Hawthorne's early commentators insisted on seeing him as a literary innocent who seemingly achieved his literary effects almost in spite of himself. Sympathetic contemporary reviewers often portrayed him as the pure genius, untouched by the harsh realities of the day to day world, whose works abound in "feminine" intuitions but lack "masculine" self-awareness. Melville summed up his contemporary's reputation, "where Hawthorne is known, he seems to be deemed a pleasant writer, with a pleasant style, a sequestered, harmless man, from whom any deep or weighty thing would hardly be anticipated - a man who means no meanings." On his part, Henry James granted Hawthorne the pre-eminent place in American letters, but insisted on seeing him as a man without literary theory: "He was guiltless of a system, and I am not sure, he had ever heard of Realism." D.H.Lawrence went a step further. In his influential book, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, Hawthorne's romances take on a mysterious life of their own, and quite against the will and the intentions of the author, the blue-eyed darling Nathaniel, reveal dark truths.
The early critics were fundamentally mistaken about Hawthorne. He was a highly self-conscious artist, who had carefully worked out his theoretical position, not only discovering, as A.N. Kaul points out, “many areas where the logic of his individual imagination, the resources of past literature, and the vital rhythms of a new culture could meet in a creative display,” but also sharing the very process of discovery with his readers. Feidelson is right when he remarks that Hawthorne was interested not just in meaning, but also in the very process by which one arrives at meaning.

The present study is concerned with the self-conscious dimension of the four major romances of Hawthorne. It is necessary to emphasize at the outset that the self-conscious dimension is intentionally and deliberately foregrounded by our author. So concerned is Hawthorne with making visible the invisible workings of self-consciousness that in the four major romances this concern becomes a key thematic issue rather than a biographical, psychological or even an issue relating to Hawthornian narrative craft.

Hawthorne's major romances, as Kronick puts it, thematize their own self-reading, stage their own self-representation. Brian Stonehill defines the
self-conscious novel in a manner which is both fruitful and rewarding. He borrows the simplifying metacritical analysis of Crane in which the myriad possible ways of approaching any literary text are resolved into four basic approaches: Author, Reader, Real World, Literary History. "Each of these approaches implies, of course, about what a literary work essentially is: whether it is a revealing expression of its author's subconscious; a verbal machine constructed so as to create a specific effect upon its reader; an artefact which is at least partially determined by and determining a tradition; or a representation of a political, social, sexual, racial or economic reality...But when focused upon the self-conscious novel ... we find... that the four grounds that we had defined as external - author, reader, literary history, and the real world - are all included as characters or features inside the novel itself."8 The self-conscious novel dramatizes its own context, or as Paul Ricour would put it, it is a narrative that exercises an interpretative function in relation to its intention. "These are narratives in which the ideological interpretation these narratives wish to convey is not superimposed on the narrative by the narrator but is instead, incorporated into the very strategy of the narrative... because this interpretation results directly from the narrative configuration."9 It could well be argued that all narratives in some form or the other perform this function, but in the case of Hawthorne, it is very much part of his artistic
design to deliberately make the narrative turn back on itself. So much so that Millington sees a Hawthornian romance as a psychological and cultural locale where the reader and the writer can meet in a special sort of interchange.10

In recent years Hawthorne's narrative craft has received a lot of critical attention.11 But this, to my mind, has aggravated not alleviated a major limitation that has marked Hawthornian criticism over the years - a tendency to discuss Hawthornian concerns only by halves. While reviewing Hawthornian criticism over the years, Colacurcio points out that critics have either "thought chiefly to praise or blame Hawthorne's own morality" or they have focused on his art, that is, "the appreciation of complex delicacy - coupled with ...penchant for uncovering ambivalence and ambiguity." He concludes that among modern critics, "probably it would not be unfair to say that art has counted for more than his moral vision."12 Bruce Michelson too notices this unfortunate division:

In recent years strong evidence has been gathered to show that Hawthorne was a deep questioner of the nature of fiction itself, that he was given to self-conscious puzzling over the problems of being understood, over the impreciseness of language and the
pitfalls of communicating by means of stories, over the whole anomalous art of seeking and imparting truth by telling tales. On the other side of a standing disagreement is the Hawthorne of old, the author who writes not to himself about fiction but directly to an American audience and who engages those social and moral issues that for a century have been taken as Hawthorne's essence: stasis and change, the past and the present, sin and retribution - problems that show up everywhere in the fiction and that no new wave of reinterpretation can or should displace.13

In this dissertation I have sought to avoid falling into the trap mentioned above by arguing that Hawthornian self-consciousness is but a dimension of his moral vision, and that the moral vision, in turn, is grounded in his self-consciousness. Through close readings of the texts, I have tried to demonstrate that in the four romances Hawthorne deliberately sets up two levels, each mirroring the other. On the first and more obvious level, Hawthorne concerns himself with the issue of universal sin appropriating a theological concept and transforming it into a secular one. At this level, he systematically exploits the similarity between the Edenic myth and the American myth of settlement to connect his romances with American
realities. On the second, more hidden level, he examines the implications of his secularized understanding of the universal sinfulness of man for art, particularly his own. At this level, his romances self-consciously reflect all that has gone into their own creation. It is necessary to mention at this point that in focusing on the self-conscious dimension it is not my intention to highlight the subtlety and complexity of the narrative techniques deployed by Hawthorne. This has been done in ample measure by others. Rather, I hope to arrive at a clearer understanding of the larger world view which shapes Hawthorne's narrative craft in the first place.

In the second chapter, I look at Hawthornian self-consciousness in general terms, first reviewing his complex relationship with Romantic thought and practice, then highlighting and examining his famous distinction between the novel and romance. In this chapter, I also attempt to place the Hawthornian romance in three larger contexts - evolution of the novel, emergence of self-conscious fiction in America, and finally, American critical response to Hawthornian romance, which has, in recent years, begun to raise fundamental doubts about his canonical status.

In subsequent chapters I follow a methodology suggested by Hawthorne himself. In the Preface to *The Snow Image and Other Twice Told Tales,*
Hawthorne reveals the veiled strategy of self presentation that his works employ, and suggests the mode of enquiry that might yield the best results:

And as for egotism, a person, who has been burrowing, to his utmost ability, into the depths of our common nature, for the purposes of psychological romance, - and who pursues his researches in that dusky region, as he needs must, as well by the tact of sympathy as by light of observation, - will smile at incurring such an imputation in virtue of a little preliminary talk about his external habits, his abode, his casual associates, and other matters entirely upon the surface. These things hide the man, instead of displaying him. You must make quite another kind of inquest, and look through the whole range of his fictitious characters, good and evil, in order to detect any of his essential traits.¹⁴

In the third chapter of the dissertation, I look through the “range of his characters,” good and evil to identify his “essential traits.” This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section briefly outlines the shape of Hawthorne's career. The second and the third section discuss Hawthorne's career long preoccupation with sin and the artist respectively. In the next
four chapters, I present close readings of the major romances, attempting
to demonstrate not only how each of the romances have been shaped by
the "essential traits," but also how they exist on two levels simultaneously,
each mirroring the other. It is by deliberately creating this mirror effect that
Hawthorne is able to use the action of the romances to both represent and
test the validity of his own convictions, and it is precisely this mirror effect
that gives his romances their self-conscious dimension. I end with a short
concluding chapter. Fogle's comment about Hawthornian criticism, written
in 1950s, seems to me to have an element of truth still, "if it has a fault,
Hawthorne criticism can be accused of judging Hawthorne's art before it
has been fully explained." Writing more recently, Kenneth Dauber
echoes the sentiment, "Have we not avoided - perhaps wilfully - what
Hawthorne places directly before us? Have we not shirked, postponing with
the labour of interpretation, the shock of the responsibility entailed by
recognition. Hawthorne ... has yet to be known in the plainness with which
he speaks."
NOTES


2 Crowley 115.


Duke University Press, 1993) presents a Bakhtian Hawthorne who dialogically dramatizes doubleness, multiplicity and contradictoriness; R.A. Thomas Moore, A Thick and Darksome Veil: The Rhetoric of Hawthorne's Sketches, Prefaces, and Essays (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994) argues that Hawthorne simultaneously wrote for both the popular as well as the more discerning audience and attempts to demonstrate his thesis by analyzing the style of Hawthorne's prose at the level of sentence construction.


14 Crowley 235.
