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Hawthorne's geometry: Ritual theory and spatial form

Friedman, Robert Steven, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1993

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HAWTHORNE'S GEOMETRY: RITUAL THEORY AND SPATIAL FORM

by

ROBERT S. FRIEDMAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1993

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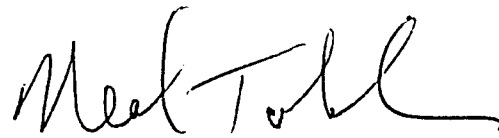
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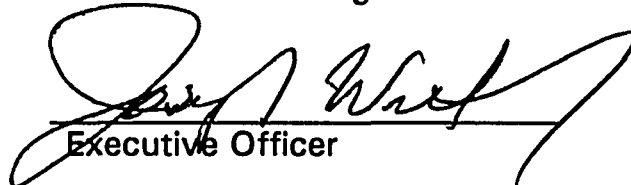
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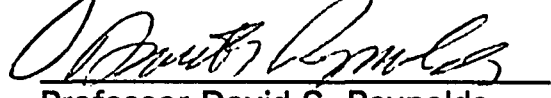
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A NOTE ON TEXTS

All quotations from Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Scarlet Letter* are cited in the body of the dissertation without further annotation and derive from: Nathaniel Hawthorne. *Novels*. Edited by Millicent Bell. New York: The Library of America, 1983.

All quotations from "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and "Sights from a Steeple" are cited in the body of the dissertation without further annotation and derive from: Nathaniel Hawthorne. *Tales and Sketches*. Edited by Roy Harvey Pearce. New York: The Library of America, 1983.

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The idea of investigating geometry in Hawthorne began in a graduate seminar led by William Kelly. I thank him for sharing his command of American literature, history and social thought. Glenn Petersen's openness to interdisciplinary work between anthropology and literature offered me the chance to view symbolism in more ways than one discipline can ever offer. I thank David Reynolds for giving me so many of his "off-duty" hours; his conversation, direction and support have been invaluable. None of my graduate school work, and especially this dissertation, would have been possible without the friendship and guidance of Neal Tolchin. I'm privileged to have been within his sphere; in that space, there is room to move, explore, and challenge one's own abilities.

Many other people have contributed to this project through discussion and critique. I thank Jean Darcy, Matthew Gartner, Bennett Graff, Fergal O'Doherty and George Otte for their friendship and insight.

I dedicate this beginning work to my son, Jack, at the beginning of a great, good life.

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Introduction

"It is worth recalling, at this point, if only symbolically, the old Greek adage, that arithmetic should be taught in democracies, for it teaches the relations of equality, but that geometry alone should be reserved for oligarchies, as it demonstrates the proportions within inequality." Michel Foucault

In his essay "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," Clifford Geertz discusses "The recourse to the humanities for explanatory analogies in the social sciences," that it "is at once evidence of the destabilization of genres and of the rise of 'the interpretive turn,' and their most visible outcome is a revised style of discourse in social studies" (23). For example, in "Ethnography as Narrative," Edward M. Bruner posits: "If classificatory schemes provide a science of the concrete, narrative schemes may provide a science of the imagination." His "[emphasis is] on temporality, [which] may enable us to deal more directly with change, and thereby to make structural and symbolic studies more dynamic" (141). This study is also an effort to blur genres, but I am taking my "explanatory analogies" *from* the social sciences and applying them *to* literary criticism, in particular, applying the ritual theory of Victor Turner to works of Nathaniel Hawthorne. I am looking at one group of symbols, geometric form, in a selection of Hawthorne's texts and discussing how spatial design is a form of cultural mediation within social drama, ultimately offering insight into the way literature and culture are inextricably bound.

As cultures develop, social interaction becomes increasingly symbolic.

"Living in a society that extends well beyond our direct observation," David Kertzer writes, "we can relate to the larger political entity only through abstract symbolic means. . . . Though symbols give people a way of understanding the world, it is people who produce new symbols and transform the old" (8, 4). This is as true and important for taking an interpretive turn with literature as it is for understanding political structures. The quotation from Foucault's "The Discourse on Language" serves as my starting point because it demonstrates the interaction of social systems such as politics with abstractions such as mathematics and geometry. As the maxim points out, knowledge of the abstract is essential to an understanding of the practical. Literature expresses such a fusion, and quite often effectively does so through symbolism.

Geometric forms establish a symbol pattern that is evident in and integral to Nathaniel Hawthorne's romances *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, and *The Blithedale Romance*, as well as his early sketch "Sights from a Steeple" and his masterful tale "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." As will become evident, these works contain spatial metaphors that not only reflect a dominant theme but also shape the texts themselves. In *The Scarlet Letter* the circle delineates the social boundaries of the characters and describes Hester's movement from her initial enclosure—the prison-door—to her ultimate enclosure—the gravesite. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, the spiral is both the metaphor for history and temporal progression. Through a narrative strategy of temporal suspension and mythic recurrence, ritualized actions bring

to bear the power of liminality in this text. The parallelogram is the narrative frame through which Hawthorne depicts Coverdale's artistic sensibility and makes a correlation between self-definition and sociation in *The Blithedale Romance*. As for "Sights from a Steeple," the narrator both distances himself from and includes himself within the circumference of objects and people whom he heeds and yet remains unheeded by. And for Robin Molineux, it is an angular labyrinth pattern that controls what he sees and how the reader conceives of his predicament, which is his being caught within two distinctive rites of initiation, status elevation and status reversal.

It would be quite reasonable to ask why discuss these texts and not others; one might discern the presence of this motif in other works of Hawthorne and other writers. John Seelye's *Melville: The Ironic Diagram* and Sherman Paul's *Emerson's Angle of Vision* exhaust the geometric metaphor in terms of their subjects, and August J. Nigro, in *The Diagonal Line: Separation and Reparation in American Literature*, avers that the geometric forms found in the myth of Genesis "[underlie] the reappropriation of that myth in American literature: the mythopoeic pattern of separation from and reparation with the boundless . . . [through] a reappropriation of symbols used within that pattern: the circle and the labyrinth, the rite of passage, and the *via negativa*" (19, 27). Yet his interest lies in presenting American literature, *en canonical masse*, as a "dialectic that sometimes confirms individuality . . . but that more often evokes the tragic consequences of individuality and the need for greater

community—as in the works of Hawthorne, Melville, James, and Eliot . . . [where] freedom and individuality often border on chaos and annihilation, and community and communion are the values most sought after" (Nigro 26).

I am explaining and interpreting the presence of geometric symbols not through a metaphysical, historical or biblically typical frame. This study is intended to add primarily to American literary studies by indicating the way symbology and narrative form interact and combine to offer models of social relations. By reading these literary texts through the lens of Turner's ritual theory, I present the works and their geometric motif in an effort both to explicate them and further the conflation of literary studies and the social sciences. My fundamental question is: can geometric form serve as a bridge between Hawthorne studies and cultural criticism? Underlying this concern is the question of how geometric representations, such as the circle in *The Scarlet Letter* and the vortex in *The House of the Seven Gables* and the parallelogram in *The House of Mirth* become metaphors for both personal and cultural boundaries, how these boundaries are delineated in fictional texts, and how the transgression of these lines comes to represent conflict and its resolution in sociocultural systems.

These works can be discussed quite cogently through Victor Turner's theory of processual symbology and ritual process. As an anthropologist, Turner finds that symbolic action and ritual behavior are the products of continual negotiations of social and cultural forces; that they are not static

systems of ceremony, but processes of redressing breaches in a sociocultural milieu. Turner's approach to how we attempt to resolve conflict yields a theory of cultural process as action comprised of social dramas. Briefly, once a breach in a sociocultural system has taken place, action within the system reaches a crisis in need of redress. Depending upon the nature of the breach, the actors affected by the crisis, and the effectiveness of the redressive process, the drama concludes with either a reintegration of the parties with implicit and explicit changes in the system, or the actors' recognition of an irreparable schism, leading to a reformulation of that sociocultural system. The new system reinterprets and revalues the symbolic ritual actions it maintains in terms of its current hierarchies and systems of relations. It is therefore representative of culture as process, in a constant state of flux. It is during the third phase of the social drama, the redressive process, when ritual actions occur. Ritual is symbol in action, it is the process of actively mediating meaning, both implicitly and explicitly, through the manipulation of signs during culturally sanctioned events. The social drama, as a culturally generated process, can be viewed as analogous to the expression of metaphor through symbolism.

Moreover, and perhaps more crucial to my work, during the redressive stage of a social drama, the nature of liminality is exposed, and the liminal processes of rites of separation, marginality, and reaggregation take place. As the discussions of individual texts below will indicate, expressions of liminality

and the symbolic actions that occur during these periods are commensurate with the form and content of the fictions themselves. "During the . . . liminal period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (*Process* 94). An actor in any ritual passes through a series of events, but it is the status of the initiate or performer, in relation to the group, not necessarily the particular act he or she undertakes, which is of concern here. In other words, whether it be a ritual of affliction Turner addresses in his own dissertation, published in 1957 as *Schism and Continuity in an African Society*, or Hawthorne's ritualized removal of his characters through mesmerism or reversions to isolated places, the status of liminality remains the same.

"If liminality in tribal, traditional ritual is a mode of plural, reflexive, often ludic metacommunication, (though containing the processes and symbol of system maintenance)," Turner writes, "we have to ask the question . . . what are the functional equivalents of liminality in complex societies . . . where the concept of the individual as against the mass is positively evaluated?" (*Edge* 164). This essay is intended to answer Turner's question by explicating these Hawthorne texts in terms of the nature of the social dramas they enact. The individual's position within a cultural and political milieu that lauds the advancement of the individual while promoting and fostering social equality within and among groups is a difficult one to maintain. While the teleology of

democracy might well entail a political equality comparable to that of mathematics, as the epigram beginning this introduction suggests, that end can only be reached, if at all, by the constant manipulation of power among contending factions. If equality is a balance of powers among members of a particular social system, the acts of attempting to achieve such a balance and those which thwart those attempts need to be understood. Hawthorne understood that the tenuous balance of individual and group, as well as the struggles between groups, can be explored through inquiry into the nature of the proportions of inequality, those that geometry can represent. To use the circle as an example of geometric form as objective correlative, I will demonstrate how Hawthorne employs this symbol of unity as one also of boundary and transgression, depicting the individual limitations spheres connote in *The Scarlet Letter*. At the same time, the narrative forms of the texts addressed here are similarly structured as social dramas: each text introduces a crisis which causes a breach between a principal character and his or her social group, one that is redressed through employing a geometric symbology at moments of liminal remove.

What makes Hawthorne's romances so particularly suited to this type of study is his overt use of geometric imagery, which accentuates the varied forms and degrees of remove his protagonists undergo, and in so doing demonstrates the importance of liminality to the individual and the culture in which that individual acts and is acted upon. In terms of narrative strategy,

Hawthorne places a premium on moments of psychic, physical, and temporal suspension, such as the scaffold and forest scenes in *The Scarlet Letter*, Eliot's Pulpit and Coverdale's bachelor-rooms scenes in *The Blithedale Romance*, the sequestering of both Jaffrey Pyncheon at the moment of his transition from life to death and Clifford Pyncheon's transition from isolation to socialization in *The House of the Seven Gables*, the "Sights" narrative point of view, and the conflation of status elevation and status reversal rituals of initiation in "My Kinsman." It is the movement of characters within these texts, movement between stratified levels of social standing, movement which exemplifies cultural, economic, and social difference—all movements that are depicted through the symbolism and metaphors of geometric forms—that is the subject of discussion.

In Hawthorne studies, focus has long been and continues to be centered on and around the "A" of *The Scarlet Letter*. In fact, the purpose of Sacvan Bercovitch's *The Office of The Scarlet Letter* is to "view the office of the scarlet letter [as it] pertains both to the symbol in the text and the symbol as the text . . . to integrate ideology and aesthetic criticism . . . [to turn] the text inside out and the context outside in: to explain the novel's aesthetic design in terms of the cultural strategies of control and to allow the culture to reveal itself in all its radical potentiality through its representation in the text" (xvii).

In order to do this, Bercovitch places his "emphasis on what [he] call[s],

for lack of a better term, cultural symbology . . . the system of symbolic meanings that encompasses text and context alike, simultaneously nourishing the imagination and marking its boundaries" (xvii). Bercovitch has a great deal to say about how "cultural symbology at once denies aesthetic autonomy and highlights the difference between aesthetics and the political or institutional forms usually associated with ideology" (xvii). One aim of this essay is to indicate where Bercovitch, a preeminent cultural and literary critic is misinformed and therefore insufficiently explains the symbolic theory that he has appropriated from cultural anthropology. Chapter One, "The Sphere of Thought and Feeling," details the dramatic use of circular imagery that Hawthorne employs in both the preface and the text of *The Scarlet Letter*. It will become clear how this text and the others of concern here take the shape of social dramas, how the rituals comprising these dramas can be fruitfully explained in terms of the social dramas they are part of, and how, in Bercovitch's words, [cultural symbology]

reminds us that aesthetic representations are inescapably political, just as literature necessarily assumes an institutional form. It also reminds us that they are flexible enough to accommodate upheaval and transformation, that this flexibility may extend in extraordinary cases across time and place, and that, at a certain pitch of intensity, this transhistorical appeal may become the vehicle not only of elusiveness and indeterminacy but also of personal agency and social subversion. (xvii-xviii)

With a more detailed explanation of the process of cultural symbology, I will indicate how it encourages "aesthetic autonomy" rather than denies it, showing the active relation, not the difference, "between aesthetics and . . .

ideology."

The idea of cultural symbology is at the heart of Victor Turner's project. He "regard[s] cultural symbols including ritual symbols as originating in and sustaining processes involving temporal changes in social relations, and not as timeless entities, [and he has] tried to treat the crucial properties of ritual symbols as being involved in these dynamic developments" (*Dramas* 55). As Kathleen Ashley has written, "For Turner, it is through metaphoric equations, symbolic vehicles, and ritual actions that social transformations take place" ("Introduction" xvii). And for David Kertzer, Turner's ideas of "Ritual [help] give meaning to our world in part by linking the past to the present and the present to the future" (9).

Surrounding the scarlet emblem "A" is an embroidered border, a circle of gold which stands as a symbol in itself and in its relation to the sign it encloses. This border and the numerous other references to spheres, orbs, and circles in the text come to demonstrate the importance of the idea of geometric circular form to the text, and will be discussed here in terms of the narrative and metaphoric "office" that form indeed succeeds in performing. Similar to Emerson's eye in his essay "Circles," this gilded circle is primary, standing at the center of many others which define and delimit it. "Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn," Emerson writes (*Writings* 279). It is arguable, as one reads Hawthorne's novel, that the image of the circle becomes as important to an understanding of the

text as the letter itself. This novel of sin and expiation is also one concerning the delineation of the individual's varied positions inside and outside of the many social, religious, and political spheres of a community. *The Scarlet Letter* calls into question the notion of specific boundaries: those in which Hester, Pearl, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth are contained and those they transgress, but also the parameters of the novelist, his acquisition and retelling of "Pue's tale," and the limitations and freedoms in the very act of retelling.

Charles Feidelson cites *The Scarlet Letter* as "a special case among Hawthorne's works. Here, since the very focus of the book is a written sign . . . [t]he symbolistic method is inherent in the subject, just as the subject of symbolism is inherent in his method. This is only partially true of the other romances" (13). When viewed from a processual anthropological perspective, the use to which Hawthorne puts geometric symbols in each of his texts under discussion here will demonstrate the inaccuracy of Feidelson's statement. "Processual symbolic analysis," Victor Turner writes, "is concerned with the interpretation of the meaning of symbols considered as dynamic systems of signifiers, signifieds, and changing modes of signification in temporal sociocultural processes" (*Edge* 171). Explication of the geometric symbols in the texts under consideration here will help to identify how fictions come to mediate and readers come to interpret textual symbol systems.

Chapter Two discusses *The House of the Seven Gables*, in which Clifford Pyncheon's train-board oration on the meaning of time, history, and progress

centers on the figure of the ascending spiral curve. This form, commented on by F.O. Matthiessen and Michael Davitt Bell, represents, among other things, "repetition in historical events and the changing political climate of the United States, from haughty aristocratic [to] egalitarian democratic" (Bell 214). By situating Clifford's speech at the climax of this romance, Hawthorne calls attention to the significance of the ascending spiral curve as a sign and a symbolic image. He is asking, for one, can the cycle of history be considered in terms other than "tragic"? Readers' answers are indicators of and prescriptions for redressive social action. In addition, "The Topsy-turvy Commonwealth of Sleep" intends to demonstrate that through temporal suspension and the reintroduction of legend and artifact the narrative structure of the text is vortical, a shape which Swedenborg, and later the Transcendentalists with whom Hawthorne associated, found to correspond with the highest form of spirituality.

Just as the cyclical nature of history, commented on in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, becomes a metaphor for the resolution of the romance, and in so doing frames the novel in terms of the political and social changes that occur over the course of three generations of Pyncheons, the image of the parallelogram frames Miles Coverdale's narrative perspective in *The Blithedale Romance*. Coverdale, reflecting on Priscilla's flight before her arrival at the commune, imagines that "A little parallelogram of sky was all that she had hitherto known of nature; so that she [now] felt the awfulness that

really exists in its limitless extent" (662). The penultimate chapter concludes with Coverdale's thoughts of the future of Blithedale and the nature of Nature as he visits Zenobia's grave, thinking that "the grass [will grow] all the better, on that little parallelogram of pasture-land, for the decay of the beautiful woman who slept beneath" (845). The parallelogram is a framing device which informs the reader's conceptions of the novel's plot, characterizations, and the roles of the participant-observer, social reformer, and mesmerist in the age of associationalism and the waning of the transcendental movement. The parallelograms of the workhouse window and the gravesite represent the frame through which Miles Coverdale's skewed vision of art, social reform, and gender relations is constructed and related to the reader, and it is also a frame of Coverdale's narrative point of view, a metonymy of the boundary between space and desire.

With "The Circle of My Glance" I return to the circle as a form that frames the narrator's vision in "Sights from a Steeple." Oriented by his position atop the steeple, the narrator practices a form of triangulation in his taking of a social survey of that which surrounds him. As his sight-line moves, his remeasurement of his affinities and fears becomes evident in his descriptions and avoidance of personal contact, ultimately creating a social map that depicts the value of a "watchman, all-heeding, and unheeded" (43). I conclude with "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" to indicate how the angular, labyrinthian descriptions create a motif that lends support to reading Robin as a character

involved in two status rites simultaneously. The symbolism of angularity, I will suggest, promotes the liminal space that brings Robin and the reader to a new understanding of the protagonist's role. His quest for a kinsman and his subsequent abandonment of him is analogous to the pre-Revolutionary desire for a recasting of both the political dynamics between colony and crown, and those of individual independence and authority as well.

The chapters below seek to explain how through Hawthorne's symbology of geometric form each text modifies his expression of the negotiation of boundaries within social schema that make problematic the simultaneous maintenance of a sense of individualism and cultural affiliation; how these texts' representations of cultural symbology indicate the nature of the interaction of text and context; and that social space becomes temporalized as diachronic events become spatialized in fictions that utilize geometric shapes as metaphors for social and cultural conflict and resolution.¹

Chapter One

The Sphere of Thought and Feeling

The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end. . . . Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; . . . there is no end in nature, . . . every end is a beginning. . . ."
EMERSON "Circles"

Emerson's notion of the concentricity of thought and being, grounded as it is in the correspondence of Idea and Nature, has important applications to the writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne. While there is little that can be called analogous between the aesthetic philosophies of Emerson and Hawthorne, both their artistic expressions entail symbology to a large degree. This commonality derives from, among other things, the cultural influence of the Transcendentalists, which was difficult to avoid in Boston of the 1830s through 1850s, an influence that pervaded language. As Sherman Paul writes, "In the transcendentalist writing of this period, 'correspondence' was the catch-all word for much of the work of the shift from the conception of the universe as a mechanism from which God was estranged to that of the universe as organism in which the mind was a unifying necessity" (32-33). Hawthorne was as concerned as Emerson with the aesthetic product of the "unifying" work of the mind. But he was more interested in explicating history and culture than he was with establishing or commenting on a connection with God.

Speaking of ideas of correspondence as they manifested themselves in early nineteenth century New England, Marjorie Elder has indicated Hawthorne's contact with the philosophies and writings of the New England Transcendentalists, no small part of which concerns the correspondence between the natural world and the spiritual spheres:

[T]hrough the years of Hawthorne's courtship and associations with the Peabody family, through the immediate contacts with Transcendentalists at Brook Farm, through increasing associations with Emerson, Thoreau, Fuller and Alcott during his residence at "The Old Manse" in Concord, through an active interest in the Transcendental writings of Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, and Fuller, Hawthorne had unusually good opportunities to encounter Transcendental beliefs. (14)

Such an influence can be recognized in Hawthorne's use of geometric metaphors. Other evidence, some tangential but some explicit, indicates if not a general interest on Hawthorne's part in geometry, at least a familiarity. If one considers Hawthorne's readings of the classics and the importance of *hysteron proteron* and ring composition to the works of Homer; his studies with Joseph Worcester, the lexicographer, cartographer, and geographer; his collegiate career which included Geometry as part of the classical Trivium; the training in penmanship suggested by the day's popular primer, *The Instructor*, of which Cathy Davidson indicates that "an anonymous reader in an 1802 edition . . . used the end papers to practice the geometric designs that constituted the preliminary exercises in the study of penmanship" (9); the dominant presence of Swedenborgian ideas of correspondence, manifesting themselves through archetypal forms in the work of Fourier and commentary by Emerson; his

intensely symbiotic marriage with Sophia Peabody, a strong proponent of homeopathy, Swedenborgianism and other Transcendental ideas; and the numerous references Hawthorne makes to geometric forms in his notebooks, letters and tales—if one considers such a concatenation of influences, all of which rely on or relate to geometry, it is a worthwhile endeavor to consider the role geometric form has in Hawthorne's fictions.

The eye, Emerson's primary circle, emits an ever-extending gaze both seeking out in speculation and returning and reshaping insight, exemplifying the fluid, active, and processual nature of this basic form. Yet while Emerson sought a "geometry of morals, the circle [being] the basic figure" (Paul 98), Hawthorne put the circle and other geometric forms to other uses. It is the purpose of this chapter to indicate the sociological work Hawthorne embarks upon in *The Scarlet Letter* through his concentration on the circle. Moving beyond the predominant application of correspondence, in which his Transcendental contemporaries affixed spiritual meanings to natural phenomena, Hawthorne's first successful romance indicates through metaphor the nature of the relationship between geometric forms such as the circle and the cultural condition of the artist he deemed himself to be.

Emerson found a footnote in J.J. Garth Wilkinson's English translation of *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom* that so influenced his interpretation of Swedenborg's Doctrine of Correspondence that he incorporated it into his essay on Swedenborg in *Representative Men*. Paul finds the passage "significant

because by giving the explicit Swedenborgian idea, it showed the limits to which it was confined by the Swedish theologian" (98). Emerson transcribes the passage as follows:

Forms ascend in order from the lowest to the highest. The lowest form is angular, or the terrestrial and corporeal. The second and next higher form is the circular, which is also called the perpetual-angular, because the circle is a perpetual angle. The form above this, is the spiral, parent and measure of circular forms: its diameters are not rectilinear, but variously circular, and have a spherical surface for center; therefore it is called the perpetual-circular. The form above this is the vortical, or the perpetual-spiral: next, the perpetual-vortical, or celestial: last, the perpetual-celestial, or spiritual. (*Representative Men* 65)

That there is a teleology to geometric form was not novel to Swedenborg. The Greek geometers and artists of the Geometric Age, working with ratios, proportions, and the relationships between physical forms and numerology, were also concerned with geometry's extensions to religion and the arts. Architecture and the fine arts were grounded in an understanding of proportion, the science of geometry. Moreover, "the example of Geometric art . . . was a symptom of the spirit of the age which saw the rise of the city state, and the foundation of those principles of rational order which the Greeks [of the eighth and ninth centuries B.C.] imposed upon themselves" (Whitman 77). For Hawthorne, geometry was more than "a symptom of the spirit of the age." The content and form of his fiction indicates geometry as fundamental to his conceptions of and reactions to social, political, and cultural institutions.

The construction of *The Scarlet Letter* and the imagery supporting it reflect Emerson's notion that "The life of a man is a self-evolving circle, which,

from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes out on all sides outward to new and larger circles, and that without end, . . . [that] the heart refuses to be imprisoned; in the first and narrowest pulses it already tends outward with a vast force and to immense and innumerable extensions" (*Writings* 227). Moreover, when considered in terms of the form of social drama devised by Victor Turner, *The Custom-House* introduction and the text of the romance itself exemplify breaches that lead to crises in established social systems. Resolution of these crises are attempted through ritualized actions, all of which utilize the symbol of the circle. The redefinition of social schemata, indicated after each of the three scaffold scenes, results from the uses to which Hawthorne has Hester, Pearl, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth put the symbol, action which is commensurate with the ritual process. When we consider that the scaffold is a sacred space, or rather a secularized, profanized recasting of what Mircea Eliade refers to as an *axis mundi*, the centrality of the three scaffold scenes becomes important. Eliade states:

The architectonic symbolism of the Center [is] formulated as follows: The Sacred Mountain—where heaven and earth meet—is situated at the center of the world. Every temple or palace—and by extension, every sacred city or royal residence—is a Sacred Mountain, thus becoming a center. Being an *axis mundi*, the sacred city or temple is regarded as the meeting point of heaven, earth, and hell. (12)

Hester's ascension of the pillory at the beginning of the romance points to the intermixing of the morally sacred and profane, as well as the institutionally religious and secular. Suffering a secular punishment for a crime

against primarily religious doctrine, Hester's position atop the scaffold indicates this fusion of opposites. This melding suggests the ease with which the significance of temples, sacred in this view because they are creations in tribute to the original creation, can be assigned to the scaffold, the site of Hester's public ignominy, her private reconciliation with Arthur, and the general reconfirmation of her position as merciful sister. The temple, the place where heaven, earth, and hell conjoin, is also where earthly temporality is exchanged for a mythologized time and place of original creation. Within the realm of Hawthornian romance, the sanctity of the temple is transposed into secularized images of the *axis mundi*. The scaffold becomes the *axis mundi* of the text, around which circles of sociation are constructed. These images are incorporated into the text in such a way as to connect Hawthorne and reader, Pue's text with Hawthorne's, the "Introductory" with the romance, in addition to Hester's egress from the prison door and her ingress into the cottage and grave at the end of the text. Hawthorne brings the reader back to the text's starting point, in addition to having its characters returning at decisive moments to the scaffold of the pillory. All of this indicates a circular narrative structure which creates a connection between aesthetic form and content that has cultural implications.

This merger of symbol and structure suggests that the "Introductory" and romance, and particularly its primary symbols, the A and the embroidered circle surrounding it, perform a number of functions simultaneously. Politically,

Hawthorne's taking the position of Surveyor creates instability in the custom house and consequently for himself. His presence disrupts the system of the custom house in that he is an appointee of the recently elected Democratic chief executive to a position of power over collectors, surveyors, and other officials with more extensive histories and more at stake than himself. Hawthorne, in turn, knew that his position would be jeopardized by future political changes. Zachary Taylor's presidency took its toll on Hawthorne. While losing this office may have spurred Hawthorne to start writing again, his taking the job of Surveyor was predicated on his desire to remove himself temporarily from the close community of Channing, Alcott, and Emerson. Not only does "It [contribute] greatly towards a man's moral and intellectual health, to be brought into habits of companionship with individuals unlike himself, who care little for his pursuits, and whose sphere and abilities he must go out of himself to appreciate" (136). Further, "It is a good lesson—though it may often be a hard one—for a man who has dreamed of literary fame, and of making for himself a rank among the world's dignitaries by such means, to step aside out of the narrow circle in which his claims are recognized, and to find how utterly devoid of significance, beyond that circle, is all that he achieves, and all he aims at" (141).

The attempts to distance himself from his writing cease with the discovery of Pue's text. His professional life as a writer reaches a crisis point, and it is Pue's directive which forces movement. Both the crises of history and

authority are resolved by the blending of history and lineage in Pue's command. "With [Pue's] own ghostly voice, he had exhorted me . . . to bring his mouldy and moth-eaten lucubration before the public" (147).

Historically, by remaining in the custom house, Hawthorne refashions the role and image of the Hathorne patriarchy in that, "the present writer, as their representative, hereby take[s] shame upon myself for their sakes, and pray[s] that any curse incurred by them . . . may be now and henceforth removed" (127). By writing *The Custom-House*, Hawthorne bridges history and literature through the use of the symbol. At the same time, Hawthorne is responding to the latent calling which writing has for him, and as the directive comes from the original surveyor of Salem, the voice of historical authority, (one much kinder than the voices he imagines puzzling "What is he? . . . A writer of story-books!" [127]), Hawthorne has no choice but to write.

For Hawthorne, these events coalesce into a social drama. The breach event is "finding" Pue's text. It is not a breach in the sense of a crime against the community or the authority of the custom house, but in that the discovery of the scroll distances Hawthorne from the present by immersing him in the past. His crisis is in the decision either to play out his role in family and civic history—in a sense play a passive role of remaining in the present—or go about his business as a romancer, in which his function will be to mediate past and present by resuscitating Pue's narrative. His ritual process is to employ the techniques of the romance writer, primarily establishing his own and his

characters' liminality. Once removed from quotidian responsibilities and events, the text employs a symbology that comprises a ritual process. As a writer with his own definition of Romance (the melding of the Actual and the Imaginary), Hawthorne exposes the nature of his characters' and his own liminal positions and through romance comes to a form of reaggregation, both for himself and his text.

Taken in its entirety, *The Scarlet Letter* exemplifies a number of social dramas. First, that of narrative form, which becomes apparent as the plot progresses from Hester's breach of cultural mores—single motherhood—to her tentative, idiosyncratic reaggregation into the Boston community. That the text becomes a liminal entity in its own right is demonstrated by the narrative intrusions which create the bridge between writer and reader. Hawthorne removes the text to the region of romance, a liminal position between the Actual and the Imaginary. Hawthorne aims at resolving both his crisis and that of *The Scarlet Letter* by establishing a relation to the text that is comfortable to him. He objectifies his reader by removing him to a sphere in which he is only imaginable, not actual, thereby obviating the pitfalls of personal revelation:

Some authors . . . indulge themselves in such confidential depths of revelation as could fittingly be addressed, only and exclusively, to the one heart and mind of perfect sympathy; as if the printed book, thrown at large on the wide world, were certain to find out the divided segment of the writer's own nature, and complete his circle of existence by bringing it into communion with it. It is scarcely decorous, however, to speak all, even where we speak impersonally. (121)

It is important not only to identify and interpret the spheres in the text

in terms of the narrative work they accomplish, but also to trace the trajectory of each sphere. Not only do these paths take the characters inside and outside of other spheres, but each defines the "liminal" position of the character. For the purposes of this essay, it is useful to define liminality in Victor Turner's sense of the concept. As in any rite of passage,

transitional rituals [accompany] changes of place, state, social position, and age in a culture. [There are] three phases: separation, margin or limen, and reaggregation. The first phase detaches the ritual subjects from their old places in society; the last installs them, inwardly transformed and outwardly changed, in a new place in society.

During the liminal period, the characteristics of the liminars (the ritual subjects in this phase) are ambiguous, for they pass through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. . . . Liminars are stripped of status and authority, removed from a social structure maintained and sanctioned by power and force, and leveled to a homogeneous social state through discipline and ordeal. (*Image 249*)

Turner describes the Christian pilgrim as one who is existing in a modified state of liminality, one that is entered upon voluntarily, and therefore termed "liminoid" (*Image 253*). Hester Prynne and the other characters in this romance are involved in pilgrimages which are indeed voluntary and therefore they can be considered liminoid. Hester never rues the compact she makes with Dimmesdale; the product of that union, Pearl, the living extension and type of the scarlet letter, becomes increasingly devoted to Hester; Dimmesdale, even though he spends the seven years between Hester's imprisonment and their reconciliation in an increasing state of psychic agitation and physical entropy, resolves to expose the sinner within, a voluntary act designed to

complete his circle of earthly existence; and Chillingworth, wary of the repercussions the truth will evoke, chooses to remain a silent but knowing participant in Hester's secret and an agent of Dimmesdale's destruction.

* * *

In the first paragraph of *The Custom-House*, Hawthorne establishes his position vis-à-vis his readers as one not necessarily complementary with "the one heart and mind of perfect sympathy [who might] . . . complete his circle of existence," but as one who is aware of a "genial consciousness" that will permit the author to "keep the inmost Me behind its veil" (121). His "true position as editor" allows him the right to both maintain "a personal relation with the public" and to embellish Surveyor Pue's text, "to give a faint representation of a mode of life not heretofore described, together with some of the characters that move in it, among whom the author happened to make one" (122). Hawthorne's effort to situate himself both inside the custom house and outside *The Custom-House* can also be viewed as his attempt to maintain a liminal position in regard to *The Scarlet Letter*: in this sense, Hawthorne is at once the Emersonian "eye" that is viewing Pue's text and "the horizon" of the work in its entirety, for he is defining the limits of his text through the acts of comprehending and re-telling "Pue's."

The movement across the threshold of the "real Pue" text into the embellished Hawthorne text occurs within the preface and again in the first chapter. Hawthorne returns across that same threshold in the concluding

chapter of his romance, giving the plot of *The Scarlet Letter* a noticeably circular form. Yet contained within this frame are four characters who establish personal, interpersonal, and communal spheres. Their actions are consistently described as movements within, without, and around their spheres of consciousness and societal relations; the imagery that Hawthorne uses to depict their actions is based in this geometrical first form. Hawthorne, through his text, asks his readers to embark on a series of pilgrimages quite similar to those of his characters. *The Custom-House* preface creates an opportunity for readers to remove themselves from the realism of Hawthorne's commentary on Salem history, contemporary politics, and his own genealogy. Yet the quest inherent in an act of pilgrimage is, in this case, for the meanings of the symbols of the text. These are discoverable once the reader enters the realm of Hawthornian romance. As Marjorie Elder puts it,

Hawthorne's assertions that Actuality and Imagination must be mingled to create Romance corresponds to Emerson's view of the Work of Art as partaking of both the Actual world and Truth. When the Emersonian Poet reaches from a point nearer the sky than the surrounding objects down into the dark wet soil of the earth, he uses the symbol, created when Imagination acts upon the Actual object, moving it up the scale of being from object to thought. The Emersonian conjunction of Ideal and Real in the symbol is Hawthorne's mingling of Imagination and Actuality in the symbol. (72)

Such an intermingling is described when Hawthorne rummages through the second story of the custom house. He comes upon "the mysterious package"; his "eyes fastened themselves upon the old scarlet letter, and would not be turned aside," in the same way as Hester's gaze is fixed with

Chillingworth's when she is on the scaffold at the beginning and the end of the romance. "[There] was some deep meaning in [the A], most worthy of interpretation, and which, as it were, streamed forth from the mystic symbol, subtly communicating itself to [his] sensibilities, but evading the analysis of [his] mind" (145-46). It is now incumbent upon the reader to join Hawthorne as he reads Pue's record of Hester Prynne, and in so doing come within not only Pue's sphere of "history," but Hawthorne's creative sphere, regenerated through his appropriation of Pue's biography of Hester. Rewriting Pue's tale allows Hawthorne to realize his goal of writing once again, but also of relocating himself and his reader to that "neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other" (149).

Although there is no circle imagery in the first chapter of the text, "The Prison-Door," the idea of limen or threshold is most important in that it establishes several types of connections between *The Custom-House* introduction and *The Scarlet Letter*. Textually, the rose proffered by the narrator serves to mediate between both the introduction and the romance and the beginning and end of the romance itself, effectively pointing to the close of a story we have been introduced to through Pue's text, a story we have become interested in yet of which we have no knowledge. The rose offered to the reader bridges that gap, mediating spatially between preface and romance. The red flower also mediates temporally between the contemporary

reader and the early Bostonian artifact, the "black flower of civilized society, a prison;" for it represents "the deep heart of Nature," civilized society's opposing pole, which "could pity and be kind to" the prisoner (158). And the red rose mediates in an aesthetic sense also. The rose is so strong a symbol that Hawthorne's narrator "could hardly do otherwise than . . . present it to the reader" to "relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow" (159). The beauty of the rose is enough to mask or veil the harshness of this village on the edge of the wilderness and the strictness of its authority.

The rose is the symbol-token which unites the prison and the cemetery: for the reader, the beginning and end of Hester Prynne. The symbol, which remains ostensibly constant in its continual presence—the A—is actually one that shifts in meaning depending upon, among other things, its relation to the meanings of and the many references to the spheres within which and among which it operates. The A is first affixed from without, yet the individual, creative artistry involved in the embroidered circle continues to redefine the office of the A. This combination of individual will and institutional power is represented in the symmetry of the A contained within the variation on the circle that Hester creates with her gilt edging. Georg Simmel finds that:

when life is viewed in the most general way, [its basic themes] almost always end in a dialectic whose struggles, compromises or combinations generate all the continuously novel forms of life. . . . This deep, living antithesis of human affairs can be conceptualized only through symbols and examples. . . . [The] present has only found for this dualism the formulae of social versus individual, which draws its line through mankind and even individual man. . . . In socio-political life [the line] is expressed by the

contrast between socialistic and individualistic tendencies. It determines not only the depths of purely materialistic interest in life, but also the heights of aesthetic value. ("Aesthetics" 68-69)

In working out the tension between the poles of Simmel's dialectic as represented in *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester's highly individualistic aims and the socially proscriptive ends of the religious and political institutions of Hester's New World community are represented in the A and its bordering embroidery, two symbols which interact to produce new expressions of the relation between individual and group. This is very much akin to the purpose of symbols in Turner's ritual process. During this process, a symbol becomes the vehicle of redefinition not only of the hierarchization of power within a group and for the individual him- or herself, but the symbol itself is also redefined, in that "symbols exhibit the properties of condensation, unification of disparate referents, and polarization of meaning" (*Process* 52). "In my view [symbols] condense many references, uniting them in a single cognitive and affective field. . . . In this sense ritual symbols are 'multivocal,' susceptible of many meanings, but their referents tend to be polarized between physiological phenomena . . . and normative values of moral facts" (*Dramas* 55).

For Simmel, "The origin of all aesthetic themes is found in symmetry" ("Aesthetics" 71). As noted above, "The influence of aesthetic forces upon social facts is most vivid in modern conflicts between socialistic and individualistic tendencies" ("Aesthetics" 74). The shifting definitions of the A, itself a skewed, asymmetrical triangle contained within the circle, comprise the

scope of these conflicting tendencies in the same sense that Turner's qualities of symbolic condensation and multivocality merge the symbol in a field where meaning is unstable and continually redefined. "In aesthetics, symmetry means the dependency of individual elements on their mutual interdependence with all others, but also of self-containment within the designated circle. Asymmetrical arrangements permit broader individual rights" ("Aesthetics" 75). Hester's comingling of the group's A, which in the magistrates' political sense seeks to create unity through conformity and submission, and her own embroidered circle, her individualistic aesthetic expression, exemplifies the flux of meaning apparent in the social processes of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Whereas Sacvan Bercovitch purports that Hester's reassuming the A upon her return to America is "a gesture that both declares her independence *and* honors her superiors, [and thereby] she re-forms herself, voluntarily, as the vehicle of social order" (15), I would suggest that Hester's entire career of bearing the A, from prison-door to gravestone, is based in her individualistic deviation from, and effort to reform, the social order. Consider that, "Meaning is assigned . . . nonverbally through ritual . . . and is often stored in symbols which become indexical counters in subsequent contexts. . . . Ritual is a transformative performance revealing major classifications, categories, and contradictions of cultural processes. It is not, in essence, as is commonly supposed in Western culture, a prop for social conservatism whose symbols merely condense cherished cultural values. . ." (*Edge* 171).

Bercovitch cites Hester's two pauses on thresholds, first on that of the prison door and then upon that of her own cottage, both "long enough to display to onlookers a scarlet letter on her breast" as "nice instance[s] of liminality serving its proper conservative function at last" (45). But Bercovitch, who has appropriated the language of processual symbology, has here misinterpreted Turner's model of symbols in action. The liminal phase is only conservative in its capacity to suspend time and space for the liminar during the ritual process. Ritual "hold[s] the generative source of culture and structure, particularly in its liminal stage. Hence, ritual is by definition associated with social transitions. . . . Ritual symbols . . . are regarded as the smallest units of ritual behavior, whether object, activity, relationship, word, gesture, or spatial arrangement in a ritual situation" (Edge 171). Bercovitch is generalizing liminality to include specific instances of suspending a narrative gaze on a symbol, the first in which the community gazes upon the A and the second in which the reader does so.

The process by which Hester refashions the Puritan's symbol of control, the encircling embroidery, not the A itself, is what "leads us, as it did Hester, into conflict—[compelling] us to choose between the reasons of the heart and the claims of institutions . . . conflict [being] precisely what the letter is designed to eliminate" (Bercovitch 8). Conflict is precisely what the symbol represents, but conflict is not necessarily negative. I would agree with Bercovitch in that "Conflict is . . . a form of process . . . that assumes inherent

antagonism; it derives from a partiality that inspires partisanship," and that "Process (for Hawthorne) is a form of partiality that . . . tends toward tolerance, accommodation, pluralism, acquiescence, inaction" (8). Hester's actions before and after the third scaffold scene attest to such an interpretation. Here, however, one point of divergence from Bercovitch's reading is that he attributes the tendency toward inaction to an ambiguity derived from the combination of Hester's "radicalization" through "the politics of either/or, [and] Hawthorne's symbolic method [which] requires the politics of both/and" (9). It is more productive and to the point to examine this process in an attempt to understand conflict as both Turner and Simmel each conceive of it, that, in Simmel's phrase, "Conflict itself resolves the tension between contrasts" ("Conflict" 15). Far from the resulting "acquiescence" and "inaction" that Bercovitch finds as the end of conflict, Simmel states:

Conflict . . . is a way of achieving some kind of unity, even if it be through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties. . . . Conflict itself resolves the tension between contrasts. The fact that it aims at peace is only one, an especially obvious, expression of its nature: the synthesis of elements that work both against and for one another. This nature appears more clearly when it is realized that both forms of relation—the antithetical and the convergent—are fundamentally distinguished from the mere indifference of two or more individuals or groups. Whether it implies the rejection or the termination of sociation, indifference is purely negative. In contrast to such pure negativity, conflict contains something positive. Its positive and negative aspects, however, are integrated; they can be separated conceptually but not empirically. ("Conflict" 13-14)

This integration can be exemplified by returning to the incorporation of the images of the red and black flowers Hawthorne depicts in Chapter I and the

circular form of the A's gilt edge. The power of the rose is transferred to the embroidered circle surrounding the A in the move from chapter I to II, in that the golden circle becomes (1) the object which at once defines and disrupts the meaning of the A, thereby defying the official purpose of the A while calling attention to it; and (2) as an object of individually created beauty, continual references to it serve to carry the opposition of beauty and culture inherent in the image of Hawthorne's rose through the length of the romance. In this sense, the embroidered circle now performs the function of establishing aesthetic symmetry, which, for Georg Simmel, is "Beauty, [which] has an almost exclusively individualistic character. Essentially it is based on individual traits, in contrast to the general characteristics and conditions of life. Truly romantic beauty is based to a large extent on the opposition and isolation of the individual from what is common and valid for everybody" ("Conflict" 75). If the aesthetic force of the rose is ascribed to the embroidered edge of Hester's badge, what is individually created, the circle, is now the representation of aesthetic beauty.

My contention is that the relationships of Hawthorne's spheres in this text illustrate the tenuous relations between the individual and the hierarchies of power represented in its characters, the dialectic of the individual and the social, in addition to the definition and positioning of the artist and artistic expression. The symbol Hawthorne calls to service is the circle, and by doing so unites preface and text, beginning and end, and reader and text by a process

of metaphorical association with a form historically considered archetypal of Unity. Hawthorne's positioning the A within the circle reflects the difficulty of union between figures, which like the circle, represent unity but are incommensurable, with measurable, angular figures such as triangles. "In geometrical philosophy the circle is the symbol of unmanifest Unity, while the square represents unity poised, as it were, for manifestation" (Lawlor 23).

When Hester steps out of Prison and into "The Market-Place,"

On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore; and which was of a splendor in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony. (163)

This description in itself indicates the separation between community and artist, between cultural expression and governmental regulation. Hester, as creator and example, represents the mediating position of artist in that she brings together the mark of governmental authority, the A, and the "splendor in accordance with the taste of the age," in the artifact by embroidering the badge. She mocks the official designation by surrounding it with her own adornment.

In terms of the ritual process, Hester's breach has already occurred; Pearl's birth is the objective correlative of her violation of socially proscribed norms. The crisis that is immediately apparent in this chapter stems from Hester's unwillingness to name the father. Her refusal results in her removal

from an ultimately private and personal governmental sanction—prison—to what the town fathers and magistrates perceive to be an even more humiliating punishment—the public scaffold. Hester is now the object of public scrutiny, her confession, the aim of the village officials, is the ostensible end of this scrutiny. However, "Those who had before known her, and had expected to behold her dimmed and obscured by a disastrous cloud, were astonished, and even startled, to perceive how her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped" (163). Hawthorne subverts the denotative meaning of "halo" by placing a "sinner" within the sphere of its light, in an analogous way to which Dickinson's seraphs dip their snowy hats toward the little tippler of "I Taste A Liquor Never Brewed." Yet whereas Dickinson's images employ a playful sense of irony to bring to her poem a sense of closure beyond the reader's time and space, Hawthorne's placement of Hester within her tragic halo is an ironic statement of a much more serious nature. Her oriental beauty and stature set her apart from the community as much as the commission of her sin for which she wears the scarlet letter, one that is "so fantastically embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom. It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and inclosing her in a sphere by herself" (164), an effect the Hawthornian romance form engenders.

In this instance beauty becomes analogous with defiance, the focus of the citizens on this intended instrument of governmental will produces the

opposite effect for both those same citizens and Hester Prynne: "But the point which drew all eyes, and, as it were, transfigured the wearer,—so that both men and women, who had been familiarly acquainted with Hester Prynne, were now impressed as if they beheld for the first time,—was the SCARLET LETTER" (164). Implicit in this description is the definition of the liminoid character. Hester's voluntary course of action with Arthur results in a breach between actor and community. Hester, as the liminoid character, is isolated and becomes the focus of her community while simultaneously undergoing a ritualized set of activities established by the powers of that community, designed to facilitate her reaggregation within the social system that she has transgressed.

The variation on the ritual process that Hawthorne's romance expresses is that Hester, neither a member nor an outcast of the group during the liminal phase of the social drama, is the object through which that community seeks to reestablish its own sense of continuity. Ostensibly designated for some type of transformation of the liminal actor herself, the social drama in this particular instance highlights the reciprocal force that the symbol and its wearer have during the scaffold scenes. Comprised of a series of actions observed by the village officials and residents, Hester's punishment is a rite of passage of which she is the subject, but also the object of the action is a return to some semblance of stasis of the community itself. Hester, suspended in a timeless and spaceless sphere, the effect of the letter on herself, is the focus of the

procession from prison-door to pillory, "a portion of the penal machine . . . as effectual an agent in the promotion of good citizenship, as ever was the guillotine among the terrorists of France" (165). The "presence of men no less dignified than the Governor, and several of his counsellors, a judge, a general, and the ministers of the town" indicates "that the infliction of a legal sentence would have an earnest and effectual meaning. Accordingly, the crowd was somber and grave" (166). For Hester, however, "there were intervals of the whole scene, in which . . . [h]er mind, and especially her memory, was preternaturally active. . . . [T]he scaffold of the pillory was a point of view that revealed to Hester Prynne the entire track along which she had been treading, since her happy infancy" (167). It is the memory of Chillingworth that brings Hester out of her spell. Realizing that the child she held and the letter she wore "were her realities,—all else had vanished!" (168).

Atop the scaffold, Hester is depicted as an icon, "something which should remind [a Papist], indeed, but only by contrast, of that sacred image of sinless motherhood, whose infant was to redeem the world" (166). The contrast, however, is of more importance than any connection a reader may draw between Hester and Mary. In terms of pilgrimage, in apposition to the terms of the liminal portion of the ritual process, there is a curious reversal of roles between the community in this romance, which remains static during its quest for the icon or relic, while simultaneously the pilgrim attains the position of icon. In this sense, Hester's ascension of the scaffold subverts two

standard pilgrimage elements. First, the community creates a martyr of their object of scorn; and second—as Hester observes from the scaffold "the entire track along which she had been treading"—rather than returning to the point of departure, reaffirming the convictions that sends the pilgrim on the pilgrimage, Hester is that much more separated from "Old England; . . . a decayed house of grey stone, with a poverty-stricken aspect" (167).

The exchanges of glances, the circles emanating from the mind's eye of Hester's memory and her reality, and the community's gaze upon Hester, create interdependent spheres. Hester, from the community's point of view, is now one of many concentric, conceptual spheres surrounding their aggregate eye. Her status is one of religious heretic, social pariah, and governmental prisoner. Hester, in her own consciousness, considers the circumscribing definitions of the community, but is determined not to succumb to those definitions. Her refusal to name Dimmesdale as Pearl's father isolates Hester from her community, yet in time strengthens her resolve to maintain at least a marginal position within that same community.

In Chapter III, "The Recognition," Hawthorne again uses both the A and circular form as symbols which serve to mediate connections and establish boundaries between the principal characters. Also, as a narrative device, he unites the beginning of Hester's trek into the wilderness and her gravesite, a circular unity pointing at closure, while commenting on the ostensible office of the A. Chillingworth states, "Thus she will be a living sermon against sin, until

the ignominious letter be engraved upon her tombstone" (171). The spheres surrounding Hester and Dimmesdale—those of their own creation and those of the public gaze—are, in turn, circumscribed by Chillingworth's gaze in "The Recognition." "When he found the eyes of Hester Prynne fastened on his own, and saw that she appeared to recognize him, he slowly and calmly raised his finger" to silence her (170). Chillingworth's gaze is so powerful that, "all other objects in the visible world seemed to vanish, leaving only him and her" (171-72). During his interview with Hester in the following chapter, he assures her that "whether in the outward world, or, to a certain depth, in the invisible sphere of thought,—few things remain hidden from the man, who devotes himself to the solution of a mystery" (182). As we come to see, the result of Chillingworth's treks to New England and out of the wilderness is not self-discovery, but destruction: his gaze into Dimmesdale's heart ultimately consumes both Dimmesdale and himself, while Hester's isolation—self-designed as much as it is a sentence imposed from without—compels her to seek her own truth outside of her New World community and within herself. "Her sin, her ignominy, were the roots which she had struck into the soil. . . . The forest-land, still so uncongenial to every other pilgrim and wanderer, [became] Hester Prynne's . . . life-long home" (186). Chillingworth manifests the concept of border to his own advantage in both spatial and temporal terms: "Here, on this wild outskirts of the earth, I shall pitch my tent; for, elsewhere a wanderer, and isolated from human interests, I find here a woman, a man, a

child, amongst whom and myself there exist the closest ligaments" (183). His self-marginalization is designed spatially to allow him to manipulate these "ligaments" in the future. He will conquer the land, so to speak, to advance his ability to control the "ligaments" of relations. In contrast to Chillingworth's removing himself to the margin as an investment in his future success, Hester's taking up residency in a cottage "On the outskirts of the town, within the verge of the peninsula, but not in close vicinity to any other habitation" (187), is done with the specific spatio-temporal ends in mind of both maintaining a distance between the town and herself that facilitates an individualism which is positive in both its charitable and self-serving aims while also protecting Pearl from the influence of those outside Hester's chosen sphere. The cottage

had been built by an earlier settler, and abandoned, because the soil about it was too sterile for cultivation, while its comparative remoteness put it out of the sphere of that social activity which already marked the habits of the emigrants. . . . Children, too young to comprehend wherefore this woman should be shut out from the sphere of human charities, would creep nigh enough to behold her plying her needle at the cottage window, or standing in the door-way, or laboring in her little garden, or coming forth along the pathway that led townward; and, discerning the scarlet letter on her breast, would scamper off, with a strange contagious fear. (187-88)

Pearl, the embodiment of Hester's breach with her community, has her "own proper beauty [creating] . . . an absolute circle of radiance around her" (195). This sphere places Pearl within an ever-present halo, similar to that which the scarlet A emits, while her destiny of "loneliness . . . [has] drawn an inviolable circle round about her" (198). Her existence places "Mother and

daughter . . . together in the same circle of seclusion from human society" (198-199). The ring surrounding Pearl's beauty, that which attracts the community's gaze, is itself surrounded by a circle that distances her from that same community. These two circles are contained by a third, that sphere which Hester and Pearl must share.

Moving in and out of these spheres of influence and subjectivity are other characters who maintain their own sets of spheres. Chillingworth becomes Dimmesdale's "medical adviser" and creates a symbiotic relationship with him. "Nevertheless, time went on; a kind of intimacy, as we have said, grew up between these two cultivated minds, which had as wide a field as the whole sphere of human thought and study, to meet upon. . . ." (225). The union of mysticism and Puritanism initiates both men on a pilgrimage of their own: "For the sake of the minister's health, and to enable the leech to gather plants with healing balm in them, they took long walks on the sea-shore, or in the forest Often, likewise, one was the guest of the other, in his place of study and retirement" (223). The relic Chillingworth is seeking is the truth contained within Dimmesdale's heart. Dimmesdale's purpose is to find the courage and strength to expose the same truth. Chillingworth eventually finds his way into "the poor minister's interior world" (238) and increasingly disrupts it for seven years. Seeking some form of relief from his guilt and confusion, Dimmesdale ventures out in the middle of the night and reaches the scaffold, where "Hester Prynne had lived through her first hour of public ignominy," and

ascends the steps (245).

The second scaffold scene is crucial to the romance in terms of the convergence of circular imagery and the maintenance of liminality associated with the symbolic office of the circle. "The Minister's Vigil" re-establishes the idea of both temporal suspension and the heightened importance of spatial recognition in liminality. The effect of Hawthorne's control of this space is to restrict, or even counteract, the effect of time. It is to the "same . . . scaffold, black and weather-stained with the storm or sunshine of seven long years . . . [that] remained standing beneath the balcony of the meeting-house" (245) to which Dimmesdale flees after confronting the demons of his late night visions described in "The Interior Of A Heart." The image of "Hester Prynne, leading along little Pearl, in her scarlet garb, and pointing her forefinger, first, at the scarlet letter on her bosom, and then at the clergyman's own breast" (243) is what prompts Dimmesdale's mid-night flight to the scaffold. The duration of seven years is reduced to the moments of fright that the image induces, a shock of recognition that nothing short of returning to the location of his silence will quell. "He had been driven hither by the impulse of that Remorse which dogged him everywhere, and whose own sister and closely linked companion was that Cowardice which invariably drew him back, with her tremulous gripe, just when the other impulse had hurried him to the verge of disclosure" (245). Maintaining his position between Remorse and Cowardice is spatially commensurate with the temporal reduction of seven years

consumed by guilt and grief. "Poor, miserable man!" indeed. To be contained within the sphere of Remorse is, for Dimmesdale, to spatialize temporality. Its expression comes in the form of the oscillation between Remorse and Cowardice. In this wavering he can neither rationalize his guilt and grief nor gain a sense of courage great enough to overcome this spatio-temporal suspension. "This feeble and most sensitive of spirits could . . . neither endure [this state nor 'fling it off at once!,' forcing him to suffer] the agony of heaven-defying guilt and vain repentance" (246).

Hawthorne continues to explicate the elements of liminality in "The Minister's Vigil" through the description of the near-meeting of Dimmesdale and Rev. Wilson, all the time invoking the image of the circle to define character and states of being. Dimmesdale stands upon the scaffold,

convinced that the doom of his existence was stealing onward, in the footsteps which he now heard. . . . As the light drew nearer, he beheld, within its illuminated circle, his brother clergyman, . . . the Reverend Mr. Wilson; who . . . came freshly from the death-chamber of Governor Winthrop . . . now, surrounded, like the saint-like personages of olden times, with a radiant halo, that glorified him amid this gloomy night of sin,—as if the departed Governor had left him an inheritance of his glory, or as if he had caught upon him the distant shine of the celestial city, while looking thitherward to see the triumphant pilgrim pass within its gates. (247)

Dimmesdale's placement on the scaffold combines with Wilson's description to effectively separate the sinner from the newly sainted through the agency of the circle of lantern light surrounding Wilson and his halo of glory, the remnant of his participation in Winthrop's ascension to heaven. Not even the

shriek Dimmesdale lets out, the effect of "the gnawing and poisonous tooth of bodily pain . . . the scarlet token on his naked breast," (246) is sufficient to merge their two spheres and allow the clergymen recognition of one another. While Wilson is enclosed in his inherited sphere of glorious light, Dimmesdale is suspended in time and space atop the scaffold.

Turner discusses liminality as a process that contains ludic experiences while at the same time partaking in ritualized experiences that can be serious in nature. "After [Huizinga]," Turner writes, ". . . the serious games which involve the play of ideas and the manufacture of religiously important symbolic forms and designs . . . are often, in traditional societies, reserved for authentically liminal times and places" (*Edge* 160). Nevertheless, during both play and ritual, liminality remains a social status in which one is removed from the constrictions of the rules and behaviors of normal social interaction. Hawthorne's descriptions of Dimmesdale during this second scaffold scene also indicate the combination of playfulness and serious intent he experiences during his separation. Dimmesdale imagines himself inviting Wilson to join him on the pillory, resulting in a "few moments" of "a crisis of terrible anxiety; although his mind had made an involuntary effort to relieve itself by a kind of lurid playfulness" (248). His thoughts are full of what the morning might bring should he be unable to descend from the scaffold. "Carried away by the grotesque horror of this picture, the minister, unawares, and to his own infinite alarm, burst into a great peal of laughter" (249).

This is, of course, not imagined or restrained, as are Dimmesdale's utterances within earshot of Reverend Wilson, nor should it be, in the context of liminality. "[T]he essence of liminality is to be found in its release from normal constraints, making possible the deconstruction of the 'uninteresting' constructions of common sense, the "meaningfulness of normal life . . . into cultural units which may be reconstructed in novel ways, some of them bizarre to the point of monstrosity" (Turner, *Edge* 160). As Hester and Pearl return from their service at Winthrop's bedside, Pearl responds to Dimmesdale's laughter with her own "childish laugh" (249). At this point the direction of the romance changes in terms of the inter-relations of spheres of existence. The second scaffold scene is of great importance to the progression of the narrative in terms of the ritual process when one takes into account the changes which occur after Dimmesdale's, Hester's and Pearl's communion on the scaffold. After this union and the intervening forest scenes, the romance moves quickly toward the third and final scaffold scene, toward a conclusion without resolution, a process dependent upon the use of the symbology of the circle.

When Hester and Pearl pass the foot of the scaffold, Dimmesdale invites them into his solitary and impotent sphere: "Come up hither once again, and we will stand all three together!" (250). Atop the scaffold, Dimmesdale takes hold of one of Pearl's hand as Hester holds the other. "The moment he did so, there came what seemed a tumultuous rush of new life, other than his own, pouring like a torrent into his heart, and hurrying through his veins, as if the

mother and the child were communicating their vital warmth to his half-torpid system. The three formed an electric chain" (250). "And there stood the minister, with his hand over his heart; and Hester Prynne, with the embroidered letter glimmering on her bosom; and little Pearl, herself a symbol, and the connecting link between those two" (251). At this point all three stand on the circumference of a sphere that will come into shape, but not until a series of negotiations takes place among Dimmesdale, Hester and Pearl. Also, at this point each of the characters on the scaffold enters into individual crises that can only be resolved through a renegotiation of the limits of the spheres surrounding them, both those they have created and those with which they have been imbued. But the primary negotiation is between reader and text, and it is the purpose of "Another View of Hester" to initiate our reconsideration of Hester's plight.

The connection between Arthur and Hester is described as "the iron link of mutual crime," laying a sense of "responsibility on her, in reference to the clergyman, which she owed to no other," not even Pearl (255). Hester is a character "With nothing now to lose . . . and with no hope." Hawthorne invokes the image of a pilgrim once again, describing Hester as one with "a genuine regard for virtue that had brought back the poor wanderer to its path" (256). The other view of Hester is that of the sinner sanctified, the world ordaining her "a Sister of Mercy" (257) for her efforts to comfort "the outcast of society" (256). Familiarity with the A and Hester's constant but unobtrusive

assistance cause "many people [to refuse] to interpret the scarlet letter A by its original signification. They said that it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength" (257). As the meaning of the A remains indeterminant, so does that same indeterminacy enlarge the question of Pearl's existence. Had "she been born amiss," was it "for ill or good that the poor little creature had been born at all?" (260). Unable to "[overcome] these problems by any exercise of thought . . . Hester wandered without a clew into the dark labyrinth of mind," (260-61) leading the narrator to the famous sentence: "The scarlet letter had not done its office" (261).

But in fact it has. The symbol has become the agent of change, the engine of Hester's reaggregation into a relationship with the community which resists definition. No longer a woman with "A tendency to speculation," (260) Hester has now "determined to redeem her error" of acquiescing in Roger Chillingworth's "scheme of disguise" (261). The remaining chapters of the romance discuss the repercussions of her decision. The second scaffold scene serves to structure this reincorporation, and the subsequent five chapters detail the course this reaggregation will follow by separating the relationships of the four principle characters into pairs.

"Another View of Hester" is designed to have the reader reassess his or her view vis-à-vis Hester. "Hester and the Physician" exposes Chillingworth's evil more distinctly than any other place in the text. Yet even though "Old Roger Chillingworth was a striking evidence of man's faculty of transforming

himself into a devil," (264) it is a fact that Hester has reached a decision to expose Chillingworth to Dimmesdale. The conversation between Roger and Hester has, as one of its offshoots, the capability of reinfusing Pearl into the romance with a renewed sense of urgency and a greater interest in revising the relations between mother and daughter. In "Hester and Pearl," Hester recalls "The emotions of that brief space, while she stood gazing after the crooked figure of old Roger Chillingworth, [and] threw a dark light on Hester's state of mind, revealing much that she might not otherwise have acknowledged to herself." Although Pearl early on is "seeking a passage for herself into [her own image's] sphere of impalpable earth and unimaginable sky," (270-71) "The thought occurred to Hester, that the child might really be seeking to approach her with childlike confidence . . . and as intelligently as she knew how, to establish a meeting-point of sympathy" (272).

The efficacy of the electric chain, the father, mother and demon child atop the scaffold, is not realized until after "A Forest Walk," Hester and Pearl's pilgrimage to the natural world. Knowing she will meet Dimmesdale on his return from the Apostle Eliot, Hester walks with Pearl into "the mystery of the primeval forest." Here, "Arthur Dimmesdale put forth his hand, chill as death, and touched the chill hand of Hester Prynne. . . . They now felt themselves, at least, inhabitants of the same sphere." Once contained within the same circle, they can "throw open the doors of intercourse, so that their real thoughts might be led across the threshold" (282). Free within this sphere,

Hester reveals Chillingworth's true identity, Dimmesdale and Hester reaffirm their love for each other and vow to flee to either the wilderness or back to England, for "there [is] not shade enough . . . to hide thy heart from the gaze of Roger Chillingworth" (288). Even with the truth acknowledged between Hester and Arthur, Roger's powerful gaze is not as yet rendered ineffective. Hester's "mind of native courage and activity," along with her proclivity to speculation—"her passport into regions where other women dared not tread"—sustained her for "the whole seven years of outlaw and ignominy [that] had been little other than a preparation for this very hour" (291). But what of Dimmesdale? His reunion with Hester into their separate sphere illuminates his unmendably bifurcated personality. "As a priest, the framework of his order inevitably hemmed him in. As a man who had once sinned, but who kept his conscience all alive and painfully sensitive by the fretting of an unhealed wound, he might have been supposed safer within the line of virtue, than if he had never sinned at all" (290-91).

Removed as they are from the vision and influence of Chillingworth and Boston during "A Flood of Sunshine," Hester and Dimmesdale experience a shared sense of freedom and free-play. After throwing off the letter, Hester's "sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty, came back from what men call the irrevocable past, and clustered themselves, with her maiden hope, and a happiness before unknown, within the magic circle of the hour" (293). Yet not until Pearl positions herself at the margin of the brook, distinct from

Hester and Dimmesdale, does Hawthorne clearly designate her as "the one likeness of their being," (296) the sphere that encompasses both her parents. At the brookside each of the various spheres that have been created before this point come into play. Pearl stands gazing into the pool of water and sees her reflection, "but [one] more refined and spiritualized than the reality. . . . Hester felt herself . . . estranged from Pearl; as if the child . . . had strayed out of the sphere in which she and her mother dwelt together, and was vainly seeking to return to it." Their pilgrimage into the woods upsets the balance of each sets of spheres, for "another inmate had been admitted within the circle of the mother's feelings," the minister who discerns "that this brook is the boundary between two worlds, and that [Hester] canst never meet . . . Pearl again" (297-98). .

In keeping with the notion of dyads negotiating for position within spheres, two characters coming to understand their relationships in terms of exclusion, Pearl's sense of estrangement is warranted. "There was both truth and error in the impression; the child and mother were estranged, but through Hester's fault, not Pearl's. Since the latter rambled from her side, another inmate had been admitted within the circle of the mother's feelings, and so modified the aspect of them all, that Pearl, the returning wanderer, could not find her wonted place, and hardly knew where she was" (298). Dimmesdale states, "I have a strange fancy . . . that this brook is the boundary between two worlds, and that thou canst never meet Pearl again" (298). Dimmesdale

recognizes the changes that have taken place, changes in the nature of each character's interactions with others, not to mention reflexively, that have resulted from the continuing employment of the circle, the symbol of personal and interpersonal boundaries.

Maneuvering across the thresholds of these intertwining spheres has come to resemble the courses of action each character seeks to take in terms of the others. It is not so much a matter of intricacies of power plays—the conversation in the forest holds no sense of cross-purposes or subterfuge for Hester or Dimmesdale. The metaphor of the maze is invoked a number of times, and it is an appropriate one to apply when describing the single character's efforts to work his or her way toward realizing a balance with the aims of the other characters. Moreover, as Jill Purce explains, "As the labyrinth . . . creates and dissolves, expands and contracts, so it reveals and conceals. It is cosmos to those who know the way, and chaos to those who lose it" (29).

In "The Minister in a Maze" Hawthorne moves from the connections explored in earlier chapters, those between Hester and Pearl, Dimmesdale and Hester and Dimmesdale and Pearl, to a discussion of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth. Here, Dimmesdale's inner maze of thought experiences an upheaval due to his resolution to join Hester and renounce his station. "Before Mr. Dimmesdale reached home, his inner man gave him other evidences of a revolution in the sphere of thought and feeling. In truth, nothing short of a

total change of dynasty and moral code, in that interior kingdom, was adequate to account for the impulses now communicated to the unfortunate and startled minister" (306). That complete turn-around involves Dimmesdale's interactions with his parishioners and brother clergymen. Three times Dimmesdale entertains the idea of shocking those with whom he meets; first the urge to utter to a deacon "certain blasphemous suggestions that rose in his mind, respecting the communion-supper; then the whisper into the ear of "the eldest female member of the church," (306) a comment "the minister could never afterwards recollect;" (307) and finally the avoidance of "the youngest sister" of Dimmesdale's congregation, one "fair and pure as a lily that had bloomed in Paradise" (307). "As she drew nigh, the arch-fiend whispered him to condense into small compass and drop into her tender bosom a germ of evil that would be sure to blossom darkly soon, and bear black fruit betimes" (308). Nor, after his reaffirmation of love with Hester, can Dimmesdale meet his world in quite the same way again. "Another man had returned out of the forest; a wiser one; with a knowledge of hidden mysteries which the simplicity of the former never could have reached" (310). Arthur's step into Hester's sphere facilitates his break from Roger's. Free now from that debilitating gaze, Arthur is able to rewrite his Election speech, intent on revealing himself to his parishioners and to God.

The Election Day holiday redefines Hester's position as one distinct from every other member of the community: "a small, vacant area—a sort of magic

circle . . . a forcible type of moral solitude in which the scarlet letter enveloped its fated wearer" (320). During "The Procession" Dimmesdale, in a state of meditational ecstasy, ascends the scaffold, and stands removed from Hester, she feeling "that he seemed so remote from her own sphere, and utterly beyond her reach" (324-25). Yet, listening to Arthur at the foot of the scaffold, she understands that the "whole orb of life . . . was connected with this spot, as with the one point that gave it unity" (328). In Purce's view, Eliade and other anthropologists and theologians would characterize this exchange as an expression of realizing

The Absolute, [which,] by becoming subject and object, divided itself into heaven and earth, thereby creating the *Axis Mundi*—the pole situated at the center of the world, holding up the canopy of heaven and connecting it with earth. It thus became the central axis connecting and penetrating the horizontal states of being, by passing through their centres. . . . It is pre-eminently man's function to act as the link between heaven and earth. Each person is therefore a central axis, and has with him a central axis, up which he must move or 'climb' by developing his various centres, or by activating the subtle energies within his spinal column, or metaphorically by climbing the central pillar of consciousness on the Tree of Life, which in turn effects the descent of light or grace from above. This descent, however, can only manifest when each person has realized, if only for a moment, the change of consciousness on to the central axis, the still point, or 'centre on the midst of condition.' (17)

Whether we consider Pearl, the scarlet letter, Arthur and Hester's mutual sphere, or Hester's self-reliance as the one point, or center, of her unity, Hester's return to the scaffold, a representation of the *axis mundi*, completes the pilgrimage that began by stepping across the threshold of the prison-door: "At the final hour, when she was so soon to fling aside the burning letter, it

had strangely become the center of more remark and excitement . . . than at any time since the first day she put it on" (331). Chillingworth is powerless over Dimmesdale when the minister is atop the scaffold; the mystic's gaze is ineffective, and Arthur is free to announce his sin and renounce Roger by bearing his heart to his community. The sphere that encompasses the two men is dissolved by Arthur's profession of sin, and it is just that profession that ultimately destroys Roger.

In the concluding chapter Hawthorne extends Hester's pilgrimage to include her departure from the Puritan community with Pearl, and her solitary return to that same cottage by the sea-shore to once again resume her "long-forsaken shame" (343). Yet he returns Hester to the site of her ignominy and shame, for "there was a more real life for Hester Prynne, here" (344). By doing so Hawthorne brings his protagonist full circle, along with his readers, placing all in position to re-examine the events—to re-read his text.

Hawthorne's pilgrimage begins with the discovery of a text wrapped within the scarlet letter, and it moves him to write. Uplifted from the torpor and stagnation of the custom-house to the liminal world of romance, Hawthorne elevates the symbol of sin and shame to the status of a relic: "a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence too" (344). But this transition happens through the agency of the circle as ritual symbol. Without its employment, the social dramas the text contains do not take place nor does the text as social drama cohere.

Hawthorne's act of "editing" Pue's text is analogous to Hester's embroidering the scarlet letter. Both are artistic acts of revision in which the primary symbol, through the ritual process, becomes not secondary but redefined. The relationships of characters, as we have seen, vary as the spheres which contain them individually and in combination, as well as those which proscribe their courses of action, change in their capacities to create meaning. These changes occur as results of liminoid actors engaging the symbol of circle, employing ritual symbols during occasions of elemental crises in places of sacred design. Hawthorne's concentration of action within the three scaffold scenes is of extreme importance, especially when thought of in terms of liminality and the power of sacred space. Should we consider the text as relic, then the eye that gazed upon the letter in the attic, the first circle, and recreated Pue's text—the horizon, or second circle—also expanded the perimeter of that horizon to include "the angel and apostle of the coming revelation . . . showing how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest test of a life successful to such an end" (344-45). For Hawthorne, in Emerson's terms, the goal of writing is "to be surprised out of our propriety, . . . in short to draw a new circle" (*Writings* 238). Hawthorne's A within its circle, the alpha contained within omega, diagrams, in its interaction of content and form, the underpinnings of social interaction. For Georg Simmel,

In any given social phenomenon, content and societal form constitute one reality. A social form severed from all content can no more attain existence than a spatial form can exist without a material whose form it is. Any social phenomenon or process is

composed of two elements which in reality are inseparable: on the one hand, an interest, a purpose, or a motive; on the other, a form or mode of interaction among individuals through which, or in the shape of which, that content attains social reality. (*Individuality* 24)

This inextricability of content and form, in conjunction with the process of symbolic mediation of meaning Turner proposes, suggests *The Scarlet Letter* has done its sociological office. By indicating the processes of identifying the relationship between the individual and the social group and explicating it through a narrative whose structure reflects this process and form, Hawthorne's romance is a work of cultural criticism that continues to surpass the limitations literary criticism has heretofore established for it.

Chapter Two

The Topsyturvy Commonwealth of Sleep

This
Is the process whereby pain of the past in its pastness
May be converted into the future tense

Of joy.
ROBERT PENN WARREN, "I Am Dreaming of a White Christmas: The Natural
History of a Vision"

The history of geometric form as part of the foundation and substance of symbology is a long one, and often presented, or hesitantly accepted, as a pseudoscientific system based in magical, religious, or mythological lore. Although Hawthorne's region of Romance would ask to profit from the less tendentious contentions of these frames of thought, it is not the purpose of this essay to present Hawthorne as a willing proponent of such systems, or even a man intent on developing, throughout the successive romances of his later career, a geometric rebus. Yet the presence of what can be described as a geometric approach to narrative, and its relevance as a metaphor of the shape of social interaction, can help us when looking back over Hawthorne's texts not only in a reconsideration of a Hawthornian "project," but also by adding a new dimension to the massive body of analysis and interpretation already written.

Jill Purce, in *The Mystic Spiral*, states that, "The function of symbolism is to go beyond the 'limitation of the fragment' and link the different 'parts' of the whole, or alternatively the worlds in which these parts are manifest: these worlds are successive windings of the spiral" (10). This geometric shape is

encountered throughout nature, in mollusk shells and in our inner ears, in eddying whirlpools and cyclones. In Swedenborg's cosmology, the spiral, or circular vortex, is the shape corresponding to one remove from corporeal transcendence into the spiritual. When moving from concrete correspondences to abstract representations, the vortex, as a descriptive, conceptual frame, incorporates the spherical, or as Purce puts it, "If life is a path 'through' time, and therefore a continuum, we may also imagine it as a line; and further, since it returns and yet flows on, it is a spiral. Only if it were possible to come back to the same point in time could it be a circle. Any circular movement carried into the fourth dimension (of space-time) becomes a spiral. . ." (13).

"A geometric diagram," states Keith Critchlow, "holds a special value as it partakes in the principles of symmetry and order on which creation is structured and therefore is both symbolic and descriptive simultaneously" (23). As we've seen, Hawthorne makes explicit use of the circle as geometric diagram in the narrative construction of *The Scarlet Letter*. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, direct reference to the spiral is limited to a few passages describing the house and Clifford's description of life's course in "The Flight of Two Owls" chapter. In terms of narrative design and symbolic extension, however, the shape of the spiral is integral to reading the text as an allegory of social and political conflict.

When allegories take shape through performance, be they on stage or in narrative form, symbols function as deictic vessels, carrying meaning from the

past to explain and comment on the present while pointing, often didactically, to the future. Lévi-Strauss explains that myth, as it is comprised in symbol and ritual, "On the one hand . . . always refers to events alleged to have taken place a long time ago. But what gives myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future" (209). I am interested in the way the myth of the Maule curse recurs in *The House* and in so doing supplies the text with a vortical narrative structure.

When myth and ritual combine as they do in *The House* the elements of the redressive phase of Turner's social drama—separation, limen and reaggregation—are evident. Holgrave's mesmeric story-hour in "Alice Pyncheon," for example, rehearses the Maule curse for Phoebe and the reader as it removes the narrative from the linear plot. In describing the function of the spiral as symbol, Purce unwittingly suggests a connection with the process and purpose that Turner sees as that of ritual performance:

Each winding [of the spiral] marks a containment and a completed cycle in the development of the whole; but as each is a part of the whole, the completion is also a beginning, so that the spiral shows the enclosure and 'rounded' quality we experience, and the equivalent points reached at every new winding. The *recurrent moments of crisis and decision*, when understood, are *growth junctures, points of initiation which mark a release or death from one state of being and a growth or birth into the next*. 'How many times,' said Yeats, 'man lives and dies between his two eternities.'(15; my emphasis)

Whereas the narrator of *The Scarlet Letter* brings the character of Hester Prynne full circle, from prison-door to grave, from one form of spatial isolation

to a remove that both incorporates and eradicates time and space, and depicts the role of aesthetics in social conflict through the trope of the circle, the narrator of *The House of the Seven Gables* turns to the gyre for an emblem indicative of the processes of historical change. "Hawthorne thought *The House of the Seven Gables* the best of his romances because it was, [in his words], 'finished with the minuteness of a Dutch picture'" (Carlson 97). Hawthorne's detail work is, however, less in the depiction of character than it is in his attention to the replication of crisis events through the generations of Pyncheons and Maules. Beginning with a statement of intent as a preface, Hawthorne establishes a strange combination of ideological treatise on the nature of historical change and a romance that parodies the generic form and content of sentimental domestic fiction so popular in his time. Susan Mizruchi, citing Ann Douglas's notion of "escape from history," believes "The novel's ending might also be seen as a parody of popular nineteenth-century historical romances, which often pictured the heroine's final triumph in freeing the hero from the bonds of history" (101).

Notwithstanding recent New Historicist efforts to raise the novel from the canonical grave into which the New Critics placed it, the general critical reception of this romance deems it a lesser work than *The Scarlet Letter*, not least of all because of its ending. Its best attributes, in the majority view, are those which relegate it to the realm of gothic horror—the legend of Maule's curse and the descriptions of the family's mesmeric powers, the power

struggles between aristocracy (Pyncheons) and plebs (Maules), and the disintegration of the "house" as family and structure.

There is, however, much more to this text than a collection of grotesque images, forlorn and forgotten characters and an anthropomorphic home. My contention is that *The House of the Seven Gables* is, at its core, an expansion of Hawthorne's depiction of social interaction, a continuing process of conflict and resolution that is explicated through a dominant spatial metaphor. Whereas in *The Scarlet Letter* Hester Prynne's striving for a status that would subsume expressions of individuality and artistic beauty and redefine social interaction is attained through an indeterminacy that the stylized embroidering of the scarlet A creates, with *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne enlarges his view of social conflict beyond that between individual and community by expanding his geometrical symbology from the circle to the ascending spiral curve.

While most of the post-WWII criticism of *The House of the Seven Gables* concerns both Hawthorne's shaping of the romance genre to address historical themes and explications of the symbolism of the house and characters in political, social and historical terms, there has been little comment on Hawthorne's narrative strategy to merge form and content into the shape of what Clifford Pyncheon calls the shape of all human progress. It is one of the purposes of this chapter to incorporate, yet move beyond, statements such as Joel Porte's, that "[t]he house comes to stand for that 'dungeon'—the

individual heart—wherein the emotions of each inhabitant are imprisoned. . . . The past of the house, the buried life, and the secrets of the heart are all caught up in one comprehensive metaphor that defines the function of the romancer" (116), and Marius Bewley's expansion of F.O. Matthiessen's reading of the ending of the novel as a resolution between Hawthorne's democratic and conservative sides—*The House of the Seven Gables* is "a debate between the respective claims, on one hand, of the past, inherited wealth, and aristocratic status; on the other, of the present, of democratic equality, both financial and social. But the debate does not come off successfully" (116). These readings and their derivatives have been accepted as commonplaces in critical commentary. I am not suggesting here a revision of these representative views, or proposing that they are wrong. What this chapter develops is a way to combine narrative strategy and cultural symbology in an effort to add to the conversation. To do so, I think it important first to take a brief look at one of the few New Critical essays to comment on Clifford's ascending spiral curve.

In keeping with the metaphor of the spiral, Maurice Beebe's 1956 apology for *The House* intends "to reveal greater thematic, symbolic, and narrative unity than is usually recognized" (1). The novel, in Beebe's view, has an organic unity like that of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," one that is apparent in its being "a world-in-itself within the larger universe of God, and the artist, a *part* of God, is also *like* a God to the extent that he creates works of art in which every part contributes to the whole and the whole encloses the

parts." In the continual flux "between the forces of contraction (gravitation) and expansion (radiation or 'electricity')," the process of Poe's cosmology, there is an ever-present desire to "return to the initial unity" of the cosmos (Beebe 4).

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, as in "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The elements of the story are governed by a single principle, and everything contributes to the whole . . . the figure which describes the novel is not a line, but a circle spinning out from its central core, its conclusion contained in its starting point. Or, better . . . as Clifford Pyncheon says of life in general, an 'ascending spiral curve'" (Beebe 2-3). For this critic, "the narrative seems to revolve within a circle, but eventually the frame is pierced—the House of the Seven Gables is abandoned—and a new cycle is begun. Since the new cycle begins in the old and overlaps it, the end of the novel is organically related to the beginning" (15). What I would like to show is how this "revolv[ing]" is effected.

In *The House*, Hawthorne moves from aesthetics to metaphysics and epistemology, from the individual's modification of the symmetrical circle to the social ramifications of temporal conceptions and historical knowledge, as represented in the spiral. Clifford Pyncheon's colloquy with the "gimlet-eyed old gentleman" aboard the train in "The Flight of Two Owls" is premised on the belief that "all human progress is in a circle; or, to use a more accurate and beautiful figure, in an ascending spiral curve" (574). The critical truism that the

text's dominant themes are the relationships of the past, present and future, and the interaction between the waning aristocracy and the burgeoning democracy is not disputed. I think the narrative structure itself enhances that point, and here I differ from Michael Bell, who in *Hawthorne and the Historical Romance of New England*, says that Clifford Pyncheon's "ascending spiral curve" speech exemplifies Hawthorne's dual sense of history: the tragic "cyclical" view, "that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones. . ." (352); and the "linear" comedic, traditional romance ending, which Hawthorne uses to imbue his sense of history with "progress,"² but that the trope fails at integrating the conservative, aristocratic Pyncheon with the democratic, plebeian Maule. I would suggest that the spiral's purpose is not to merge but to distinguish between cyclical tragedy and linear comedy. By doing so, Hawthorne maintains through metaphor the tensions between the oppositions of aristocratic and democratic, and past and present. One may reassess the "successfulness" of the conclusion if only by suggesting that the generic space between comedy and tragedy—and the socio-political space between aristocrat and pleb—takes a vortical shape as a result of the tension that the narrative form of Hawthornian romance advances. Hawthorne's use of the geometric figure of the spiral curve not only correlates to the process of historical change but also, as we will see, to the shape of the narrative itself.

As in the case of *The Scarlet Letter*, in *The House of the Seven Gables* a geometric shape acts as a cultural symbol, a metaphor of social conflict and

its resolution, and the process of its implementation in a literary text can be understood in terms commensurate with the operation of ritual process in Victor Turner's social drama. In *The House*, Hawthorne involves characters in a set of social and political crises which result in a restructuring of social schema. The forms that the characters' reaggregations into the community take are predicated on the varying effects dictated by the negotiation of symbolic processes occurring in the liminal stages of the social drama. The particular symbols that comprise the Maule legend shape the ritual action that gets replayed throughout the text: the narrator's discourse of suspension; Holgrave's mesmerism; and the iconography of the portrait, shop-bell, oaken arm-chair, and garden, recur and combine to bring both families together yet keep them distinct. The symbology involves each Pyncheon and the sole Maule in a separation from and a questioning of their social status. Through a discussion of selected chapters of *The House*, my intention is to demonstrate how legend, artifact, and narrative discourse merge to mirror the vortical shape of the romance and explicate the value of the spiral shape as metaphor.

Each major character is, at crucial points in the text and in differing forms, liminal, both temporally suspended and spatially isolated, resulting in alterations in the structure of the social system. Clifford Pyncheon perhaps best represents the nature and effects of spatial isolation in liminality, while the Maule/Holgrave mesmerism indicates the power of a psychic/temporal remove. Hepzibah in her cent-shop is an analogue for the difficulties encountered when

making the transition between economic isolation and the unyielding circulation inherent in the increasingly industrial, capitalist economy of the mid-1800s. And temporal suspension as narrative device is perhaps best demonstrated in the "Governor Pyncheon" chapter. Although this text suggests the geometric symbology of the spiral in a more subtle way than *The Scarlet Letter* promotes the circle, the shape of the narrative, the importance of liminal space and the prominence of Clifford's oration all indicate an interesting correlation between the symbology of geometric form and Hawthorne's narrative strategy. The reader is informed through an admixture of repetition of legendary iconography and myth in combination with successive narrative suspensions that reinforce these devices by focusing on them. Unlike the curse, the armchair and the portrait, certainly unrepresentative of a vortex in any sense, assume that dimension when they are introduced into a narrative that relies on them to remind the reader of their values, first discussed in "The Old Pyncheon Family."

Eric J. Sundquist, in his essay "Suspense and Tautology in 'Benito Cereno,'" likens Melville's tale to

other notable texts of the nineteenth century—Emerson's essays, Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, and Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, for example—[for it] tends to live as vividly in our memories as in actual encounter and seems to haunt us so in retrospect . . . in part because it fully exploits, by reflected narrative action and by the formal suspension of moments of crisis, impending problems at once relegated to the historical past but nonetheless alive in the fictional present. (103)

When the text is approached in terms of the theories of liminality and the ritual process, the narrative method which Sundquist dubs the "formal suspension

of moments of crisis" is not only an effective narrative strategy but also an entree to explicating the narrative space which Hawthorne's geometric symbols represent and transform, and in so doing alter the structures in which his characters operate.

The employment of narrative suspension as a means to introduce the symbolic artifacts that will recur in the ongoing myth of Maule's curse begins with Hawthorne's preface, his attempt "to mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight, delicate, evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the dish offered to the Public" (351). Hawthorne is necessarily standing at a similar remove to that of *The Custom-House* and earlier tales and sketches such as "Sights from a Steeple" in which the narrator's spatial location supplies a vantage point for a curious combination of reticence, irony and near-omniscience. Marilyn Chandler puts it well in finding that

Hawthorne's narrator, in his own provocative way . . . begins by telling us how much he is not going to tell us . . . [guides us] on the slippery path of interpretation at our own moral peril. . . . The narrator . . . introduces himself as one long familiar with the house and all its curious stories. He is a seer; he has the double vision of a spiritual man who sees beyond the literal structures of the visible world to the invisible forces and spirits that animate it. (73)

As "this tale comes under the Romantic definition [in its] attempt to connect a by-gone time with the very Present that is flitting away from us" (351), Hawthorne's role is that of mediator of this "Legend." He is still occupying the space so familiar and comfortable to his narrative voice, "that neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the

Actual and Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other" (*SL* 149). In this romance, however, the narrator's position takes on an even greater importance than it had in *The Custom-House*. As the interconnected circles of *The Scarlet Letter* define the boundaries of individual and community, the shape of the spiral curve is emblematic of the course of historical and social change, merging representations of time and space within one geometric metaphor. This conjunction is accomplished through the agency of artifact and myth, recurring as they do during the episodes that describe the effects and effectiveness of liminality in the narrative.

As we have seen in the discussion of *The Scarlet Letter*, the cycle of breach, conflict, redress through ritual and schism or reaggregation is, as Turner suggests, the process through which individuals and groups determine changes in their forms, contents and value systems. Those determinations integrally involve the use of cultural symbols during ritual actions. In focusing on the scaffold scenes of *The Scarlet Letter*, I indicated the importance of sacred space for the employment of ritual symbols and the enactment of ritualized behavior. In each of the three scenes, characters enter a liminal realm which facilitates the reconceptualization of their positions vis-à-vis other characters and their status as members of the community. Their suspension in this fictive liminality is both spatial and temporal, psychic and physical, encouraging a sense of introspection while also promoting a playful, ludic, or as Turner puts it, a "subjunctive" quality to their self-conceptions and

interactions with others. Whereas Hester's ascension of the pillory in "The Market-Place" describes her personal\historic recollection as a place of safety, Dimmesdale's midnight climb up the scaffold stairs in "The Minister's Vigil" portrays his desire to break free of the constrictions that his position in the church hierarchy, as well as those which Chillingworth's scrutiny, impose. In "The Revelation" the scaffold of the pillory is again the site of psychic and spiritual remove, yet unlike "The Market-Place," where the temporal concentration is in the past, and "The Minister's Vigil," where it is in the present, in the final scaffold scene, the focus is on the future.

When we move to *The House of the Seven Gables*, we again see Hawthorne isolating his characters in order to develop them, suspending them temporally while removing them spatially from the fictive present. Where Chandler finds that the garden and its natural images "sustains and redeems the house and its inhabitants, providing a refuge and place of sanity to offset the deranged house and unhealthy interior environment" (80), I would suggest that it is not the garden primarily, but the house that is both representation of and refuge from the shifting social and economic scene with which the Pyncheons cannot cope. "Each of the three stories is occupied principally by one of the three reclusive inhabitants," Chandler continues. "The first by Hepzibah in her kitchen and cent-shop; the second by Clifford, who watches the world from behind the veil of his arched window; and the third by Holgrave, a photographer whose art seems descended from the wizardry of his ancestors

and whose fate is bound to the old house by dint of an inherited wrong that remains to be righted" (81). Each floor of the house is the location of a particular character's reclusion, but their stratification within the house represents the particular issues from which the characters wish to separate themselves.

That is to say, within the house sites of refuge indicate those conditions from which refuge is sought. Hepzibah in her cent-shop is incapable of establishing or maintaining the commerce she is, reluctantly, forced to establish; the first floor, or engine, of the market economy is incommensurate with the Hepzibah's history and sensibilities. She becomes a metonymy of the difficulties of establishing economic circulation while maintaining social distance. If the cent-shop is any kind of sanctuary, it is an abandoned one, and it takes Phoebe to infuse the room with life, as she does with each other room and person in the house.

Clifford's personal sanctuary is the arched window of the second level of the house. Here, Clifford's "loss or suspension of power to . . . keep up with the swiftness of the passing moment" (490) allows him the spatial distance of an observer as well as a temporal remove. But the psychic space which he occupies also suggests to him his taking a leap "towards the great centre of humanity" (495). "[H]ad I taken that plunge, and survived it, methinks it would have made me another man," he tells Hepzibah (495). What's of interest here is the narrator's suggestion that such a change of

course must take place. "[H]e required to take a deep, deep plunge into the ocean of human life, and to sink down and be covered by its profoundness, and then to emerge, sobered, invigorated, restored to the world and to himself. Perhaps, again, he required nothing less than the great final remedy—death!" (495). When Clifford's change does take place later in the novel, it restores him to the world but he is hardly "himself." Death is the remedy, but it is Jaffrey's, not his own, that does the sobering. In Clifford's case, Phoebe is less of a replacement, as she is for Hezibah, than a catalyst for Clifford's changes.

As for Holgrave, he is rarely in his rooms at the top of the house but his presence is always felt, suggesting that whatever refuge is to be had cannot be found in the structure that has, for generations, been the site of contention between representations of opposing social and economic spheres. But Holgrave is at the center of what I am describing as a vorticular narrative of social conflict and reaggregation through ritual symbology. What remains is to detail how legend, artifact, and narrative discourse merge to mirror the vortical shape of the romance and the value of the spiral shape as metaphor.

As liminality and the symbol of the circle in *The Scarlet Letter* are depicted both in a temporal and a spatial sense, in *The House of the Seven Gables* these concepts also indicate the nexus of space, time and symbology. As Chandler writes,

What seems to begin as a simple allegory acquires as the story proceeds a multiplicity of symbolic dimensions; simple dichotomies

branch and tangle into increasingly complicated issues as the house becomes a more and more inclusive symbol of every aspect of life, history, and relationship. Conventional boundaries between the world and the text and the world outside the text dissolve as the two worlds mirror one another in an endless reiteration of signs and symbols, and the simplest objects assume archetypal dimensions. Symbolic numbers, shapes, and geometrical configurations abound; in scene after scene the architecture of the house reiterates itself in a spatial symbology that explicitly evokes comparisons with psychic and linguistic syntax, and the mind finds itself caught in a hall of mirrors where everything is mind looking at itself with the vision of Emerson's "transparent eyeball." (81-82)

In the preface, Hawthorne prepares the reader by explaining that "The point of view in which this Tale comes under the Romantic definition, lies in the attempt to connect a by-gone time with the very present that is flitting away from us" (351). We may understand from this prefatory note that the author is defining himself as a Romancer, relating a "Legend" which gives the tale more importance than the teller. As Hawthorne assigns himself the title of editor of Pue's text in *The Scarlet Letter*, in *The House* he also removes himself from direct responsibility for the text by surrounding the tale in "its legendary mist, which the Reader, according to his pleasure, may either disregard, or allow it to float almost imperceptible about the characters and events, for the sake of a picturesque effect" (351). To disregard the mist is to disregard the tale, for the Romantic ambiance is inextricable from the content.

In keeping with the fashion of both the popular fiction of the day, the sentimental novel, and the branch of allegory called the ironic *aenigma*,³ "the Author has provided himself with a moral," but one that is less a specific tool

of instruction than an expression of what the narrator takes as a teleological verity: "the truth, namely, that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief". . . [and therefore of] "the folly of tumbling down an avalanche of ill-gotten gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity, thereby to maim or crush them, until the accumulated mass shall be scattered abroad in its original atoms" (352). Rather than conform to the popular fashion, "relentlessly to impale the story with its moral, as with an iron rod—or rather, as by sticking a pin through a butterfly—thus as once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude," a comment that can be construed as a jab at the skill and style of the sentimental novelists, "It has been no part of [Hawthorne's] object, however, to describe local manners, nor in any way to meddle with the characteristics of a community for whom he cherishes a proper respect and a natural regard" (352). However ironic one might take Hawthorne to be in these remarks, his efforts to separate his work from the style and subject matter most successful in the mid-1800s is clear.

The iron rod of morality, the object lesson of virtue through example, is the realm of domestic fiction, not of "Romance, having a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead" (353) and the impact of the past on the present and the future. This is not to suggest that the two are mutually exclusive. For as Gillian Brown explains, "From the phenomenon of economic change,

domesticity mines a transformative power by which the past may be reanimated even as it is superseded. It is within this domestic circularity that Hawthorne discovers a new life for the 'circle of gentility,' (390) the possibilities for an aristocracy within democracy" (70). My difference from Brown's assessment is that whereas I am positing this romance to be a move toward uncovering the tensions between the two through the employment of a geometric symbology, Brown focuses on the politics of gender to make distinctions between subject positions.⁴

The first chapter of *The House*, "The Old Pyncheon Family," acts as a lengthy introduction to the romance, giving the history and circumstance of both the Pyncheons and the Maules, the peculiarities of both families, distinguishing between aristocracy and plebacy, and in so doing anticipates the plot of the novel. One importance of the overview that this chapter provides is its establishing the groundwork for the legends that will be retold throughout the text. By giving the reader the outline of these legends first, complete with the artifacts that infuse power with their recognition, the narrator establishes the foundation of the mystery about to unfold, one which will require the reader to piece together the artifacts that are introduced here. The ritualistic employment of these artifacts is the basis of my reading the text as a social drama. As "the 'force' of a social drama consists in its being an experience or sequence of experiences which significantly influence the form and function of culturally performative genres" (Turner, *Edge* 201), it is legitimate to see the

first chapter of *The House* as the starting place for a narrative that expresses its spiral form in the repetition of events over the course of generations, yet with each reenactment modified by the particular time and circumstance of that generation.

Mizuchi finds that Hepzibah's "sense of the past is kindled by family ornaments that provide an overall view of Pyncheon attitudes toward history" (90), and refers to the map and the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon. I am suggesting that the map and other props of this drama become the stuff that comprises ritual. These ritual practices remove the narrator and characters to liminal positions. Moreover, after engaging these artifacts and legends, the characters reassess and reestablish themselves within the existing social structure, effecting the process of reaggregation in social drama.

There is a narrative remove from the romance proper in the chapter's work as introduction, as if setting the stage for the action to come while concentrating on a legend that can easily stand by itself. In establishing his philosophy of history in "The Old Pyncheon Family," Hawthorne's narrator positions himself temporally in the present through a verisimilar description of the house itself, but stands at a remove from the events of the story by explaining the need for a second preface, as the first chapter might be considered. The "brief sketch" of the house's construction and the "rapid glimpse at its quaint exterior" are intended to fuse the "chain of events, extending over the better part of two centuries" with the time of Clifford,

Hepzibah, and Jaffrey Pyncheon (355). Yet "Still, there will be a connection with the long past—a reference to forgotten events and personages, and to manners, feelings, and opinions, almost or wholly obsolete—which, if adequately translated to the reader, would serve to illustrate how much of old material goes to make up the freshest novelty of human life" (355-56). Within the space of two paragraphs, Hawthorne has turned historic time into narrative time, set readers on a course in which they too will be suspended in narrative time, and from which they might "[draw] a weighty lesson from the little regarded truth, that the act of the passing generation is the germ which may and must produce good or evil fruit, in a far distant time. . ." (356).

The substance of the lesson is couched in the proviso that "Our acquaintance with the whole subject is derived chiefly from tradition" (356). In this sense, the amount of "truth" to be found in this story is commensurate with the amount of validity we place in the substance of what Hawthorne calls this "Legend" in his preface. This is in line with Mizruchi's reading, that

The chimney-corner legends . . . constitute a view of history that consistently portrays it as a process of conflict and change. They persist through the generations because they are dialectical narratives, adaptable to the circumstances of each era. Passed on via the instrument of the human voice, the legends represent an inside view that penetrates the self-serving truths of particular social hierarchies. (131)

The physical artifacts contained by the legend include the oak arm-chair, the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon, and the words with which "Maule had addressed [Colonel Pyncheon] from the scaffold . . . utter[ing] a prophesy, . . . which

history, as well as fireside tradition, has preserved . . . 'God,' said the dying man, pointing his finger with a ghastly look at the undismayed countenance of his enemy, 'God will give him blood to drink!'" (358). The determination of "the Puritan soldier and magistrate" to follow through with the execution is the fatal Pyncheon flaw which, when put into action demonstrates the hubris of aristocracy. The Colonel "was ready to encounter an evil spirit, on his own ground. . . . [H]e followed out his original design, probably without so much as imagining an objection to it" (358).

The first manifestation, or recurrence, of the legend is soon after the wizard's death, during the house-warming, what Hawthorne's narrator calls "A ceremony of consecration, festive, as well as religious" (360). Similar to the congregation of power in "The Market-Place" and "The New England Holiday" chapters of *The Scarlet Letter*, this gathering is a conflation of the religious and the secular, as well as the aristocracy with the growing plebian class. When the Colonel is found dead, wearing the blood-stained ruff in the oak arm-chair, the narrator stands back to offer an aside which typifies his detached, yet subjective, position. "Thus early had that one guest—the only guest who is certain, at one time or another, to find his way into every human dwelling—thus early had Death stepped across the threshold of the House of the Seven Gables!" (364). These intrusions continue and combine, adding up to what Mizruchi has called narrative "attempts . . . to tell the story of a decrepit mansion and a fading lineage [which] become, like psychoanalytic case studies,

mirrors of their present psychological and political condition" (87).

The narrator continues by conflating legend and tradition.

Tradition—which sometimes brings down truth that history has let slip, but is oftener the wild babble of the time, such as was formerly spoken at the fireside, and now congeals in newspapers—tradition is responsible for all contrary averments. . . . His duties all performed,—the highest prosperity attained,—his race and future generations fixed on a stable basis, and with a stately roof to shelter them, for centuries to come, —what other upward step remained for this good man to take, save the final step from earth to the golden gate of Heaven! (365)

When juxtaposed to Swedenborg's teleology of forms, there is little difference between the correspondence the narrator ironically posits—that Pyncheon is a step away from spirituality—and Swedenborg's circular-vortical, which here takes shape through the progress of future generations along the Pyncheon path. "It might fairly be anticipated," the narrator continues, "that the progress of time would rather increase and ripen their prosperity, than wear away and destroy it" (366).

The fusion of legend and ethics are indicated by a narrator who,

[f]or various reasons . . . and from *impressions often too vaguely founded to be put on paper* . . . cherishes the belief that many, if not most, of the successive proprietors of the estate, were troubled with doubts as to their moral right to hold it. Of their legal tenure, there could be no question; but old Matthew Maule, it is to be feared, trode downward from his own age to a far later one, planting a heavy footstep, all the way, on the conscience of a Pyncheon. (368; my emphasis)

The Maule's mesmeric powers are also introduced in this first chapter in terms of legend.

But there was *a story, for which it is difficult to conceive any*

foundation, that the posterity of Matthew Maule had some connection with the mystery of the looking-glass, and that—by what appears to have been a mesmeric process—they could make its inner region all alive with the departed Pyncheons; not as they had shown themselves to the world, nor in their better and happier hours, but by doing over again some deed of sin, or in the crisis of life's bitterest sorrow. (368; my emphasis)

The portrait is also called into play as an artifact of legend, and as the passive voice of the narration implies, the narrator takes no responsibility for the truth or falsehood of the claims he brings forward.

It was considered, moreover, an ugly and ominous circumstance, that Colonel Pyncheon's picture—in obedience, *it was said*, to a provision in his will—remained affixed to the wall of the room in which he had died. . . . To the thoughtful mind, there will be no tinge of superstition in what we figuratively express, by affirming that the ghost of a dead progenitor—perhaps as a portion of his own punishment—is often doomed to become the Evil Genius of his family. (369; my emphasis)

Even legal documents such as wills, deeds, and charters are discussed in terms of spatial configuration, and through their incorporation into legend, these artifacts become the icons of ritual performance. "[I]n view of death, the strong prejudice of propinquity revives, and impels the testator to send down the estate in the line marked out by custom, so immemorial, that it looks like nature" (371). Oral transmission has as much effectiveness as legal document in this narrator's discourse. The Maules'

companions . . . grew conscious of a circle roundabout the Maules, within the sanctity or the spell of which . . . it was impossible for any man to step. . . . They were half-believed to inherit mysterious attributes; the family eye was said to possess strange power. . . . The Pyncheons, if all stories were true, haughtily as they bore themselves in the noonday streets of their native town, were no better than bond-servants to these plebeian

Maules, on entering the topsyturvy commonwealth of sleep. (373)

In Chapter II, "The Little Shop-Window," narrative intrusion is subsumed by narrative suspension. Mizruchi likens the narrator at this point to Hepzibah in that they "both are reluctant to proceed with the respective tasks set out before them." He is a "self-conscious procrastinator, loathe to begin a tale tainted by the profane details of commercial enterprise" (90). I hesitate to ascribe any equation between Hawthorne's narrator and his character in purpose or deed. Rather, I would subscribe to Sundquist's view, that the technique of narrative suspension creates mystery by bringing the historical past into the fictive present. Statements such as "Our story must therefore await Miss Hepzibah at the threshold of her chamber" (377) serve to deflect from the linear progression of plot while introducing characters and artifacts that will play important roles later on in the text. The narrator is a "disembodied listener" (377) who teasingly controls the progress of the plot by detailing the descriptions and movements of a character who is, as are the reader and the narrator, "Alone," "inaudible," and while reading or narrating "taking no part in the business of life" (377). This narrative strategy conflates character, narrator and reader. When the narrator asks, "Will she now issue forth over the threshold of our story?" and answers, "Not yet, by many moments," the reader is suspended within the text and within the temporal sense of the character herself.

By remaining a non-participating observer "like ourself," the reader is

introduced to an as yet unnamed Clifford through the narrator's description of both his miniature portrait and Hepzibah's view of it. "She has opened a secret drawer of an escritoir, and is probably looking at a certain miniature, done in Malbone's most perfect style, and representing a face worthy of no less delicate a pencil" (378). We know it is Clifford's description only later in the text when a phrase such as "the countenance of reverie, with its full, tender lips, and beautiful eyes, that seem to indicate not so much capacity of thought, as gentle and voluptuous emotion" (378) gains currency through definition and repetition. Clifford's feminized description comes to fruition after his arrival. The point is that Hawthorne uses description as allusion to definition and identification. These images are suspended, and when we encounter them later in the narrative, we gain a sense of connection with the previous allusion. The reader is carried along through the text by a series of hints through which he comes to recognize that allusions are effected through hind-sight.

The "very antique elbow-chair, with a high back, carved elaborately in oak, and a roomy depth within its arms," is the same chair which Colonel Pyncheon died in, brought back into the narration, as is the "map of the Pyncheon territory at the eastward" and "the portrait of old Colonel Pyncheon" (379). As the romance continues, it establishes a sense of progression and continuity somewhat akin to what Beebe describes as unity based in a Poesque organicism by continually bringing characters into confrontation and involvement with a limited set of artifacts that, through employment, become

cultural symbols on the order of Hawthorne's previous novel's A and its embroidered circle.

Through this reengagement of symbols and icons, the text takes on not a repetitive, circular shape, but that of a spiral. The dimension of temporality is what, in terms of narrative, separates recurrence from mere repetition. For example, Holgrave's reluctance to take advantage of Phoebe as she sits mesmerized by his recitation of the myth of the Maule curse is indicative of the power of temporal and historical change. Holgrave is capable of moving "forward" and away from historical constriction by using the same methods and invoking the same myths of his progenitors. One difference between Holgrave and Jaffrey Pyncheon is the former's ability to use myth as a vehicle of change, and therefore a way to prosper. The judge, incapable and unwilling to alter his conception of the past, is doomed to retrace the path of his own ancestors. As the balance of this chapter is intended to demonstrate, the novel hangs together when read as a instance of social drama in narrative form. My position is counter to the mass of criticism that has "remarked upon the novel's repetitive and even static quality, where descriptions seem not to forward the narrative's development but almost impede it." My intention is to show that, when read through the symbology of geometric form, the romance is not "[d]evoid of a strong plot line," does not "[manifest] a resistance to temporal process as progress," nor "[read] as a series of sketches and introductions of various characters, a muddled consort of dramatic scenes that fail to cohere or

develop" (Mizruchi 105-06).

Hawthorne's narrator tells us at the end of this chapter that "Life is made up of marble and mud" (386). As Hepzibah cries in her lap, sitting literally in the arms of history, as she's in the oak arm-chair, she is the epitome of somebody who, "In this republican country, amid the fluctuating waves of our social life, . . . is always at the drowning-point" (383-84). She is in transition, although slow and unacknowledged. In her resistance to opening the doors to commerce, itself a repetitious act in that another Pyncheon at "the drowning-point," at a transitional point, had also made due through commerce, Hepzibah becomes the embodiment of marble and mud, of stagnation and obfuscation. She is what we see when we are endowed with "poetic insight . . . the gift of discerning, in this sphere of strangely mingled elements, the beauty and the majesty which are compelled to assume a garb so sordid" (387).

Taylor Stoehr describes *The House of the Seven Gables* as having a plot that moves

in two directions: one within the advancing present, reported by the narrator (Hawthorne himself) along the lines of conventional probability and expectation; the other oscillating back and forth in the Pyncheon family history, partly controlled by Holgrave, whose tale of Alice Pyncheon exposes an abyss of symbolic meanings behind the events and relations of the surface plot. (263)

When fused together, these two directions take the diagrammatic form of a spiral. Narrative time merges with historical time through repeated contact with the historic icons of arm-chair, map, shop-bell and portrait, unchanging in themselves, yet varyingly significant for the characters who interact with them.

It is narrative time that represents distance away from the starting point, while the line of historic time returns to glance upon the myth and iconography comprising the relations between Maule and Pyncheon. As the romance progresses toward its "fairy-tale" ending, the social distance between the two factions necessarily reduces, even as the narrator returns the reader to the central division between the families, reiterated in "Alice Pyncheon" and "Governor Pyncheon."

Hawthorne ends Chapter II and begins Chapter III, "The First Customer" with Hepzibah wrapped in the arms of history. The shop-bell, the call to commerce, acts in an analogous way to that of the Maule voice when it is mesmerizing one of the Pyncheon women. Unable not to obey, as Alice is incapable of defying Matthew Maule, upon hearing the shop-bell, "The maiden lady arose upon her feet, as pale as a ghost at cockcrow; for she was an enslaved spirit, and this the talisman to which she owed obedience" (388). As all the Pyncheons are enslaved spirits, and Hepzibah owes her allegiance to the growing plebeian class, historically represented by the Maules, it is only fitting that it is Holgrave who has entered the shop first. Holgrave indicates that he is not the typical Maule long before his begging off control of Pheobe after the "Alice Pyncheon" chapter.

In the cent-shop, Holgrave comforts Hepzibah, telling her, "I look upon this as one of the fortunate days of your life. It ends an epoch, and begins one" (390). The day is the beginning of a new cycle for Hepzibah: coming into

contact with the past, as represented by both the cent-shop and the Maule descendant, she is forced to confront it by involving herself in it. Even though her reticence to participate in capitalism results in her turning the cent-shop over to Phoebe, her failure does not mitigate the fact that the narrative time line has merged with the historic, that progression and suspension have combined.

Holgrave's assessment proves correct when Hepzibah takes money from Ned Higgins.

The little schoolboy, aided by the impish figure of the negro dancer, had wrought an irreparable ruin. The structure of ancient aristocracy had been demolished by him, even as if his childish gripe had torn down the seven-gabled mansion! Now let Hepzibah turn the old Pyncheon portraits with their faces to the wall, and take the map of her eastern-territory to kindle the kitchen-fire, and blow up the flame with the empty breath of her ancestral conditions! What had she to do with ancestry? Nothing;— no more than with posterity! No lady, now, but simply Hepzibah Pyncheon, a forlorn old maid, and keeper of a cent-shop! . . . That little circlet of the schoolboy's copper-coin—dim and lustreless though it was, with the small service which it had been doing, here and there about the world—had proved a talisman, fragrant with good, and deserving to be set in gold and worn next her heart. It was as potent, and perhaps endowed with the same kind of efficacy, as a galvanic ring! (396)

The passage is significant for a number of reasons. First, it demonstrates, in short order, the demise of Pyncheon aristocracy through involvement in consumer economy. Hepzibah's taking the coin is as dramatic as would be her destroying the effectiveness of two other talismanic objects in the house: the portrait and the map. Yet, if currency is the engine of change, it is interesting that Hawthorne's narrator would have Hepzibah remove the original copper-coin from circulation, as it "had proved a talisman." The implication here is that the

coin as artifact, as relic, actually, will have more positive effect than if it remains in circulation, for Hepzibah, by falling from aristocratic grace, is suspended somewhere between ancestry and posterity, the past and the future, without being active in the present.

Examples of characters' contact with the artifacts that propel the plot of the text through legend are plentiful and need not be rehearsed here. The point can be made effectively, I think, through explicating significant chapters that demonstrate how narrative suspension and the elements of legend combine to exemplify the vortical design of this romance. In "The Arched Window," for example, Hawthorne's narrator combines a picture of contemporary Salem with a description of Clifford's state of mind by painting the picture through Clifford's eyes. He is "pale, gray, childish, aged, melancholy, yet often simply cheerful [as he peers] from behind the faded crimson of the curtain—watching the monotony of every-day occurrences with a kind of inconsequential interest and earnestness . . ." (489). Not only is the description ambiguous, the narrator has difficulty fixing his view on his subject. If Clifford is both "childish" and "aged," "melancholy" and "cheerful" his demeanor, and sensibility are indeterminate while his position is fixed. Watching all the conveyances track up and down the street below his sanctuary, Clifford "could never grow familiar; [the water cart] always affected him with just the same surprise as at first" (490).

The narrator explains:

Nothing gives a sadder sense of decay, than this loss, or suspension of the power to deal with unaccustomed things and to keep up with the swiftness of the passing moment. It can merely be a suspended animation; for, were the power actually to perish, there would be little use of immortality. We are less than ghosts, for the time being, whenever this calamity befalls us. (490)

While this state of "suspended animation" allows Clifford's plight to be readily understood, it serves a more functional purpose also, that of enabling the reader to access the setting through descriptions that, as John Dolis finds, "set forth the perceptual phenomenon itself, the temporal aspect of the object as it is originally 'intended' in consciousness" ("Tactile Gaze" 267). The narration includes descriptions of sounds familiar to Clifford only to the extent that his memory allows, demonstrating how memory is not past but present. As he watches the scissor-grinder's wheel revolve, "an ugly, little, venomous serpent of a noise . . . give[s] him a more vivid sense of active, bustling, and sunshiny existence, than he had attained in almost any other way. Nevertheless, its charm lay chiefly in the past; for the scissor-grinder's wheel had hissed in his childish ears" (491).

Scenes such as this and that of the barrel-organ grinder and his "company of little figures, whose sphere and habitation was in the mahogany case of his organ," (492) further serve to offer "description [that] corresponds to subjectivity; it recuperates a prereflective intentionality," Dolis writes, "the expressive accommodation of an object as it intentionally appears to consciousness" ("Tactile Gaze" 275). Fusing sight and sound within a description that is conveyed through a consciousness that remains suspended

outside of time, Hawthorne's narrator substitutes Clifford's noumena with phenomena, therefore conflating the narrative present with the character's past. Clifford's gaze from the arched-window also "discloses the phenomenal reciprocity between subject and object in a world common to both—a world, moreover, which makes the birth of being possible in the first place" ("Tactile Gaze", 283).

Clifford is as out of touch with the present as Hepzibah, but whereas the external, talismanic objects that comprise and recur in the Pyncheon legends initially restrict Hepzibah but ultimately impel her into the cent-shop and all the acts of sociation that entails, the procession of street commerce has the effect of prompting Clifford "towards the great centre of humanity" (495), but that movement is ultimately aborted. "The procession . . . [when] viewed from some vantage-point" such as Clifford's, "might so fascinate him, that he would hardly be restrained from plunging into the surging stream of human sympathies" (494). Of course, at this point of the narrative, Clifford is restrained. The point is that when Clifford confronts the past he does so through the impetus of the present, yet when Hester confronts the present, she does so through the powers of the past. These are inverse representations of the interaction between time and symbol, yielding a similar narrative suspension, or as Dolis puts it,

Hawthorne's gaze . . . brings the object out from its surroundings, from its perspective, toward an affective or "bodily" depth uniquely born amid the indivisibly situated structure of perception. For Hawthorne, being is incarnate throughout, the image made

flesh between the double horizon of physical and expressive space. . . . In opposition to the uniform continuity of perspective, Hawthorne sketches his most dramatic scenes *palpably close* because they are perceptually inquisitive, re-creating the ambiguous network of affective intention. . . . Hawthorne never "paints" or "pictures" his most affective scenes, but rather disrupts them from the inside out; his gaze engages the object inasmuch as it seduces it outward and away from the familiar security of its perspective depth. . . . The image no longer represents a constituent whole, but a unity whose structure re-creates the perceptual intention itself, the inaugural situation in which the object ceaselessly recommences itself. ("Tactile Gaze" 282-83).

I think it is valid to extend this idea from image to symbol, to view symbology in narration as a strategy which enables the symbol to carry forward in time as to fulfill "a unity whose structure re-creates the perceptual intention itself." This can be demonstrated by examining how the images which perpetuate the Pyncheon and Maule legends recur in instances of temporal suspension, in a narrative that has a linear, progressive plot and yet an invasive, ironic narrator who stops the progress of that plot with moralistic intrusions and substantive digressions. "Alice Pyncheon," the story-within-the-story, and "Governor Pyncheon," the narrator's explosion of sarcasm, offer two different views of how narrative suspension operates, while enhancing a unity in the text through symbolic recurrence.

As in Chapter I, Holgrave's text "Alice Pyncheon" offers a genealogical accounting of the Maules and Pyncheons, but moves forward from 1690 two generations in order to relate a tale of the curse recurring in the narrative present. The conflict, this time, is between the grandson of the Wizard Maule

and the very person who, "In the very act of running to climb Colonel Pyncheon's knee . . . had discovered the old Puritan to be a corpse!" (515). Gervayse is the living link between the first chapter and the thirteenth, a Pyncheon personally acquainted with the effect of the Maule curse. Matthew Maule, a carpenter and the wizard's namesake, is the reinscription of the wizard in word and deed. In effect, the primary actors of "The Old Pyncheon Family" are about to reenact the power struggle textually inaugurated in that chapter in "Alice Pyncheon."

The artifacts that comprise the legend, the map and portrait, are the "two objects that appeared rather out of place in Mr. Pyncheon's peculiar apartment" (518). They are two American artifacts in a room that is otherwise a collection of European antiques. Their descriptions indicate the Pyncheon resolve to "be" Continental Brits even when geographically located in territory alien and even hostile to the aristocratic sensibility. The "large map . . . now dingy with smoke, and soiled here and there, with the touch of fingertips," along with "a portrait of a stern old man, in Puritan garb, painted roughly, but with a bold effect," are aesthetically inferior to the Parisian furniture, "in an elegant and costly style," the Venetian "large and very beautiful cabinet of ivory," or the pictures on the wall "that had a mellow tinge, diffused through all their artful splendor" (518). The social distance between Pyncheon and Maule is represented through an iconography that incorporates historical time and geographic space but distinguishes the families through value-laden

descriptions of these artifacts. Gervayse Pyncheon is as ill-situated as he is anachronistic: his setting and sensibility are antiquated European yet his location is bedrock American.

After rehearsing the history of the Maule-Pyncheon conflict, Holgrave's narration brings the reader with Phoebe into the narrative present through the vehicle of the "chimney-legend." In fact, "Alice Pyncheon" is Holgrave's recasting of "The wild, chimney-corner legend" (522). We are again reminded "that the popular belief pointed to some mysterious connection and dependence, existing between the family of the Maules, and these vast, unrealized possessions of the Pyncheons" (520), a dependence the reader will experience when Matthew places Alice mesmerically within his grasp. One example of the conflation of time accomplished through myth is Holgrave's reliance, for his own retelling, on a "very aged woman, recently dead" (520-21) to support the verity of the particulars of the family feud. It is not documented testimony such as Surveyor Pue's papers that carries the weight of authenticity, but the "fireside-talk" of an unnamed dead woman, infused with "metaphorical expression" (521) that instigates "shrewd lawyers," intrigued by "these fables," to secretly exhume the wizard's body in search of documents that would benefit the Pyncheon's claim to the Waldo County territory, not to mention the rightful claim to the real-estate beneath the house of the seven gables.

The "object" of Maule's mesmerism is "to convert the mind of Alice into

a kind of telescopic medium, through which Mr. Pyncheon and himself might obtain a glimpse into the spiritual world." Under Maule's power, "Alice described three figures," Colonel, Matthew and Thomas Maule, who "possessed a mutual knowledge of the missing document" (530). The trance succeeds in transferring property, but not that which Gervayse intended. Stoehr's description of mesmerism in Hawthorne's time indicates that "The mesmerist's will is more powerful even than the natural ties of affection and duties of filial obedience" (58). Gervayse's demand, "Give me back my daughter! Then go thy ways; and may we never meet again!" (531) is, of course, ineffectual. "[W]hile Alice Pyncheon lived, she was Maule's slave, in a bondage more humiliating, a thousand-fold, than that which binds its chain around the body" (531-32). What Walter Michaels calls the "the notion of inalienability" that the Pyncheons demonstrate is certainly not limited to real-estate. "Indeed," says Michaels, "the very idea of romance asserts the possibility of immunity to appropriation in an Alice Pyncheon-like fantasy of strength through purity" (108-09).

Through his description of mesmerism, the artist Hawthorne takes the latitude ascribed to the romancer, that of suspending historical narrative in the liminal space between actuality and fantasy. Hawthorne and Holgrave are one, so to speak, for the duration of "Alice Pyncheon." This idea is consonant with Stoehr, for whom,

One virtue of the mesmerist was that he 'held still' for an author, since the culture itself has given rise to the figure and mythologize

him. Hawthorne recognized the ways that mesmerism expressed his own ambivalent position on the questions of will, imagination, and reality, and he made what use he could of it to bring his problems as a writer into the center of *The House of the Seven Gables* . . . where if he could not solve them (no more could his characters) he could at least continue, tentatively and equivocally, to practice the art he mistrusted. (62)

The temporal bridge between the legend and the text is expressed materially through Phoebe, who is herself mesmerized by Holgrave's incantatory speech just as Alice was stultified by Holgrave's ancestor. Coming out of the haze of "Alice Pyncheon," Phoebe, now representing the narrative present, returns with the reader to the text. But whereas Phoebe reviews the legend in "that curious psychological condition" (534), the reader has witnessed and recalls the legend's reengagement, complete with artifacts that are at once deictic and symbolic. "Alice Pyncheon" works as an expression of liminality in a text that is itself a social drama. The specific, explicit breach in this romance is the Colonel's execution of Matthew Maule, but it is an act which inaugurates the allegorical subtext, the continuing crisis between aristocratic and democratic actors. In the redressive processes intended to pave the way toward reintegration of the factions, including the generational negotiations that the text recounts through recasting the fireside stories, the ritual process of separation, liminality, and reaggregation takes place. In this chapter, the reader textually experiences rites of separation via narration of myths, experiences liminality as a textual remove and the employment of mesmerism, and experiences reaggregation into the text with "Phoebe's Good-

Bye." In participating in this portion of the text, the reader is ostensibly as liminal as the chapter itself. Legend and artifact are used in order to reassert the power of this sense of remove. "Alice Pyncheon" is one way Hawthorne demonstrates the cyclically progressive, therefore vortical, romance that is *The House of the Seven Gables*. The chapter is a miniature of its plot, which, as Stoehr notes, "is not 'what happens' but what prevents anything from happening—the secret sin that is committed by every generation, in a compulsive repetition that cannot be escaped until some symbolic act of renunciation, atonement, and rebirth" (259). It is not out of the question to replace "renunciation" with "breach," "atonement" with the "ritual process" of rites of separation, liminality and reaggregation, and "rebirth" as one form of "reintegration."

In "Governor Pyncheon" Hawthorne's narrator employs narrative suspension in his use of the present tense. In his review of the Judge's laundry list of plans for the day, the narrator demonstrates his merging of verisimilitude and humor into a chapter that is as different from the narration of the primary plot, I think, as "Alice Pyncheon" is.⁵ Riffaterre says that

Verisimilitude requires an adjustment to each successive context, a new lighting of the stage, a descriptive response to the demands of evolving motivation and, specifically, varying viewpoints with changing actors and changing interplay between them. The continuity that generates humor cannot therefore be anything other than the voice of an outsider, that is to say, the narrator's viewpoint, the distancing of the author from his fiction. (45)

"Governor Pyncheon" works in tandem with "The Flight of Two Owls" in its

depiction of such a change in actors and the interplay between them. What starts with Hepzibah's "colloquy with Judge Pyncheon" in "Clifford's Chamber," during which time the "stories, which had heretofore been kept warm in her remembrance by the chimney-corner glow, that was associated with them—now recurred to her, somber ghastly, cold, like most passages of family history . . . [a] calamity, reproducing itself in successive generations, with one general hue, and varying in little save the outline" (558), develops into a chapter fraught with mysterious suspense and confusion that mirror Hepzibah's state of mind. To her knock at Clifford's door, "There was no reply!" To her next attempt, "Still, no response!" And to her calls "A silence!" (563). At the end of this chapter Clifford, who had been characterized as having a limited sense of awareness at best and near incoherence at worst, reverses caretaker-patient roles with Hepzibah. Jaffrey's death infuses life into Clifford, affording the opportunity for the narrator to philosophize so in "The Flight of Two Owls." The strategic narrative move from Chapter XVI to XVIII is from mystery and suspense to didacticism to farce, all three tones of narration supplying their own forms of narrative suspension and all three using the elements of the chimney-legend to move the primary plot, through recurrence, to its conclusion.

In "Governor Pyncheon" the narrator supplies the reader with many, if not all the artifacts that comprise the legend. He directly addresses and mocks the Judge, who sits dead in the same "oaken chair" in which the original

Pyncheon sat dead. The chapter comprises, in fact, many of the elements contained in the ritual process. In his mockery of and ironic stance vis-à-vis Judge Pyncheon, the narrator supplies a "ludic deconstruction and recombination of familiar and cultural configurations" (*Edge* 293), which is at the core of Turner's rites of liminality.

The narrator's playful tone displays an irreverence for the Judge who would be Governor. "How profound a fit of meditation!" (582) is the Judge engaged in, sitting dead, with one eye open. Sarcastically accounting the Judge's "schemes . . . [and speculations] on the probabilities of the next fifteen years" (583) and his schedule for the day, the narrator informs us that "Time, all at once, appears to have become a matter of no moment with the Judge!" (584). The man whose "neck is too precious to be risked on such a contingency as a tumbling steed" is the same one who has to be informed by a church sexton that his wife's tombstone "is cracked quite in twain." A new stone "is better, at least, than if she never needed any!" (585). The Judge, as gluttonous as the Pyncheon patriarch, is late for his power dinner with "men of distinguished character and influence," embellished by a bottle of Juno Madeira "so rare and admirable," one that "would all but revive a dead man! Would you like to sip it now, Judge Pyncheon?" (586-87). The mood turns a little somber at the end of the chapter, however, as

the parallel, drawn in some of the preceding pages, between [Jaffrey's] Puritan ancestor and himself, [fail] in this point. The Pyncheon of two centuries ago, in common belief with most of his contemporaries, professed his full belief in spiritual ministrations,

although reckoning them chiefly of a malignant character. The Pyncheon of today, who sits in yonder chair, believes in no such nonsense. . . . What sense, meaning, or moral, for example . . . can be traced in this ridiculous legend, that at midnight, all the dead Pyncheons are bound to assemble in this parlor! (591)

But the narrator just as easily recoups his tone as he depicts the assembly. What is important here is that, even in his ironic pose, the narrator finds it necessary to retell the Pyncheon history yet again, this time narrating the story he sees as he gazes at the portrait. Time and space collapse into the legend framed and prompted by the Colonel's portrait. In his desire to return to the romance's plot, the narrator again shifts his tone, advising the reader that "The fantastic scene, just hinted at, must by no means be considered as forming an actual portion of our story" (593). Invoking the shop-bell as a *deus ex machina* to move the reader into the narrative present, we leave Jaffrey with a fly "creeping over the bridge of his nose, towards the would-be chief-magistrate's wide open eyes!" (595).

The aversive criticism concerning the ending of this romance has no better spokesperson than Michael Bell, who finds that it is

Judge Pyncheon's symbolic function to represent the repetition of the past in the present, to represent the cyclical or "tragic" view of history. But if the Judge represents one of the two conflicting ideas of history in the book, we can hardly say that Hawthorne resolves the conflict by killing off one of the ideas. Rather we are left, once again, with the realization that Hawthorne has finally affirmed one view of history only by ignoring the other. (222)

Jaffrey is simply Pyncheon incarnate, and to rely on him as more than that is to err in granting the character greater narrative and representational

force than he deserves. The Judge represents one of the two groups engaged in a battle of ideology that manifests itself in a turf war. It is convenient, but inaccurate, to read this romance primarily as a binary opposition between Pyncheon and Maule, aristocracy and republicanism, or the past and the future, mutually exclusive antinomies that cannot be conflated. If one understands the fairy-tale marriage of Phoebe and Holgrave to be a radical break from the tragedy of the Maules and Pyncheons, and therefore a failure because of its incommensurability with what precedes it, one underestimates the subtle and effective use to which Hawthorne puts the rehearsal of the legend and its attendant symbology, all of which alter the possibilities that the social drama of their antagonism represents.

Through symbolic recurrence and narrative suspension, Hawthorne's romance takes the shape of the spiral metaphor that stands at the climax of the text, bringing the opposition of aristocrat/pleb, with the attendant political and economic hierarchies subsumed under it, into a tensive relation that repeats and changes, yet does not converge; a circular-vortex. As Purce says, the spiral "denotes eternity, since it may go on for ever. But because we necessarily conceive infinity in our own, and therefore finite, terms, we are forced to limit the limitless. It is only by imposing limits that we can make infinity accessible to us" (7).

My argument has not been that Hawthorne intentionally selected the spatial image of the ascending spiral curve as one that would control the course

of the plot, but that it is an image that metaphorically subsumes historical and social change. As the ramifications of these processes are the critical issues of this text, the vortex stands as an image that maintains a tension between time, as it is experienced in a linear manner, and repeated event, here demonstrated to be ritual. The conjunction time/event is a way into understanding *The House of the Seven Gables* as a romance that Turner's social drama can critically frame. Rather than relying on the line (diachrony) or the circle (repetition, unity, synchrony), Hawthorne makes effective use of a descriptive image in the vortex, for through it the abstraction of time and the "fact" of historical action play off one another. Time is not necessarily conceived of in diachronic, linear terms once the weight of historic action, be it fact or legend, is added. Nor is ritual wholly synchronic when conceived of in terms of temporality.

Spatial isolation and temporal suspension undergird this romance conceived of from the onset in the conditional mood. This suggests Hawthorne to be a cautious writer yet one who maintained at least a small degree of hope for humanity. Caution mixed with optimism is a curious combination. And the recipe one part warning and one part hope makes a sense of closure difficult, if only for the underlying ambiguity. Clifford Pyncheon's perspective, as iterated in "The Flight of Two Owls," is that of one leaning first heavily on hope, but in the end, dispassion. Leaving the "great, gloomy, dark-chambered mansion . . . [where hangs the] frowning picture [of] . . . Evil Destiny," he

voices his belief that "the harbingers of a better era are unmistak[ably]" present (577-78). The railroad, the telegraph, mesmerism, and electricity are novel enough to fuel "The wild effervescence of his mood" (580), to counterpoint, if only briefly, the idea that the power and influence of the past is inescapable. Indeed, "Time, the continual visissitude of circumstances, and the invariable inopportunity of death, render [Clifford's vindication] impossible" (621). If "The better remedy is for the sufferer to pass on, and leave what he once thought his irreparable ruin far behind him" (622), then the precarious balance between optative and tentative views remains oscillating.

For the living representatives of the old guard, Clifford and Hepzibah, the opportunity for and feasibility of change is limited to that of location, yet the location is aristocratic property, indicating at least the unseverable, non-conscious attachment these character have to the past. For "Clifford and Hepzibah bade a final farewell to the abode of their forefathers, with hardly more emotion than if they had made it their arrangement to return thither at tea-time" (626). Holgrave's submission to domesticity entails not so much a dismissal of the past or a desire to take the future any more seriously than he has, but to focus on the present. His comment on the country-house, that "so excellent a piece of domestic architecture [should have been built] in stone, rather than in wood" (622) is telling. "Then," Holgrave continues, "every generation of the family might have altered the interior, to suit its own taste and convenience; while the exterior, through the lapse of years, might have

been adding venerableness to its original beauty, and thus giving the impression of permanence, which I consider essential to the happiness of any one moment" (622-23). This coming from a character described earlier as one for whom "in this age, more than ever before, the moss-grown and rotten Past is to be torn down, and the lifeless institutions to be thrust out of the way, and their dead corpses buried, and everything to begin anew" (506).

The marriage of Phoebe and Holgrave is a conclusion many readers are unsatisfied with, but it is one resolution to the interplay of the trappings of the Maule legend and temporal progression which opens up the possibilities for continuing the dialectics of all that Maule and Pyncheon have come to represent. And it is a conclusion that readers might anticipate given all that Holgrave offers in "The Daguerrotypist." For him, the house is an analogue of Pyncheon, the

perpetual remorse of conscience, a constantly defeated hope, strife amongst kindred, various misery, a strange form of death, dark suspicion, unspeakable disgrace,—all, or most of which calamity, [he has] the means of tracing to the old Puritan's inordinate desire to plant and endow a family. To plant a family! This idea is at the bottom of most of the wrong and mischief which men do. The truth is, that, once in every half-century, at longest, a family should be merged into the great, obscure mass of humanity, and forget all about its ancestors. (511)

For Hawthorne to have kept the oppositions distinct, to have kept Pyncheon and Maule at a distance which offered no possibility for such a merger, would mean that time and history continue on a circular course, bringing "the wrongdoing of one generation . . . into the successive ones," negating the chances

for his "singular gratification," that "this Romance might effectually convince mankind . . . of the folly of tumbling down an avalanche of ill-gotten gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity" (352). The marriage offers a perspective on the course of the future that is on balance a hopeful one. By negotiating the reaggregation of an aristocratic or Puritan past with a democratic and secular future, the course of events that the romance includes seems to spin closer, as if viewing an ascending gyre from a stationary position, or watching "that sweet Alice Pyncheon . . . as she floated heavenward from the HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES!" (627).

Chapter Three

The Epoch of Annihilated Space

Je suis l'espace où je suis. NÖEL ARNAUD, *L'état d'ébauche*

The idea of hearth-side legend that *The House of the Seven Gables* presents, and through it an epistemology of history, gives way to a phenomenology of space, perception and the subversion of fantasy in *The Blithedale Romance*, through Miles Coverdale's understanding of the social relations at play around the hearth. As Gaston Bachelard conceives of it, fire is "more a social reality than a natural reality" (*Fire* 3). Knowledge of its properties and the attendant benefits and dangers associated with it provide the bases for "an interaction of the natural and social in which the social is almost always dominant" (*Fire* 10). Fire is "one of those elemental metaphors that persist throughout Hawthorne's work," one of his biographers writes, finding in it "both its domestic and diabolic aspects—the comforting warmth of the hearth, the purifying rites of the flame, the damnation of hellfire" (Mellow 45). In fact, Elizabeth Hawthorne remembers local fires as one of the events for which her brother would leave the house. To quote Mellow: "'A great conflagration,' Elizabeth recalled, 'attracted him in a peculiar manner.' Whenever the alarms sounded, she said, Hawthorne was sure to be found at the scene, "looking on, from some dark corner, while the fire was raging" (46). As one of the narrator's dominant tropes, the space between the hearth and

Coverdale becomes paradigmatic of his relations with the main characters and the social positions they represent. Miles Coverdale's perspective, however, gives way to another dominant image, the parallelogram, as the season at Blithedale progresses.

It is the shape, as Miles conceives it, of the window that frames Priscilla's own view of the world prior to her arrival at Blithedale as well as the shape of Zenobia's grave. The window-parallelogram as a trope of perspective and observation is another example of what I am calling Hawthorne's aesthetic geometry; another example of the development of spatial form into an art form as it merges the phenomenologically objective with the aesthetically subjective. In *The Scarlet Letter* this fusion obtains in the A and its gilt embroidery; in *The House of the Seven Gables*, in the image of the vortex. With the parallelogram, Hawthorne's well-known narrative stance of removed observer is again brought to the fore. The shape impressed Hawthorne at least over a year prior to writing *The Blithedale Romance*. In a notebook entry of May 16, 1850, he objectifies his own mood and subjectifies nature by projecting his sensibility through a window and onto the scene outdoors. Looking out on a rainy day, Hawthorne writes, "On the grass-plots are strewn the fallen blossoms of the cherry-trees; and on the scene broods a parallelogram of somber sky" (AN 508).

The parallelogram frames as it informs, limiting Miles Coverdale's narrative point of view as it acts as a metaphor of the threshold of physical

space and imaginative desire. The gaze through the window-frame is a trope that recurs often enough to inquire as to the ramifications of the shape of the frame, for Coverdale's reticence to participate in the Blithedale experiment comes through as much in his descriptive, subjective observations of the other characters as it does in his efforts to avoid revealing himself to the reader. Bachelard's dictum that "Man is a creation of desire, not a creation of need," is also a central concern of *Blithedale* (Fire 16). Miles Coverdale's desire is a desire deferred. His interest in the associationist community is not based on his affinity with the social or political ideologies purported by its various residents. Criminal reform through appealing to the criminal's higher moral center, as represented by Hollingsworth; women's rights in politics and in the literary marketplace, as represented by Zenobia; the abuse of factory workers and the manipulative evils of industrialism, as represented by Westervelt's control of the Veiled Lady, Priscilla—all these political positions and social causes fail to come to some type of satisfactory fruition, just as Blithedale fails as nexus of utopian ideologies, and perhaps more importantly, just as Coverdale's deferral of acting on his desire results in his embarrassingly moot confession at the end of the romance.

Miles Coverdale, it will be argued here, is an observer who comes to annihilate artistic and social spatial distance by infusing the objects of his gaze with his own reticent subjectivity, an insecure sense of self that he tries to avoid confronting directly. At the same time, he redresses the crisis of realizing

an independent identity both within and distinct from the Blithedale community by annihilating the space in which that subjectivity can be manifest. He succeeds in doing so by engaging the parallelogram as a symbol of the boundaries between himself and the other characters in *Blithedale*. But those boundaries shift so often that Coverdale the artist cannot maintain a space in which to create.

Coverdale's place in the commune is defined and mirrored by his lack of place in Boston society. His aesthetics are neither defined through his art—he is a second-rate poetaster with one collection in print, searching for material and inspiration—nor are they shaped by an active striving for social position. One might posit that they are shaped by his insecurity: social, artistic, political, and sexual; there is certainly enough internal evidence in the text to support such a reading. But Hawthorne is making a more interesting narrative move in this text than simply creating a first-person narrator who, in his reticence and emptiness, becomes the image of failed artistry. Coverdale's lack of self-definition causes him to seek out privileged spaces that afford both distance from powerful people and a view of those same individuals. My intention in this chapter is to show how the physical spaces of Miles's remove reflect the function of liminality in terms of Turner's social drama. I am describing Coverdale's retreats—to Blithedale, to his hermitage, and back to his hotel rooms—as ritual performances initiated by both subtle and overt shifts in his perceived place in the social schema, all of which preclude Hawthorne's artist

from a space in which to create an aesthetic identity free of melancholy, embarrassment and defeat.

As his literal frame of reference is so often described as a parallelogram of one type or another, I am construing the shape to be a dominant ritual symbol, as it incorporates the three basic properties Turner assigns to ritual symbols: condensation, unification, and polarization. Briefly, condensation is the representation of many things or actions in a single form, unification is interconnectedness "by virtue of . . . common possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought," and polarization is the binary opposition of assigned meaning between "two clearly distinguishable poles of meaning . . . the ideological pole and the sensory pole." At the ideological pole is a "cluster of *significata* that refer to components of moral and social order . . . to principles of social organization, to kinds of corporate groupings, and to the norms and values inherent in structural relationships. At the other pole, the *significata* are usually natural and physiological phenomena and processes. . . . [T]he meaning is closely related to the outward form of the symbol" (*Forest* 27-28).

The parallelogram is condensed in its ability to represent the varying perceptual frames of other characters, as offered by Coverdale. For instance, his view through the Blithedale window often depicts the distinction between a natural world of chaotic darkness and what Priscilla experiences as limited urban existence. Near the end of Coverdale's stay at Blithedale, he dreams of

"Hollingsworth and Zenobia, standing on either side of [his] bed, [bending] across it to exchange a kiss of passion. Priscilla, beholding this,—for she seemed to be peeping in at the chamber-window—had melted gradually away, and left only the sadness of her expression in [his] heart" (766). The parallelogram is also a unified symbol in its capacity to accommodate these variations. Again, Coverdale's mediation of perspective, and his failure to occupy any space successfully, bring together the many instances of the trope's use. And, as will become evident, it is the site of polarization in its bivalence, that between its representations of the disparate ideologies of the characters within the physical metaphor of the frame. The rest of this chapter will explore the ways in which this shape operates as a ritual symbol enabling Miles to enter both a psychic and physical liminal status, and how that positioning allows Miles to reassess and reconfigure his place within the social network that Blithedale precipitates.

The moves to and from town and country, between his bachelor-rooms and the socialist commune at Blithedale, define one position in which an artist can be comfortable: that space where contemplation is privileged over action, where indecision is valued for its potential action, and is therefore sought out. These are sites of psychic and physical suspension and remove. Before his departure from town, Miles lacks any real conviction to go to Blithedale. Musing before his glowing crate of cannel coal, Miles is "in truth, not so very confident as at some periods that this final step, which would mix [him] up

irrevocably with the Blithedale affair, was the wisest that could be taken" (638). Even so, Miles leaves the comforts and opulence of his bachelor apartment—"with a fire burning in the grate . . . [and] a bottle or two in the champagne-basket—into the heart of a pitiless snowstorm, in quest of a better life" (640).

His memory of arriving at Blithedale is focused by the image of the fireplace, and the hearth itself becomes a metaphor for his own consciousness. "Vividly does the fireside recreate itself, as I rake away the ashes from the embers in my memory, and blow them up with a sigh, for lack of more inspiring breath" (639). The remembrance, however, is not phoenix-like, and does not induce the reverie Bachelard speaks of, that "sufficient to evoke the volcano at the funeral pyre," but a more grounded sense of reality (*Fire* 18). After contemplating the luxury he has just left, Miles rebukes his own ideas of attaining a better life or contributing to a utopian community. He voices an uncertainty that stays with his character throughout the novel, one that is lodged in his opposition of hero and fool. "The greatest obstacle to being heroic is the doubt whether one may not be going to prove one's self a fool; the truest heroism is, to resist the doubt; and the profoundest wisdom, to know when it ought to be resisted, and when to be obeyed" (640). As readers come to know, Coverdale consists of both the hero and the fool, yet he is not the synthesis of the dialectic he sets up—wisdom—that faculty necessary to differentiate hero from fool. His reticence, his voyeuristic tendencies, and his

consistent impulse toward isolation support his sense of himself as wise, but these same distancing behaviors—all of his doubt—inhibit him from acting, thereby challenging his own definition. "Whatever else I may repent of, therefore, let it be reckoned neither among my sins nor follies that I once had faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world's destiny,—yes!—and to do what in me lay for their accomplishment" (640).

Coverdale's detachment is also depicted by his tenuous interaction with the other members of the Blithedale community. He is unable to define himself as either a member of the town or a member of the mock edenic community. In one way, he is quite like Simmel's stranger, not

the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as a man who comes today and stays tomorrow. . . . He is fixed within a certain spatial circle—or within a group whose boundaries are analogous to spatial boundaries—but his position within is fundamentally affected by the fact that he does not belong in it initially and that he brings qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it.

In the case of the stranger, the union of closeness and remoteness involved in every human relationship is patterned in a way that may be succinctly formulated as follows: the distance within this relation indicates that one who is close by is remote, but his strangeness indicates that one who is remote is near. (*Individuality* 143)

Moreover, though as an actor he is analogous to the stranger, the space that he occupies can be described as liminal in Turner's sense, and by extension he is a liminoid persona. Coverdale is "structurally, if not physically 'invisible' . . . defined by a name and a set of symbols . . . [which] give an outward and visible form to an inward and conceptual process" (*Forest* 95-96).

On the road to Blithedale, Coverdale gives himself over to the "better air to breath" on the country road; "Air that had not been spoken into words of falseness, formality and error, like all the air of the dusky city!" (641). In other words, the air on the road holds not only the potential for his regeneration, in terms of his community, but also the possibility of transforming himself, by removing himself from the falsehood of the city, from a passive to an active state.

These possibilities are dashed upon his arrival at Blithedale, however. As he is "seated by the brisk fireside of the old farm-house," Miles thinks of "a family of old Pilgrims [who] might have swung their kettle over precisely such a fire as this." The comfort afforded by such a fantasy is dissolved by the reality of the scene, for there appeared "two young women, smiling most hospitably, but looking rather awkward withal, as not well knowing what was to be their position in our new arrangement of the world" (642). In the transience between town and country, Coverdale is at his most vibrant, for all possibilities exist within his imagination. Inside either his bachelor apartment or the farm-house, the social and political restrictions inscribed by either setting remove those transformative possibilities and reduce Coverdale to the mass of self-doubt and inactivity he knows himself to be. At the same time, however, proximity to the hearth effects a psychic remove analogous to those qualities associated with the passage from Boston to Blithedale. His physical relation to the hearth conflates with the temporal expression of liminality. The image of

the Pilgrim-Blithedale hearth yields the feeling "that we had transported ourselves a world-wide distance from the society that shackled us at breakfast time" (642).

The new world order at Blithedale is also quickly exposed as a sham. Zenobia, "the first comer" to the community, establishes herself as "hostess, for to-day. . . . Tomorrow, if you please, we will be brethren and sisters, and begin our new life from day-break" (645). But the division in labor is set in the traditional way, with the women in the kitchen and the men in the fields. "By and by, perhaps," says Zenobia, "it may be that some of us who wear the petticoat will go a-field, and leave the weaker brethren to take our place in the kitchen" (646). Hawthorne never allows that to happen. Coverdale does not intercede in the reinscription of gender roles, but offers confirmation of their distinction. "It is odd enough that the kind of labor which falls to the lot of women is just that which chiefly distinguishes artificial life—the life of degenerate mortals—from the life of Paradise" (646).

While there is no direct correlation between "paradise" and what Turner calls "communitas," the term has suggestive elements that are worth relating here. Communitas is "a spontaneously generated relationship between leveled and equal total and individuated human beings, stripped of structural attributes . . . the *fons et origo* of all structures and at the same time their critique. For its very existence puts all social structural rules in question and suggests new possibilities. Communitas strains toward universalism and openness. . .".

Whereas paradise suggests an attained Edenic perfection, *communitas*, as it occurs during liminality, "remains open and unspecialized, a spring of pure possibility as well as the immediate realization of release from day to day structural necessities and obligatoriness" (*Dramas* 202). The point is that *communitas* remains a fluid stage of the malleable ritual process which, in a macro view, never obtains even though it "often appears culturally in the guise of an edenic, paradisaical, utopian, or millennial state of affairs, to the attainment of which religious or political action, personal or collective, should be directed" (*Dramas* 237-38).

It is interesting to contrast *communitas* with Fourier's notion of "unityism," which Frank Manuel describes as

the individual acting in his own behalf at the same time furthers social ends; fulfilling simultaneously and harmoniously his obligations to himself and his responsibilities to society. In Fourier the mechanism for achieving a synergic phalanstery involved a kind of natural shuffling or shaking down of large, random agglomerations to produce all the essential psychic types and an overall passion for 'unityism'—today we might say community—that would integrate individual with group happiness. (4)

Unityism is not exactly community in its common denotation. For Fourier, it is "the inclination of the individual to reconcile his own happiness with that of all surrounding him, and of all human kind, to-day so odious. It is an unbounded philanthropy, a universal good-will, which can only be developed when the entire human race shall be rich, free, and just" (Manuel 61). At Blithedale, only Zenobia is rich and no one is free or just.

As we come to see, Blithedale is far from the embodiment of Fourier's

ideal, and as such we read Hawthorne's indictment of Transcendentalists' Fourieristic projects. In *Blithedale*, labor is one division between the sexes, a division that is noted, proposed for change, and left to subsist under traditional structures. Zenobia, the feminist writer, and Hollingsworth, an ex-blacksmith turned philanthropist, with dreams of a reformatory process for criminals, are two characters who aspire to positions of power and leadership within the community, yet pale in comparison to Silas Foster, the only real farmer on the property. As Manuel interprets Fourier's design

[l]abour . . . must be so organized that it should be attractive, that is to say, that man should take it from inclination, from passion, and we must, therefore, determine by analysis what are the motor passions of man which must be brought into play in this instance. Fourier finds three such passions: the papillone, which is the need of change and variety; —the cabaliste, which is the love of intrigue, and that emulation which results in rivalry;—the composite, which seeks satisfaction in a compound pleasure affecting at once the mind and the body. (19)

If a reader is looking for connections and commentary on Fourierism in *The Blithedale Romance*, the three passions are a good place to concentrate, for the correlates of the passions are clear and plentiful. The papillone can be read as a driving force behind Coverdale's transitoriness. The cabaliste is inherent in Coverdale's perspective and in his initial relation to Hollingsworth. The composite describes, I think, the strategy Hawthorne puts behind Coverdale's narration—a cerebral expression of physical desire unmanifested because of Miles's persistent deferral of pleasure.

Foster's realism acts as an opposing point of view, actually propelling the

social and economic dynamics that guide the community during Coverdale's stay. Seated around the hearth, the members "began to talk over [their] prospects." Silas Foster, who had been out tending to his chores, comes inside, greets them "in pretty much the same tone as if he were speaking to his oxen," and remarks, "Well, folks, you'll be wishing yourself back in town again, if this weather holds" (647). Silas, the capitalist among supposed socialist thinkers, is amused by the conversation around the fire. In one statement he conjoins economics and gender roles, while distinguishing urban from rural life:

We shall never make any hand at market-gardening unless the women folks will undertake to do all the weeding. We haven't the team enough for that and the regular farm-work, reckoning three of you city folks as worth one common field-hand. No, no; I tell you, we should have to get up a little too early in the morning, to compete with the market-gardeners around Boston. (649)

Coverdale, recognizing the conflicting forces about to be put into motion, finds it

rather odd, that one of the first questions raised, after our separation from the greedy, struggling, self-seeking world, should relate to the possibility of getting the advantage over the outside barbarians in their own field of labor. But, to own the truth, I very soon became sensible that, as regarded society at large, we stood in a position of new hostility, rather than new brotherhood. (649)

The field of the main characters also become an arena for hostility, although it is an unspoken hostility on Coverdale's part. He admits nothing to himself in terms of his sexual attraction to Zenobia. Coverdale longs for a fraternal relationship with Hollingsworth, yet is rebuked for his lack of support of Hollingsworth's philanthropic scheme. Zenobia is not aware that Priscilla is

her half sister. Worlds apart in temperament and thought, they are set into conflict not only by the competition inherent in Blithedale, but by their individual histories coming to the fore and interacting. Westervelt's presence, as the controller of *The Veiled Lady*, Priscilla, but the ex-husband or lover (Hawthorne never makes clear their relationship) of Zenobia, in and around Blithedale creates even more conflict for Coverdale. Westervelt comes into Blithedale at precisely the point at which Coverdale feels closest to Zenobia, disrupting his imagined chances of gaining her affection. The sisterly feelings developing between Zenobia and Priscilla are also disrupted by Westervelt's presence.

What is interesting here is that most of the conflict that persists among the members of the commune stems from discussions that take place near the hearth. Chores completed after the first night, the "Knot of Dreamers," says Miles, "drew our chairs close to the hearth, and began to talk over our prospects" (647). The descriptions Hawthorne offers can be seen as couched in sexual imagery, and this is supported by Bachelard's contention that "To assert that fire is an element is . . . to set up sexual resonances. . . . If we next treat the fire which animates our heart and that which animates our world as being one and the same thing, it will now appear that our feeling of communion with things is so powerful and primitive that precise criticism is disarmed" (*Fire* 50-51). Seated near the kitchen hearth before his first supper at Blithedale, Miles revels at the sight of "what seemed the butt of a good-sized

oak-tree, with moisture bubbling merrily out of both ends. . . . [The fire], if it served no other purpose, made the men look so full of youth, warm blood and hope, and the women—so very beautiful, that I would cheerfully have spent my last dollar to prolong the blaze" (652). The value of fire quickly increases when the fire is conceived of with Bachelard's analogy in mind. In fact, the value of each piece of wood, with its potential for fire, becomes that much more for Hawthorne: "for the New England yoeman, if he have the misfortune to dwell within practicable distance of a wood-market, is as niggardly of each stick as if it were a bar of California gold" (652). The commodification of wood, in this sense, brings about the commodification of sex.

More specific, however, to the concatenation of fire and sexuality is the relationship between Coverdale and Hollingsworth during Miles's illness after his arrival at Blithedale. Hawthorne releases the sexes from their gender-specific roles, not only intimating a homosexual relationship between the two men, but also depicting the reformer as the community's nurturer. After learning of Miles's ague, Hollingsworth "built a fire in [his] chamber . . . and . . . established himself as [his] nurse. . . . Hollingsworth's more than brotherly attendance gave [him] inexpressible comfort. . . . There was something of the woman moulded into the great, stalwart frame of Hollingsworth. . . . There never was any blaze of a fireside that warmed and cheered [him], in the down-sinkings and shiverings of [his] spirit, so effectually as did the light out of those eyes, which lay so deep and dark under his shaggy brows" (667).

Hawthorne's sense of commodification can also be extended into language. When Priscilla is brought into the farm-house by Hollingsworth, she is silent. Zenobia reacts with hostility to Priscilla, for she cannot understand the girl's intentions. "Is she crazy? Has she no tongue?" to which Hollingsworth replies, "The very heart will be frozen in her bosom, unless you women can warm it, among you, with the warmth that ought to be in your own!" (656). He wants to "warm her poor, shivering body with this good fire, and her poor, shivering heart with our best kindness" (658). Priscilla, offering only her first name and a request of Zenobia that "she will shelter me, and will let me be always near her," becomes the object of Coverdale's silent pity. For Silas, however, Priscilla is a potential source of exploitable labor:

"Give the girl a hot cup of tea, and a thick slice of this first-rate bacon," says Silas, the sensible man that he was. "That's what she wants. Let her stay as long as she likes, and help in the kitchen, and take the cow-breath at milking-time; and in a week or two, she'll begin to look like a creature of this world." (658)

The kitchen is the location as much for the merging of hearth and heart in the image of fire as it is for distinguishing the opposition of nature and domestication in the image of the window. What is important, however, is how the connection between hearth and heart merges with the image of the window through Coverdale's narration. "The Supper-Table" begins, "The pleasant firelight! I must still keep harping on it" (652). Coverdale's reverie in the fire is strongest in the sense of its negation: what the hearth offers is presence, as opposed to absence, and the dividing line, or threshold of this

opposition is imaged in the window. The blaze in the hearth was so substantial "that we cared not what inclemency might rage and roar on the other side of our illuminated window" (652). Miles's struggle to find his place among the others begins with coming to terms with his own elitism, taking form in his attempt to find level ground between himself and Silas Foster, but failing to do so, his subject becomes the unknown person beyond the window. "If I have ever deserved . . . to be soundly cuffed by a fellow-mortal, for secretly putting weight upon some imaginary social advantage, it must have been while I was striving to prove myself ostentatiously his equal, and no more" (653). Uncomfortable with the self-knowledge he has come upon, Coverdale tries to distance himself from himself by shifting the reflecting object of his own discomfort, Silas, to an unknown and possibly nonexistent person:

"I hope," said I, at last, "that our blazing windows will be visible a great way off. There is nothing so pleasant and encouraging to a solitary traveller, on a stormy night, as a flood of firelight, seen amid the gloom. These ruddy window-panes cannot fail to cheer the hearts of all that look at them. Are they not warm and bright with the beacon-fire which we have kindled for humanity?" (653)

It is, of course, Priscilla who takes the form of the solitary traveller. "The fantasy occurred to [Coverdale], that she was some desolate kind of creature, doomed to wander about in snow-storms, and that, though the ruddiness of our window-panes had tempted her into a human dwelling, she would not remain long enough to melt the icicles out of her hair" (655). Priscilla is indeed mysterious as she enters the room, but perhaps the most important aspect of this scene is the exchange of gazes that takes place, all conferred through

Coverdale's own. Priscilla "stood near the door, fixing a pair of large, brown, melancholy eyes upon Zenobia—only upon Zenobia! . . . It was the strangest look I ever witnessed; long a mystery to me and forever a memory" (656). Hollingsworth had "a tenderness in his voice, eyes, mouth, in his gesture . . . which few men could resist, and no woman. But now he looked stern and reproachful; and it was with that inauspicious meaning in his glance, that Hollingsworth first met Zenobia's eyes, and began his influence upon her life" (656-57). The influence and appeal of one look upon another in this brief span reflects the course of events at the commune.

In the mock-edenic community of Blithedale, no one is comfortable or honest with the others. The individual agenda each character maintains subverts any chance of success for the supposed communal goals of Blithedale. Socially, class hierarchies remain intact. Coverdale, the aesthete, is constantly mocking and devaluing Silas, the manual laborer. Zenobia's inherited wealth establishes her social position above the rest of the community, rather than her espoused political views or literary efforts establishing her as leader. Priscilla's mysterious past, *i.e.*, an initially indeterminant status, brings about Zenobia's abuse. In fact, Zenobia, suspicious of Priscilla's intentions, ridicules her by locating her in the working class. "She is neither more nor less than a seamstress from the city; and she has probably no more transcendental purpose than do my miscellaneous sewing, for I suppose she will hardly expect to make my dresses" (660). Priscilla overhears the comment, and after Zenobia

retracts the slur with one pass of her hand through Priscilla's hair, she reverses her position and by proxy that of the commune. "This one caress, bestowed voluntarily by Zenobia, was evidently received as a pledge of all that the stranger sought from her, whatever the unuttered boon might be. From that instant, too, she melted in quietly among us, and was no longer a foreign element. . . . We no more thought of questioning it, than if Priscilla had been recognized as a domestic sprite, who had haunted the rustic fireside, of old, before we had ever been warmed by its blaze" (661).

When Miles tries to solve the mystery of who Priscilla might be, he transfers his sense of remoteness and alienation onto her. Using the window as a frame, he does not so much bring Priscilla into his sphere of sensibility as he sees in Priscilla a vessel or mirror for it. As the storm "spattered the snow against the windows," Miles intuits that

She had been bred up, no doubt, in some close nook, some inauspiciously sheltered court of the city, where the utmost rage of a tempest, though it might scatter down the slates of the roof into the bricked area, could not shake the casement of her little room. The sense of a vast, undefined space, pressing from the outside against the black panes of our uncurtained windows, was fearful to the poor girl, heretofore accustomed to the narrowness of human limits, with the lamps of neighboring tenements glimmering across the street. The house probably seemed to her adrift on the great ocean of the night. A little parallelogram of sky was all that she had hitherto known of nature; so that she felt the awfulness that really exists in its limitless extent. (662)

Coverdale expresses sympathy for Priscilla's condition when it is actually a false sense of empathy deriving from his trying to make his predicament hers, his sense of being lost at Blithedale equivalent to what he imagines hers to be.

Bachelard says that "every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination" (*Space* 136). Hawthorne continuously creates spaces in which his characters exercise their imaginations. These privileged spaces become less efficacious as the romances become less optimistic. The scaffold is a powerful and ultimately freeing space for Hester Prynne; the arched window holds potential for Clifford Pyncheon, yet he is unable to take advantage of its release. At Blithedale, as in Coverdale's Boston, the spatial symbols of solitude, window and hearth, allow Miles to imagine lives and events other than his own. His spaces are platforms for voyeuristic gazes and unrealizable daydreams. He is primarily observer, rarely participant. If there is a benefit to Miles's physical and symbolic alienation, it takes form in his coming to an understanding of the others at Blithedale, and, if the reader is generous, by extension himself.

Hollingworth's intentions for the commune are at first unspoken. Coverdale is left to surmise that Hollingsworth's "heart was never really interested in our socialist scheme, but was forever busy with his strange, and as most people thought it, impracticable plan, for the reformation of criminals through an appeal to their higher instincts" (662-63). The scene is made dimmer by Coverdale's description of "the outer solitude look[ing] in upon us through the windows, gloomy, wild, and vague, like another state of existence, close beside the little sphere of warmth and light in which we were the prattlers

and bustlers of a moment" (663). Coverdale's perspective as far as the window is concerned is that it is a conveyance, a transmitter of mood, an equalizer of inner and outer.

After passing time with Hollingsworth, Miles "began to discern that [Hollingsworth] has come among [them] by no real sympathy with [their] feelings and [their] hopes, but chiefly because [they] were estranging [themselves] from the world, with which his lonely and exclusive object in life had already put him at odds" (679). Hollingsworth's singlemindedness and inflexibility are totally debilitating, while Coverdale's insecurity, although it reinforces his own alienation and isolation, also manifests in a liminal suspension and remove that holds potential for change. Before the plot of the novel moves from Blithedale back to the city, Coverdale re-evaluates his own motives, social position, and desires. True to form with many of Hawthorne's characters, these reconciliations occur in secluded and elevated places. Hester and Dimmesdale, for instance, both climb the scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter* at daybreak on order to remove themselves simultaneously from the community and gain a perspective that is all-encompassing. Clifford Pyncheon views the procession on the street from his privileged position of the arched window in *The House of the Seven Gables*. For Coverdale, there are two different aeries. One is in the woods surrounding Blithedale, which he uses as a retreat when in residence there, and his bachelor-rooms in town. Coverdale's rural "hermitage was [his] one exclusive possession while [he] counted [himself] a

brother of the socialists. It symbolized [his] individuality, and aided [him] in keeping it inviolate. . . . [He] brought thither no guest, because, after Hollingsworth failed [him], there was no longer the man alive with whom [he] could think of sharing all" (718-19).

Much like the middle ground between the rural and the urban, in which Coverdale can remain inactive without interruption or consequence, Miles, in his hermitage, can breathe the unsullied air, observe, and ponder without committing himself or engaging himself. He can be heroic, for there is no doubt to resist and there is no one that might see him as foolish. He may gaze without being seen, and in that one sense he maintains his heroic nature. Awash with this sense of invincibility, Coverdale (in a Whitmanesque maneuver) unleashes his heart and sends a message to Priscilla via a bird that "flew past [his] tree." The message encapsulates his understanding of the dynamics of the quaternity, and ultimately enables him to leave Blithedale:

Tell her that her fragile thread of life has inextricably knotted itself with other and tougher threads, and most likely it will be broken. Tell her that Zenobia will not be long her friend. Say that Hollingsworth's heart is on fire with his own purpose, but icy for all human affection; and that if she has given him her love, it is like casting a flower into a sepulchre. And say that if any mortal really cares for her, it is myself; and not even I, for her realities,—poor little seamstress, as Zenobia rightly called her!—but for the fancy-work with which I have idly decked her out! (720)

After the social positioning, power struggling, and self-defining that take place at the commune is complete, all the characters are ultimately exposed as to their true natures and motivations. Hollingsworth is a manipulative schemer

who is after Zenobia's money, Coverdales's support, and Priscilla's sycophantic adoration. Zenobia ends up committed to women's rights yet equally certain that those rights will never be attained. Her growing love for Hollingsworth also becomes her demise. Coverdale realizes, after coming to understand the true Hollingsworth, that he was also a pawn in the reformer's scheme to use Blithedale as grounds for his own reformatory. With this knowledge, Miles decides to leave the commune, or as he puts it, "my health demands a little relaxation of labor, and a short visit to the sea-side, during the dog-days." But Silas Foster reads through this and delivers the bottom line: "I understand the business. We shall never see your face here again. Here ends the reformation of the world, so far as Miles Coverdale has a hand in it!" (752). Miles, who never has a hand in anything, lights out for the territories. But in his recollected escape the narrator offers two hints at Zenobia's demise. At the end of "Eliot's Pulpit" Coverdale's eye is trained on "the long slope of pasture-land, and beheld [Zenobia and Hollingsworth] standing together, in the light of sunset, just on the spot . . . they meant to build their cottage" (744). The reader returns to that spot at the close of the novel, looking with Coverdale at "that little parallelogram of pasture-land" (845) that is Zenobia's grave. In "A Crisis," Coverdale and Hollingsworth continue to argue over the purpose of Blithedale and Hollingsworth's dream of criminal reform. Coverdale painting the future with mock-heroic prose, says, "I shall never feel as if this were a real, practical, as well as poetical system of human life, until somebody has sanctified it by

death" (746).

Miles moves from the hearth-side of Blithedale to the coal-grate of his hotel-room, but not without first establishing a rationale that offsets the result of the ultimatum Hollingsworth puts to him in "The Crisis." "'Be with me,' says Hollingsworth, 'or be against me! There is no third choice for you.'" To which Miles replies, "No! . . . [a word proving] an absolute torture of the breast" (751). This is a far more emotional, violently heartfelt scene than that provided in "Leave-Takings," in which Miles poses as the rationalist. "No sagacious man will long retain his sagacity, if he live exclusively among reformers and progressive people, without periodically returning into the settled system of things, to correct himself by a new observation from that old standpoint" (755). The new observation post is his hotel room, the windows of which providing relief from two days of living "in the laziest manner possible," a style that "grew a little too soporific" (761).

The new observation Miles makes is that of Westervelt, Priscilla and Zenobia together in an apartment facing Miles's window. The participants in a new "settled system" that is never arrived at in Blithedale have now returned to town, the old "settled system," only to disrupt whatever sense of stability Coverdale thought he might obtain in the city. In Sartre's discussion of "The Existence of Others," he finds that "The appearance of the Other in the world corresponds . . . to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralization which I am simultaneously

effecting" (231). The decentering of the subject by nature of his own objectivity underlines the remainder of *Blithedale*. Zenobia has also returned to the city, with Priscilla, and has established residence across the street from Coverdale, although unwittingly. Zenobia's recognition of Coverdale's observing her, and Miles's reaction to Zenobia's detection of his gaze, cause Miles to re-evaluate not only his own position vis-à-vis Zenobia, but those positions so tenuously established at Blithedale. In a word, the gazes create new doubts similar to those that precipitated Miles's move away from Blithedale. What was he doing there in the first place? For what actual purpose were the other characters participating in the Blithedale experiment, and why did they return, or follow Coverdale, back to civilization?

Coverdale, far from being disheartened by his Blithedale experience or disinterested in his commune brethren, spends a great deal of time looking at the two women across the courtyard, who are joined by the mysterious Westervelt. It is Westervelt who adds "considerably to [Coverdale's] discomfiture, by detecting and recognizing [him], and [his] post of observation." Unsure of the consequences of his actions, Coverdale is also unsure as to the proper response to his being detected. "Perhaps I ought to have blushed at being caught in such an evident scrutiny of Professor Westervelt and his affairs. Perhaps I did blush" (770). Coverdale is not sure if he should be experiencing the same "shame of self" that Sartre finds as "the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the other is looking at and judging" (237). In

other words, does the shame of self carry over from the objective Other to the observer? It is only when Zenobia comes to see what Westervelt is displeased about that Coverdale begins to become aware of his position and actions, and reaches some conclusion to his "perhaps:"

Zenobia appeared at the window, with color much heightened, and eyes which, as arrows, barbed with scorn, across the intervening space, directed full at my sensibilities as a gentleman. If the truth must be told, far as her flight-shot was, those arrows hit the mark. She signified her recognition of me by a gesture with her head and hand, comprising at once a salutation and dismissal. (770-71)

Zenobia, interestingly enough, experiences herself to be Sartre's "Other," "the being toward whom I do not turn my attention. . . . The one who looks at me and at whom I am not yet looking, the one who delivers me to myself as *unrevealed* but without revealing himself, the one who is present to me as directing at me but never as the object of my direction" (245).

Contemplating the actions within Zenobia's apartment and the gazes between hers and Coverdale's, Miles decided that it is the action within her apartment, his observation of it and the uncertainty that it creates, that is the cause of his own distress, not Zenobia's rebuke. One way to center his decentralized position is to gain access to Zenobia's apartment, essentially to become an object of his own gaze. "It occurred to me how very absurd was my behavior, in thus tormenting myself with crazy hypotheses as to what was going on within that drawing-room, when it was at my option to be personally present there" (773). Gaining access, or participating in the activity of the Other, is at the heart of the conversation between Zenobia and Coverdale, once

he does speak with her. Coverdale suggests that Zenobia's lowering of the shade, effectively blinding him from her activity, is ultimately an impotent act:

It is really impossible to hide anything, in this world, to say nothing of the next. All that we ought to ask, therefore, is, that the witness of our conduct, and the speculators on our motives, should be capable of taking the highest view which the circumstances of the case admit. So much being secured, I, for one, would be happy in feeling myself followed everywhere by an indefatigable human sympathy. (774)

Zenobia's reply is basically that peeping-Toms have no place in her world, and she extends her hand to signify her willingness for a truce. It seems that Coverdale's (and if we are to draw the same consistent biographical allusions as readers so often do, Hawthorne's) stance on subjectivity and objectivity that derives so much from the act of gazing is that the ends of the gazing subject justify the means when "best intentions" are posited, and that the gazing subject should have no problem with being the objectivized other when there is an overflow of fellow-feeling on the part of the observer. It is an incongruent position for one who, from early on in the fiction, establishes and reconfirms that the only safe place is that in which he is removed from the chance of being "proved a fool." "Who" must see "what" to do the proving, and how much "human sympathy" does that observer hold?

The handshake, for Miles, obtains both positive and negative results. On the one hand, "her manner made [him] sensible that [they] stood upon no real terms of confidence." Yet the touch evokes a memory of their original meeting. "Then, in the warm light of the country fireside, Zenobia had greeted

[him] cheerily and hopefully, with a full, sisterly grasp of the hand" (774). The Blithedale hearth provides what Bachelard refers to as "the ultra-living element . . . intimate [and] universal" (*Fire* 7). The supposed intimacy of the commune's residents created the possibility for "human sympathy," but the actual level of intimacy only further stratifies the members of the community, ultimately exposing the reasons for Hollingsworth's subterfuge, Zenobia's false front, and Priscilla's inability to express herself. For Coverdale, there never was a blanket of fraternal support sufficiently broad enough as to cushion his fall from his isolated aerie in the woods, or warm enough to open his heart and express his love for Priscilla directly. Such expression results in dangerous exposure, not only of a personal nature in revealing one's true feelings, for Coverdale ostensibly completes his narration with such a maneuver, but an exposure to and participation in what Boston society "never dreams of," according to Zenobia: "stepping across the inappreciable air-line which separates one class from another. But what was rank to the colonists of Blithedale?" (780). As the colonists proved themselves time and again, social hierarchy was at the core of every decision and action. Rank was of utmost importance.

At this point in the romance, Coverdale's narrative reverts to Old Moodie and the portrait of the saloon. "An Old Acquaintance" serves a greater purpose than an introduction to "Fauntleroy." In this chapter, Hawthorne has Coverdale exercise what John Dolis calls "Hawthorne's Metonymic Gaze."⁶ On the walls

of the saloon in which Coverdale meets Old Moodie, pictures of food and revelry offer Coverdale the opportunity to express desire and fantasy. Mocking the verisimilitude with which the paintings of beef-steaks, sirloins and cheeses are depicted, Coverdale has the pictures frame the intentions of the painter in terms equivalent to the Blithedale colonists' attempts to raise their actions from the mundane to the Arcadian. The food is "so perfectly imitated, that you seemed to have the genuine article before you, and yet with an indescribable, ideal charm; it took away the grossness from what was fleshiest and fattest, and thus helped the life of man, even in its earthliest relations, to appear rich and noble, as well as warm, cheerful, and substantial" (785). Dolis writes that

Hawthorne's descriptive image recreates the discovery of an object according to the changing situatedness of a subject; that is, it postpones identifying the object as objective, as that which stands over and against a subject in reflection. Our proximity to any given figure is solely predicated upon the way in which we affectively take it up, so that the unity of the object is primordially intentional. Rather than portray, through representation, an optical relation to the world, as that which is outside the percipient, Hawthorne's gaze presents us with an internal animation of the image, one which interrogates the image for its own sake: it is first and foremost autfigurative, invested with a logic of its own. ("Metonymic Gaze" 368)

With these points in mind, it is worth juxtaposing the two paintings of the Flemish revellers, "drinking their wine out of fantastic, long-stemmed glasses; quaffing joyously, quaffing forever, with inaudible laughter and song," (785-86) with the little picture "in an obscure corner of the saloon . . . of a ragged, bloated, New England toper, stretched out on a bench. . . . You smelt the fummy liquor that had brought on this syncope. Your only comfort lay in the

forced reflection, that, real as he looked, the poor caitiff was but imaginary, a bit of painted canvass, whom no delirium tremens . . . awaited, on the morrow" (786). This is a method Hawthorne employs throughout his fictions, one that, in this romance, infuses Coverdale with what Dolis describes as

[t]he controlling consciousness at the center of Hawthorne's vision, [which] is thus discovered amid the interval of both human and natural space; here alone we unearth that intimate and unified bearing toward the object as a whole. Hawthorne's image holds within it the inward landscape of the world, its incarnate or "figured" texture: it is an icon of vision itself. ("Metonymic Gaze" 374-75)

Dolis and I could not be in any greater agreement than with his statement that "Hawthorne's spatial relationships are initially metaphors of human relationships. . . . The structure of Hawthorne's image reveals how we are simultaneously rooted in two horizons, the human (expressive) space of the body and the natural (geometric) space of the thing" ("Metonymic Gaze" 374). I would extend this idea even further and suggest that Hawthorne's descriptive skill is displayed in a merging of the two horizons. Moreover, it is the geometric image that extends the initial metaphor of human relationships into the depiction of the process of social drama. It should be remembered that social dramas are comprised of the processes of breach, crisis, ritual action and some form of reaggregation resulting from the negotiations that take place during the ritual phase, of which liminality is a most important part. The two horizons, the "human (expressive) . . . and the natural (geometric)," are analogous to the two poles of meaning—ideological and sensory—described

earlier in this chapter as the quality of symbolic polarization. The tension between these binary opposites is generated by the ritual symbols operating during liminality. In terms of this text, the parallelogram—the shape of the window, Miles's perception of Westevelt's stage, and Zenobia's grave—is the ritual symbol.

Old Moodie's revelations in "Fauntleroy" give Coverdale and the reader many of the missing pieces of the Zenobia-Priscilla connection, solid information that, previous to Coverdale's relating Moodie's story, were presented as clues earlier in the text. Moodie's inquiries at the beginning of the first chapter and his appearance outside the colony in "A Visitor From Town;" Zenobia's "The Silvery Veil;" Westervelt's inquiries in "The Wood-Path" and his presence in "Zenobia's Drawing-Room"—all the pieces cohere, pushing Coverdale to a place where he believes he might find peace of mind through distance, but

in all the weeks of [his] absence, [his] thoughts continually reverted back, brooding over the by-gone months, and bringing up incidents that seemed hardly to have left a trace of themselves, in their passage. I spent painful hours recalling these trifles, and rendering them more musty and unsubstantial than at first, by the quantity of speculative musing, thus kneaded in with them. Hollingsworth, Zenobia, Priscilla! These three had absorbed my life into themselves. (801)

Coverdale avoids embarrassment by reducing his summer at Blithedale to "fair matter for a jest." But making light of the matter doesn't negate "how deeply [his] connection with those three had affected all [his] being" (802). Neither time nor distance can alter how Coverdale conceives of his place nor perceives

of himself vis-à-vis the knot of dreamers. A phrase Coverdale uses to introduce the scene of Westervelt's demise during his failed Veiled-Lady performance at "one of those Lyceum-halls," has more bearing on how one might understand Coverdale than the throw-away line it appears to be. "As it was already the epoch of annihilated space" (802) is a curious phrase, yet consonant with the phenomenology of space that I am proposing as one of Hawthorne's concerns in *Blithedale*. Coverdale is a Hawthornian observer for whom expression and objectivity are fused in the act of telling. The contemporary space and time that Coverdale finds reduced to nothing has its narrative correlative in the fusion of image and consciousness as represented in Coverdale.⁷

After the machinations Hawthorne puts his characters through—Westervelt losing control of Priscilla to Hollingsworth during a public failure of his mesmeric artistry; Zenobia, indirectly through the same act, losing Hollingsworth to Priscilla, and by extension, losing the sister she barely knew—Hawthorne returns the characters to Blithedale, reformed, with positions and allegiances redefined. The actual performance in "A Village Hall" can be read as the ritual performance that serves as a redressive measure to the breach and crisis that are enacted at the colony. The Veiled-Lady performance is an opportunity for a cross-section of the Boston populace to witness and participate in Westervelt's mesmerism, itself an expression of an annihilation of the social fabric. "Alas, my countrymen, methinks we have fallen on an evil age! . . . We are pursuing a downward course, in the eternal

march, and thus bringing ourselves into the same range with beings whom death, in requital of their gross and evil lives, has degraded below humanity" (805). Priscilla, as medium, collapses the spiritual world with the present; her answers to the audience's questions presage the future. Her stepping out of her role reduces the performance to farce and humbug for the audience, but it also points toward the resolution of the characters' positioning at the end of the romance.

Coverdale, who remained strangely elusive while espousing communal doctrine, goes back to Blithedale two days after Westervelt's performance, "conscious that nobody would be quite overjoyed to greet him there" (810). So unsure as to his relative social position at Blithedale, Coverdale longs for the day to turn to night, so that he might steal "to some lighted window of the old farm-house, and [peep] darkling in, to see all their well-known faces around the supper-board" (812). Yet the fantasy of what he might see is nothing in comparison to the reality he finds: Zenobia heart-broken over Hollingsworth and Priscilla, her strength and conviction depleted, her resolve non-existent. "I am weary of this place, and sick to death of playing at philanthropy and progress," says Zenobia. "When you next hear of Zenobia, her face will be behind the black veil" (830).

Indeed, Coverdale next sees Zenobia when she is behind the blackest veil—death. Her suicide—drowning in the river—sets up not only the end of the romance, but an elemental opposition between fire and water. As the

romance begins with fellow-feeling around the hearth, it ends with Blithedale's residents isolated and distanced from one another through the power of the river. Far from Bachelard's "reverie before the fire," that which works in a star pattern . . . returns to its center to shoot out new beams . . . [a] gentle reverie that is conscious of its well-being . . . the most naturally centered reverie" (*Fire* 14), Hawthorne creates a finale which focuses on Coverdale standing before "that little parallelogram of pasture-land" (845), Zenobia's grave.

Hawthorne's conclusion is perhaps the least hopeful of all his romances. Condemning Zenobia to death, as he does, Hawthorne's final statement on the women's movement seems to be that, whatever vitality it may hold is as fragile as the ego of its most ardent spokeswoman. In reducing Hollingsworth to a guilty, feeble, mumbling failure, his reform movement never taking shape and his survival dependent upon Priscilla, the frailest figure in the novel, Hawthorne disparages the possibility of the misguided to redirect themselves. The prison reform movement, alive and well on both sides of the Atlantic in 1850, does not bode well in Hawthorne's view of the future. As for Priscilla, condemned to factory work by the workings of fate at the beginning of the novel, it seems that she has not only exchanged temperaments with Hollingsworth and powers with Westervelt, the men who would oppress her, she has triumphed over them; she is now her keeper's keeper.

Coverdale, the artist, is another story, however. His movement from aerie to bachelor rooms, from town to country and back again, as I have said,

fails to provide Hawthorne's artist with a space in which to create. His constant self-exile, his isolation, speaks to the failure of his community and its divisions between economic classes, be they at Blithedale or in Boston, to accommodate the artist with the space in which to express himself, artistically or passionately. Zenobia comments, "In society, indeed, a genuine American never dreams of stepping across the inappreciable air-line which separates one class from another. But what was rank to the colonists of Blithedale?" (780). Rank, as we come to see, is the hierarchy that each of the characters cannot dismantle. Coverdale can reposition himself within it, but he cannot remove himself from this structure. His hermitage "was [his] one exclusive possession, while [he] counted [himself] a brother of the socialists. It symbolized [his] individuality, and aided [him] in keeping it inviolate" (718). His individuality, however, was an empty shell.

Coverdale, the observer who annihilates space by infusing the objects of his gaze with his own expression and subjectivity, redresses the crisis in which he has acted by annihilating the interpretation his own ritual performance has produced. Priscilla remained, until her last performance, within the tension produced by the struggles between Zenobia, Hollingsworth and Westervelt. Coverdale is empathetic to her plight because she mirrors the position he maintains. As the object of his gaze, and as an entity without power or persuasion, Priscilla is the vessel for Coverdale's subjectivity, one he seeks to relinquish. In Priscilla, prior to "A Village-Hall," Coverdale finds refuge for and

animation of his own subjectivity. He loses this refuge with Priscilla's refusal to perform, to be both an object of Coverdale's gaze and the reflection of what that gaze consists in. But when Priscilla chooses Hollingsworth over Westervelt, she again reveals herself to be an active character, incapable of acting as proxy for Coverdale's identity. She also indicates the failure of mesmerism, a mode of psychic suspension that Hawthorne uses in *Blithedale* and *The House*, one that I am reading as a narrative correlative of liminality, both structurally and heuristically. From his position in the audience, Miles's perspective of the lyceum stage is the spatial frame of this ritualized activity, a spatial frame that would appear to him much like the window-frame views. Though it is the symbol employed to reshape or redirect the ritual actor in liminality, in this instance the frame reflects the failure of the dominant symbol to enact its office: the parallelogram as the frame of perspective, yet without an object to gaze at, forces Coverdale as an ego to accept his own expression of subjectivity, to be consciously and self-reflexively aware, but there is no change.

Coverdale's one supposed success at self-expression comes at the end of the novel, his courageous admission of his love for Priscilla. Yet the halting syntax in this last line—"I—I myself—was in love—with— PRISCILLA!"—while calling into question its own veracity, permits a reappraisal of the symbolic effectiveness of the parallelogram. If Coverdale loved Priscilla, it was because she reflected a subjectivity that he had little investment in. The contiguity of

subject and reflexive pronouns in this sentence indicates Coverdale's confused sense of identity, adding both strength and doubt to the confessional nature of this sputtering final sentence, as if he comes to the epiphanaic realization that he was actually in love with what Priscilla offered him throughout the romance, the opportunity to display and divest himself from and to himself, to be in one sense on both sides of the window, and in another to be the parallelogram itself.

Substituting Zenobia's name for Priscilla's in this last line may seem more plausible to some readers. At their parting, She tells Miles that "It is an endless pity . . . that I had not bethought myself of winning your heart, Mr. Coverdale, instead of Hollingsworth's. I think I should have succeeded; and many women would have deemed you the worthier conquest of the two" (830). It is an interesting reversal of the standard power positions between male and female, but as the stereotypical gender roles of these two characters are juggled throughout the text, the sentence comes as no surprise. Zenobia decides to leave Blithedale, "the very emptiest mockery" for "No matter where," (830), or where there is no matter. Priscilla's decision to refuse Westervelt's on the public stage, and in so doing collapse that particular parallelogram, forces Coverdale, who thrived within it, to seek out a new space to annihilate. Or more positively, he must redefine the parallelogram in terms that will at least permit a chance of artistic creation. He does this with Zenobia's grave. Standing over "that little parallelogram of pasture-land," (845) he comes to

understand that self-interest and schemes such as "Philanthropy, when adopted as a profession, [are] often useful by [their] energetic impulse to society at large, [but] [they are] perilous to the individual . . . fearfully apt to ruin the heart" (844). And so with writing.

Closing the romance with the sentence he does, Hawthorne deflects attention away from Zenobia and the effect she has had on Coverdale throughout the text. The shift away from the hearth and toward chaotic darkness beyond the parallelogram of the window-frame early in the romance moves our attention away from Zenobia and toward Priscilla. Zenobia is the woman whom Coverdale meets in "A Knot of Dreamers," whose "free, careless, generous modes of expression" leaves Miles feeling "an influence breathing out of her . . . saying—'Behold, here is a woman!'" (646-47). That is a creative force which Miles flirts with yet shies away from, a force he can aspire to because he can displace his own desire for it onto another. At the end of the romance we have the reversal of attention, moving from Priscilla and Hollingworth back toward Zenobia and her "parallelogram of pasture-land" (845). Here Coverdale depicts Nature's creative powers in terms that define Zenobia as Beauty: "While Zenobia lived, Nature was proud of her, and directed all eyes upon that radiant presence, as her fairest handiwork" (845). But Nature, being the cyclical force it is, turns "the calamity of [Zenobia's death] into her system," infusing beauty into "the tuft of ranker vegetation that grew out of Zenobia's heart . . . "the grass [that] grew all the better, on that little

parallelogram of pasture-land, for the decay of the beautiful woman who slept beneath" (845). Now beauty, or aesthetic creation, resides in the annihilated space of Zenobia's grave. Through the image of the parallelogram, Coverdale's possibilities for artistic creation oscillate between himself and the spaces that the two women of the text occupy, spaces that Coverdale cannot enter because they are spaces that he has already collapsed.

Chapter Four

The Circle of My Glance

"'Am I here, or there?' cried Robin," HAWTHORNE

In her "Theoretical Postscript" to *Seeing and Being*, Carolyn Porter states that "it is only by conceiving language itself as not merely permeated with ideological values, but constituted out of the social interaction in which those values are born, live, and die, that we can begin to understand a literary text as part of a social process" (280). While this is the premise I've chosen to work from, this study is not an attempt to define Hawthorne's fictions as Porter does the prose of Emerson, James, Adams and Faulkner: as reified objects resulting from "the Lukácsian opposition between observer and participant attendant upon the developing phenomenon of reification under capitalism" (279). Rather, my purpose has been to express one way in which Hawthorne, as a social observer and a participant through literature, appropriates and synthesizes the terms of Lukács' opposition: by posing spatial metaphors as devices through which social, cultural, and historical change are depicted. Specifically, my concern has been with establishing a relation between the geometric images and metaphors in some of Hawthorne's texts and the processes of social drama Turner has developed in his own work. In depicting that relation, I am suggesting that to read Hawthorne's sketches, tales and romances is to read both a sliver of the cultural work being done in antebellum

America and an expression of how cultures change as a result of the social dramas comprised of the processes of conflict and resolution between individuals and within groups.

In this chapter I will look closely at a sketch and a story that antedate the longer, popular romances examined in the previous chapters, with the specific intentions of explicating "Sights from a Steeple" as a sketch that demonstrates the role of Hawthorne's narrative perspective within the Turnerian scheme of social drama: the voice of the liminoid figure. An understanding of this narrative perspective not only informs my reading of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," the focus of the second section, as a tale of *rite de passage* for Robin and the nation, but also as an example of social drama in its entirety—from breach to crisis, to the ritual processes of redressive action which take place during the liminal phase and incorporate geometric shapes as informing symbols, to the forms of reaggregation or schism that take shape in my understanding of Hawthorne's vision of sociation and conflict.⁸ "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" can be read simultaneously as a "personal" tale of *rite de passage* for Robin and a "socio-political" rite in Revolutionary lore. In such a merger, as Michael J. Colacurcio demonstrates, the reader might find "that Hawthorne means both his matters, public and private; that he means them both equally; that in this one instance, at least . . . the process of personal maturation and the dynamics of political independence go round and round in our mind forever, in the aftermath of Hawthorne's tale, like equilibrists

. . . [that] Robin and Revolution now exist in that sort of indissoluble union which only literature can create."⁹

* * *

The first question is, To what purposes does Hawthorne put the narrator of "Sights" and those other characters who maintain an optative, liminoid position vis-à-vis their cultural situations? The explication that follows shows that the Pry-type characters' choices of distance, of a physical/spatial distinction and differentiation from their cultural milieux, depict Hawthorne's negotiation of the relation between individuality and polity. This is to say that, with this early sketch as example, the indeterminacy of a young writer in a young country is perhaps best brought out in the removed positioning of a narrative voice that flirts with action as it flees from it. This paradoxical positioning is found again in later works, taking form, for instance, in Dimmesdale's scaffold reveries, Clifford Pyncheon's near plummet into sociation/ death, and Coverdale's reflective moments in Eliot's Pulpit and from behind the window panes of the Blithedale commune and later, his rented rooms. Significantly, the image of the circle that becomes a metaphor of boundary and transgression in *The Custom-House* and *The Scarlet Letter*, serves here, in a sketch antedating those works by twenty years, as a way of defining, limiting, and protecting narrative perspective.

Teresa Toulouse has shown that many of Hawthorne's sketches are extensions and complications of a generic narrative perspective that was

familiar to his readers through both Addison and Steele's *Spectator Papers* and the narrative stance of Irving's Geoffrey Crayon. She points out that, "the 'I' of the *Spectator Papers* presents no distinct persona: he is, rather, an eidolon . . . that tends to disappear if approached too closely" (204). However, whereas Addison and Steele's "Mr. Spectator" is offered as a medium through which "an objective shared world is to be seen by all through the lens of this eidolon . . . he is also seen—that is, purposefully distinguished from his readers" (Toulouse 204). Irving's Crayon is closer to Hawthorne's narrator in "Sights" than Mr. Spectator, but "makes no explicit nod to an audience. He encourages the audience more indirectly, through his very manner of presenting himself, to enter into the process of feeling as he feels" (Toulouse 205). Whereas "Geoffrey Crayon's personal feelings . . . become social generalizations that readers are encouraged to appropriate as their own . . . Hawthorne's . . . sketches present a narrator who threatens, undermines, or changes traditionally accepted relations between being seen and being seen through" (Toulouse 206-07). Toulouse maintains that the differences between Hawthorne's narrator and both Mr. Spectator and Geoffrey Crayon are grounded in the fact that "this narrator offers no background, places himself in no immediately definable social context, and gives himself no explicit or easily guessed role vis-à-vis his audience. He neither engages in objective speculating nor provides a conventional emotional experience" (207). I think Toulouse is helpful in distinguishing the three narrative positions within one established

form, but I have differences with her conclusions, and these can be explained by reading Hawthorne's "Sights" with Turner's schemata in mind.

In *From Ritual to Theatre*, Turner gives a succinct distinction between the terms liminal and liminoid that not only suggests Hawthorne's narrator to be a liminoid character, but also helps in distinguishing the "Sights" narrator from his generic predecessors: "Optation pervades the liminoid phenomenon, obligation the liminal. One is all play and choice, an entertainment, the other is a matter of deep seriousness, even dread, it is demanding, compulsory" (43). If "Mr. Spectator," in his role as a reflector of his readers' culture, "accommodate[s] the greatest number of individual roles and at the same time project[s] the value of the common social reality (and social hierarchy) in which these roles are played out," and "Crayon's personal feelings . . . become social generalizations that readers are encouraged to appropriate as their own" (Toulouse 204, 207), in the "Sights" narrator and Hawthorne's other characters who offer individual and subjective views from a spatially superior position, there is movement toward a more specifically liminoid narrative position. There is a progression from the culturally sanctioned voice (Addison and Steele) to the voice proposing cultural definition (Irving) to the voice describing the boundary between the compulsory liminal and the optative liminoid, and the difficulties in negotiating it (Hawthorne). I am stressing the significance of this boundary because Hawthorne continuously stresses it. He brings the spatial positioning of characters and narrators to readers' attention in both prefatory statements

and the fictions themselves. Hawthorne's narrators and many of his characters are poised in a distanced, alienated position that derives from the troubling negotiations when defining oneself as an individual, an artist, and a member of a community. If the work of art, even the sketch, acts as the artistic medium between individual and polity, the difficulty of describing the connections between these artificially polar terms is inherent in the artist's narrative point of view.

Turner's distinction between liminal and liminoid is applicable to the narrator's shift in perspective and the action he views. His descriptions of the bands of marching volunteers and their imitators can be understood as the recording of liminoid phenomena. As in the language of processions in the American 1830s, both military groups in "Sights" can be said to be "characteristically individual products . . . in times and places apart from work settings assigned to 'leisure' activities" (*Theatre* 54). Mary Ryan avers that parades "can tell us something of the historical process whereby cultural meaning is created," its creators, "devis[ing] ceremonial forms specific to their own times, needs, and possibilities" (133). Hawthorne's use of the procession here indicates one response to his own "times, needs and possibilities." His use of the eidolon trope in this sequence of processions distinguishes the liminoid from the liminal and fosters the movement away from consequential experience. As we will see, by placing the liminal, funeral procession in a dominant position over the liminoid, idiosyncratic formations of the volunteers

and boys, the narrator avoids allowing a pleasurable sensation—identification with the volunteers—to come to fruition. The liminoid, which is "felt to be freer than the liminal, a matter of choice, not obligation" (Turner, *Theatre* 55), in this narrator's rendition, is shown to be slightly less threatening than the liminal, but ultimately he is uncomfortable with all forms of sociation.

Without the extensive social history supporting the English "Mr. Spectator," and without presenting characters and scenes through a Crayonesque narrator, one who, as noted above, "encourages the audience . . . through his very manner of presenting himself, to enter into the process of feeling as he feels" (Toulouse 205), Hawthorne's narrative stance in "Sights" can be understood as analogous to that of Whitman's speaker in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," where the reader is informed by the perspective of the gull's oscillating body. Even in Whitman's efforts to survey the ferry's occupants and what they are viewing as they cross the river, the position of the gull—static and superior—encourages in the reader both a sense of identification with the panoptical view and an association with the objects that fall beneath it. Whitman's speaker is closer to Crayon's sensibility, but his position is that of Hawthorne's "spiritualized Paul Pry, hovering invisibly round man and woman, witnessing their deeds, searching into their hearts, borrowing brightness from their felicity, and shade from their sorrow, and retaining no emotion peculiar to himself" (43).

Hawthorne's narrator begins "Sights from a Steeple" with the

exclamation "Sol," indicating a resigned dissatisfaction with the visual results of climbing to the middle ground between "earth . . . at a dizzy depth below, but heaven far, far beyond me still." He yearns for the "zenith . . . [which] appears only a deepened shade of nothingness! And yet I shiver at that cold and solitary thought." The narrator responds to the combination of the storm clouds, "black as death, and freighted with the tempest," and the "airy archipelago, where the sunbeams love to linger in their journeying through space," as he does to the "bright[ness of a] young man's vision . . . realized in chillness, obscurity and tears" (42): he avoids this inevitable tragic outcome by shifting his view elsewhere. The transition from the close of this first paragraph—"I will look on them no more"—to the second paragraph's overview of the ground and sea below his sight-line demonstrates the narrator's reluctance to acknowledge a more emotive sensibility than the potential transparency of an eidolon. But, at the edge of awareness, the narrator opts to change perspective.

This contradicts Toulouse's indication that the narrator "resists the thoughts that leave him solitary and strains to forge links to the external world that will establish his credentials as an eidolon." But I think she is correct in saying that "In the sketch's next section, he looks down rather than up and exercises his powers of association on the landscape and town beneath him. First he offers an unvarnished, almost *geometrical description* of what he sees, which gradually *spirals inward* to become another personal dilation in external

reality" (Toulouse 208-09; my emphasis). The reality is Hawthorne's narrator's subjective response to what he sees "In three parts of the visible circle, whose centre is this spire." The fourth side is "the sea, stretching away towards a viewless boundary" (42). The narrator's perspective is that of a surveyor's, indicated by the first lines of the first three paragraphs of this brief sketch. The line of sight ascends in the first paragraph, his eyes upon the heavens and the clouds above the spire. Gauging both depth and breadth in the second paragraph, the narrator defines himself: "Hitherward . . . on the verge of the harbour . . . is a town; and over it am I, a watchman, all-heeding and unheeded" (43). As the rest of the sketch depicts, the narrator as watchman is as much a fiction as the possibility of his becoming an eidolon. By imposing the critiques he does on what he sees below, and by allowing the expressions and actions of those he sees to affect him to the degree they do, the narrator is examining himself more than watching others. Ultimately, it is not simply that "Paul Pry . . . fears any overwhelming connection to his sights" (Toulouse 209), but that he understands the results of being an eidolon, a "spiritualized Paul Pry . . . none of these things are possible; and if I would know the interior of brick walls, or the mystery of human bosoms, I can but guess" (43).

The beginning of the third paragraph orients the view introduced in the second: "Yonder is a fair street, extending both north and south" (43). With the narrator, the reader's attention and interest are drawn to what the narrator "sees." As with the transitions between the previous paragraphs, what is seen

is what is felt, and what is felt is avoided. Those sights, oriented by his position in the center of the circle, startle him into abandoning the possibility of accepting the responsibilities of association, moving his sight outward again, onto a new scene. As he follows the path of the "fine young man of twenty," whose "pensive air" might be attributable to "doubt . . . debt . . . love . . . or [his] striv[ing] to be melancholy and gentlemanlike," the narrator allows the possibilities to remain unanswered, "bid[ding] him farwell, for the present," for from an opened door "come two ladies . . . arrayed for a summer ramble" (43). Once the chances of eye contact have passed, the narrator allows himself to survey another scene.

The shift from the young people's strolling to the scene of commerce at the wharf provides both a "busy contrast" between leisure and work and the opportunity to work in a description that diverts the narrator's attention outward once again, to the possibilities of trade and the lives of the traders. His speculations, however, arrive at no conclusion, giving rise to the abrupt statement: "But I bestow too much of my attention in this quarter" (44). The narrator's sentiments concerning the scene of labor he describes are exemplified in the distinction between his activity and theirs: "Business evidently has its centre there, and many a man is wasting the summer afternoon in labor and anxiety, in losing riches, or in gaining them, when he would be wiser to flee away to some pleasant country village, or shaded lake in the forest, or wild and cool sea-beach" (44). Or a church-steeple. The

narrator's suggestions favor the liminoid experience over sociation, when "profane relations may be discontinued [and] former rights and obligations are suspended" (Turner, *Theatre* 27).

His attention moves back to the young ramblers of the previous paragraphs, the digression providing the time for the young ladies to meet the young man, who continues with them. The affinity of the narrator with the "melancholy and gentlemanlike" young man is iterated through the narrator's satisfaction with the young man's "placing himself on the inner side of the pavement, nearest the Venus to whom I—enacting, on a steeple-top, the part of Paris on the top of Ida—adjudged the golden apple" (44-45). The choice of myths with which to analogize the action of this scene is interesting for a number of reasons. In becoming Paris, the narrator takes on the burden of Paris's choice—which eventually causes the destruction in the Trojan Wars. Many years pass between Paris's abandonment on top of the highest mountain on Crete, the legend of the golden apple of discord and the consequences of Paris's choice of goddess. All that time is conflated in this scene, which gives way to another scene suggestive of warfare and tragedy, the three processions. The narrator's identification with Paris and the young gentleman allows him the fantasy of god-like selection, but without the negative consequences of the choice; these are the purview of the young gentleman. All the narrator must do is move his sight-line to the "two streets, converging at right angles towards my watch-tower" (45), and in changing his view, he strengthens his liminoid

status.

Perhaps the richest section of this sketch is the one describing the three processions. Whether read as the actual depiction of the life cycle and the sacrosanctity of funereal images or as an allegorical rendering of the power of the "King of Terrors," the possibility of reading the processions as forms of social organization and conflict remains viable in its own right. Ryan has documented "The parade [as standing] out in the chronicles of American public life as the characteristic genre of nineteenth-century civic performance. . . . The parade presents historians with a kind of cultural performance from which anthropologists have extracted rich meaning" (132).

Using spatial forms as directional markers, Hawthorne begins this central paragraph by bringing "two streets, converging at right angles toward my watch-tower" into focus for the purpose of commenting on his "distinguish[ing] three different processions" (45). Ryan's distinction between "parade" and "procession" is an important one, especially for my purposes here. "The term *parade*," she states, "refers to that ritualized, collective movement through the streets that took a distinctive form in nineteenth-century American cities." Its characteristics included "separate marching units, each representing a preestablished social identity . . . enrolled a large portion of the population," and had the quality of "aimlessness, or lack of plot, so to speak." It is a "species of procession, with ancient and geographically widespread antecedents." Processions are "mobile pageants . . . draped in classic

symbolism and surrounded by public drama and communal festivity. . . . [T]he early Republic . . . had not yet acquired the stream-line characteristics of a parade, nor did it occupy the center of ceremonial time and space" (134-35).

Hawthorne's three processions comprise three stages of the life cycle: those of the young boys who are following the mature soldiers, both of which approach and avoid the funeral procession. Toulouse's finds that in this scene "the narrator gropes toward an allegorical awareness in which maturity and youth confront the universal dilemma of age and dissolution" (211). There is more to it than such a reserved and generalized cast of thought. When the distance between all three processions and the narrator is explored, the two "living" bands, being briefly but curiously conflated with the aid of distance, suggest a much more personal and animated subtext.

The first procession is

a proud array of voluntary soldiers in bright uniform, resembling, from the height whence I look down, the painted veterans that garrison the windows of a toy shop. And yet, it stirs my heart; their regular advance, their nodding plumes, the sun-flash on their bayonets and musket-barrels, the roll of their drums ascending past me, and the fife ever and anon piercing through—these things have wakened a warlike fire, peaceful though I be. (45)

The narrator's perspective controls these two sentences and succeeds in rendering artificial and inanimate the members of the first procession. Distance reduces "proud" men in "bright uniform" to tin soldiers as it ages the volunteers toward that of experienced veterans. But, more importantly, the perspective allows the narrator to participate and observe simultaneously, imposing his own

imagination, resulting in an ambiguity of emotion that obscures sensibility and prompts a shift of perspective, but not before eroticizing what he perceives. It is not the child-like image of tin toys that "stirs [his] heart," but the excitement that aggressive and phallic imagery—"their regular advance, their nodding plumes, the sun-flash on their bayonets and musket barrels, the roll of their drums . . . and the fife ever and anon piercing through"—that has "wakened a warlike fire, peaceful though I be" (45). I am suggesting that the narrator's resistance to identification with the soldiers is not derived from his peaceful opposition to their war-like ways, but from his fear of acknowledging the sexual aspects of these images, pushing the narrator away from watching the virile volunteers, and training his eyes on the boys tagging the first procession. From atop the church steeple, the narrator sees that,

Close to their rear marches a battalion of school-boys, ranging in crooked and irregular platoons, shouldering sticks, thumping a harsh and unripe clatter from an instrument of tin, and ridiculously aping the intricate manoeuvres of the foremost band. Nevertheless, as slight differences are scarcely perceptible from a church spire, one might be tempted to ask, 'Which are the boys?'—or rather, 'Which the men?' (45)

One might be tempted, but the answer is clear without asking the question. It is the group of school-boys that is "ranging" disorderly, not moving in "regular advance." They have "sticks" to shoulder, not "bayonets and musket-barrels." Their "instrument of tin" produces an "unripe clatter," not the piercing pulses of drum beats and fife notes. The visual and aural images do not contrast as much as they display the sexual aspects of maturation through

shape and sound. The narrator's acknowledgement of the transition from one life-stage to another is arrested by the two processions' confronting the funeral train. Ultimately, however, the immaturity of youth does merge with the experience of the volunteers, but the convergence is bewildering to the narrator. Men become toys, followed by boys who fail to become men, leaving the narrator, slightly perplexed, to ask who is who. But the question becomes moot when the next section of the paragraph comes into play.

But, leaving these, let us turn to the third procession, which, though sadder in outward show, may excite identical reflections in the thoughtful mind. It is a funeral. A hearse, drawn by a black and bony steed, and covered by a dusty pall; two or three coaches rumbling over the stones, their drivers half asleep; a dozen of careless mourners in their every day attire; such was not the fashion of our fathers, when they carried a friend to his grave. There is now no doleful clang of the bell, to proclaim sorrow to the town. Was the King of Terrors more awful in those days than in our own, that wisdom and philosophy have been able to produce this change? Not so. Here is a proof that he retains his proper majesty. The military men, and the military boys, are wheeling round the corner, and meet the funeral full in the face. Immediately, the drum is silent, all but the tap that regulates each simultaneous foot-fall. The soldiers yield the path to the dusty hearse, and unpretending train, and the children quit their ranks, and cluster on the sidewalks, with timorous and instinctive curiosity. (45)

The descriptions of the vivacity of the volunteers and the playful mimicry of the boys comes to a complete halt in the face of the "King of Terrors." The narrator's detached associations with the young gentleman and the Golden Apple myth give way to the processions in much the same way, and for the same basic reason, as the narrator's focusing on the trail of the hearse: as a passive observer, enticed and titillated by the actions of those onto whom he

can only dare to impose his own imagination, he is forced by his own timidity to move away from confrontation, to retreat by selecting a new, less threatening object, and therefore redirects his own fantasy. The rapidity with which his gaze moves from objects that reflect his repressed sexuality to that which suggests our ubiquitous end, is staggeringly short. Yet, the net effect of these constrained shifts in focus is extended by his static position atop the steeple: here, the narrator can entertain his fanciful, fetishistic, optative mood for as long a period as is desired, or is needed to assess or arrive at an understanding of his own position once he does return to the community he is studying.

Turner writes that

In the so-called "high culture" of complex societies, liminoid is not only removed from a *rite de passage* context, it is also "individualized." The solitary artist creates the liminoid phenomena, the collectivity *experiences* collective liminal symbols. This does not mean that the maker of liminoid symbols, ideas, images, etc., does so *ex nihilo*; it only means that he is privileged to make free with his social heritage in a way impossible to members of cultures in which the liminal process is to a large extent the sacrosanct. (*Theatre* 52).

The funeral as a life-cycle ritual is universal in meaning, if not in content and form. As a method of making the transition of life to death as seamless as possible for the survivors, the funeral is a ritual process that remains a liminal phenomenon: "centrally integrated into the total social process . . . [its] symbols having a common intellectual and emotional meaning for all the members of the group. [Liminal phenomena] reflect, on probing, the history of

the group, *i.e.*, its collective experience, over time." Not so liminoid phenomena, which "develop apart from the central economic and political processes, along the margins. . . . Their symbols are closer to the personal-psychological than to the 'objective-social' typological pole" (Turner, *Theatre* 54).

The progression from liminal to liminoid is represented in the description of the funeral procession and its encounter with the volunteers and boys. The outward show of dignity in this particular procession is a personal affront to the narrator. The memory of the deceased is profaned by the condition of the hearse ("dusty"), the horse pulling it ("black and bony"), the coaches' drivers ("half asleep"), and the mourners ("careless . . . in their every day attire"). The absence of the "doleful clang of the bell, to proclaim sorrow to the town" (45), as an expression of the power of death, the dignity for the funeral rite and the honor of the deceased himself is displaced by the movement of the men and boys. What was once "the fashion of our fathers, when they carried a friend to his grave" (45), an expression of liminality in its role of ritual process, has been supplanted by a liminoid phenomenon, more "idiosyncratic [and] quirky," as Turner would have it. Death is no less "awful" for those below the steeple than it was for the narrator's forbears; the demonstration of its recognition has changed. And this change is indicative of the American cultural conflict that occurs when attempts are made to define the terms "individual" and "American," and the boundary they share. Just as the funeral causes the

volunteers to "yield the path to the dusty hearse . . . and the children to quit their ranks" (45), the narrator, after describing the church-yard scene, is forced, by the significance of the event and its mitigated solemnity, to both contemplate that significance and dismiss its immediacy by literally raining on the parade.

As the "lightning glimmers" and the "thunder rattles" while the coffin is interred, the narrator's mind is diverted to wondering about the melancholy young man and the two girls. The imminent rain causes a shift in the narrator's focus from the funeral to his aborted, associative dalliance, and is effected with ease by expanding his view while fixing the moment.

How various are the situations of the people covered by the roofs beneath me, and how diversified are the events at this moment befalling them! The new-born, the aged, the dying, the strong in life, the recently dead, are in the chambers of these many mansions. The full of hope, the happy, the miserable, and the desperate, dwell together within the circle of my glance. In some of the houses over which my eyes roam so coldly, guilt is entering into hearts that are still tenanted by a debased and trodden virtue,—guilt is on the very edge of commission, and the impending deed might be averted; guilt is done, and the criminal wonders if it be irrevocable. There are broad thoughts struggling in mind, and, were I able to give them distinctness, they would make their way in eloquence. Lol the rain-drops are descending. (46)

The conclusion of this heavily freighted paragraph is of a piece with the transitional rhetoric Hawthorne uses in "Sights." "I will look no more" (42), "I can but guess" (43), "I may look elsewhere" (44), "But I bestow too much of my attention in this quarter" (44): all of these paragraph beginnings and endings are examples of the narrator's unwillingness to move from a position

of remove, one characterized by a lack of responsibility. His authorial control follows the pattern of his vision: he cuts and runs when confronted with acknowledging the connections between himself and what he sees. His vantage point is panoptic, yet he is unwilling to exercise any influence that is capable of inscribing a lasting relevance to what he imagines and what he sees. Although he recognizes the complete spectrum of life-stages, all the possibilities of emotional fulfillment, and the universal condition of guilt, these thoughts are, ultimately, greater than his powers of utterance. It is not that, as Toulouse proposes, "An awareness of the shared human reality of death frees him to enter into an imaginative identification with others" (211). The narrator no more identifies with what he imagines than he is capable of accommodating the "broad thoughts struggling in [his] mind" (46).

"I love not my station here aloft, in the midst of the tumult which I am powerless to direct or quell," (47) says the narrator, after watching all those he has commented on flee the rainstorm. It is not only the thunder and lightning that create his apparent dissatisfaction with his position atop the steeple. Indeed, the narrator has voiced his dismay from the very first word of the sketch. Within his "visible circle" (42) are scenes of birth and death, youth and old age, leisure and commerce, love and war, all enticing but none he deems accessible. "The oblique rays of the sun" (43) fall on the melancholy young man and the rival to Old Vincentio alike. All live and die "within the circle of [his] glance" (46). The narrator claims to see all of this without being seen,

and as Toulouse puts it, he "may not want to see as [he does], yet [he] may be trapped in [his way] of seeing" (215). That is certainly one possibility, but a more likely explanation is one that removes Hawthorne even further from his eidolon-voiced forebears Addison and Steele and Irving.

The "Sights" narrator chooses to remain aloft and removed. This is perhaps the perfect position for the liminoid character, who is "betwixt and between," as Turner would put it, one who is in the process of coming to terms with the conflicting factions and sentiments within a sociocultural system. It is a narrative stance that mirrors the "manifestations of a cultural anxiety central to the rhetoric of Jacksonian democracy in the 1820s, 1830s, and beyond." This being the case, for Toulouse, "the troubled eidolons . . . become less the unique and alienated Hawthornian artists of most critics than the image of a dilemma shared by their countrymen" (215).

Unlike his predecessors, Hawthorne lived in an America of "democratic institutions [that] could offer images of possibility or progress or endless self-making, [but] they could not project a stable image of a self created, completed, and living among other completed selves. Unable to project a fixed image of the 'free' individual, they were equally incapable of defining the individual's association with an outer world seen as equally in flux" (Toulouse 216). In the constant shifting of social relations, the process of reassessing one's place and purpose vis-à-vis one's goals and those of one's social system, there is the time for employing a personal or cultural ritual symbology for the

purposes of reassessing that position and those aims. In the Turnerian scheme of social drama, this "time-out" is the liminal. If Hawthorne's role as artist was "to represent the psychological and social complexities involved in defining and sustaining personal and communal relationships in a fluid and democratic world" (Toulouse 217), there is no better narrative stance than the embodiment of the liminoid perspective to seek those definitions, for within this portion of the social drama, the writer, and the reader, perform the rituals of "manifesting ourselves to ourselves, and of declaring where power and meaning lie and how they are distributed" (Turner, *Theatre* 78).

Hawthorne expresses himself neither in terms of emotional investment or divestment but in the power relations that narrative perspective makes material through an arbitrage of spatial imagery. In this early sketch, the narrator's "most desirable mode of existence might be that of a spiritualized Paul Pry, hovering invisible round man and woman, witnessing their deeds, searching into their hearts, borrowing brightness from their felicity, and shade from their sorrow, and retaining no emotion peculiar to himself." Atop the spire, he is the "watchman, all-heeding, and unheeded" (43). Meaning in the sketch inheres in just this perspective, one made possible by the the process of liminality. Rather than seeing social change as a concept and set of actions to avoid or master, Hawthorne's narrator in "Sights" subsumes the "various . . . situations of the people covered by the roofs beneath [him] . . . within the circle of [his] glance" (46). Hawthorne is effectively suspending the temporal

progression of his sketch by spatializing the liminoid quality of his narration. From the narrator's point of view, the demonstration of power is not in the activity of the townspeople, no matter how analogous to or metaphoric of the changes taking place in early nineteenth-century New England. Power resides in the perspective that affords the narrator the possibilities of sociation and the option to reassess the tentative meanings he has derived from his perspective.

* * *

Whether one takes a psychoanalytic, historical, or allegorical approach to "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," the tale has at its bottom Robin's self-reflexivity, the slow and uncomfortable manifestation of himself to himself. What begins ostensibly as a search for an uncle is, by the end of the story, the discovery of a self. I do not wish to argue the merits of the triad of accepted readings; Crews and Leverenz champion a Freudian interpretation that is as convincing as that of the historicists' take à la Pearce and Colacurcio. Anyone who is acquainted with Daniel Hoffman's "Yankee Bumpkin and Scapegoat King" and Q.D. Leavis' "Hawthorne as Poet" has heard the strongest voices supporting the "rites of initiation" reading of the tale. The critical commentary on this story continues to grow with T. Walker Herbert, Jr.'s "Doing Cultural Work," demonstrating the role that Cultural Studies as a critical vantage point performs by combining gendered, historical, and social theory perspectives. And John N. Miller's reading, that "'My Kinsman, Major Molineux' is a tale of a youth who, while happening onto and into a well-orchestrated political

rebellion, also experiences a revolt against his own conceptual ordering of experience" (53), is a strong argument for historicizing Hawthorne's pagentry while charting the interaction between Robin's interior rationality and the exterior insurrection.¹⁰ Each of these perspectives has its value. In the balance of this chapter, however, I intend to offer the social drama as an additional vantage point from which to approach this tale, and demonstrate the relevance of Turner's paradigm not only to reading "Kinsman" but to many of Hawthorne's fictions.

As discussed above, Hawthorne's narrative perspective in "Sights from a Steeple" is one that exemplifies the ludic, subjunctive voice of the liminoid actor. Yet the shifts in perspective that the "Sights" narrator employs are not intended as "playful," as a mode of interaction with the objects in his sight or with the reader. The liminoid position for this narrator, as it is for Coverdale, is a method of combining self-revelation with self-protection. It acts as a buffer against interaction, a method of suspending action in order to reassess and renegotiate one's position. While reticence is a quality that the "Sights" narrator shares with Robin Molineux, reticence is not behaviorally synonymous with liminality. The liminal space Robin enters is defined in spatial terms through the narrator's use of angular descriptions that take on an imagistic currency as the tale proceeds. In other words, the rituals that Robin undergoes are increasingly subject to a symbolism of angles that result in carrying Robin and the reader through the process of ascribing the character with an altered

set of socio-cultural roles. If we are to take Robin to be representative of not only youth but citizen, Robin's ostensible quest for his kinsman becomes an analogue for the colonist's desire for redefinition as independent from the crown. While Turner states that both "tribal initiation [and] . . . religious movements . . . exhibit a 'liminal' character, in that they arise in times of radical social transition, when a society itself seems to be moving from one fixed state to another" (*Process* 133), I would add political change to the ritual processes partaking in liminality. From that vantage point, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" stands as a fiction detailing such a process. In reading the story as a narrative form of social drama, as a text that indicates the processes of breach, crisis, redressive action, and some form of reaggregation or schism, the affinities between Hawthornian narrative form and Turnerian paradigm should become evident.

"Whether it is a large affair," Turner writes,

like the Dreyfuss Case or Watergate, or a struggle for village headmanship, a social drama first manifests itself as a breach of a norm, the infraction of a rule of morality, law, custom or etiquette in some public arena. This breach may be deliberately, or even calculatedly, contrived by a person or party disposed to demonstrate or challenge entrenched authority—for example, the Boston Tea Party—or it may emerge from a scene of heated feelings. (*Theatre* 69-70)

Readers of the tale come first to the prefatory paragraph describing the relationship between colonial governors and the populous as resulting, for the governors, in "imprison[ment] . . . [a] musket ball . . . [and] continual bickerings with the House of Representatives" (68). The introductory paragraph serves

to ground the fiction that follows it in as strong a fact-based history as can be demonstrated in so short a statement. Historical criticism has shown that Hawthorne's summary of Colonial events is an accurate "paraphrase from Thomas Hutchinson's *History of Massachusetts Bay*, offer[ing] one historical perspective for [Hawthorne's] readers and a partial framework for the ensuing events" (Miller 51). Of further interest is Roy Harvey Pearce's detailed documentation linking Hawthorne's Major Molineux "with the real one . . . William Molineux, a well-to-do radical Boston trader, an organizer and leader of anti-Loyalist mobs, member of the Boston Revolutionary Committee of Correspondence, one of those who are said to have been at the Boston Tea Party" (140, 137). As Pearce tells it, "By . . . Hawthorne's time, there seems to have been a Molineux legend" that painted William Molineux to be both an anti-Loyalist and a Loyalist sympathizer" (138). The confusion, or merging, of views on who Molineux was and what he represented results, in terms of Hawthorne's story, in the "transform[ation of] the Revolutionary Molineux into the Loyalist Molineux. . . . [I]f we . . . connect the real Molineux with Hawthorne's we can know that through Robin the two are one and that what he inevitably helps destroy and drive away is himself, or part of himself" (Pearce 140). I'll have further comment on this inevitability in my discussion of the form Robin's reaggregation into the Boston community takes. For the moment, what is important to recognize is that the purpose to which Hawthorne merges history with legend within his preface paragraph serves as

the narration of the breach phase of the social drama. "Once [the breach is] visible, it can hardly be revoked," states Turner. The historical record sufficiently and accurately represented, Hawthorne can get into his tale with no further demands for truthful grounding in fact. Working around such a requirement for authenticity, he asks the reader "to dispense with an account of the train of circumstances, that had caused much temporary inflammation of the popular mind" (68).

In the social drama, after the breach is recognized,

Whatever the case, a mounting crisis follows, a momentous juncture or turning point in the relations between components of a social field—at which seeming peace becomes overt conflict and covert antagonisms become visible. . . . The phase of crisis exposes the pattern of current factional struggle within the relevant social group . . . and beneath it there becomes slowly visible the less plastic, more durable, but nevertheless gradually changing basic social structure, made up of relations that are relatively constant and consistent. (*Theatre* 70)

In order to shift the crisis from one of overt historical representation to a tale of self-discovery, Hawthorne ferries us, along with Robin, across the river, the threshold of the story proper. It is important to note here Turner's use of grammatical terminology which informs the process of liminality and bridges the theory of social drama with Hawthorne's narrative method. In preliminal rites of separation the initiand is moved from the indicative quotidian social structure into the subjunctive antistructure of the liminal process and is then returned, transformed by liminal experiences, by the rites of aggregation to social structural participation in the indicative mood (Turner, *Theatre* 82-83). In

removing his readers from the harsh reality that historical summary relates, and himself away from the constrictions that the indicative voice of history demands, Hawthorne moves us into the familiar liminal territory of his romance setting: "It was near nine o'clock of a moonlight evening, when a boat crossed the ferry with a single passenger" (68).

From this moment until Robin is befriended by the old gentleman, the reader gains an indirect understanding of, if not the effects of the breach, at least the particular manifestations of the crisis. Robin's trek through the labyrinthian streets of Boston, while liminal, as will become evident, also reflects the nature of the crisis enacted by the anti-Loyalists, and suggests the breach that has occurred before we, as readers, enter the story. Moreover, there are two social dramas unfolding simultaneously in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." On the one hand, Robin is, for all intents, partaking in a *rite de passage* that necessarily entails his separation from one status and his indoctrination into a new set of social values and roles. On the other, the anti-Loyalists are partaking in a political ritual that is at once divorced from Robin as it incorporates him. Robin is both a spectator of a ritual process of the group he is about to join and the subject of that process.

Observing Robin through the ferryman's eyes, the reader meets Robin dressed in homespun and hand-me-downs. Even his currency is less valuable than that circulating in town. Robin's appearance is distinctive as that of the country bumpkin come to town: his "three-cornered hat, which in its better

days had perhaps sheltered the graver brow of the lad's father . . . [and his] heavy cudgel, formed of an oak sapling, and retaining a part of the hardened root," (69) can be recognized as the crown and scepter of a youth who, though intent on using the dignity and station accorded his kinsman, is actually the initiate undergoing separation from one set of cultural conditions and taking on, willingly or not, the obligations and characteristics of a different status.

As the story progresses, Robin simultaneously enacts the dual role of "representative American, first as witness, then as participant, in a cultural-political experience of archetypal significance to our national identity . . . [and] also a representative young man who must come to terms with his feelings about his father, about the past, about authority, in order to pass from adolescence into maturity" (Hoffman 117). By conflating these two roles and moving the character into a liminal space, Hawthorne is preparing to enact the ritual processes that Robin will undergo in order to demonstrate to his contemporary readers, also "young Americans," both the historical (civic) and maturational (personal) paths toward independence.

Atop Robin's "head was a three-cornered hat" that, having "sheltered the graver brow of the lad's father," has a personal historic significance. As a triangular crown indicating his being an "evidently country-bred" representative of as yet undetermined, but likely Loyalist political leanings, it joins with the "sexangular piece of parchment valued at three pence" (69) required to meet the ferryman's fare, in beginning a series of spatial descriptions that encode the

youth's transition from one status to another. Hawthorne creates a subjunctive, dream-like quality to the narration from the second paragraph until Robin's colloquy with the gentleman-clergyman, which calls attention to the angular objects and perspectives in terms of fixing Robin's evening in Boston in a state of liminality for both Robin and the other characters.

Robin, in his attempt to orient himself, "looked up and down the narrow street, scrutinizing the small and mean wooden buildings" that gave way to a "wider" street with "houses more respectable in their appearance" (69). His perspective broader by dint of the breadth of his path, the objects of his gaze are described in more agreeable terms: "the houses [are] more respectable in their appearance," and more likely to be his uncle's home than the "low hovel" he first encounters. Hawthorne, in broadening Robin's perspective, brings Robin's intentions in line with his perspective: the houses on the wider street, according more with the image Robin's holds of the Major's status, reassure Robin that he is on the right path.

The first person Robin approaches for direction disrupts his mood but does not deplete his optimism. Hawthorne's description of the man's gait and speech: "He carried a long and polished cane, which he struck down perpendicularly before him, at every step; and at regular intervals he uttered two successive hems, of a peculiarly solemn and sepulchral intonation," (70) indicates an affected, self-conscious presentation of self, a practiced pattern, regimented much like a marching band leader's step. More telling, though, are

the two hems that intrude into the old man's speech. If one takes the verbal tic as a way to pause and reassess a statement made or about to be made, the "hem, hem" bracketed by "authority" and at no other place in this utterance suggest that, at his core, the old man's authority is subject to continual challenge. As Colacurcio points out, "Quite probably he is the Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives: some such function is comically suggested by his continual hem-hem clearing of the throat, as if to deliver a speech" (172).

Miller makes a strong case for "The situation Robin encounters . . . [being] a revolt disguised and erupting as carnivalesque pagentry" (52). Status reversal is one of the key elements of such displays, something Hawthorne was well aware of from his readings in Strutt's *Sports and Pastimes of England*. It is also one of two forms that liminality takes in social dramas, the second being rituals of status elevation. Taking both social dramas of the story into account, that of Robin's initiation and that of the political transformation that surrounds it, there is ample evidence in the story that each form informs the other, making Robin increasingly aware of his elevation from boy to man, from rural to urban dweller, as the pageant of status reversal and political revolt unfolds during the evening. Turner puts it thus:

I wish to distinguish two main types of liminality . . . first, the liminality that characterizes *rituals of status elevation*, in which the ritual subject or novice is being conveyed irreversibly from a lower to a higher position in an institutionalized system of such positions. Secondly . . . persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise

ritual authority over their superiors; and they, in their turn, must accept with good will their ritual degradation. Such rites may be described as *rituals of status reversal*. They are often accompanied by robust verbal and nonverbal behavior, in which inferiors revile and even physically maltreat superiors. (*Process* 167)

I am not suggesting that what the Major undergoes is in any way ludic or voluntary. My point is simply that, within the conflation of the two social dramas that comprise the story, the two types of liminal rituals also become enmeshed in each other, leading a figure such as the sepulchral old man to adopt the guise and role of what Miller calls "carnavalesque pagentry" but certainly without the acceptance or good will of a superior such as Major Molineux. One problem of reading this story as a sort of ritualized carnival, where roles are reversed, authority placed into the hands of the governed, and neatly retrieved when the party is over, is that the fiction takes on the impossible task of both making allegory literal and history allegorical. The carnivalesque guise here is a way of dampening the relation of the overt and destructive revolutionary forces at work in Hawthorne's vision of political upheaval in the 18th century. If one considers Major Molineux to be an unwilling participant in the pageant, one must also question whether it is the reader's quest for Robin's identity or Robin's for his own that has us interpreting Robin's actions as comprising a *rite de passage* from boy to man. Robin's "'initiation' is not into confident, unconditional maturity, but into the equivocal manifestations of emotions of revolt" (Miller 52-53).

Such a murky mixture of intent, expectation and performance is echoed

in the labyrinth imagery Hawthorne sets out for the reader and Robin following the exchange outside the barber's window. Willing to recognize his choice of guide as nothing more than a mistake, and a learning experience in that, "'You will be wiser in time, friend Robin[,] [he] now became entangled in a succession of crooked and narrow streets, which crossed each other, and meandered no great distance from the water-side. . . . [N]umerous signs . . . informed him that he was near the centre of business. But the streets were empty, the shops were closed, and lights were visible only in the second stories of a few dwelling-houses" (70-71). The symbolic properties of the labyrinth extend back millenia, and Hawthorne's extensive knowledge in Greek mythology supplies the imagery of an incoherent grid of streets with more substance than mere dream-scape would posit. Considering the dark imagery that the tavern takes on, it is not insignificant that, in light of the lore, Hawthorne would lead Robin through a maze and toward a tomb so that he might escape it and be reborn.

Jill Purce describes the labyrinth as an extension of the spherical vortex, or spiral shape.

As the labyrinth creates and dissolves, expands and contracts, so it reveals and conceals. It is cosmos to those who know the way, and chaos to those who lose it. . . . The point or centre, in those labyrinths depicted in the pavement floors of many medieval cathedrals, is sometimes (as it originally was at Chartres) a depiction of Theseus and the Minotaur. The symbolism is that of the 'original' Cretan labyrinth—an initiatory hero test, the overcoming of death at the centre, and a subsequent return or rebirth into life, a regeneration on a higher winding. For, as it is necessary to be born from the womb to see this world, only he

who is born from himself sees the other world. 'He who is not twice born will not ascend to the Kingdom of Heaven.' (29)

Coming into the tavern scene, Robin indeed follows a path that both "reveals and conceals." He happens upon "the broad countenance of a British hero swinging before the door of an inn . . . [and finds] a party at supper, round a well-furnished table." The maze of streets reveals a potential source for discovering his kinsman, but once inside, "the murmur of voices, and fumes of tobacco" conceal within the "long and low apartment, with oaken walls . . . [a] number of persons, the larger part of whom appeared to be mariners, or in some way connected with the sea . . . [and] Others, who had the aspect of men who lived by regular and laborious handicraft" (71), none of whom were of the station Robin judged the Major to be. The only ones with whom Robin could feel "a sort of brotherhood . . . were two or three sheepish countrymen" who were brown-bagging dinner in "the darkest corner of the room" (72).

The center of this labyrinth is the public room with the "Nicotian atmosphere," containing the nightmarish devil-figure with "eyes [that] glowed . . . like fire in a cave." As the innkeeper engages the stranger ingratiatingly, Robin becomes the center of the labyrinth: "All eyes were now turned on the country lad, standing in the door, in his worn three-cornered hat" (72). Mentioning his kinsman for the second time, Robin suffers the mocking derision of the innkeeper and the other conspirators. Robin's voicing of his kinsman's name can be considered, on the part of the townsmen, part of a status reversal ritual. In taking on the association of his kinsman, he is unwittingly

participating in the incipient events, gaining the allegiance of those strangers who would outwardly cast him aside. This is the second occasion that Robin has been told by an older, male authority figure to be on his way. To challenge the power of authority twice is to engage in an initiatory test that is part of a status elevation ritual process. The fact remains that Robin, outside his element, alone and growing increasingly distanced from his goal, remains undeterred from his search, and demonstrates the fusion of the two rituals of liminality I am depicting here. Turner states that "Life-crisis rites and rituals of induction into office are almost always rites of status elevation; calendric rites and rites of group crisis may sometimes be rites of status reversal" (*Process* 169). This story demonstrates the complication of fusing both, in Robin's attempted status elevation taking place within a larger group crisis of status reversal.

Robin's continuing on his way, on the course of his labyrinthian journey, takes him from the Nicotian atmosphere of the tomb-like tavern back out onto "the corner of a narrow lane, [opening onto] a spacious street [from] whence the ringing of a bell announced the hour of nine" (73). To follow Purce's logic, Robin has survived his initiatory test and has been reborn into a higher winding of the labyrinth's path. All of his activities have occurred within less than half an hour, according to the indicative flow of narrative events. But Robin, after the prefatory paragraph, is lodged in a liminal frame that reduces him to an indeterminate position. "[For] individuals and groups, social life is a type of

dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality. The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness" (Turner, *Process* 97). I doubt that Hawthorne overlooked the minute chronology of events in his merging all these para-fantastical events within an impossible time-frame. Such a condensation promotes the dream-like quality of this romantic tale. Hawthorne anticipates Turner's sense of temporal and physical remove being part of the liminal experience of ritual participation.

The beginnings of "Hawthorne[']s] career-long association between carnival pagentry and dream or fantasy" are evident upon Robin's emergence from the tavern (Miller 54). Those he encounters in his continued search for the Major are "gay and gallant figures," quite unlike the denizens of the tavern. "Embroidered garments . . . enormous periwigs, gold-laced hats . . . glided past him and dazzled his optics. Travelled youths, imitators of the European fine gentlemen of the period, trod jauntily along, half dancing to the fashionable tunes which they hummed, and making poor Robin ashamed of his quiet and natural gait" (74). All that he sees is beyond his immediate experience, making new demands on his provincial demeanor. If he is to profit from this experience, in terms of a ritual of status elevation, he must accept this sense of disorientation, for the "liminality of life crisis . . . humbles and generalizes the aspirant to higher structural status" (Turner, *Process* 170).

Upon recognizing "the approach of some one, who struck down a cane

on the flag-stones at every step, uttering, at regular intervals, two sepulchral hems," Robin flees to "some other part of the town . . . [with] his patience . . . low [, feeling] more fatigued from his rambles since he crossed the ferry, than from his journey of several days on the other side" (74). His possible refuge takes the shape of a "dainty little figure [with] . . . round arms . . . [a] scarlet petticoat [that] jutted out over a hoop, as if she were standing in a balloon. . . her face . . . oval and pretty" (75). Whatever else one makes of the role of the prostitute in this tale, she is the only person in the story who is described with circular imagery. There is a connection here between the dominant geometric metaphors of the romances and a distinction here between angularity and circularity. In *The Scarlet Letter*, both Hester and Pearl are repeatedly drawn in circular terms, while in *The Blithedale Romance*, Coverdale's observations are dominated by angular images. It is Clifford Pyncheon, a male described so often with typically female characteristics, who is to subsume both circle and square when described. This is not meant to reduce Hawthorne's use of geometric imagery to such a stark opposition between angular/male and circular/female, but to generate further discussion of the possible interpretations we might derive from Hawthorne's use of spatial images.

In light of the dream motif that has been widely accepted as basic to reading this tale, the prostitute/temptress remains a tantalizing alternative to what Robin has experienced already on the Boston side of the river. When

conversing with her, Robin's weariness gives way to expressing himself with a "plaintive and winning" voice. However, he remains wary of the woman, whose dark hair, sweet voice and liberal eye suggest that she may not have spoken "Gospel truth" (75) concerning Major Molineux. In a brief but telling scene, Hawthorne re-infuses the anti-Papist political argument of the Anglican church into a story that obscures its overt religious, typological allegory with the intricate linkage of Robin's quest and political insurrection. As he moves from the tomb-like tavern back onto the labyrinthian streets, his resolve fluctuates. Rather than an additional challenge to male authority, Hawthorne poses the ambiguous siren as Robin's next test. But "the Major's housekeeper," not Robin, succumbs first to the next authority figure, the watchman. Just when "the slender waisted woman" had "drawn [Robin's] half-willing footsteps nearly to the threshold," his fantasy about to be realized, "she vanished speedily," (76) leaving Robin to the threats of the watchman. Brought back to some semblance of reality by this exchange, Robin can now resist "the sparkle of a saucy eye [and] a round arm beckon[ing] to him" (76-77).

Robin "roamed desperately, and at random, through the town, almost ready to believe that a spell was on him. . . . The streets lay before him, strange and desolate" (77). In the central portion of the tale, Hawthorne places Robin at once as psychically far as he has yet been from reaching his goal and physically directly upon the spot where his ostensible goal will be realized.

Degraded and humiliated by bands of "individuals in outlandish attire," Robin again calls upon his own "perseverance" to muster the strength to now demand knowledge of his kinsman's dwelling. The tempting dream of the prostitute gives way to the grotesque nightmare of the man from the inn returning with an even more frightening face, now that his "complexion had undergone . . . a two-fold change" (78) to red and black.

Nevertheless, this is the only person to answer Robin directly—"Watch here an hour, and Major Molineux will pass by"—he "seated himself . . . upon the steps of the church-door, resolving to wait the appointed time for his kinsman's appearance" (78). At this point, the affinities between Hawthorne's romance and the narrative settings in which liminality is possible are highlighted. Indeed, as Miller notes, "The moonlight . . . which receives prominent mention in the tale, adds to the phantasmal quality of Robin's perception. Like the protagonist's half-waking, half-dreaming mind, moonlight in Hawthorne's work often mediates objective reality and romance, imagination, or fantasy" (57).

Robin

threw his eyes along the street . . . and the moon, 'creating, like the imaginative power, a beautiful strangeness in familiar objects,' gave something of romance to the scene, that might not have possessed it in the light of day. The irregular, and often quaint architecture of the houses, some of whose roofs were broken into numerous little peaks; while others ascended, steep and narrow, into a little point; and others again were square . . . these matters engaged Robin's attention for awhile, and then began to grow wearisome. Next he endeavored to define the forms of distant objects, starting away with almost ghostly indistinctness, just as

his eye appeared to grasp them; and finally he took a minute survey of an edifice, which stood on the opposite side of the street, directly in front of the church-door, where he was stationed. It was a large square mansion, distinguished from its neighbor by a balcony, which rested on tall pillars, and by an elaborate Gothic window, communicating therewith. (78-79)

In this section, the angularity of the architecture becomes the focus of the initiand, who views it through the aura of the everpresent moonlight. Robin, alone and weary, is here very much like the narrator of "Sights from a Steeple" in that his surveying of his surroundings is an attempt to camouflage his disorientation and ineffectiveness from himself. Yet with Robin there is the additional glossing over of his inability to make rational sense of a highly irrational sequence of events. He uses his sense of sight to avoid contact with the truth that he claims he is after. If this is the case, Hawthorne is using the liminal positioning of both the reticent participant/observer and the third-person narrator to expose the irony behind Robin's repeated references to his own "shrewdness." It is, of course, the people Robin meets who are shrewd in their ability to draw Robin into witnessing his kinsman's humiliation.

Robin's isolation in front of the church-door has the effect of disrupting even further his sense that he can accomplish his mission. His thoughts move from the man made up as "a fiend of fire and a fiend of darkness" to the "irregular architecture . . . of the houses" to those deriving from his view through the "window-frame . . . of the church," finally imagining "how that evening of ambiguity and weariness had been spent by his father's household" (78, 79, 80). His thoughts moving from the bifurcated face of the devil to the

mishapen houses of the populous, to the church window to the image of his father's house generate a sense of loss and confusion that results in the cry, "Am I here, or there?" (80). Is he in dream or reality, Boston or his village, heaven or hell, is he anchored or adrift? Is he in some ritual of status elevation or reversal? In his attempt to orient himself, "he endeavored to fix his attention steadily upon the large edifice which he had surveyed before. But still his mind kept vibrating between fancy and reality; by turns, the pillars of the balcony lengthened into the tall, bare stems of pines, dwindled down to human figures, settled again in their true shape and size, and then commenced a new succession of changes" (80-81). Amid all this psychic disturbance, Hawthorne's visual descriptions are again charged with images of angularity.

In the preliminal rites of separation [Turner writes] the initiand is moved from the indicative quotidian social structure into the subjunctive antistructure of the liminal process and is then returned, transformed by liminal experiences, by the rites of reaggregation, to the social structural participation in the indicative mood. (*Theatre* 82-83)

As Robin is drawn out of his phantasmagorical hallucination, from his mind's oscillation between his interpretation of "fancy and reality," he moves from the dreamlike subjunctive experiences that have relied so heavily on terms of geometric forms, to the indicative mood of a linear narration of events that are grounded in both Robin's relation of his past and reason for being in Boston to the "gentleman in his prime," (81) and the narrator's verisimilar relation of the Major's ordeal. At the point where the kind gentleman enters the story, the narration moves from the subjunctive-liminal to the indicative-reaggregative.

Here also is where the two social dramas come closest to being one. Robin, who has undergone his trek through the labyrinth of confusion and fear, who has shed the bravado which undergirded his sense of shrewdness, has been coaxed by the participants of the pageant of revolt, to borrow Miller's phrase, into joining them. The search for identity in authority results in the the overturning of just that authority which had defined and continues to redefine Robin's identity.

"Whether juridical or ritual processes of redress are invoked against mounting crisis, the result is an increase in what one might call social or plural *reflexivity*, the ways in which a group tries to scrutinize, portray, understand, and then act on itself" (Turner, *Theatre* 75). This is the course "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" takes once the conversation between Robin and the gentleman begins. The series of questions and answers between the two works in such a way as to have the gentleman maintain his knowledge of the events that have been leading up to Robin's being shocked by the sight of the Major while also responding to Robin's queries, so that what had appeared unfamiliar to him before becomes, if not increasingly understandable, at least less threatening. Colacurcio makes a compelling argument for the friendly gentleman actually being the clergyman of the church from whose steps Robin witnesses his uncle's disgrace, and the gentleman's tone and indirectness would support that reading. But more important, "we are [not] all safe in assuming that the apparently friendly man who stands with Robin on the steps of the church,

witnessing his meeting with Uncle Molineux, is himself anything but an arch-conspirator" (Colacurcio 144). While this is highly plausible, the gentleman, in his responses, is neither directly for or against the pageant of revolt against Molineux, occupying a space similar to that of the narrator seated in Grandfather's chair. In this position, the gentleman can at once be an agent of reflexivity for Robin and the reader. In a sense, the gentleman is providing his own version of the redressive phase of this social drama, "in which feedback on crisis is provided . . . a liminal time, set apart from the ongoing business of quotidian life, when an interpretation . . . is constructed to give the appearance of sense and order to the events leading up to and constituting the crisis" (Turner, *Theatre* 75).

Prior to Major Molineux coming into Robin's sight, he watches "A mighty stream of people [empty] into the street . . . [and roll] slowly towards the church." Led by the man of "fierce and variegated countenance . . . wild figures in the Indian dress, and many fantastic shapes without a model, [give] the whole march a visionary air, as if a dream had broken forth from some feverish brain." At this moment, Robin "[has] an indefinite but uncomfortable idea, the he [is] himself to bear a part in the pagentry." At the leader's command, "the shouts and laughter of the people [die] away, and there remains only a universal hum, nearly allied to silence" (84). As Robin witnesses his uncle's abasement, the Major confers upon him "the bitterest pang of all . . . [knowledge of] the foul disgrace of a head that had grown grey in honor" (84-

85). In a word, maturity. In this one brief moment, Robin, as does the reader, comes to understand that it has been the political ritual that has occasioned his own step into adulthood, and it has been Robin's *rite de passage* that has occasioned a humiliation of the mob's victim beyond their wildest dreams. And with one brief shout of laughter, "the loudest there" (86), Robin is made part of the mob. The indeterminacy of the ending leaves the form of reaggregation open to the reader's determination. The friendly gentleman does not refuse Robin's request to be led out of the city once more, but asks him to wait "Some few days" (87), and decide, after considering the political changes that have taken place, whether or not to employ his newly recognized shrewdness and stay. That the rite of status reversal has been effected is demonstrated by the gentleman's unequivocal statement that Robin will be "without the help of [his] kinsman" (87). That the rite of status elevation has been effected is shown through the gentleman's offer to Robin to "remain with us" (87). That these rites of liminality are constantly being effected is suggested by the indeterminate ending with which Hawthorne leaves the reader.

Colacurcio begins summing up his discussion of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" by suggesting that readers, upon reaching the end of the story, "respond . . . by reformulating the political significance and reemphasizing the human pain from our own" subjective perspectives.

[R]eversing our sense of sign and signified, we may want to insist that the passage from adolescence to adulthood is just as definitively significant for the life of the human individual as any political revolution ever was (or was claimed to be) for the life of

a nation. We confidently imagine that Hawthorne could well have been interested in the significance of *both*, separately and at once. And, with growing literary confidence, we think to propose that perhaps it has been Hawthorne's intention so to join tenor and vehicle that we cannot assign primacy to either the individual or the social passage. Each one illuminates the other. (150)

When Hawthorne's ironic stance is taken into account, however, as it must always be, Colacurcio finds that "we are left, deliberately, with Robin's *difference*. He has finally entered into an adult world, but he remains very little representative of its historic complexity. . . . *His* story is not *theirs*. . . . [I]n the ironic structure of Hawthorne's complex and even deconstructive tale, the two stories are as inseparable as they are different: everybody grows up somewhere, but Robin passes out of adolescence in the process of discovering, first-hand, the distressing secrets of a provincial politics already shrewdly adult" (152-53).

Liminality offers us "a 'moment in and out of time,' in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties" (Turner, *Process* 96). Within "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," Robin's increasingly "anxious progress" (Colacurcio 131) reflects not only the difficulties undergone by initiands in a rite of status elevation from youth to manhood, but those of political rituals of status reversal, in this case, the colonists' usurping power from the representative of the Crown. By conflating the two dramas within one story, Hawthorne demonstrates, early in his career,

his mastery of appropriating the middle ground between fact and fiction and exposes their intricate ties. On a cultural level, liminality results in the "manifestation of *communitas*," which is "a spontaneously generated relationship between leveled and equal total and individuated human beings, stripped of structural attributes . . . its very existence puts all social structural rules in question and suggests new possibilities" (Turner, *Process* 109; *Dramas* 202). Taken individually, the social dramas comprising the story appear to contradict this occurrence, in that Robin's "rite of status elevation" is not an overt act, and the mob's "rite of status reversal" is not enacted with the intention of ever reversing the status of the political participants. Taken individually, the harmony supposedly achieved, however briefly, as *communitas*, resulting from ritual processes enacted during the liminal phase of social dramas, is not even briefly demonstrated in the story. But taken together, with the ostensible benefits of each ritual conferred on the other, one can understand how the participants of both dramas reach, briefly, that state of communion, and for each actor, the path to reaggregation is defined.

In the chapter on *The Scarlet Letter*, my point was that Hawthorne's spheres depict the tenuous relations among the characters and the social structures they lived within; the circle shapes the dialectic of the individual and the social, in addition to defining and positioning the artist and artistic expression in the text. By calling the symbol of the circle into service, Hawthorne unites preface and text, beginning and end, and reader and text

through a process of metaphorical association with a geometric form historically considered archetypal of Unity. Content and form become inextricable through the enactment of ritual process and symbolic mediation.

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, the shape of the spiral is the shape of both social and political conflict and history; here, Hawthorne expands his depiction of social interaction, a continuing process of conflict and resolution through another dominant spatial metaphor. If in *The Scarlet Letter* Hester Prynne's role subsumes expressions of individuality and artistic beauty and redefines social interaction through her stylized embroidering of the scarlet A, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne maintains through geometric metaphor the tensions between the oppositions of aristocratic and democratic, and past and present. Hawthorne's use of the geometric figure of the spiral curve not only correlates with the process of historical change but also to the shape of the narrative itself, thus exposing another example of the connection between content and form. As the inter-connected circles of *The Scarlet Letter* define the boundaries of individual and community, the shape of the spiral curve is emblematic of the course of historical and social change, merging representations of time and space within one geometric metaphor. This conjunction is accomplished through the agency of artifact and myth, recurring as they do during the episodes that describe the effects and effectiveness of liminality in the narrative.

In *The Blithedale Romance*, the parallelogram frames Miles Coverdale's

narrative point of view and acts as a metaphor of the threshold of physical space and imaginative desire. The narrator is an observer who annihilates artistic and social spatial distance by casting his reticent sense of self onto the objects of his gaze. At the same time, he redresses the crisis of realizing an independent identity both within and distinct from the Blithedale community by annihilating the space in which that subjectivity can become manifest. The parallelogram becomes a symbol of the boundaries between himself and the other characters in *Blithedale*, but those boundaries shift so often, no definitive sense of self can be achieved. Those shifts are analogous to liminality and define one position in which an artist can be comfortable: that space where contemplation is privileged over action, where indecision is valued for its potential action, and is therefore sought out. The geometric image extends the initial metaphor of human relationships into the depiction of the process of social drama. Through the image of the parallelogram, Coverdale's possibilities for artistic creation oscillate between himself and the spaces that Zenobia and Priscilla occupy, spaces that Coverdale cannot enter because they are spaces that he has already collapsed.

Hawthorne's negotiation of the relation between individuality and polity is a constant concern, from the tales and sketches depicting the indeterminacy of a young writer in a young country whose characters flirt with action as they flee from it, to the later romances. The image of the circle as a metaphor of boundary and transgression in *The Scarlet Letter* serves in "Sights from a

Steeple" as a way of defining, limiting, and protecting narrative perspective in a similar way to the parallelogram. Hawthorne's narrators and many of his characters are poised in a distanced, alienated position that derives from the troubling negotiations when defining oneself as an individual, an artist, and a member of a community. If the work of art, even the sketch, acts as the artistic medium between individual and polity, the difficulty of describing the connections between these artificially polar terms is inherent in the artist's narrative point of view.

Hawthorne suspends temporal progression by spatializing the liminoid quality of his narration. Power is found in the perspective that affords the narrator the simultaneous possibilities of sociation and the option to reassess the tentative meanings he has derived from his perspective. The liminoid position combines self-revelation with self-protection. It is a buffer against interaction, a method of suspending action in order to reassess and renegotiate one's position. Robin Molineux also enters a liminal space that is defined in spatial terms through the "Kinsman" narrator's use of angular descriptions that take on an imagistic currency as the tale proceeds. From that vantage point, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" stands as a fiction detailing such a process.

By identifying the relationship between the individual and the social group, and explicating it through a narrative strategy whose structure reflects this process and form, Hawthorne's fictions reassert the need for a critical vantage point that surpasses the limitations literary criticism has heretofore

established for it. If we consider Hawthorne's work to address the relation between individual and group on social, political, and aesthetic levels, we need to continue the multi-disciplinary approach to criticism currently underway. This study is offered as a very small step in that direction. Alan Wolfe recently described the opposition of democracy and sociology as a conflict between a political structure that "is understood as a process of taking in rather than keeping out," and an academic discipline endeavoring to promote an epistemology "that recognizes humans as best fulfilled when living in groups rather than isolated atoms. But groups by their very nature are exclusive rather than inclusive. They function best only by keeping others out" (309). My efforts here have been toward explicating one author's conception of boundaries through the metaphors he has offered. To do so, I have sought a common ground for both social science and textual analysis by situating Hawthorne geometric imagery within Turner's paradigm of social drama. Wolfe proposes to bridge the space between democratic inclusion and sociological exclusion by examining "the thoughtfulness of boundaries," particularly to "use the concept of . . . moral passage . . . those special moments of clarity imposed by a break with the routines of daily life" (319-320). I conclude by suggesting that the realm of liminality, socially constructed and fictionally depicted, shares a complementary space with the moral passage, and their study can strengthen the case for the continued dialogue between literary studies and social science.

Notes

¹ The idea of spatializing temporality is certainly not mine, nor is it new. For an historical overview and a discussion of its impact on anthropology and the practice of ethnography, see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1983).

² See Bell, *Hawthorne and the Historical Romance of New England*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), 217-226, for his logical, yet unconvincing conclusion.

³ See Angus Fletcher, *Allegory*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1964), 8, in which he describes this type of allegory as "serv[ing] political and social purposes by the very fact that the reigning authority . . . does not see the secondary meaning. . . . But someone does see that meaning, and once seen, it is felt strongly to be the final intention behind the primary meaning. . . . It is [common] to find a veneer of action laid over a moralizing intent."

⁴ See Brown, *Domestic Individualism*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990), 227 n53, in which she states: "My reading of the inner workings of the romance's transformative operations, foregrounding the women's work which enables Hawthorne's romance of commerce, investigates how this novel encompasses change so as to make it seem tradition. . . . The actual operations of change in this romance suggest that the central issue here is the role of women in nineteenth-century social and political transformations: the aesthetics through which a certain profile of political economy emerges."

⁵ This chapter is a fine example of what Michael Riffaterre finds humor to be, "an index of fictionality," *Fictional Truth*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1990) 45.

⁶ See John Dolis, "Hawthorne's Metonymic Gaze: Image and Object," *American Literature*, (Vol. 56 No. 3, October, 1984), 362-378.

⁷ See Dolis, "Metonymic Gaze," 372-73, where he states that Hawthorne's observers partake in "a pre-reflective operation in which the subject as a person (reflective consciousness) is at all times absent, [yet] . . . nevertheless partakes of significance in so far as it is intentional and is the foundation of all subsequent forms of consciousness. . . . The synecdochic structure of Hawthorne's image enacts a form of behavior which trans-"figures" an indefinite series of discontinuous aspects into a unified project (intention) which is the object of itself, an object whose claim to "objectivity" must be perceptually recaptured in a fresh act which is itself temporal. The unity of such an object is therefore never complete or finished but endures, as such,

only so long as it is taken up by the subject and invested with a "living" significance Hawthorne's image constitutes the visible "reply" to those interrogations which the object inaugurates. In this way the object *speaks* to us from out of the depths of its expressive con-figuration. Indeed, it is this expression which confers upon the object its constancy and self-evidence."

⁸ I am using the term "sociation" for the purposes of clarity. Sociation, for Simmel, (*The Sociology*, ed. and trans. Kurt H. Wolff, [New York: The Free Press, 1950], 41), is "the form (realized in innumerable , different ways) in which individuals grow together into units that satisfy their interests. These interests, whether they are sensuous or ideal, momentary or lasting, conscious or unconscious, causal or teleological, form the bases of human societies." This definition lends itself more to the act and process of social behavior of all kinds and privileges the individual over the group, whereas "association" is a social group expressly organized to satisfy the specific intentions and purposes of its members, and "socialization" is the process whereby the individual acquires the necessary societal information to enter adulthood.

⁹ *The Province of Piety*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1984) 133. I am indebted to Colacurcio's reading of "My Kinsman. Major Molineux" to such a degree that my discussion of the story pales in its echoing of his. My intention, though, is to point out one additional way in which his uniting of the mytho-analytical and political historical readings of past criticisms proves not only an effective approach to Hawthorne's tale but suggests once again the common territory of literary analysis and social science.

¹⁰ See also: Michael J. Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety*; Frederick Crews, *Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1966); T. Walker Herbert, Jr., "Doing Cultural Work: 'My Kinsman Major Molineux' and the Construction of the Self-Made Man," *Studies in the Novel*, 23, Spring 1991, pp 20-27; Daniel Hoffman, *Form and Fable in American Fiction*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1961); Q.D. Leavis, "Hawthorne as Poet," *Sewanee Review* 59, (Spring-Summer 1951), pp 179-205; David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989); and Roy Harvey Pearce, *Historicism Once More*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969). See Peter Shaw, "Fathers, Son and the Ambiguities of Revolution in 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux,'" *NEQ*, 49 (1976) 559-76.

¹¹ See Peter Shaw, "Fathers, Son and the Ambiguities of Revolution in 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux,'" *NEQ*, 49 (1976) 559-76.

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