narcissistic libido overflows onto the object.” Fascinatingly, Freud even goes so far as to suggest that very often the “object serves as a substitute for some unattained ego ideal of our own. We love it on account of the perfections which we have striven to reach for our own ego”; indeed, being in love is a “roundabout” way of “satisfying our own narcissism”! (SE 18: 112–13). Far from being a minoritizing discourse about desire, the Freudian theory of narcissism claims it as one of the major components of human love.

As Jacques Lacan, reworking these Freudian ideas, explains the relation of ideal ego to ego ideal, it helps us to consider certain key questions: “What is my desire? What is my position in the imaginary structuration? This position is only conceivable in so far as one finds a guide beyond the imaginary, on the level of the symbolic plane . . . This guide governing the subject is the ego ideal.” In one of his best glosses, Slavoj Žižek explains Lacan’s reframing of these Freudian concepts, including the superego:

Lacan introduces a precise distinction between these three terms: “ideal ego” stands for the idealized image of the subject (the way I would like to be, the way I would like others to see me); Ego-Ideal is the agency whose gaze I try to impress with my ego image, the big Other who watches over me and impels me to give my best, the ideal I try to follow and actualize; and superego is this same agency in its vengeful, sadistic, punishing aspect.
The underlying structuring principle of these three terms is clearly Lacan’s triad Imaginary-Symbolic-Real: ideal ego is imaginary, what Lacan calls the “small other,” the idealized mirror-image of my ego; Ego-Ideal is symbolic, the point of my symbolic identification, the point in the big Other from which I observe (and judge) myself; superego is real, the cruel and insatiable agency that bombards me with impossible demands and then mocks my botched attempts to meet them, the agency in whose eyes I am all the more guilty, the more I try to suppress my “sinful” strivings and meet its demands.31

To consider Septimus Felton from these psychoanalytic perspectives, we can posit that the English soldier functions for Septimus as both ideal ego (“the way I would like to be, the way I would like others to see me”) and as ego ideal. The soldier’s cultural heritage—the fatherland England of law and traditional values; the motherland England of generative aesthetic forms—and his racially privileged whiteness provide the foundation for his role as ego ideal to Septimus. The racially charged descriptions of Septimus’s possession of “a certain dark beauty” and the handsome, confident English soldier’s “delicious beauty” emerge as poles of possession and lack, of longing and excess, of having and not having. The multiracial male longs for the secret to the fecundity of the European white male’s overflowing racial fullness. This fullness finds explosive metaphorical form in the fecund field of flowers growing over the soldier’s grave, flowers that symbolize the soldier’s life-giving powers. The voice of Hawthorne’s narrator, as always evasive and endlessly evaluative, provides a perverse textual superego, faltering in its occasional empathy, more often more than adequate to its authoritarian task.

If the text would appear to suggest that whiteness is the mixed-race subject’s ego ideal, what undermines the racial politics of the scenario, a racial politics that would appear to confirm Hawthorne’s status as white writer extending a fantasy of white privilege into the private provinces of sexuality, is Hawthorne’s investment in the imaginary life of a mixed-race subject. Of all canonical white antebellum writers, Hawthorne and Harriet Beecher Stowe are among the few to have written a work that attempts to understand the differently raced subject from within. (For all of his daring and brilliance generally and specifically in his exploration of race, Herman Melville rarely attempts such an inhabited experience of racial difference. For example, his villain Babo in *Benito Cereno*—serialized in *Putnam’s Monthly* in 1855, and then somewhat revised for inclusion in his collection *The Piazza Tales* [1856]—is endlessly fascinating but always a character beheld from the outside, never one given interior personhood.) To be clear, I am not mak-
ing any evaluation here of the success or failure of these efforts. Rather, what I’m suggesting is that Hawthorne’s career-long interests in male sexuality and narcissism, and his personal investments in these themes, are precisely what give *Septimius Felton* its value as a work about race. *Septimius Felton* deepens, in this regard, Hawthorne’s attempt to inhabit a Jewish identity in his depiction of Miriam Schaeffer in *The Marble Faun*. In that novel, the heroine’s Jewishness is suffused with the same aura of impenetrable mysteries—tied to sexual crime of some kind, most likely incest between Miriam and her father, recalling the famous tragic figure of Beatrice Cenci—that suffuses the novel. *Septimius Felton* is less invested in the “mystery” of its protagonist’s racial heritage than it is fascinated by the mysteriousness of his desire, ostensibly figured as the quest for immortal life, but a quest everywhere shown to be inextricable from his desire for a white, English masculinity. Adding to the gendered daring of Hawthorne’s conceptions here, this English masculinity is depicted as a generative feminine form, a kind of male mother, on several, mutually reinforcing levels a matrix.

If *Septimius Felton* reveals that Hawthorne’s unusually explicit depiction of male beauty depends upon a privileging of a whiteness that is crucial to this beauty, it is nevertheless a perverse, excessive whiteness. It is not a whiteness governed by symbolic law (in Lacanian terms, the realm of the Father, his language and his laws, the social order that upholds sexual difference) but specifically a whiteness in defiance of the law. The English soldier’s flirtatious and teasing manner extends as fully to Septimius as it does to Rose, his sister. His appeal seems more deeply registered by Septimius than by Rose, but it is offered freely, excessively, to all.

By suggesting the confusing homoerotic pull of the bond Septimius has with the soldier, Hawthorne implicitly challenges the homophobic desexualization of all male bonds in our culture. The daring of Hawthorne’s depiction of this homoeroticism can be seen in Hawthorne’s own disavowal of it in the *Septimius Norton* draft. The description of the aftermath of the soldier’s death in *Norton* subtly and tellingly alters the fuller intensity of feeling in the *Felton* draft. If we recall the *Felton* description given above, the one in *Norton* evinces a diminution of feeling achieved through revision. Now, Septimius cannot help shuddering at himself, for reducing that gay, beautiful boy to a lump of dead flesh, which a fly was already settling upon, and which must speedily be put into the earth else it would grow a sensible horror, that beauty for women to love, that strength and courage for men to fear, all annihilated[.] (240)
Removed from this passage now are the idea that the corpse will be “a horror to men’s eyes”; most significantly, that what we have lost is the “delicious” beauty of the soldier. Hawthorne also dampens the phallic charge of the soldier’s appeal—the soldier’s “strength and energy” (31) transmutes now into the more conventional “strength and courage” proper to a soldier. Along similar lines, what had been the soldier’s “beautiful grace of form and elegance of feature” (31) transforms now into the blander and more general “This beauty of form, and bright intelligence of feature” (240, all italics mine).

In the later draft, Hawthorne commits the unexpectedly emotionally intense earlier version of the scene to a more conventional fantasy of auto-genesis, the modified language aiding in a more properly desexualized version of male–male relations. If my reading of these shifts has any validity, we have to conclude that Hawthorne retreated from the radicalism of his libidinal investments in Septimius Felton, a sexual panic that then has to be, on some level, connected as well to the general sense of “failure”—unpublishability, incompleteness—hovering around both drafts and the period of the late works.

The perversity of Septimius Felton is that in it Hawthorne inhabits the consciousness of a multiracial male in order to gaze upon the spectacle of male whiteness that Hawthorne treats not as prohibitive privilege but as site of spectacle and jouissance, an excessiveness of pleasure bordering on death. In other words, Hawthorne renders whiteness here a spectacle of wonder in which he himself shares; he puts himself in the removed, alienated position of the other to marvel at the irresistibly compelling spectacle of whiteness. All of this is to say that the white male author remains more fascinated by whiteness and its workings than by any other racial category. Certainly, a potential for racist attitudes and white privilege abounds here. At the same time, Hawthorne imbues whiteness with a Freudian perversity. In other words, whiteness is associated here not with the stifling, crushing, grandiose narcissism of the social order but, instead, with something closer to the polymorphous perversity that, in Freud’s view, the social order determinedly represses.

**HAWTHORNE AND MIXED-RACE MASCULINITY**

Septimius can be read as an ameliorative figure across racial lines, like mixed-race Dirk Peters in Poe’s novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. In that novel, the mixed-race Dirk Peters, initially described as an eye-poppingly grotesque fusion of white, “negro,” and Native American races
and as a figure that exceeds the boundaries of the animal and the human, nevertheless undergoes a confusing racial transformation by the end of the novel, in which he and Pym, the narrator, emerge as the “only living white men” on a dark-skinned-savage-overrun island. Hawthorne does not relinquish Septimius’s racial mixture, as Poe does, to a program of white makeover, even as Septimius’s quest may be interpreted as an attempt to transform himself into the body of the white man he kills. Hawthorne takes great pains to make us—to keep us—aware that Septimius emerges from complex racial lineages. Hawthorne appears to suggest, in his depiction of Septimius, that beauty is the result of a special discernment—a certain slant of light, to wax Dickinsonian, will reveal a “certain dark beauty” in the figure of someone from a race associated in racist thought with physically unattractive qualities that outwardly evince moral and cultural failings. (Native Americans’ dark skin and non-European clothing was thought to connote the savagery of their characters; the dark skin of Africans was taken as a literal form of their “benighted” condition as a race and linked to animality and an aesthetically displeasing physicality. Given the sheer intensity of this racist rhetoric, Hawthorne’s evocation of beauty in Septimius stands out all the more. Stowe evoked the beauty of both African and mixed-race characters in the 1852 *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as well, and it is possible that Hawthorne may have been inspired by her deeply popular work.)

Septimius should be read, I argue, as a male mulatto. The figure of the mulatto in literature is usually rendered in alternately tragic or sexually threatening terms. Moreover, the mulatto is most usually a woman (Cora Munro in Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, the titular heroine of Frances Harper’s *Iola Leroy*). Rafia Zafar notes that James Weldon Johnson’s depiction of the mulatto as male in his *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* in 1921 is a significant break in the tradition of the mulatto as female. Given this significance, it is even more remarkable that Hawthorne represents the mulatto male in the early 1860s.

The appearance of mulattoes was particularly unsettling to many nineteenth-century viewers. As Stephen Talty writes of antebellum Americans, “Most whites looked on blacks with disgust or pity, but, mostly, indifference. It was not that they secretly knew that blacks were human and chose to ignore it. Their blindness was so deep-seated as to be almost a function of brain chemistry; they simply could not look on blacks and see creatures like themselves.” Mulattoes, Talty writes, were a “shock to the optic nerve.”

Septimius’s surprisingly appealing—though its appeal is undeniably qualified—appearance suggests a broader capacity to appreciate the range of human “looks” on Hawthorne’s part than one would have thought likely, especially
given the paucity of direct references to raced subjects in Hawthorne’s work
before *Septimius* and the general, almost hysterical, abhorrence of “ugliness”
he consistently expressed. 34

The category of ugliness was one of the most potent weapons in the arse-
nal of anti-black racism. This tradition of thought can be traced in American
culture at least from Thomas Jefferson forward. In his “Notes on the State
of Virginia” (written in 1781, revised in 1782), Jefferson crystallized white
racism’s construction of the ugliness of the physical appearance and customs
of Africans. “Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of
every passion by greater or less suffusions of color in the one, preferable to
the eternal monotony which reigns in the countenances, that immovable veil
of black that which covers all emotions of the other race?”35

If Hawthorne’s marble faun suggests an attractive white male body
tinged with dark racial as well as interspecies otherness, in Septimius he sug-
gests that racial intermixture can produce a white subject with an unusual,
offbeat appeal. Hawthorne suggests that the attractiveness of a mixed-race
person is a matter of perspective—the anamorphic angle from which Sep-
timius’s certain dark beauty can be perceived and evaluated as such—and
such a person’s appearance is a phenomenon that does not produce an inevi-
table revulsion in the white spectator, always assumed to be the subject of
the desiring gaze. And given that it is precisely from such an anamorphic
angle that same-sex desire can be viewed in nineteenth-century texts, as Val-
erie Rohy has argued, the ability to take an unusual perspectival position
comes to be crucial to the late romance’s negotiation of the homoerotics of
race.36

In light of Jefferson’s repellent racist aesthetics, Hawthorne’s depiction
of a darkness blended into whiteness comes to seem a daring exploration of
the limits of white identity figured, as ever in Hawthorne’s visually oriented
fictions, in the physical and the outwardly visible. Indeed, in these terms,
before the marble faun and the mixed-race Septimius, Minister Hooper, a
white male shrouded by his own self-donned “immovable veil of black,”
begins to suggest the first in a series of the “dark” white males in Haw-
thorne’s imagination. That Hawthorne could devise in Septimius such an
ameliorative figure is notable, given how wrenching all of these issues were
in antebellum America and Hawthorne’s own conflicted attitudes toward
racial difference. Again, none of this exculpates Hawthorne for his lapses
in empathy for the condition of the enslaved and racially oppressed. Never-
theless, *Septimius Felton* evinces a shift in Hawthorne’s thinking, one regis-
tered through his imaginative faculties: his first mixed-race protagonist. In
this work, the sexually ambiguous male familiar from Hawthorne’s fictions
becomes explicitly racially ambiguous as well, as opposed to the inchoate racial allegory of Minister Hooper and his black veil. Figures of “black whiteness,” such as Hooper and much more pronouncedly Septimius Felton, combine sexual and racial ambiguity.

Though the “delicious” excessiveness of the handsome English soldier is one important aspect of white identity as Hawthorne represents it, throughout both Septimius manuscripts, a much more critical view of whiteness prevails. Here is the point at which Hawthorne may be considered authentically daring. Linking white male subjectivity to the histories of imperialism and exploitation of other cultures, Hawthorne repurposes in the Septimius Norton manuscript the bloody footprint symbol from the American Claimant manuscripts in a revealing manner. The spectral, immortal man known as the Sagamore, who lends guidance to but also tyrannically controls a tribe of Native Americans, is actually the Englishman cursed by the “Bloody Footprint,” which he attempts to flee by venturing to the New World.

As Charles Swann writes, “The white benevolent dictator may (quite unintentionally) have made it easier for the Puritans to conquer the Indians by sapping their individual and social independence and aggression. . . . [he] becomes a Tories’ Tory, a tyrant[.]”7 The Sagamore is the embodiment of all of the sinister old white males in Hawthorne’s fiction; now, Hawthorne inserts his dubious old white male into the history of colonization and racist oppression through which the United States was founded, and in which the Sagamore plays a central role. It should not be overlooked as well that, while Aunt Keziah in her virulent opposition to white culture conforms to racist stereotypes of the barbarous and uncouth other, her character nevertheless provides an alternative view of Hawthorne’s own white Calvinist culture and is, moreover, a figure of considerable sympathy, one who demands far more consideration than I have the space to provide here. She embodies the figure of the savage mother, but she is also a loving maternal presence, and an alternative point of identification for the nonnormative male Septimius. In contrast, the Sagamore represents the negative narcissism of white, colonial power, the textual superego against whom Septimius chafes even as he shares in his fantasies of narcissistic, imperialistic omnipotence. Similarly, Dr. Portsoaken, in his enigmatic and dubious scientific role, and with his familiar, that large, diabolically knowing spider, is a kind of warlock double to witch-like Aunt Keziah.

The abortive romance between Septimius and the soldier looms above Septimius Felton as an unfulfilled possibility of connection across racial, national, and sexual lines. Its tender, evanescent memory—and the aesthetic power of the episode as Hawthorne describes it—provides a constant coun-
terpoint to the increasingly obsessive fascination with white morbidity and duplicity, conducted across and seeping into the centuries, in the manuscripts; Septimius's quest enshrines the encounter with the man he kills and whose multivalent textual blood infuses his volatile own. The surprising suggestion Hawthorne makes in *Septimius Felton* is that homoerotic male intersubjectivity disrupts and challenges the ongoing, inexorable patterns of white hegemonic rule.

**FEMALE AUTHORITY**

One character complicates all of these matters even further: Sybil Dacy, the woman whose image Septimius's bullet shatters. Sybil is the daughter of Dr. Portsoaken and the betrothed of the young English soldier, a decisive fact Septimius learns only in the climactic portion of the *Septimius Felton* narrative. Considering her role in this version of the narrative allows us to consider more broadly the question of female sexuality in Hawthorne and Freud’s theories.

Throughout this study, my focus has been on Freud’s theory of masculinity and its self-defeating and self-protecting psychic defenses, such as voyeurism and fetishism. In chapter 6, I attempted to make use of these Freudian theories in order to appreciate Hawthorne’s critique of misogyny. But I have not wanted to give the impression that Freud’s theories are uniformly revelatory or potentially radical—far from it. His views of female sexuality are an especially difficult aspect of his work that demands careful consideration and, I would argue, reconsideration. Altogether, they are hampered by his inability either to understand or to make clear that he understands the social constraints upon femininity. If “penis envy” has any validity at all, it is only when retooled—if I can be excused the term—as desire for a share in social power always already decreed as the privilege of the male. Lacan, in his theory of the phallus, comes closer to doing so than Freud, but I share feminists’ frustrations with the treatment of “woman” in Lacan as a “symptom of man.” In order to make better sense of the significance of the Sybil Dacy character as well as to establish both the inherent frustrations in and the possible uses that can be made of Freud’s theories of femininity, I want briefly to compare Hawthorne’s and Freud’s views of women before commencing an analysis of femininity in *Septimius Felton*.

In her essay “Bourgeois Sexuality and the Gothic Plot in Wharton and Hawthorne,” Monika Elbert speaks to an important issue, “the bourgeois dilemma of exploiting woman’s body for public consumption—exposing
Hester in the marketplace—and of exploring class anxieties and allegiances using woman as a battleground for these tensions” (260). Elbert’s major argument in this essay is that Hawthorne is disturbed by the spectacle of unlicensed female sexuality, which he works to contain. If this is indeed the case—and despite my admiration for Elbert’s work, I am not in full agreement with her—he also questions the socialization of women, suggesting that patriarchy denies girls and women the full range of their sexualities generally. This disposition finds a particularly harrowing exploration in the episode in *The House of the Seven Gables* in which Alice Pyncheon is punished by Matthew Maule because she visually appraised his body and found it desirable. He makes her a zombie slave, and then inadvertently kills her. In my view, Hawthorne is critiquing here the male sexual anxiety that motivates Maule’s malevolent vengeance.

Hawthorne problematizes heterosexual presumption and compulsory heterosexuality by repeatedly returning to themes such as bachelor anxiety (almost all of the young males of his short fiction and novels are unmarried and deeply anxious about the prospect of heterosexual intimacy), marital discord (Young Goodman Brown leaving his new wife alone for a dark night in the forest, the husband who walks out on his wife for years in “Wakefield”), and, most importantly, the tendency for men to betray the trust women invest in them (*The Scarlet Letter* and *The Blithedale Romance* are exemplary in this regard). Creating an ongoing ominous atmosphere of tension, anxiety, and even sadism when it comes to matters of sexuality, Hawthorne refuses any view of sexuality as necessarily positive, affirming, or unquestionably appealing. This is, ultimately, the meeting place between his sensibility and Freud’s.

The feminist relevance of Hawthorne’s work stems from this skeptical view of sexuality and lies specifically in his consistent, ruthless depiction of male inadequacy and tendencies toward both duplicity and domination. By unceasingly exposing the precarious nature of relations between men and women in his culture, Hawthorne sheds empathetic light on the social condition of femininity in patriarchy. Of course, this empathy is in no way a straightforward empathy, intermixed as it is with ambivalence, alienation, and even antipathy. Without denying this intermixture, I nevertheless argue that the empathy is genuine and politically valuable. Of course, the views that Hawthorne expressed in life about women complicate matters further. Hawthorne frequently made derogatory and hostile comments about women in his private writings (correspondence, journals, notebooks). I can only add that his fictional version of Margaret Fuller in *The Blithedale Romance*, the fiery feminist Zenobia, is a far more sympathetically drawn portrait than his
scabrous comments about Fuller herself, whom he once called a “humbug,” would suggest was a possibility.

With Freud the situation is much more vexed for feminism. After a demonstration of genuine identification with his female patients in his early Studies of Hysteria (1895), an identification fraught with difficulty, Freud proceeded to discuss women with an increasingly alarming lack of sympathy, to say nothing of empathy. A desultory tone pervades his discussions of women and female sexuality; Freud is indifferent to the social and experiential ramifications of his theory of penis envy, which, while it has a certain value when his social context is taken into consideration, audibly expresses his competitive hostility toward women. Where, then, is the feminist value in Freud, who differs from Hawthorne in that whereas there’s a genuine feeling for the plight of women detectable throughout Hawthorne’s body of work, Freud’s work evinces a greater and greater indifference to women?

The primary feminist value of Freud lies in the general stance he maintains toward the relationship between human beings and culture. As does Hawthorne, Freud overturns positive assumptions about and associations with the two most prominent social roles and functions our culture designates as the responsibility of women: mothering and marriage, woman’s social responsibility being, on the one hand, to provide nurture and to domesticate her children, and, on the other hand, to ensure that marital sexuality is full and fulfilling and that men are properly socialized through marriage. Casting, as does Hawthorne, these compulsory roles and the social system dependent on them in an ominous, denatured light, Freud makes sexuality a source of ongoing frustration and even terror. The value of his Grand Guignol version of sexuality is that it renders normative, positive views of sexuality and the assumption that individuals must conform to them deeply suspect. Troubling the socially enforced views of such phenomena as the family, marriage, child rearing, and childhood as inherently positive, Freud offers a pessimistic theory of culture. The feminist value of his theory lies in its implicit critique of the effect culture has on the people who live in and make it. It is the Freudian view of culture and civilization as deeply suspect that enables a feminist view of women’s oppression within culture to emerge from Freud’s work, even if it does not frequently emerge within it.

In her discussion of what value lies, if any, in Freud’s Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria, commonly known as Dora, Toril Moi puts the matter somewhat differently, but in a way that extends what I mean here: “Freud’s epistemology is clearly phallocentric. . . . To undermine this phallocentric epistemology means to expose its lack of ‘natural’ foundation. In the case of Dora, however, we have been able to do this only because of
Freud’s own theories of femininity and sexuality. The attack upon phallocentrism must come from within. . . . We can only destroy the mythical and mystifying constructions of patriarchy by using its own weapons. We have no others.”

Moi’s statement about the usefulness of Freud is hard won, hardly celebratory; I invoke it here because it demonstrates the difficulty of Freudian theory but also what remains useful in it for the purposes of projects such as feminism as well as queer theory. Despite Freud’s considerable failures, his theories retain their value as methods for the study of the ways in which we are sexually socialized in patriarchy. Freud’s theories of femininity are also not entirely without value. Nancy Chodorow argues that one of the vexations of Freud is that while he is deeply insightful on masculinity, he is equally troubled and troubling on femininity.

Despite, as Chodorow rightly notes, the infiltration of Freud’s cultural biases into his more clinical findings, Freud nevertheless provides a piercing account of the thwarting of female autonomy and self-confidence by the misogynistic strictures of the patriarchal social order, even if he is also intricately connected to these strictures.

Freud repeatedly returns to an increasingly poignant theme: the condition of femininity is one of loss. Freud shares with Hawthorne a tragic view of gender. Girls must relinquish their active, phallic sexuality in order to become women. This is the central issue in Juliet Mitchell’s brilliant feminist reformulation of Freud’s theories of female hysteria in the Dora case history especially, in which she argues that one of its major issues is that the young Dora was forced to relinquish her active sexuality, while her brother Otto was allowed to maintain and develop his own.

This compulsory forfeiture of women’s sexuality has tremendous significance for their subsequent relationships with their mothers and other women, males, and with themselves and their own psychic and corporeal lives. With this theme comes another significant insight: misogyny is the result of the trauma of male socialization. In other words, our culture’s socialization of males manufactures misogynists. However blinkered Freud can be, he does at times provide an insightful account of the female experience of patriarchy and, given how both females and males are socialized, the inevitability of misogyny. What Hawthorne and Freud share is the sense that women fight for their right to act and for their right to desire in patriarchy.

WHEN SEPTIMIUS first discovers Sybil Dacy, she is fluttering about in “his” hillside spot where the soldier lies buried by Septimius’s own hand. Indifferent to her in a manner suggestive of his likely sexual disposition, Septimius,
like the protagonist of classical Hollywood film noir, nevertheless becomes hopelessly intrigued by Sybil; in turn, she emerges as an emotionally unstable femme fatale. Indeed, Hawthorne may be said to rework the conventions of noir by depicting Sybil not as the black widow who lures the protagonist to his doom, but as a wronged woman who takes narrative into her own hands for more ambiguous purposes, including revenge. Hawthorne reveals the tellingly named Sybil as a rival author figure in a work that teems with them: Septimius, the solider, Dr. Portsoaken, Aunt Keziah with her own diluted “elixir” recipe, and the Sagamore who inscribes his own identity upon the tribe he colonizes. Sybil may be said to be the most successful author figure in Septimus Felton in that she not only concocts some versions of the elixir herself but overmasters Septimius in the process of his own quest to do so, subsuming his quest into her own stratagems.

Given the number of female characters who become ensnared within if not altogether destroyed by the male quest in Hawthorne’s fiction—Georgiana in “The Birthmark,” Beatrice in “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” the wife in “Wakefield”—Sybil’s outmaneuvering of Septimius takes on a note of feminine triumph, the nature of which feminist and queer theory revisions of Freud illuminate. Judith Butler, drawing on the work of French feminist Luce Irigaray, describes the prevailing Western fantasy of autogenesis as “a spiritualized and desexualized desire for the form or reflection of a masculine self in another,” which produces the “fantastic logic whereby men beget other men, reproducing and mirroring themselves at the expense of women and of their own reproductive origin in women/mothers.” As Irigaray puts it in Speculum of the Other Woman, “The only men who love each other are, in truth, those who are impatient to find the same over and over again.” Unable to find the same in “some other part of man,” they must seek out what Irigaray calls “that mirror of vision in which they can look at themselves in the very gaze of the other, perceiving, in one and the same glance, their view and themselves.” This circuit of male self-reflection depends, writes Butler, upon an excluded third term or medium, “the girl, considered a flawed copy, or the mother, the medium through which procreation becomes possible and who physicalizes and, hence, demeans the higher form of the spiritual reduplication of ‘man’ that is philosophy.” As Butler continues, “For Irigaray, then, there can be no feminine desire inside this economy and certainly no parallel possibility of feminine self-reflection.”

If Septimius, the dead soldier, the manuscript, and the abundant field of purple, tumescent flowers that grow above the soldier’s body all connote a fantasy of masculine autogenesis, a shared male world of spiritualized male desire and male beauty—which Luce Irigaray critiques as hommo-sexuality—
Sybil disrupts, even shatters, the fantasy by insisting upon inserting herself within the circuit of male self-reflection and reordering the logic of the male quest plot. In this manner, if we recall the shattering of her portrait by Septimius’s bullet, she may be said to restore her shattered image, insisting upon its solidity and that of her own presence. But Hawthorne, even in his most fantastic plots, is too much of an emotional realist to describe this daring act of feminist agency as being without cost: Sybil immolates herself in the process. Having vengefully intended to kill Septimius because he killed her lover, the English soldier, Sybil realizes that she now loves Septimius herself. She quaffs the poisoned elixir she meant to give Septimius, even as he cries out in horror that she must not do so, and dies.

Hawthorne critiques the male fantasy of autogenesis by enlarging our understanding of what this fantasy means in something like the real world. He does so by making vividly clear this fantasy’s costs to femininity. But he also undermines the fantasy by emphasizing the force of female will—Sybil’s active desire constitutes a parallel quest narrative in this work, even if a quest for revenge. At the same time, Septimius’s solipsistic quest for immortal life robs Sybil and also the soldier of their own. The eerie, despairing, and highly frustrating means that women have of demonstrating their agency and acting on their desires is to choose death over subjugation, as happens repeatedly in Hawthorne (Beatrice, Zenobia), and happens, on some level, here. Again, such a theme provides no comfort to anyone. At best, it reflects what I have called Hawthorne’s tragic view of gender. In his near-final works, Hawthorne continued to explore the woman’s experience in patriarchy, her means of negotiating it, and also the male’s investment in women.

Sybil initially recalls Ophelia, Hamlet’s would-be fiancée, who, driven mad by Hamlet’s own feigned madness, drowns herself. But Hawthorne’s Sybil is an Ophelia with the guile of Hamlet: she uses a veneer of madness as a cunning strategy. Hamlet, in fulfillment of his revenge plot, also ends up dead from a poisoned drink, murders his mother in the process, and was, if not the cause of, certainly the catalyst in Ophelia’s suicide: if Hamlet manages to defeat his enemies, he does so at considerable cost to himself and those around him, particularly the women he loves. His nearly Pyrrhic triumph haunts Sybil’s own ambiguous fate. The interest, in both Shakespeare’s and Hawthorne’s work (and one inevitably thinks of Melville’s ecstatic celebration in his review “Hawthorne and His Mosses” of Hawthorne as nearly Shakespeare’s equal) lies precisely in these muddles of gendered representation.

One further point in our consideration of Hawthorne’s treatment of femininity deserves amplification. Aunt Keziah-Nashoba is a maternal presence
despite her savagery, one that will in no way allow itself to be excluded or repudiated. She is like a Mistress Hibbens or a Mother Rigby who has been endowed with a human complexity, vulnerability, and depth. Moreover, she is, like Septimius, a mixed-race character who ultimately solicits our sympathy and even admiration. As such a persona, she signals a further development in Hawthorne’s thinking about gender and race, and the mother–son bond. In his portrait of the depth of Septimius’s bond with Aunt Keziah-Nashoba, Hawthorne further develops the theme of mother-identified masculinity that he began to explore in his tale “The Gentle Boy.” But here, the bond is constant, lasting, and mutual.

CHARLES SWANN writes that by the 1860s, Hawthorne’s “confidence in the realities or truths of world or reflection and in the stability of the relations between world and reflection has, it seems, been replaced by the larger question of whether there is a stable reality to which we can have access.” Of Septimius Felton, Swann writes, “Ambitious as The Marble Faun was, Hawthorne has gone beyond that. While we may only have fragments, they are fragments of a masterpiece.” Swann’s astute reading of the value of Septimius Felton not only recuperates its aesthetic worth but also draws our attention to the ways in which its textual and thematic qualities mirror while deepening the significance of each other: the fragmentary text and the fragmentation of identity it thematizes achieve an exquisite equilibrium.

Gray Kochhar-Lindgren writes of the necessity for the textual Narcissus’s transfiguration, which demands that Narcissus “shift the cathexis of his libido from his own self-representation to a textual body that enters the chain of signification. . . . When Narcissus moves from the imaginary register of reflexive mirroring to the symbolic dimension of subjectivity that acknowledges the necessity of otherness, the body emerges from the chrysalis of reflection.” Death emerges as the fate Narcissus attempted to elude with his self-mesmerized desire, and acknowledging its inevitable presence provides cold comfort. But it is the very acknowledgment of death that frees the narcissistic subject to experience the larger world beyond the self.

If the heart of Narcissus’s tragedy is that he can never recognize an other, in the Septimius manuscripts Hawthorne, to whatever extent we can view him as a Narcissus figure, insists upon seeing the other in his depiction of an other-raced protagonist, a character through whom he gazes upon a character whose beauty reflects Hawthorne’s vanished own. Septimius’s obsession with “undyingness” can be read as Hawthorne’s own ambivalence toward acknowledging the increasingly undeniable imminence of his own death.
These late works insist, however, upon grappling with otherness in a way unparalled in Hawthorne’s previous work. Overall Hawthorne’s last phase marks his emergence from the chrysalis of self-reflection into a world of difference. These features alone make the late work meaningful and worthy of renewed attention.

The new critical work on Hawthorne and Freud begins rather than ends with this book. The entire question of masculinity in Hawthorne (as well as Freud) needs further analysis. A range of masculine styles animates Hawthorne’s work and would benefit from the Freudian queer perspectives that illuminate his dark young men. What is the psychology of the Judge Pyncheons, the Old Moodies, and the Sagamores, the robber barons of their day, who exert their will sadistically on others? Of the Chillingworths, whose desires for vengeance mutate, along the way, into obsessive desires to keep their male quarry all to themselves? Perhaps even more urgently, Hawthorne’s feminist poetics and politics need further exploration. In life, though in his “private” writing, Hawthorne said some unforgivably uncharitable things about women. In his fiction, however, Hawthorne exhibits a feminist sensibility in his empathy with embattled women and in his unyielding critique of male dominance, both of which also make his work important to queer theory. That so much work has been done on Hawthorne over the years and that so much more work still needs to be done attests to the significance of his achievement.