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THE PARTICIPANT-OBSERVER: AN AMERICAN NARRATOR

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
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*****

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1983

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Point of view has been seen as a central critical issue ever since Percy Lubbock's influential book, *The Craft of Fiction*, was published in 1921. Lubbock asserts, "the whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story. He tells it as he sees it, in the first place; the reader faces the story and listens." The reader will "listen" to a very different story depending on whether it is told from a point of view outside or inside the story. The narrator outside the story is usually in a privileged position above the characters, able to share with the reader the thoughts, words, and actions of each character. This access to unlimited knowledge about the story also gives the narrator every right to guide the reader's understanding of that story. The narrator inside the story is, at the same time, a character in the story. If a realistically drawn character, this narrator can have no access to other characters' unspoken thoughts or to the words and actions that occur away from her or his sight and hearing. Even with this limited perspective, the narrator may yet feel competent to guide the reader's interpretation of events; but the reader may not
agree to be led by a narrator whose powers are no more omniscient than the reader's own. The point of view of the dramatized first-person narrator presents not only a different story to the reader, but also a different set of problems of interpretation.

Dramatized first-person narrators are of two basic types, the main character who tells of her or his own adventures and the (supposedly) minor character who tells the story of the main character(s) with whom she or he is involved. My concern is with the second of these types, and my objective is to examine and describe this form of narration and to explore its place in the American literary tradition before 1900.

In the nineteenth century, major American authors had already begun to employ the participant-observer narrator; Hawthorne's only fully developed first-person narrator, Miles Coverdale in The Blithedale Romance, is this type, as is Melville's lawyer narrator of "Bartleby the Scrivener," Poe's narrator in "The Fall of the House of Usher," and Henry James's narrator of "Louisa Pallant," to name just those works which will be analyzed in this dissertation. However, Poe's "The Gold Bug" and "The Oblong Box" have narrators who fit the criteria of the participant-observer, as do the narrators of other stories by James, such as "The Author of Beltraffio" and "The Figure in the Carpet." The narrators of The Shadow of a Dream by William Dean Howells and "Jenny Garrow's Lovers" by Sarah Orne Jewett also share most of the characteristics of the participant-observer, while The Copperhead by Harold Frederic is just one of a number of instances of lesser-known American writers making use of this form of
narration.

We can occasionally find European and British examples of this narrator prior to 1900, such as those in Alexander Dumas, Père's, *The Corsican Brothers*, Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*, Prosper Mérimée's "The Venus of Ille," and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*. But unlike the group of American narrators under discussion, these old world narrators have few common characteristics. Dumas's storyteller, Alexandre, takes part in the action but is identified with the author himself; since this kind of narrator "demonstrates the smallest possible distance between himself and his author," Betty Schrock Beck in her 1963 dissertation dubs this type, the narrator as "nom de plume." The narrator of *Castle Rackrent* is a servant who follows from a distance the Castle's sundry heirs without deeply involving himself or the reader with any of these characters. The emphasis in Mérimée's tale is on the mystery of a Roman statue of Venus which comes dangerously to life, rather than on the narrator's relationships with other characters in the story. The narrator of *Cranford* developed from observer to actor when Mrs. Gaskell changed the work from an essay for Dickens's *Household Words* to a novel.

For the most part, except for Emily Bronte and Joseph Conrad, the major nineteenth-century continental and English authors restrict their use of the first-person dramatized narrator to the role of protagonist. However, in *Wuthering Heights* and *Heart of Darkness*, the narration is split between one character, like Nellie Dean or Marlow, who witnesses the events and describes them aloud, and another character who, like Lockwood or Conrad's frame narrator,
records what he has heard and adds what he feels is pertinent from his more limited observation. There are also instances of mixed forms of narration in which part of the action is communicated by a dramatized first-person narrator, while other parts of the plot are related by means of letters and/or third-person narration. One especially pertinent example is a possible source for Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," E. T. A. Hoffman's "The Legacy." In this tale, the narrator's uncle gives the explanation for the strange experiences that have already befallen the narrator during his stay at the estate of Freiherr Roderick von R____. However, the narrator reassures us that "The history of the R____ legacy, which my old uncle told me, I retain so faithfully in my memory even now that I can almost repeat it in his own words (he spoke of himself in the third person). So then as he told it, I tell it now..."6 The narrator must hand over control of the narrative to his uncle as he lacks the information that will make comprehensible the situation he has been describing. His own capacities of sensitivity and perceptivity are irrelevant since the insights that are necessary for understanding the story do not depend on any characteristic of his; they come from outside the time frame that he has given us, from at least thirty years before he enters the picture. Readers of "The Fall of the House of Usher" and other participant-observer narratives often go without the satisfaction of having mysteries solved or questions answered, since it is usually not in the power of the narrators to offer such solutions. Yet this very frustration draws our attention to the special focus of this study: the single mind in control of
both perception and narration which allows no other perspective than its own. The narrators who will be the object of my inquiry are those who observe, participate in, and record the situations that confront their imaginations.

The type of narrator I have singled out, Norman Friedman has named "'I' as witness" in his essay, "Point of View in Fiction." Friedman notes that the author "hands his job completely over to another . . . The witness-narrator [who] is a character on his own right within the story itself, more or less involved in the action, more or less acquainted with its chief personages, who speaks to the reader in the first person."7 Wayne Booth makes an important distinction between the narrator as a witness who only observes the action and the narrator-agent who produces "some measurable effect on the course of events."8 The term narrator-agent more closely describes the object of this study. From Percy Lubbock's discussion of the first person in The Craft of Fiction we might surmise the role for the narrator being defined here is the one for which Lubbock believes the first person narrator is best suited. The first-person narrator is good at dramatizing other characters, "but when the man in the book is expected to make a picture of himself, a searching and elaborate portrait, then the limit of his capacity is touched and passed."9 Lubbock's book gives only one brief phrase to the potential of a dramatized first-person narrator to reveal himself unintentionally to the reader: "The point of the whole thing is that the man should give himself away unknowingly."10
While recent criticism generally assumes the importance of the narrator's self-revelation, it tends to consider the participant-observer only in relation to a single heroic figure. In one of the best of these studies, Lawrence Buell defines the "Observer-Hero Narrative" as:

a story told by a dramatized first-person narrator about a significant relationship or encounter he has had with another person. The two figures are both opposites and counterparts, the second person perceived both as contrasting with the first in outlook or life-style and as embodying in purer or more extreme form qualities which the observer has or sympathizes with in moderation. The observer's world seems more like our own world, while the second person's seems more intensely focused and more romantic by comparison.11

Throughout this insightful article Buell stresses the contrast between the "grandeur [of] [t]he archaic values of the hero . . . [and] the more mundane world of the witness."12 The appropriateness of this approach to Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" seems apparent. Yet in Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," while the attorney and his world are certainly "mundane," Bartleby himself is problematic when taken as a hero. More accurately, he is an anti-hero whose values are unclear and are only shown in the negative, that is, what he "prefers not to" do. In order for Buell's analysis with its emphasis on "the inseparability of the two main figures"13 to be applied to Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance, critics must distort their reading of this novel. The Blithedale Romance gives us Miles Coverdale's re-creation of a love triangle involving Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla in the context of an experiment in communal living. Although Zenobia and Hollingsworth
are more fully developed than Priscilla, the narrator's and our interest is in all three characters and the ways in which they respond to each other, to minor characters, and to Coverdale. Buell's choice of Hollingsworth as the "hero-figure" seems only explicable by a need for there to be a sole and male hero set against Miles Coverdale. When David L. Minter makes the same choice for the hero of The Blithedale Romance, it is because Hollingsworth fits the thesis of his book in which he considers "works structured by juxtaposition of two characters, one a man of design or designed action, a Hollingsworth, who dominates the action of his world, the other a man of interpretation, a Coverdale, through whose interpreting mind and voice the story of the man of design comes to us." Although Hollingsworth does have a plan which would transform Blithedale to a model of prison reform, many critics agree that if there is one character who "dominates" the fictional world of this novel, it is Zenobia, not Hollingsworth.

Robert Curtis Vetrick insists in his 1973 dissertation "that the narrator be distinct from a central, easily recognizable hero and his story," yet he still includes a discussion of The Blithedale Romance. But the participant-observer narrator is not always confronted by an "easily recognizable hero." Sometimes, as in The Blithedale Romance, his interest is attracted by relationships as they develop between other characters. Sometimes, as in James's "Louisa Pallant," a budding romance interests him as well as a particular person. But James's narrator does not see Louisa Pallant as an heroic figure, nor is his narration motivated by his sympathy
or admiration for her. As Louisa Pallant's jilted fiance of twenty years before, the narrator seems to want most of all to verify the bad opinion he has maintained of her over the years because, somehow, on that bad opinion rests the justification for life as he has chosen to live it.

Typically, critics assume that what motivates participant-observer narrators to write their stories is their desire to understand the heroes whom they find so mysteriously compelling. Walter L. Reed describes the participant-observer as "a narrator who insists on his inability to understand the hero even as he seeks this understanding," and Minter presents the participant-observer narrator as "Moved . . . by his own need (of understanding), his own affront (at bafflement), his own vision (of understanding as the condition that for him will suffice), and his own faith (that narration will bring understanding)." I argue to the contrary that the participant-observer narrator needs to defend himself from the challenge represented by the very characters and situations he is portraying. Therefore, he seldom strives for any genuine understanding of others unless he can safely satisfy his own curiosity without threatening his established way of viewing the world. Although I do not treat participant-observer narrators as a metaphor for the artist as peeping-tom, as James Leland Grove does in his 1968 dissertation, I do agree with Leland's estimation that "They rarely learn . . . They do not carry away anything valuable from the semi-involvement" they have with their subjects. Indeed, in the works considered here, "the encounter with the hero" is not "turned
into a learning experience for the observer," as Buell suggests, nor is the "person . . . able to grow to maturity because of his absorption in the fortunes of the hero of his tale," as Peter Irvine states. On the first day of his visit, the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" finds Roderick Usher's emotionalism, his "excessive nervous agitation" (p. 402), offensive to his rational-minded approach to life. The events of the last day of his visit, Lady Madeline's escape from the tomb and the collapse of the house of Usher, do not cause the narrator, when he later comes to relate the tale to us, to reconsider the nature of his criticism of Usher or his confidence in logic and reason. The attorney is still as proud of his connection to the Wall Street financial establishment after Bartleby's death as he was before he met Bartleby. The description of himself Miles Coverdale offers prior to his departure for Blithedale resembles remarkably the one he gives at the book's close. The narrator of "Louisa Pallant" continues to see Mrs. Pallant as "the wronger of [his] youth" (p. 122) in spite of all that passes between them that recommends he should revise his idea of her. The notion that participant-observer narrators demonstrate a growth in understanding of themselves and their subjects is one that must be questioned.

I would argue that the potential for growth and understanding is in the reader more than the narrator; that potential can best be realized by the reader's focusing as much or more attention on the narrators themselves as on those whom the narrators depict. Bertil Romberg points out that the "gaze of the narrator, fastened as it is
upon the main character, simultaneously reflects the narrator himself. But it is the personality of the narrator that gives his story its characteristic colouring . . . often the information which the narrator gives unconsciously about himself is of greater interest than the information he conveys as part of his conscious purpose."23 The narrator might intend only to share his knowledge of the lives of those characters he can observe. Yet the way that he presents that information about those characters will say as much, or more, about the narrator as it does about his subjects. The narrator who tells the story of other characters is nearly always what Wayne Booth calls a self-conscious narrator, aware of being a writer.24 Like "real" authors, the narrator must find in his imagination what will shape and transform his impressions into a story for his readers. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg argue that the imagination of this narrator is more important in the creation of his story than either the characters or the situations he has observed. They explain in The Nature of Narrative: "Since the imagination plays the central role, the factual or empirical aspect of the protagonist's life becomes subordinated to the narrator's understanding of it. Not what really happened but the meaning of what the narrator believes to have happened becomes the central preoccupation in this kind of narrative."25

If Scholes and Kellogg are correct, can we ever assume that what this type of narrator relates is true or reliable? I would like to suggest, in response to this question, that one of the distinguishing characteristics of these narrators is that most often their stories
are told in a mixture of reliable and unreliable narration. This is a natural result of their limited point of view. We can usually trust them to report with reasonable accuracy the events and conversations they actually witness. But since the narrators are also dramatized as characters in the plot, they lack the power to see into the other characters' minds; thus we have no good reason to accept their opinions and judgments about why the other characters involved act as they do. Nor can we necessarily take for granted the validity of the narrators' understanding of their own personalities and motivations. We have cause to consider their capacity for self-deception since they seem to cherish their role of observer yet deny the importance of their involvement with the characters and the situations they present to us. Carolyn Porter explains this stance: "once admit that observation of the world constitutes a form of participation in its activity, and you experience a curious modern version of the Fall, for you become at least theoretically implicated and complicit in events which you presume merely to watch, analyze, and interpret."26

The form of participant-observer narrations, as Buell describes it, demands that the "observer is always in the foreground, the hero at one remove from him and at two removes from us. The observer's account is always a biased one, both because it is colored by his personal feelings and because of the nature of his role of observer."27 It is worthwhile for us to try to assess the amount of distance the narrator places between the reader, himself, and the other characters since it can help us both to figure out the
narrator's attitude toward the characters whose stories are being told and to come to our own conclusions about those characters. However, a narrator like Miles Coverdale in The Blithedale Romance, who is so often sharply critical of the other characters, also keeps the reader sufficiently distant to make it difficult for the reader to come to an independent judgment of their worth. Coverdale accomplishes this distancing by making his presence always evident. Scholes and Kellogg point out that "to the extent that the narrator is characterized he will dominate the narrative, taking precedence over event and situation." The reader learns more about the lawyer narrating "Bartleby the Scrivener" than about its eponymous character, Bartleby. But the narrator is put into this predicament by Bartleby, who refuses to offer any information about himself or about the reason he "prefers not to" respond to the simplest requests of his employer. Yet the narrator's pained bewilderment and frantic concern for his clerk are what keep the reader from simply dismissing the infuriating passivity of Bartleby.

In these works the point is not so much that the reader need decide if the narrator is entirely reliable or entirely unreliable; but rather, given that the facts he relates are reliable, the reader must decide how reliable the narrator's opinions are. The question of reliability is an open one, and since the text does not often solve the problem conclusively, it is up to readers to try to cope with it. But first, I believe, we must acknowledge that a decision over whether to trust a narrator's opinion is very like a decision over whether to trust the opinion of a new acquaintance. Quite
frequently, we decide based on how closely the individual's view of life coincides with our own. It becomes important then to understand the role our own positions and values play in evaluating those of the narrator. Perhaps if we think in these terms, it will become easier to appreciate and accept the radical differences in the way critics treat participant-observer narrators. For instance, Miles Coverdale is described by Marius Bewley as a "charmingly confirmed bachelor" who "meddles and snoops to a disconcerting degree" and commits "an irritating lapse of taste" in concluding *The Blithedale Romance* with a protestation of love for Priscilla, but "is otherwise quite nice." The same character exhibits an attitude of "ambivalent hostility," according to Leslie Fiedler, who continues by depicting Miles as an "impotent failed poet [who] distrusts Zenobia not for being an emancipated woman but for being a fully sexual one." Oddly enough, both critics see Hawthorne in the character of Miles Coverdale. I have noticed that where one finds critical arguments over the reliability of a narrator, it is likely that the narrator under dispute is the type I am examining.

Wayne Booth would explain such on-going critical disagreements over these narrators as the result of the author's unfortunate choice of an "impersonal narrator," which is Booth's designation for both observer and agent narrators. Booth faults the author for presenting the story in a manner that confuses the reader, who is unable to get a clear idea whether the author has an ironic intent. Few would deny that one result of using participant-observer narrators, in lieu of the third-person centers of consciousness Percy Lubbock prefers,
forces the reading audience to cope with a great deal more ambiguity. The situation is aggravated by the often complex blending of reliable and unreliable elements of their narrative. The reader cannot simply decide once and for all whether the narrator is reliable or unreliable and accept or dismiss his judgments accordingly. Instead, if we are readers who are alert to the problems of relying on a narrator whom Susanne Kappeler styles "our sole informant, standing between us and "the author" or "the truth,"" then we should, as she observes, "know that we are not in front of a simple tale which, if there were no more to it, the author might have given us "straight."" A reader must be prepared to continue to make fine distinctions and separate decisions throughout the text in order to come away with a satisfactory analysis. Yet any one reader, as we have already seen, may find that another careful reader has come to a different conclusion. We can blame the authors for their lack of clarity, but why then do readers continue to be engaged by these "flawed" works? Perhaps the answer is that the works are not flawed by this quality of openness; rather that the openness is what forces the reader to be engaged in the work, "to fill in between the lines, to draw inferences, and to come to conclusions that are beyond the narrator or even contrary to the character's interpretation," as Beck says, in order to participate in the judgments demanded by the problems of the story. Without the guidance some form of omniscience provides, the reader must become actively involved in the moral dilemmas of the characters in the book she or he is reading. Other forms of narration can be adapted to encourage reader involvement,
but this form of narration, whenever it is used, insists on that reader involvement. Susan Sniader Lanser suggests the possibility "that the very choice of a narrative technique can reveal and embody ideology. This is especially plausible if we understand ideology to concern the form as well as the 'content' of a text." An implied author who directs the reader so little towards arriving at a certain analysis might well be credited with a high tolerance for individual opinion and a high respect for individual intelligence.

Such democratic traits are demonstrated by the American writers who early tried this complicated form of narration, so demanding of their audience. But Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, and even James are not usually credited with being the first to encourage such active reader participation in the creation of a work's value structure. Instead of seeing reader-participation as an American development, it has been seen as a discovery of modern, twentieth-century writers. Booth praises the puzzling difficulties of "some modern works in which this effect of deep involvement is combined with the implied demand that we maintain our capacity for ironic judgment." Scholes and Kellogg state that the "frequent use [of an unreliable or semi-reliable narrator] in modern fiction is also an aspect of the modern author's desire to make the reader participate in the act of creation." Even Buell thinks that while the "observer-hero narrative may have first been developed as a distinct form in Anglo-American literature. In the novel . . . the form did not become anything like a tradition before Conrad." All three critics attribute the first conscious use of this technique to Joseph Conrad
and congratulate "Conrad's American followers [who] have employed this mode of narration with some signal success. Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and Warren have all worked variations on this basic tactic." I have seen no evidence that suggests that the form of the participant-observer narration is used differently in a short story than in a novel and I would like to argue that twentieth-century American writers need not have studied Conrad to find a tradition to follow; the tradition was well-established in America in the nineteenth century.
CHAPTER ONE FOOTNOTES


2. Since all the participant-observer narrators I am discussing are male, the masculine pronoun will be used from now on to refer to them both generally and specifically.


10. Lubbock, p. 145.


13. Buell, p. 94.


15. Minter, pp. 3-4.

16. See below, chapter 3, note 42, p. 73.


26. Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant-Observer in Emerson, James, Adams, and Faulkner (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 33-34. Although Porter shares my interest in the narrator's relationship to his subject matter, her approach is Marxist, emphasizing reification as crucial to the point of view of the participant-observer.

27. Buell, p. 97.


35. Booth, p. 324.


37. Buell, p. 108.

CHAPTER 2

SHARED TRAITS:

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PARTICIPANT-OBSERVER NARRATOR

The participant-observer narrators can be described not only by the way they function as both story-tellers and minor characters in their own stories, but also by similarities in life style and personality attributed to them by their creators. Although the narrators are by no means identical, it is remarkable how many of the same characteristics appear in the narrators of diverse works by diverse authors. The traits of the participant-observer narrator which will be described in this chapter are as follows:

1. He is single and lives alone without economic dependents.

2. He avoids intimate relationships.

3. He has a sense of his own intellectual, moral, and/or social superiority.

4. He sees himself as an observer rather than a participant, passive rather than active.

5. His interest in others seems more often motivated by curiosity than by concern.

6. He believes he has the capacity as well as the right to judge others.

7. He refuses to take responsibility for himself and his impact on others.
8. His retreat to safer or more familiar ground as the work concludes is one indication that he has experienced little or no growth in self-awareness.

Apparently, the form that employs a participant-observer narrator requires that he or she be a rather specific type to fulfill the needs of the text.

When creating dramatized narrators who are going to focus their attention on the joys and sorrows of the stories' other characters, authors seem to think it best that these narrators have few distractions in their private lives. All the narrators under consideration, as far as it is possible to tell, are single and customarily live alone. The narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" says nothing of his marital status, but in his decision to respond to Roderick Usher's plea to visit, he considers no personal commitments that would make him hesitate before undertaking the journey to the Usher estate.

Although the attorney introducing the account of his experience with Bartleby the scrivener states, "it is fit I make some mention of myself" (p. 19), the information he offers concerns only his business life. Later in the course of the narrative, when he speaks of returning to his apartment to dine, to think at leisure about how to manage Bartleby, to pace the floors while he builds his assumptions regarding Bartleby's hoped-for departure, and, generally, to retreat from Bartleby's preferences, he never once suggests that there is anyone at home with whom he can discuss his situation or from whom he can ask advice. An occasional Sunday walk to church is as solitary
as his daily walk to the office. From this sketch of his personal life, the reader is left to assume that the lawyer's "profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best" (p. 20) has meant that he has established a home life as free of the challenge of relating to another person as his legal work is free of the challenge of relating to a jury. Morris Beja has pointed out that the lawyer, like Bartleby, is "cut off from others and from the world."\(^1\)

The narrator of Henry James' story "Louisa Pallant" leaves no question as to his unwedded condition; early he describes himself as "a selfish bachelor" (p. 87). When he is not presenting the romance as it develops between his nephew and Linda Pallant, he is concentrating on the woman who jilted him over twenty years before, Linda's mother, Louisa. The narrator believes Louisa's reasons for breaking their engagement were purely financial, but the reader soon begins to think about additional reasons for Mrs. Pallant's choice of a husband other than the narrator. The fact that the narrator has remained single moves out of the background of this tale to become one of its main concerns.

Hawthorne's Miles Coverdale, the only narrator here studied whom we can call by name, has lived alone until joining the Blithedale community. Once among this group, Miles enjoys all the opportunities he has to observe the company, especially a romantic triangle involving the people who most interest him. For him, if there is any sense of regret over being unmarried or even unattached emotionally, it seems to be outweighed by the luxury of living well, comfortably, and alone. In fact, he describes his departure for
Blithedale as "heroism":

I quitted my cosey pair of bachelor rooms,—with a good fire burning in the grate, and a closet right at hand, where there was still a bottle or two in the champagne-bucket, and a residuum of claret in a box. (p. 38)

Years after his experiment with communal living, he sums up his life in terms of the same preferences:

My subsequent life has passed,—I was going to say happily,—but, at all events, tolerably enough. I am now at middle age,—well, well, a step or two beyond the midmost point and I care not a fig who knows it!—a bachelor, with no decided purpose of ever being otherwise. I have been twice to Europe, and spent a year or two rather agreeably at each visit. Being well to do in the world, and having nobody but myself to care for, I live very much at my ease, and fare sumptuously every day. (p. 249)

The economic independence which allows Miles Coverdale and the narrator of "Louisa Pallant" to travel in Europe for "a year or two" appears to be a regular feature of the participant-observer narrator. Nina Baym notices that "Coverdale is not deeply interested in the community's economic aims, for as a man of means he feels little tie to the working classes."2 Worries over raising and supporting a family, finding and keeping a job, shopping and paying bills that occupy the attention of most people are of no concern to the participant-observer narrators. Free of personal encumbrances, they are at leisure to direct their energies toward trying to uncover and understand the problems of other people. Seldom do they show any stress over difficulties of their daily lives. Of course, the attorney of "Bartleby, the Scrivener" complains about "the sudden and violent abrogations of the office of Master in Chancery, by the new Constitution . . . inasmuch as [he] has counted upon a life-lease of
the profits, whereas [he] only received those of a few short years" (p. 20). Yet this complaint just serves to point out that during the time of Bartleby's employment, the lawyer had additional income, "pleasantly remunerative" (p. 20), on which little of his effort depended. The lawyer's description of his work is one many might envy: "in the cool tranquility of a snug retreat, [I] do a snug business among rich men's bonds, and mortgages, and title deeds" (p. 20). Although he is not free to leave for Europe on a whim (hardly a fancy we would expect from him), the attorney is free from the pressures usually associated with earning one's living. The journey by Poe's narrator to the House of Usher is undertaken without his mentioning any need to arrange business matters during his absence. While it is impossible to know whether the narrator is conceived of as being in business or as being independently wealthy, he has related that from infancy he was accustomed to the accoutrements of nobility and that his school years were spent in the company of aristocrats like Roderick Usher.

Economic independence, which creates the opportunities to attend to other people's circumstances instead of their own, might also contribute to their sense of superiority over others. While the narrator in "The Fall of the House of Usher" has no demonstrable economic advantage over Roderick, he believes his rational approach superior to Roderick Usher's more emotional sensibilities. The narrator's certainty that his ideas are of greater value than Roderick's is part of what leads him to dismiss Usher's theory of the sentience of all things: "Such opinions need no comment, and I will
make none" (p. 408). Poe's narrator is not unique in finding that the characters who people his story often do not meet his standards. The narrator of "Louisa Pallant" criticizes his nephew because he "hadn't the smallest vein of introspection . . . His mind wasn't formed to accommodate at one time many subjects of thought" (p. 98). Louisa Pallant, whose intelligence he never questions, is set down as morally and socially inferior to himself:

I hadn't felt it anything but an escape not to have married a girl who had in her to take back her given word and break a fellow's heart for mere flesh pots . . . if she had been of a hard composition at the beginning it should never occur to me that her struggle with society . . . would have softened the paste. Whenever I heard a woman spoken of as 'horribly worldly' I thought immediately of the object of my early passion. (pp. 84-85)

That the participant-observer narrator accepts and profits from the distinctions society draws between groups of people is evident from the lawyer's "natural expectancy of instant compliance" (p. 29) in "Bartleby the Scrivener" as well as in Miles Coverdale's thoughts on social experimentation at Blithedale:

It was the first practical trial of our theories of equal brotherhood and sisterhood; and we people of superior cultivation and refinement (for as such, I presume, we unhesitatingly reckoned ourselves) felt as if something were already accomplished towards the millennium of love. The truth is, however, that the laboring-oar was with our unpolished companions; it being far easier to condescend than to accept of condescension. Neither did I refrain from questioning, in secret, whether some of us . . . would so quietly have taken our places among these good people, save for the cherished consciousness that it was not by necessity, but choice. Though we saw fit to drink our tea out of earthen cups to-night, and in earthen company, it was at our own option to use pictured porcelain and handle silver forks again tomorrow. This same salvo, as to the power of regaining our former position, contributed much, I fear, to the equanimity with which we subsequently bore many of the
hardships and humiliations of a life of toil. (pp. 50-51)

Unhampered by economic necessity and familial demands, men of the education and social standing of the participant-observer narrators are situated to lead lives full of varied activities and wide-ranging friendships. They choose instead a secluded and quiet existence, even while they travel, tending to see themselves lone observers rather than friendly participants. When they do become involved with the characters whose adventures they narrate, they feel, at times, the need to justify having stepped out of the role of observer; the explanations offered for this involvement are usually curiosity, not concern. It is the mystery in the lives of these other people not their problems that the narrators most often suggest they want to solve. In The Blithedale Romance, Miles Coverdale finds the occasion to indulge his special fascination with Zenobia while she helps care for him during the illness of his first weeks at Blithedale. Zenobia remarks on all the attention she is receiving from Coverdale, and her astuteness is rewarded by Coverdale's openly admitting his intentions:

... 'I seem to interest you very much; and yet-- . . . I cannot reckon you as an admirer. What are you seeking to discover in me?'

'The mystery of your life,' answered I, surprised into the truth by the unexpectedness of her attack. 'And you will never tell me.' (p. 71)

While Miles Coverdale evidently appreciates occasions to scrutinize those nursing him, he probably did not consciously choose to fall sick. The narrator of "Louisa Pallant," however, seems to have consciously positioned himself as an onlooker in the opening
scene of his story:

There were a hundred people walking about, there were some in clusters at little tables and many of benches and rows of chairs, watching the others as if they had paid for the privilege and were rather disappointed. I was among these last; I sat by myself, smoking my cigar and thinking of nothing very particular while families and couples passed and repassed me. (p. 82)

Even when he notices Louisa and Linda Pallant passing by, he does not relinquish his vantage point to hail them: "I forebore to speak to my pair at once. I watched them a while—I wondered what they would do. No great harm assuredly; but I was anxious to see if they were really isolated" (p. 83). Of course, if he would greet them, they would no longer be isolated. Instead, for the time being, he keeps his relationship to them that of a theatre-goer at a familiar play who wonders how the actors will handle the next plot development. Before the hour goes by, the narrator leaves his seat to join the Pallants’ party and the complications that follow. Still, as the story progresses, he continues to ignore the fact of his own participation except as it pertains to his need to satisfy his curiosity: "I couldn’t get it out of my head, as I have sufficiently indicated, that Mrs. Pallant was playing a game, and I’m afraid she saw in my face that this suspicion had been the motive of my journey. I had come there to find her out" (p. 103).

In relating "The Fall of the House of Usher," the narrator does not make a point of describing himself as an observer, yet he feels most at ease when acting as one. Disturbed by his initial impression of the House of Usher and the appearance of Roderick and Madeline, the narrator finds comfort in cataloging details of his surroundings,
such as the arrangement of the stones in the mansion's facade or the books that comprise Roderick's current reading. He would probably like to think of himself as presenting Roderick as dispassionately as he reads book titles off a shelf. Although he says he came to the House of Usher in response to the "heart" (p. 398) in Roderick's invitation, there is little evidence of warmth in the narrator's presentation of Roderick. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren describe "his interest in Usher's character [as] . . . a "clinical" interest."3 The narrator early dubs Roderick a "hypochondriac" (pp. 405, 409, 413) and determines "the futility in all attempts at cheering a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe in one unceasing radiation of gloom" (p. 405). Once he decides he cannot aid his old school friend, it is unclear why he stays on with him. What keeps him there, we might conclude, is a desire, unacknowledged to himself as well as his readers, to discover and explain away the mystery haunting the House of Usher; after all, that, in large part, is what compels many readers to return to this story even after knowing its climax.

Similarly, reader and narrator share a common curiosity about Bartleby the scrivener. The lawyer writes his account and we examine it again and again in hopes of understanding Bartleby's nature and behavior. The lawyer holds out little hope that our curiosity can be satisfied: "Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and, in his case, those are very small. What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby,
that is all I know of him, except, indeed, one vague report . . . " (p. 19). The narrator was forced into the role of observer by Bartleby's unavoidable presence. His concern over Bartleby's welfare is forced on him as well. The screen he places around his employee speaks to the extent of personal involvement the narrator favors: "I procured a high green folding-screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined" (p. 28). His reluctance for any complex engagement with others is also expressed earlier in his approach to his career: "though I belong to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous, even to turbulence, at times, yet nothing of that sort have I ever suffered to invade my peace" (p. 20). What we learn about this narrator suggests that although his preference for a relatively inactive and solitary life remains within socially acceptable bounds, Bartleby's withdrawal from society is not as foreign to the attorney as he would have us think.

To say that Bartleby's presence forced the narrator into a personal relationship with Bartleby, however minimal, is not to imply that the attorney lacks inquisitiveness. On discovering that Bartleby occupies the office after working hours, the lawyer cannot help but investigate Bartleby's few belongings:

Suddenly I was attracted to Bartleby's closed desk, the key in open sight left in the lock.
I mean no mischief, seek the gratification of no heartless curiosity, thought I; besides, the desk is mine, and its contents, too, so I will make bold to look within. (p. 40)
The attorney's insistence that he is innocent of "heartless
curiosity" contrasts with Miles Coverdale's partial disclaimer: "Had
I been as cold-hearted as I sometimes thought myself, nothing would
have interested me more than to witness the play of passions that
must thus have been involved" (p. 94).

While the attorney feels uncomfortable about his eagerness to
search Bartleby's belongings, Miles assumes that he has the right to
listen to or watch people without their permission. He likens his
role to that of the Chorus in a classic play, which seems to be set
aloof from the possibility of personal concernment, and
bestows the whole measure of its hope or fear, its
exultation or sorrow, on the fortunes of others, between
whom and itself this sympathy is the only bond. Destiny
... seldom chooses to arrange its scenes, and carry
forward its drama, without securing the presence of at least
one calm observer. It is his office to give applause when
due, and sometimes an inevitable tear, to detect the final
fitness of incident to character, and distill in his
long-brooding thought the whole morality of the performance.
(pp. 116-17)

The difference between watching actors who intend to have an audience
and eavesdropping on people who believe they have some privacy does
not much strike Miles Coverdale. While ill, he listens to Hollings-
worth at morning prayer: "My sleeping-room being but thinly
partitioned from his, the solemn murmur of his voice made its way to
my ears, compelling me to be an auditor of his awful privacy with the
Creator" (p. 64); once healthy, he seeks out a retreat, a hiding
place up in a tree from which he can look down on others. From
there, he can see and judge without being seen and judged himself.
On his return to Boston, Coverdale tries to create a similar vantage
point by observing life from his hotel window. But he can no longer see without himself being seen. Once discovered by Zenobia, he finds himself being judged by "eyes which, as my conscience whispered me, were shooting bright arrows, barbed with scorn, across the intervening space, directed full at my sensibilities as a gentleman" (p. 172). Nevertheless, after his initial embarrassment, Coverdale responds to having been caught spying by constructing an elaborate justification for his behavior. The narrator of The Blithedale Romance and the participant-observer narrator in general will go far to place themselves in the right and thereby also preserve their privilege of judging others:

It must be owned, too, that I had a keen, revengeful sense of the insult inflicted by Zenobia's scornful recognition, and more particularly by her letting down the curtain; as if such were the proper barrier to be interposed between a character like hers and a perceptive faculty like mine. For, was mine a mere vulgar curiosity? Zenobia should have known me better than to suppose it. She should have been able to appreciate that quality of the intellect and the heart which impelled me (often against my own will, and to the detriment of my own comfort) to live in other lives, and to endeavor--by generous sympathies, by delicate intuitions, by taking note of things too slight for record, and by bringing my human spirit into manifold accordance with the companions whence God assigned me--to learn the secret which was hidden even from themselves.

Of all possible observers, methought a woman like Zenobia and a man like Hollingsworth should have selected me. And, now, when the event has long been past, I retain the same opinion of my fitness for the office. True, I might have condemned them. Had I been judge, as well as witness, my sentence might have been as stern as that of destiny itself. (p. 173)

Participant-observers justify their right to judge as well as their right to observe. While Miles Coverdale launches into a complex review of the qualifications he believes should nullify
Zenobia's as yet unspoken criticism of him, the narrator of "Louisa Pallant," in a parallel situation, reacts with straightforward resentment. After a conversation in which Mrs. Pallant points out that the narrator appears to be encouraging his nephew into an ill-advised engagement with her daughter, he thinks, "it was absurd that Louisa Pallant, of all women, should propose to put me in the wrong. If ever a woman had been in the wrong herself—! I had even no need to go into that" (p. 97). Having once been wronged by Louisa Pallant has left the narrator with the supposition that he must now forever be in the right.

While Miles Coverdale and Louisa Pallant's jilted fiance both vehemently assert that they are in the right, their readers, put off by their strident tone, may not be so sure. There is, however, likely to be less discrepancy between readers' and narrator's view of the situation in "Bartleby the Scrivener." All would agree that Bartleby is the problem. He creates the difficulty by refusing to perform tasks ordinarily associated with his position of scrivener. How could his employer be wrong in expecting Bartleby to perform those tasks? Bartleby heightens the pressures by taking up residence in the office where he will not work. How could the attorney be wrong in expecting Bartleby to vacate the office? The attorney presents his case: "What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay any taxes? Or is this property yours?" (p. 51) Pitying Bartleby for being so alone and adrift in the world, the lawyer gives much thought to discovering a way out of the predicament into which Bartleby has drawn him. Despite the pity the
narrator expresses, he never doubts the established authority that puts him in the position to judge Bartleby in the first place, and then to find him guilty of disturbing his peace of mind.

Roderick Usher is guilty of Bartleby's crime; he too makes the narrator in Poe's tale terribly uneasy with his "excessive nervous agitation" (p. 402) and his insistence on theories that conflict with the narrator's own. The narrator has confidence in his right to judge Roderick's theories and his person since Roderick is sick while he is well; Roderick admits great fear while the narrator does not; Roderick is often incoherent while he, as evidenced by his writing this story, considers himself an able communicator; and Roderick argues ideas irreconcilable with science while the narrator espouses logical laws, albeit sometimes "paradoxical" ones (p. 399). Using rationality as his measure, the narrator assumes that because his approach is logical and Roderick's is not, he should be able to understand more of what is happening in the House of Usher than can the Usher heir.

Like the readers of "Bartleby the Scrivener," the readers of "The Fall of the House of Usher" align themselves with the narrator and, as John F. Lynen notes, agree with the narrator's "comforting common sense, which keeps entities distinct and holds mind and matter to separate levels."4 We believe we should be able to discriminate between the superstitious and the reasonable, the animate and the inanimate, and the living and the dead. Yet the narrator's participation in the entombment of Madeline should warn readers that the ability to make these distinctions and the distinctions
themselves do not always hold. The narrator might think of himself as a better judge of reality than Roderick, but, even after viewing Madeline's lifelike appearance in death, he does not question Roderick's resolve to put Madeline quietly away rather than conduct an immediate public burial. This is the point in the story where readers expect the narrator to intervene, to challenge Roderick, and to apply his analytical mind to the peculiarities of Madeline's death. But the narrator does not even consider becoming involved in Roderick's decision, since to do so would mean he might have to assume some responsibility for whatever might follow. It is characteristic of the participant-observer that he wants to convince himself and his readers that he is somehow not implicated in the events that affect the people around him. To agree with Roderick becomes the simplest way for the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" to avoid the necessity to take any action. Relying solely on his own knowledge, the narrator confidently though incorrectly ascribes to the disease "as usual in all maladies of a strictly cataleptical character, the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death" (p. 410), and in so doing, the narrator confuses the attributes of catalepsy from those of a living person who looks dead with those of a dead person who looks living. This should lead readers to wonder whether Roderick is in fact justified in including the narrator in the responsibility for Madeline's suffering: "We have put her living in the tomb" (p. 416). To the narrator, the "We" means only that he assisted Roderick, at
Roderick's request, in the entombment of Lady Madeline. He never raises the possibility that he might share in the responsibility for the horror of the end of the Usher line. According to Frederick S. Frank, the narrator is "No mere spectator or witness to the collapse of the house, he may really be the causal agent whose aesthetic insensitivity and rejection of visionary habits of seeing bring about the catastrophe of amorphousness at the climax of the tale." The narrator reports the happenings at the House of Usher so that the reader concentrates on the strangeness of the house and of Roderick and Madeline while paying little attention to the part the narrator plays in the destruction of the House of Usher.

There is a tendency for the participant-observer narrator to minimize the fact that he participates in while he observes the actions of the other characters. Since he has difficulty admitting that he acted at all, it is especially difficult for him to acknowledge responsibility for those actions. The necessity of taking responsibility is presented to the narrator by someone else rather than occurring to him spontaneously. In one attempt to make the narrator act in his role as his nephew's guardian, Louisa Pallant finds a hint insufficient: "My dear friend, you're quite amazing! You behave for all the world as if you were perfectly ready to accept certain consequences" (p. 94); so she speaks more plainly: "Haven't you any sense of the rigour of your office? . . . Is that what his mother has sent him out to you for: that you shall find him the first wife you can pick up, that you shall let him put his head into the noose the day after his arrival?" (p. 95). Only after more
discussion does she finally evoke an appropriate response from him:  
"You are warning me . . . but I hardly know of what! It seems to me my responsibility would begin only at the moment your daughter herself should seem in danger" (pp. 95-96). When Mrs. Pallant assures him that she will "take care of Linda" if only he will "carry off" his nephew, the narrator pulls back. "I don't know—I should be very sorry to act on a false alarm. I'm very well here; I like the place and the life and your society. Besides, it doesn't strike me that—on her side—there's any real symptom" (p. 96). Thinking to himself later, he adds, "I really had no wish to change my scene. It was no part of my promise to my sister that, with my middle-aged habits, I should duck and dodge about Europe" (p. 97). By Louisa Pallant's plea that he act responsibly and leave with his nephew, the narrator refuses to be moved; in place of his original determination "to be very careful about . . . the relations [Archie] should form [since he] suspected him of great innocence" (p. 83), the narrator substitutes a resolve to maintain his life's easy habits.

Equal in his disinclination to be answerable for all his behavior is Miles Coverdale. Angered by his attitude, Zenobia calls him to task for his voyeurism and what she considers his meddling:  
"You know not what you do! It is dangerous, sir, believe me, to tamper thus with earnest human passions, out of your own mere idleness, and for your sport. I will endure it no longer!" (p. 182). Coverdale's denial pushes her further: "But, beware, sir! With all your fancied acuteness, you step blindfolded into these affairs. For any mischief that may follow your interference, I hold you
responsibie!" (pp. 182-83). Perhaps in his reluctance to credit
Zenobia's attack on his perceptiveness, Miles also rejects her
warning, for we soon discover him thinking, "Well, as Zenobia so
kindly intimates, I have no more business here. I wash my hands of
it all. On Hollingsworth's head be the consequences!" (p. 183).

Unfortunately, the attorney in "Bartleby the Scrivener" can
conceive of no one on whom to shift the burden of Bartleby. When the
tenant who moved into his old office and found Bartleby there
insists, "you are responsible for the man you left there" (p. 57),
the attorney apologizes but disagrees: "really, the man you allude to
is nothing to me—he is no relation or apprentice of mine, that you
should hold me responsible for him" (p. 57). However, the remaining
occupants see the situation differently—they turn to the narrator
after Bartleby takes up residence on the stairs and in the halls and
entry of their building. The attorney finally elects to "strive my
best to rid them of the nuisance they complained of" (p. 58), not in
response to a feeling of responsibility but because he is "Fearful
. . . of being exposed in the papers" (p. 58).

When the attorney is once again unsuccessful with Bartleby, he
rushes away from him and the crowd of "exasperated tenants" (p. 60).
He pursues his escape into the suburbs after temporarily
"surrendering" (p. 60) the business to clerk Nippers. Yet he tries
not to admit his retreat is connected to any failure of
responsibility: "I distinctly perceived that I had now done all that
I possibly could, both in respect to the demands of the landlord and
his tenants, and with regard to my own desire and sense of duty, to
benefit Bartleby, and shield him from rude persecution" (p. 60).

This retreat to a safer ground distant from the problems faced by the protagonists is a maneuver typical of the participant-observer narrator. Sometimes it is as obvious as Poe's narrator's mad dash from the bodies of Roderick and Madeline Usher; sometimes it is more subtle, as when the narrator of "Louisa Pallant" returns to his hotel and waits to hear from his nephew the outcome of Archie's conversation with Mrs. Pallant. When Miles Coverdale prepares to break off his labor at Blithedale "for a week or two" (p. 153), the farm's manager, Silas Foster, comments, "We shall never see your face here again. Here ends the reformation on the world, so far as Miles Coverdale has a hand in it!" (p. 153). Although Coverdale does reappear at Blithedale, it is not as a worker among workers, an idealist among idealists. He has, as Silas indicated, given up pretensions to seeking utopia and settled himself once again into the familiar comforts of his bachelor life.

Miles Coverdale at the conclusion of his experiment with community at Blithedale is not very different from the man who first arrived there: he has given up trying to write poetry, but his pleasures and interests are otherwise the same. In fact, all the narrators show little sign of having been much influenced by their encounters with the subjects of their narratives. The attitudes and values with which they began their inquiries are virtually unmodified at the end. Although his "brain reeled" (p. 417) from the impact of the House of Usher's destruction, the effect on Poe's narrator must have been short-lived. He does not feel moved to revise his telling
of the tale to reflect any doubts he might have had about the incapacity of reason to explain what happened on the narrator's last day in the House of Usher. Nor does extended contact with Mrs. Pallant cause the narrator of James' short story to re-examine his version of the past. On the last page of "Louisa Pallant," she is still presented as "the wronger of [his] youth" (p. 122). Not even Archie Parker's choice, so like Louisa's, to escape his uncle's authority makes the narrator question his own part in the circumstances he has been describing. By composing Bartleby's biography, the lawyer seems to have gained some relief from whatever guilt he might have experienced over Bartleby's incarceration. However, less guilt does not necessarily indicate more self-knowledge. Once his feelings have been expressed, he is free to resume the easy existence he prefers, an existence that ignores suffering humanity unless it presses upon him. Norman Springer comments that in writing about Bartleby, the narrator, "Essentially . . . speaks from where he is now, which is where he was before Bartleby, where he was most of the time with Bartleby."6

In summary, the participant-observer narrators I analyze are bachelors whose social and economic positions advantageously place them above the majority of people. These advantages, they assume, authorize a condescending observation of others more than an inclination to befriend them. The posture of an observer suits their preference for passive rather than active relationships with the world and gives them a position apart from which to judge the activity of people whose lives they often see as mysteries to be
revealed. Though they feel confident in their right to observe and judge the behavior and motives of others, they are not much inclined to subject themselves to similar scrutiny. What some might see as their active involvement strikes the participant-observer as no more involvement than an audience has when watching a play. By refusing to acknowledge that they have acted and are involved, it follows that these narrators can then refuse responsibility for their actions. Such a stand encourages the narrators to back off from scenes of activity to secure vantage points. In this retreat, readers recognize not only that the narrators are unwilling to move into fuller engagement with the problems of their companions, but also that they are unwilling to alter their views to reflect their experiences. With such characters as narrators, it is inevitable that the question of reliability should arise.
CHAPTER 2 FOOTNOTES


CHAPTER 3
RELIABILITY AND DISTANCE

The emphasis I have placed on the participant-observer narrators' tendency to credit themselves with greater sensitivity and understanding than is evident in their portrayals of other characters might lead one to the assumption that I suspect these storytellers of some degree of unreliability. They are, in Scholes and Kellogg's language, "semi-reliable," making it necessary for us to discover to what extent a particular narrator is reliable or unreliable. Strictly reliable and unreliable narrators do exist in literature; against clear examples of these, the qualities of semi-reliability should be able to be seen more clearly.

But if we are to limit this part of the discussion to dramatized first-person narrators, then, first, reliability should be distinguished from fallibility. All realistically drawn dramatized first-person narrators are fallible; this fact alone does not indicate unreliability. Where fallibility depends entirely on the limitations imposed on the narrator because she or he is a character in the story for whom complete and perfect knowledge is humanly impossible, reliability, although founded on these same limitations, adds the dimension of the individual narrator's intellect, personality, values, and motivations. In Charlotte Bronte's novel,
Jane Eyre's judgment may at times be flawed because she lacks essential facts. But in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" it is more than flawed judgment that leads the narrator to do away with the old man in his care--it is a totally distorted sense of reality. While we can recognize that many of Jane Eyre's decisions are based on her need to maintain her self-respect, Poe's narrator asks us to accept his antipathy for the diseased eye of his victim as reasonable cause for his decision to murder and dismember him. The reader of Jane Eyre ordinarily ends up with feelings similar to Jane's about her experiences and the other characters who people her world. It would be an unusual reader of "The Tell-Tale Heart" who would share the narrator's dread of the old man's eye and be convinced of his sanity by his ability to plan and carry out the crime. Jane Eyre is a fallible but reliable narrator; the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" is a fallible and unreliable one. The status of the narrator as a character within the story totally determines that the narrator will be fallible. Yet the reactions of the reader to the individual characteristics of the narrator are primary when considering reliability.

In many texts, readers can decide about reliability without hesitation. Almost immediately, it is clear that the orphaned Jane Eyre deserves readers' sympathy and admiration; even sooner, readers realize that "The Tell-Tale Heart"'s narrator can not be trusted. When the narrator's reliability or unreliability is so obvious, readers hardly realize they are making up their minds about how to value the voice telling the tale. However, it is not always a simple
matter for readers to decide whether to allow the narrator to guide their thoughts and judgments. In one paragraph, a narrator might come across as sensitive and wise and in another, callous and obtuse. Unable to relax, confident in the knowledge of how to value the narrator and consequently the "truth" of the narrative, readers must be wary, constantly revising their opinions of the narrator and all that she or he says. This is the situation of the reader who confronts the semi-reliable narrator. Some critics place a high value on texts with a high degree of such indeterminacy. Wolfgang Iser is typical:

>a text which lays things out before the reader in such a way that he can either accept or reject them will lessen the degree of participation as it allows him nothing but a yes or no. Texts with such minimal indeterminacy tend to be tedious, for it is only when the reader is given the chance to participate actively that he will regard the text, whose intention he himself has helped to compose, as real . . . indeterminacy is the fundamental precondition for reader participation.3

The enthusiasm of Iser for reader participation in indeterminate texts is not shared by Wayne Booth. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, he issues a warning about the negative influence on the reader of what he calls the "impersonal narrator." Booth's explanation for the use of the term "impersonal" for the intimacy of a first-person narrator is the absence of an explicit relationship between the dramatized narrator and the implied author.4 In fiction in which the dramatized first-person narrator is obviously reliable or obviously unreliable, the reader has an unmistakable sense of where the implied author stands—that there is a correspondence of values between *Jane Eyre* and her implied author seems a given; that the implied author of "The
Tell-Tale Heart" looks over the narrator's shoulder and urges the reader to judge this story's narrator differently than he judged himself is clear from first paragraph:

True!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in hell. How then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story.5

Booth stresses that a literary text includes more than the narrator addressing the reader, it also incorporates the relationship between the author, who "has an obligation to be as clear about his moral position as he possibly can be,"6 and her or his characters and readers. When those relationships are made plain, Booth sees no problem; but when they are obscured, as is the situation with works employing some unreliable and all semi-reliable narrators, one has great difficulty discovering in the text whether there is a norm besides the narrator's that could be the implied author's.

The disappearance of the implied author behind, above, or within the character of the narrator, which critics since Henry James have praised as one of the chief accomplishments of modern fiction7, is seen by Wayne Booth as a development that allows the often questionable morality of the narrator to go unchallenged. According to Booth, if we are supposed to view the narrator ironically and judge him critically, then the implied author's presence is necessary. Without a sense of that presence, the reader is left to depend solely on the narrator. If that narrator is especially appealing, her or his morals might become of less importance than
they should be to the reader: "the failures we are talking about . . . come from the reader's inability to dissociate himself from a vicious center of consciousness presented to him with all of the seductive self-justification of skillful rhetoric." From his examples, we can tell that Mr. Booth worries mainly that a corrupt narrator, portrayed with charm, as in Celine's *Journey to the Edge of the Night*, could corrupt a modern reader who is not firmly anchored in a secure morality. That may be possible; however, all semi-reliable narrators are not necessarily attractive nor do they all lead the reader away from questions of morality. Although the readers of tales told by participant-observers may have trouble identifying how they are meant to take the views of these narrators, this difficulty works to confront readers directly with the moral problems of judging others. Booth's concern over the threat posed by narrators who are criminals or fascists, whose amorality challenges Judaeo-Christian values, is uncalled for here since participant-observer narrators tend consciously to uphold the traditional values of Western society. Their conventionality contrasts with the unorthodox approaches to life of the characters whom they are presenting. The danger to the reader is that it is all too easy to agree with these narrators' judgments of others, not because of how compelling the narrators are, but because of how acceptable, how reasonable, their views first appear. If the reader simply goes along with a narrator's findings, she or he will not be corrupted; however, that reader will miss the opportunity to gain what might be learned by critically examining the "safe" assumptions the narrator
chooses not to examine very closely.

Yet, identification with the narrator is not a habit that can be attributed only to the less sophisticated. On first reading, few of us can resist the natural inclination to ally ourselves with the voice addressing us in a manner so personal. Unless, of course, that narrator gives unmistakable notice of her or his unreliability by stating at the offset a credo of hypocrisy, madness, lies, or such—a technique preferred by Mr. Booth as an appropriately clear signal to the audience to read ironically. However, we do not expect the fully dramatized narrator to be without faults; we may be even more attracted to a narrator’s point of view because of this lack of perfection. Like us and unlike most omniscient narrators, participant-observers expose their weaknesses; they present themselves, for example, sometimes as too self-important and other times as too self-deprecating. Without cautious rereading, it is easy to miss the fact that the flaws that make the participant-observer narrators more human affect not only their self-characterizations but also their descriptions of other characters.

Perhaps in this respect, the participant-observer is a more difficult problem than other semi-reliable narrators. Even after a reader acknowledges the necessity of keeping a wary eye on the narrator, the major dilemma of this form of narration remains: the narrator is our only source of information about the characters whose story he is telling. It is quite possible that a reader who has moved beyond identification with the narrator and is able to
determine just how far she or he is willing to trust the narrator's self-estimation, still is uncertain how to evaluate that narrator's depiction of his subjects.

To some, the fact that these narrators do not consider themselves central characters in the events they witness and report gives them an advantage over the protagonist narrators. Percy Lubbock states, "When the man in the book is expected to make a picture of himself, a searching and elaborate portrait, then the limit of his capacity is touched and passed." Since the participant-observer narrator is a minor actor in the plot, Lubbock implies, it matters little if he seems only a "dim silhouette against the window," so long as he is able to produce a sharp image of those who play leading roles in the story. Lubbock's assessment of the relative merits of the protagonist narrator and what Norman Friedman and others have called, with less emphasis on his activities, the "witness" narrator has taken on the standing of a given. For example, Norman Friedman's important 1955 article, "Point of View in Fiction" suggests, "Because of his subordinate role in the story itself, the witness-narrator has much greater mobility and consequently a greater range and variety of sources of information than the protagonist proper, who is centrally involved in the action." Leon Surmilion's descriptive treatment in Techniques of Fiction Writing: Measure and Madness flatly states, "when the observer is a minor character in first person, he can give an objective description of the hero, which the hero cannot do for himself." The point is made again and again. Somehow the
assumption that the protagonist is too close to the action to give a fair and full account has led to the conclusion that the narrator who is less involved can be more objective. A 1977 dissertation by Ellen Shamis Roth allows that the witness narrator:

> can be questioned because of possible biases . . . [but] even more distortion is possible in the novel related by the narrator who is also the protagonist. His vision is generally more complexly subjective than that of an observer for the simple reason that his close involvement in the narrated events blurs his clarity of vision.\(^\text{15}\)

In this chapter and the next, I will indicate just how "complexly subjective" participant-observer narrators are, and how often their potential for "clarity of vision" is blurred.

The assumption that the participant-observer is disinterested simply because he is not the main character does not hold true. Booth notes, "we react to all narrators as persons,"\(^\text{16}\) and the intimacy of reading an account by a dramatized narrator encourages us to compare the narrator to ourselves and learn from the comparison. If we recognize that we tend to show ourselves in the best possible light, often in the role of wise advisor, when telling an anecdote about someone else, we might then expect the participant-observer to do the same. Perhaps his stake in the actual incident he narrates is not of crucial importance to him. What is crucial to him and to us is the validity of his interpretation of that incident. To be seen by the reader as having correctly assessed the situation and the people concerned becomes the narrator's goal. The narrator succeeds when, in convincing us that all the events proceeded as he says they did, he also convinces us that his interpretation of what came to
pass takes everyone and everything into account. The narrator "fails" when in spite of being convinced of the accuracy of his facts, we are not equally sure he understands the importance of the events to the characters involved or their feelings and motivations regarding their involvement. While the participant-observer, like all semi-reliable narrators, can be counted on to have his facts in order (or else she or he would not be semi-reliable but blatantly unreliable), the reader cannot assume that the narrator's objectivity in reporting goes beyond facts into analysis. It might help readers who are trying to arrive at judgments independent of the narrator's to regard the narrator's explanations as part of a case he is building to persuade readers he is right— not only in the judgments he has made but also in the action and responsibility he has or has not taken—for we must remember that this narrator is, indeed, a participant as well as an observer.

This is where the issues of semi-reliability and distance intersect. Our power to determine the relative reliability of the participant-observer narrator depends on the distance he keeps us from the other characters and their situation. To deal with this problem, we must examine the narrator as a writer controlling his material and making decisions on how he wants that material presented. Looking at the narrator as a writer, we must inquire about his tone, not only in terms of his attitude toward his audience, but, more significantly, in terms of his attitude toward his characters. How much of the other characters does he allow us to see and hear directly? Are we able to tell what the other characters
think of him? By the work's conclusion, do we feel that we have learned all that is humanly possible to know about the situation of the protagonist(s)? Has the narrator left us with a sense of his and our deepening knowledge and sensitivity toward his subjects and his story?

These questions can only be answered by studying the texts of the stories. It is by determining how distant the narrator keeps us from the characters that we are able to draw conclusions about each narrator's degree of reliability. The narrator who allows us to come closest to his characters is not necessarily the most reliable, but he gives us the most opportunity to decide on his reliability. If, from what we see and hear these characters do and say, we come to feel that we know them well enough to evaluate them independently of the narrator, then we are in the position to use what these characters tell us about the narrator in order to judge him for ourselves.

Our ability to judge, however, still depends on the narrator's presenting us with exact reports of conversations which took place, in some instances, many years before the narrator sat down to transcribe them. Yet, readers know they are to accept every phrase and pause in a dialogue as accurate because the narrator is exercising the literary "convention of the perfect memory." The advantages of this convention to the narrator as writer are obvious, but there are advantages to readers that go beyond our just being entertained—dialogue lets readers encounter the narrator and the other characters relatively free of the narrator's editorializing.
According to Michal Glowiński, "Extended quotation in the first-person novel brings the 'I' who is speaking close to an omniscient narrator and consequently introduces substantial complications." The complications to which Glowiński refers have to do with the logical conflict between the convention of perfect memory and the limited knowledge of all dramatized first-person narrators. Yet, out of this conflict comes the reader's means of gaining some distance from the narrator. Glowiński observes that, "a first-person narration becomes somewhat similar to a dialogue in the presence of the reader. He is in possession not only of the narrative text, but also, so to speak, involved in the very act of creating and transmitting the story." Assuming that by "he" Glowiński intends the reader, we recognize in the conversation among characters the chance to disengage from identification with the voice which has been heretofore addressing solely the reader. We can then react to all who are engaged in the dialogue almost as we would to a dialogue in a story told by an omniscient narrator. Dialogue can act as a catalyst to our sense of responsibility to become active readers, reminding us of the necessity and the capacity to judge all the speakers for ourselves.

In quite a straightforward way, the amount and content of the dialogue offered are among the best means we have of arriving at a decision about a narrator's relative reliability. By examining dialogue in the context of the distance the narrator as a writer establishes between his characters and his readers and the distance the narrator as a character maintains from other characters, and his
attitude toward them, we should gain added insight into the meaning of the works. The paucity of dialogue in Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," makes its narrator's degree of semi-reliability most difficult to ascertain. And although the lawyer narrating "Bartleby the Scrivener" gives us almost every word of his subject, the infrequency and the ambiguity of Bartleby's speech throws us back into the predicament of depending almost entirely on the narrator. In Henry James' "Louisa Pallant" and Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance, the narrators frequently avail themselves of opportunities to use dialogue, and it is these works to which I will first turn.

"Louisa Pallant"

In each of the six sections into which "Louisa Pallant" is divided, dialogue is present; in all but one, a lengthy conversation is prominent; all dialogues feature the object of the narrator's attention, Louise Pallant. The nearly even balance between dialogue and commentary offers the reader regular occasions to measure the narrator's subjective account against the more objectively presented conversation. Yet, we do not get to overhear each member of the narrator's party converse at length, and so the insights we are able to gain through the medium of dialogue are limited. By restricting the discussions he reports in depth to those with Louise Pallant, the narrator causes us to see Linda Pallant and Archie Parker through his and Mrs. Pallant's eyes rather than ours or Archie and Linda's. Since what we are to make of this story depends so much on our
understanding of the moral nature of Linda Pallant, the narrator's choice to allow us so little direct access to her is significant. It forces us to read the story in terms of conflicting visions of Linda Pallant and her purpose, and to decide about Linda based not on our own judgment of her actions and speech, but on our inclination to believe either her mother or the narrator.

The reaction of the narrator when he observes a woman and her very beautiful daughter strolling in a Hamburg beergarden is censorious, but not without some cause:

I am afraid it occurred to me to take for granted that they were of an artful intention and that if they hadn't been the elder lady would have handed the younger over a little less to public valuation and not have sought so to conceal her own face. Perhaps this question came into my mind too easily just then—in view of my prospective mentorship to my nephew. If I was to show him only the best of Europe I should have to be very careful about the people he should meet—especially the ladies—and the relations he should form. (p. 83)

From the beginning of his account, then, we are led to expect that the narrator is sensitive to the possibility that Archie Parker could become involved with someone as attractive as Linda Pallant. In fact, after greeting mother and daughter as old acquaintances, he finds Linda Pallant so appealing that he is swayed from his initial impression: "She was such a little lady that she made me ashamed of having doubted, however vaguely and for a moment, of her position in the scale of propriety. . . . No girl who had such a lovely way of parting her lips could pass for designing" (p. 86).

As far as we know, Linda Pallant does not part her lips for speech very often. Her mother tells the narrator that, in private,
speech is hardly necessary between them; and the narrator passes on to his readers but few of Linda's public utterances. Thus the first thing we hear Linda say becomes the more significant when we realize how little else we will hear directly from her. In answer to her mother's remark, "Well, we won't kill him, shall we, Linda?" about the yet-to-arrive Archie Parker, she replies, "I don't know—perhaps we shall!" (p. 88). The ominous tone of this exchange does not cause the narrator to pack his bags and stand ready to sweep his nephew away. Possibly her comment does contribute to the more balanced, less glowing assessment he makes of Linda after a few days in her acquaintance:

I've seen girls I liked better . . . but have never seen one who for the hour you were with her (the impression passed somehow when she was out of sight) occupied you so completely . . . she struck you above all things as a felicitous final product—after the fashion of . . . some waxen orchid or some perfect peach. She was clearly the result of a process of calculation, a process patiently educative, a pressure exerted, and all artfully, so that she should reach a high point. (pp. 89-90)

With his admiration for Linda so qualified by a sense of her artificiality, he still makes no attempt to separate Archie from her; even though, by his own report, her effect would be much lessened by distance.

The narrator makes no further criticisms of Linda. Perhaps she wins him over by the attention she pays him: "If I liked her I had . . . my good reason: it was many a day since a pretty girl had had the air of taking me so much into account" (p. 94). By the time he and Archie rejoin the Pallants at the Italian lakes, the calculated quality of Linda's appearance no longer seems to bother him; it
strikes him that Linda is "in every way beautiful . . . why shouldn't the presumptions be in favor of every result of it?" (p. 104). Since the narrator's responses to Linda appear to be limited to her undisputed attractiveness, he gives us little opportunity for determining her character. In fact, he seems to avoid thinking about her character. For example, he "scarcely knew why" (p. 104) his reaction to the possibility that Linda might be afraid of boating with Archie caused him an involuntary laugh. He records the "quick slightly sharp look . . . [that] appeared to challenge [him] a little—"Pray what's the matter with you?"" and notes, "It was the first expression of the kind I had ever seen in her face" (p. 104). But if this wordless communication raises any questions in the narrator's mind, we never get to hear of them. Apparently, Linda's remarks and glances are subtle enough to be ignored by some readers altogether. Philip Nicoloff says Linda "throughout seems . . . charming and sensitive," while Walter E. Wright suggests that although "It is even possible that she is designedly obedient and charming—that her every action is egoistic—. . . yet . . . she is free of malice and eager to please." Whether or not we believe the narrator should and does suspect Linda's goodness, he had sufficient reason to leave the Pallants behind and guide his nephew's grand tour of Europe elsewhere, because the women are clearly open to the charge that their sole purpose is to have Linda marry into money and position. Their situation is so obvious that as the narrator first addresses them, he worries that he will be asked for money. However, he assures us from the start that this will not be among the
complications of the plot: "I may as well say immediately . . . that she gave me neither then nor later any sign of a desire to contract a loan" (p. 85).

Nor does Louisa Pallant want to solve their financial problems by helping Linda marry the wealthy nephew of the man she rejected so many years before. She says and does nothing to encourage either the narrator or Archie Parker to take a favorable view of her daughter, to the extent that the narrator is surprised at how lukewarm Mrs. Pallant's reception is to his praise of her daughter: "my remarks produced so little of a maternal flutter. Her detachment, her air of having no fatuous illusions and not being blinded by prejudice, seemed to me at times to savour of affectation" (p. 92). Far from instigating any relationship between Linda and Archie, she pressures the narrator to remove Archie from her daughter's influence, and, failing that, she leaves with Linda.

In the course of the story, Louisa Pallant gives three motives for her decision to work against her daughter's apparent inclination to engage Archie Parker. One reason is, as the narrator would expect, out of consideration for him, though hardly expressed in terms that would flatter him. When he does not attend to her suggestion that the narrator "ought to fish [Archie] out now--from where he has fallen--and take him straight away," (p. 95) she reproaches him: "You're very annoying. You don't deserve what I'd fain do for you" (p. 96). A second consideration of Louisa's is the feelings of Archie's mother. Louisa questions the narrator as to his sister's expectations:
Haven't you any sense of the rigour of your office? . . . Is that what his mother has sent him out to you for: that you shall find him the first wife you can pick up? . . . If I were his mother I know what I should think. I can put myself into her place—I'm not narrow-minded. I know perfectly well how she must regard such a question. (p. 95)

Indeed, Mrs. Pallant seems to be putting herself in the place of Archie Parker's mother, since her most pressing desire seems to be to "save" (pp. 99, 107, 109) Archie from her own daughter. Her third reason for discouraging Archie from his interest in Linda is that Louisa agrees with the narrator's sense of his nephew's innocence and sees Archie as, she says, "simple and sane and honest" (p. 112).

Archie would be no match for Linda, whom she describes as "ambitious, luxurious, determined to have what she wants--more 'on the make' than anyone I've ever seen" (p. 108). Although there is some truth in Christof Wegelin's statement that, "the contrast between the innocence of the young athlete and the corruption of the girl is neither at the center of the story nor related to any international contrast,"23 Louisa Pallant's recognition of that contrast is at the heart of her position. Her stand on Linda's incompatibility with Archie is unequivocal: "You could tell him she's a bad, hard girl--one who'd poison any good man's life" (p. 105).

The narrator, however, seems less impressed with Mrs. Pallant's indictment of Linda than with her unconventional willingness to criticize her daughter. At one point when Louisa calls Linda "horrible" (p. 109), the narrator's reaction is "isn't it still more so to hear a mother say such things" (p. 109). Because by criticizing her daughter she deviates from what Adrienne Rich in Of
Woman Born describes as society's "unexamined assumption" that a mother's love is "unconditional," by Nicoloff and Wright. Nicoloff further accuses Louisa of "some deliberate misrepresentation or even insanity," indicating the risk run by those like Louisa Pallant who challenge society's expectations of women. That Louisa Pallant wishes her daughter to marry someone deserving of her calculating nature is given no credence. Rather than take seriously, first, Louisa's warning and, then, her condemnation of Linda, the narrator prefers to use the situation to find more cause to discredit Louisa Pallant. He concludes that Linda's interest in Archie is "perfectly innocent" (p. 93) while attributing to Louisa a greater avarice. To suit his purpose, the narrator revises his estimate of Archie's fortune—Archie Parker is no longer to be considered one of "that disgustingly rich set" (p. 87), but instead simply "one who could give [Linda] nothing but pocket-money ... a very moderate prize ... if she had been prepared to marry for ambition" (p. 99). According to this way of thinking, Louisa is not trying to "save" Archie from Linda but is trying to save Linda for a wealthier, perhaps even a titled, match. In conversing with Louisa, his comment, "It's a pity my nephew hasn't a title" (p. 112) gives away part of his analysis of her motives. But Mrs. Pallant appears not overly offended by this: "I see you think I want that, and that I'm acting a part. God forgive you! Your suspicion's perfectly natural. How can anyone tell ... with people like us" (p. 112).
It is Louisa Pallant's willingness to hold herself accountable, as well as her daughter, which leads us to accept her word over the narrator's:

I've a right to speak of it. I've been punished by my sin itself. I've been hideously worldly, I've thought only of that, and I've taught her to be so—to do the same. That's the only instruction I've ever given her, and she has learned the lesson so well that now I see it stamped there in all her nature, on all her spirit and on all her form, I'm horrified at my work. (p. 109)

As Osborn Andreas says, "Louisa's self-knowledge and consequent self-censure is quickened by her seeing in her hard-natured ambitious daughter Linda, what she herself must have been like."28 Linda has taught her mother what it means to live with someone for whom "a brilliant social position" (p. 110) is more important than any human relationship. Linda treats her as Louisa knows she has treated others:

God in his mercy has let me see it in time, but his ways are strange that he has let me see it in my daughter. It's myself he has let me see—myself as I was for years. But she's worse—she is, I assure you; she's worse than I intended or dreamed. (pp. 110-111)

That Louisa is not giving herself more credit than she is due can be surmised from a description of her, not intended by the narrator to be in the least complimentary. Louisa Pallant once had qualities that Linda seems never to possess:

She was battered and world-worn and, spiritually speaking, vulgarized; something fresh had rubbed off her—it even included the vivacity of her early desire to do the best thing for herself . . . at the same time she betrayed a scepticism, and that was rather becoming, for it had quenched the eagerness of her prime, the mercenary principle I had so suffered from. (p. 89)
Freshness, vivacity, and eagerness are characteristics which the narrator would hardly accuse "a felicitous final product" (p. 90) like Linda Pallant of inheriting; yet the reader warms to Louisa for having once had this energy, though it might have been used for "mercenary" purposes.

The narrator seems to find Linda's more cultivated manner is more to his liking, but then it is not Linda's ambition that had hurt him so by breaking off an engagement. This apparently traumatic event of twenty years before manages to overshadow every current exchange with the Pallants. As Nicoloff puts it, "The deepest logic of the narrators' life is that he is the bereaved lover, that he has been irremediably wronged." The reminders the narrator gives of Louisa's inconstancy, her poor morals, her manipulativeness, and her acquisitiveness are all marked by her rejection of him and her decision to marry another. This incident must also have its story; but all the details of that story, the narrator chooses to keep to himself. We get the narrator's interpretation of the key event without ever hearing the painful tale upon which that interpretation is founded. We are hampered from arriving at a conclusion about his jilting independent of him by his choice to keep his past from his readers. The only bit of data that challenges the narrator's point of view is presented by him as Louisa's coverup story and then never commented on again: "I knew ... what she had given out—that I had driven her off by my insane jealousy before she had ever thought of Henry Pallant, before she had ever seen him" (p. 84). Perhaps he believes the image of himself in the throes of strong passion is so
incredible that no comment on the accusation of jealousy is necessary. Although we would surely like to know what Louisa Pallant would say in her own defense, we are never given the chance to hear her speak directly on this subject.

That is not to say that the narrator never alludes to the broken engagement in conversation, or that Louisa is unaware of how it dominates his thoughts. When she tries to explain to him that the action she takes to thwart Linda's plans for Archie is her "reparation" and "expiation" (p. 106) for raising such a daughter, she understands why he is confused. Since he views himself as the one originally sinned against, he expects the reparation is due him, and so complains to Louisa, "I don't see what good it does me, or what it makes up to me for, that you should abuse your daughter" (p. 107). However, she is irritated; after being reminded that, "she owed me nothing and I wish no one injured, no one denounced or exposed for my sake" (p. 109), she snaps back, "For your sake? Oh I'm not thinking of you! . . . It's a satisfaction to my own conscience—for I have one, little as you may think I've a right to speak of it" (p. 109).

Because the narrator feels secure in his readers' sympathy and allegiance, he does not hesitate to include Louisa Pallant's criticism of him. Each time Louisa says anything harsh to him, she apparently does so out of the frustration of trying to make him give up his grudge against her long enough to understand that Archie is in danger from Linda. When she initially tries to point out to him that the "consequences" of Archie's befriending Linda could be romance,
calling them "the very same consequences that ensued when you and I first became acquainted" (p. 94), the narrator uses the occasion to hint at her poor treatment of him, by asking, "Do you mean she'd throw him over" (p. 94). Her reaction is: "You're not kind, you're not generous" (p. 94). Later in the same conversation, she calls him "incredibly superficial" (p. 97) when he side-steps her admonition to leave immediately with Archie by suggesting she should not "really object to the boy so much as a son-in-law" (p. 97). Angered by her "contempt" (p. 97), he resorts to his past familiarity with her: "But it seems odd that a lesson in consistency should come from you" (p. 97). Since Louisa Pallant's every word and action in this story is consistent with her purpose to prevent a marriage between Linda and Archie, his retort seems unjust as it applies to their present situation. But she knows as well as we do that it is not simply her handling of the budding romance to which he is referring. However, she indicates hope that eventually he will be able to give up his focus on the past and take a longer view of her: "Oh yes, you've made up your mind about me; you see me in a certain way and don't like the trouble of changing. . . . But you'll have to change—if you've any generosity" (p. 108).

The story the narrator decides to tell ten years later should have been that longer, more generous view; in fact, in his introductory paragraph, he suggests that it will be:

Never say you know the last word about any human heart! I was once treated to a revelation which started and touched me in the nature of a person with whom I had been acquainted—well, as I supposed—for years, whose character I had had good reasons, heaven knows, to appreciate and in
regard to whom I flattered myself I had nothing more to learn. (p. 82)

Apparently, the narrator thinks he has learned more about the character of Louisa Pallant; but what he has learned has been only about her way of life. The knowledge he has gained has been superficial because his lack of generosity has not permitted him to allow that Louisa Pallant could change.

Her change is not altogether attractive. It may be that we find Louisa's denunciation of her daughter too extreme, like Nicoloff, who believes "The very extravagance of Mrs. Pallant's outburst keeps it from being particularly convincing," but we recognize as does Louisa that her denunciation of Linda is also a denunciation of herself. There is nothing that makes manifest one's weaknesses as clearly as one's offspring. Louisa Pallant has been forced to acknowledge what is ugly in herself when she cannot ignore what is ugly in her daughter. We see Linda Pallant as her mother sees her rather than as the narrator sees her because she voluntarily exposes herself as she exposes her daughter. She states her motives and they seem more believable than the motives the narrator attributes to her. While the narrator's motives for acting as he does in regard to Linda and Archie are vague, his motives are unmistakable as they pertain to Louisa—"he "had come there to find her out" (p. 103)—and little he tells us indicates that he ever intended to find anything in her favor.

We should reject the narrator's view of Linda Pallant primarily because it has not been Linda Pallant whom he has been
studying; it has been her mother, Louisa Pallant. We should reject
the narrator's view of Louisa Pallant because it has not been Louisa
Pallant, the mature adult, whom he has been "finding out," it has
been the young woman of years earlier, the "wringer of [his] youth"
(p. 122).

The Blithedale Romance

Although Miles Coverdale intends to uncover, for his
satisfaction and ours, the secrets in the relationship between
Hollingsworth, Priscilla, and Zenobia, he only partially succeeds in
his efforts. There are important questions raised which his
narrative never answers. Zenobia's motives for compromising
Priscilla are not revealed. Has she willingly turned Priscilla over
to Westervelt to rid herself of competition for Hollingsworth, or has
Westervelt some hold over her which forces her into this betrayal?
Nor are Hollingsworth's motives made clear. Has he chosen Priscilla
only after he learns of her inheritance, or has Zenobia so displeased
him by her aggressiveness that he turns in relief to the submissive
and virginal Priscilla? The puzzles of the romantic triangle go
unsolved by Miles Coverdale but not because they are too intricate to
be worked out by him. The reason he cannot offer us the answers is a
lack of information that only Zenobia, Priscilla, or Hollingsworth
could supply him. Since they will not confide in him, there is no
way of learning their secrets. Readers of The Blithedale Romance are
able to assess its characters differently than does its narrator.
But having no source for the "facts" other than the narrator, we are
no more able to solve the unsolved problems than he is.

Miles Coverdale's record of observations and conversations leads readers as often to the characters' views of Coverdale as to a comprehension of the whys and wherefores of these characters' own behavior. While this is crucial in helping to evaluate Coverdale, it does not always compensate us for our incomplete knowledge of the other characters' motivations. However, we do see in their interactions with Coverdale the grounds for their withholding confidences from him. Without a willingness to lower his own defenses, he expects others to reveal themselves. As Nicholas Canaday, Jr., says, "The others give him nothing because he gives them nothing." Since Miles Coverdale refuses to come close enough to his subjects to deserve their trust, we cannot come close enough to the most problematic of the characters, Zenobia and Hollingsworth, to decide on their moral culpability. To protect himself from the claims of intimacy, the narrator keeps his distance from those who might have been his friends and, therefore, when telling their story, keeps us distant from them as well.

As if to direct his readers away from drawing these conclusions, Coverdale closes his account by confessing that he, himself, "was in love--with--Priscilla!" (p. 251). If this is the "story of Miles Coverdale's aborted love of Priscilla" that Canaday suggests then the confirmed bachelor certainly kept his secret well, since, when we review the novel for evidence of this love, we find instead signs that he feels for Priscilla only pity, somewhat marred by contempt. His reactions to her vary from his early irritation over her
helplessness: "There has seldom been seen so depressed and sad a figure as this young girl's; and it was hardly possible to help being angry with her, from mere despair of doing anything for her comfort" (p. 53), to his later impatience with her excessive joy in finding health and friends at Blithedale: "'What is the use or sense of being so very gay?' I said to Priscilla . . . 'I love to see a sufficient cause for everything; and I can see none for this. Pray tell me, now, what kind of a world you imagine this to be, which you are so merry in'" (p. 97). The nearest he comes to declaring his feelings to Priscilla is a message sent via a bird flying past his tree hermitage: "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" (p. 120). Were Priscilla to have heard this avowal of affection, it seems to me unlikely that she would have felt called on to reply to someone who loves her only in the character of a "Victorian ideal" of a "romantic heroine" in an, as yet, unwritten romance.

Earlier, Priscilla had offered Coverdale a gift, a nightcap, which he all but refused. As if she had divined his true feelings, after this she neither tenders to him or accepts from him anything: neither his advice ("It had taken me nearly seven years of worldly life to hive up the bitter honey which I here offered to Priscilla. And she rejected it!" [p. 98]) nor his arm for support ("'No,' said Priscilla, 'I do not think it would help me. It is my heart . . . that makes me heavy'" [p. 142]), nor, in town, even his greeting
("when I held out my hand, her own moved slightly toward it, as if attracted by a feeble degree of magnetism" [p. 180]). Without intending it, Coverdale describes the limits of his sexuality at the same time as he describes Priscilla's disinclination to make or maintain contact with him.

Even as he reveals his own lack of appeal, Coverdale shows how Hollingsworth's magnetism and concern attract Priscilla, Zenobia, and himself. Coverdale alleges that he loves Hollingsworth for the unfailingly gentle care with which Hollingsworth tended him when the narrator was ill:

Hollingsworth's more than brotherly attendance gave me inexpressible comfort. Most men—and certainly I could not always claim to be one of the exceptions—have a natural indifference, if not an absolutely hostile feeling, towards those whom disease, weakness, or calamity of any kind, causes to falter and faint amid the rude jostle of our selfish existence... But there was something of the woman moulded into the great, stalwart frame of Hollingsworth. (p. 66)

Nor is this the only time we see Hollingsworth in this positive light. It is he who obliges Moodie in the favor that Coverdale had refused, and Hollingsworth who protects Priscilla from prying questions when, wet and cold, they first arrive. These examples demonstrate that at the outset, at least, of Hollingsworth's relations with Priscilla, as well as in all his relations with Coverdale, Miles is correct in saying, "Hollingsworth's behavior was certainly a great deal more creditable than mine" (p.56).

These first glimpses of Hollingsworth make of him an honestly appealing man who does not try to hide his nature from his companions. He responds to a compliment from Coverdale by pointing
out the very flaw for which Coverdale most faults him: "and you call me tender! . . . I should rather say that the most marked trait in my character is an inflexible severity of purpose. Mortal man has no right to be so inflexible as it is my nature and necessity to be" (p. 67). Given more opportunities to hear Hollingsworth in relaxed conversation and given a less biased point of view from which to observe him, perhaps we might come away with a sense of Hollingsworth as a man whose determination is balanced by his tenderness. Certainly, the final chapter, where we are left to conclude what the narrator never points out, supports a more lenient judgment of him. Hollingsworth does not proceed over Zenobia's dead body to build his reformatory with Priscilla's money. His iron will is crushed and his heart broken by the responsibility he assumes for Zenobia's suicide. While Nina Baym argues that Hollingsworth's authoritarian "nature does not change in the course of the novel, but Coverdale's perception of him alters," John Caldwell Stubbs believes that Hawthorne intended to end the novel by "balancing Coverdale against Hollingsworth. The one is incapable of human ties and the other uses human ties to further his selfish aims. Each has been equally guilty of misusing life . . . yet of the two, Hollingsworth ends better. He has gained in self-knowledge where Coverdale has not."  

During their stay at Blithedale, in spite of the fact that the two men work closely through the spring and summer, we seldom hear another kind word from the narrator about his friend. Earlier, he posts a notice in the midst of his praise of Hollingsworth that this will be the case: "nor was [Hollingsworth] ashamed of it [his
womanliness], as men often are of what is best in them, nor seemed ever to know that there was such a soft place in his heart. I knew it well, however, at that time, although afterwards it came nigh to be forgotten" (p. 66). The narrator continues his characterization of a man whom he has said can be as soft as he is rigid by placing him into a classification of people who "have no heart, no sympathy, no reason, no conscience. They will keep no friend, unless he make himself the mirror of their purpose; they will smite and slay you, and trample your dead corpse under foot, all the more readily, if you take the first step with them, and cannot take the second" (p. 92). Coverdale admits that "the above statement is exaggerated, in the attempt to make it adequate" (p. 93), but his readers need to analyze what other reasons he might have for making this man whom he has earlier found so tender into a monster.

Coverdale begins the above attack by stating, "I loved Hollingsworth" (p. 92), and in this love we might find some possible explanation. Miles feels best about Hollingsworth when, lying feverish and helpless in bed, he asks him, "to let nobody else enter the room" (p. 66). In this situation, no demands are made of Coverdale and yet all his demands are met. This is love as Coverdale wished it to be. Perhaps, as Frederick Crews suggests in The Sins of the Father, this is love as an imaginary father might offer it.39 However, once he is well and is expected to meet Hollingsworth's demands and to share his attention with others, Coverdale is filled with resentment. Sitting up in his tree hermitage, he reflects, "I brought thither no guest, because, after Hollingsworth failed me,
there was no longer the man alive with whom I could think of sharing all" (p. 118). Yet at this stage in the narrative, the disillusioning discovery of Hollingsworth's plans for the Blithedale community have not been revealed nor has he "failed" Coverdale in any specific instance that the reader can unearth. There is no cause, so far, for Coverdale to withdraw so from Hollingsworth, except out of a disappointment of his personal expectations.

Justification for his harsh valuation of Hollingsworth comes in the chapter, "A Crisis," where Hollingsworth is ready to sacrifice the Blithedale experiment for one of his own and calls on Coverdale to

"Take it up with me! Be my brother in it! It offers you (what you have told me, over and over again, that you most need) a purpose in life, worthy of the extreme self-devotion . . ." he held out both his hands to me . . . "there is not the man in this wide world whom I can love as I could you. Do not forsake me!" (pp. 149-50)

Where Hollingsworth assumes that to love others means to join with them in their hopes and endeavors, Coverdale feels that to make such a request is in itself a betrayal. In a scene that will later echo in his meeting with Priscilla in town, Coverdale rejects his friend:

Had I but touched his extended hand, Hollingsworth's magnetism would perhaps have penetrated me with his own conception of all these matters. But I stood aloof. I fortified myself with doubts whether his strength of purpose had not been too gigantic for his integrity, impelling him to trample on considerations that should have been paramount to every other. (p. 150)

Coverdale casts some suspicion on this pious exposition of his motives for denying Hollingsworth when he then jealously questions Hollingsworth as to Zenobia's and Priscilla's involvement in the project.40 On leaving Blithedale the next day, Coverdale cuts
himself off entirely from Hollingsworth's passion and influence: "I had a momentary impulse to hold out my hand, or at least to give a parting nod, but resisted both... Being dead henceforth to him, and he to me, there could be no propriety in our chilling one another with the touch of two corpse-like hands" (p. 158). What greater distance could Coverdale establish between himself and Hollingsworth than to declare them dead to each other? Coverdale is announcing not only the death of a friendship but also of his capacity to make contact with another human being through physical and spiritual means, leaving him solely dependent on his intellectual ability "to live in other lives" (p. 173). Lentz and Stein see his leaving Hollingsworth and Blithedale as but one instance in a repeated pattern in which each attempt by Coverdale at involvement "develops to a crisis... a point at which the effort and involvement strikes him as too demanding, and he abruptly breaks away from the "knot" of other lives to return to his original passivity."

For Hollingsworth's assessment of Coverdale, we must turn back to where the two are still on speaking terms. "Miles Coverdale is not in earnest, either as a poet or a laborer" (p. 90), Hollingsworth states flatly. Following the imputation that Miles Coverdale is a dilettante comes Zenobia's tribute to the exemplary qualities of Hollingsworth's "strong and noble nature" (p. 90) whose influence she believes should strengthen and ennoble Coverdale. All this creates in Coverdale no desire for soul-searching. His critical abilities, as usual, are focused outwards, not inwards, and he is busy taking in the evidence that Zenobia has become a disciple of Hollingsworth.
Once Coverdale feels he has fixed Hollingsworth's character in the light in which he wants his reader to see this "iron" (p. 92) man, he virtually cuts us off from Hollingsworth. This technique for managing the readers' impressions will not work with Zenobia. She does not allow herself to be so readily categorized and put aside to be replaced by a static interpretation, either as a woman or as a character in Coverdale's "romance." Perhaps, in the case of Zenobia, we do find the influence of the implied author, since many readers seem able to transcend Miles Coverdale's ambivalence to see Zenobia as a force for life. There is considerable critical agreement on this view of Zenobia: Baym describes Zenobia as "the life principle," as does Philip Rahv. Crews calls her "the implicit reproach to all escapism in The Blithedale Romance" and Roy R. Male sees everyone bent on destroying Zenobia's vitality. Harriet Rose finds Zenobia "the touchstone of normality and her death is the end of possibility for Blithedale."42 She ends up dominating the book not because Coverdale wants us to see her as his heroine but because her vitality is too much for the passive Coverdale to control. If she is in a scene, she is expressing herself. For every comment the narrator offers about her, we are left to think about a comment she makes for herself. She takes over the printed page as she apparently takes over the gathering at Blithedale, welcoming all as her guests upon their arrival at the communal farm. Even before Zenobia finishes her greetings, Coverdale recognizes the force of her personality:
"Zenobia's bloom, health, and vigor . . . she possessed in such overflow that a man might well have fallen love with her for their
sake only . . . but when really in earnest, particularly if there were a spice of bitter feeling, she grew all alive, to her fingertips" (p. 43).

This life force of hers seems quite impossible for Coverdale to cope with and he barely tries. But his reason for not trying might well be that he soon finds his meditations on Zenobia leading into what he experiences as dangerous territory:

Assuredly, Zenobia could not have intended it;—the fault must have been entirely in my imagination. But . . . something in her manner, irresistibly brought up a picture of that fine, perfectly developed figure, in Eve's earliest garment. Her free, careless, generous modes of expression, often had this effect, of creating images, which, though pure, are hardly felt to be quite decorous when born of a thought that passes between man and woman. (p. 44)

Richard Vandeweghl sees Coverdale putting as much distance as possible between the concreteness of the event and his description of it by using what he calls "the mythic mode," comparing Zenobia to the Biblical Eve, and "the generalized mode," making impersonal the attraction he feels for Zenobia with such phrases as, "a thought that passes between a man and a woman."43 Zenobia's sexuality awakens his own when he prefers that it remain dormant. According to Nina Baym, "The major block to Coverdale's release of energies is . . . his inability to acknowledge passion as an element of human character . . . art is passionate and it celebrates passion; rejecting this truth, Coverdale is incapable of mature artistry and must remain a childish man."44 Letting Zenobia speak for herself and, in effect, create her own characterization permits Coverdale to stay a safe psychological distance from her without giving her up either as an
object of his curiosity or a creation of his pen.

The presumption that his contemporaries and readers will react as he does to Zenobia leaves Miles Coverdale secure in giving her such a free hand. When confronted by a woman as powerful, outspoken, and unconventional as she, as openly sexual and clearly independent in means, attitude, and interests as she, Coverdale feels sure an almost universal disapproval will modify the admiration she instinctively evokes. Our narrator realizes that as Zenobia demonstrates all that she is, she also demonstrates all that she is not. Zenobia is not, for instance, what society expects every woman to be—maternal and nurturing. When first faced by the pitiful sight of Priscilla huddled shivering on the floor, Zenobia appears repulsed, not moved. Coverdale, who has already stated similar feelings, says, "I never thoroughly forgave Zenobia for her conduct on this occasion" (p. 54). Crews points out that since "Zenobia is, for Coverdale's mind, less an individual person than 'womanliness incarnated,' . . . Coverdale has not yet forgiven womankind for its deviation from the maternal ideal."45 Zenobia never warms to Priscilla who, in her passivity, dependence, and fair, child-like beauty, is the socially acceptable ideal of womanhood to which Zenobia stands in contradiction. She identifies Priscilla as, "the type of womanhood, such as man has spent centuries in making it. He is never content, unless he can degrade himself by stooping towards what he loves" (p. 139). As Baym states it, "To accept Priscilla is, for Zenobia, to accept the very shape of womanhood she is in rebellion against, society's version of the feminine."46
In Zenobia's recitation of the story of The Silvery Veil, we see her at her worst. Having spoken with Westervelt, she must know of Priscilla's identity as the Veiled Lady. Yet she still tells her cruel tale, finishing ominously by throwing the gauze veil over Priscilla and predicting that the Veiled Lady would become the magician's "bond-slave forevermore" (p. 133). About this malicious act, Coverdale says nothing. To our knowledge and surprise, he seems not to have concluded that Priscilla is the Veiled Lady. Perhaps he senses that even to think about the implications of Zenobia's tale requires that he put himself in the role of Theo and thus raises the question of his sexuality. So he presents the story, foregoes an obvious opportunity to chastize Zenobia, and leaves his readers to do so for him. He has left us with a difficult problem—is her jealousy sufficient cause for what Stubbs calls her "gratuitous cruelty" toward Priscilla? Is it possible that Zenobia is trying to warn Priscilla in hopes that the timid young woman will take heed and escape before the prophecy is fulfilled? If so, she has underestimated Priscilla's passivity and fatalism. Zenobia's culpability for returning Priscilla to the veil begins with her recounting the legend but does not end there.

Although Coverdale has Zenobia define her own character, he does not refrain from commenting on her altogether. However, in comparison to his near obliteration of Hollingsworth, Coverdale's attacks on Zenobia are mere potshots. As a poet, he feels in a position to evaluate her literary talents, at least twice pointing out that, "Her poor little stories and tracts never half did justice
to her intellect" (p. 68). Baym does not contradict Coverdale, but argues, instead, that, "Zenobia is uncultured because culture is a matter of society, institutions, and the past. True original energy is . . . somewhat barbaric." The vocation of "stump oratress" (p. 68), in Coverdale's opinion, suits her better. To demonstrate the validity of this claim, he still relies more on what Zenobia says and does than on his own evaluations. We get an example of her in the role of orator as she defends women's rights: "Thus far, no woman in the world has ever once spoken out her whole heart and her whole mind. The mistrust and disapproval of the vast bulk of society throttles us, as with two gigantic hands at our throats" (p. 137). As those hands reach out, extended from the person of Hollingsworth, Zenobia, fearful of losing his affection, retracts. Coverdale is quick to note her blatant inconsistency, but his remarks are not so much directed at Zenobia as they are meant to explain why his own defense of women is so little appreciated. First, he complains, "How little did these . . . women care for me, who had freely conceded all their claims," followed by his rationalization, "Women almost invariably behave thus" (p. 141). It is for the reader to recognize that in her passion for life, her attraction to Hollingsworth overrides her convictions. James H. Justus suggests that "What Hawthorne dramatizes is feminine spirit not ideological advocacy." Later in town, when Coverdale attempts to write her off as a fraud, the necessity of his approach to her characterization becomes clear:

I malevolently beheld the true character of the woman, passionate, luxurious, lacking simplicity, not deeply refined, incapable of pure and perfect taste.
But, the next instant, she was too powerful for all my opposing struggles. I saw how fit it was that she should make herself as gorgeous as she pleased, and should do a thousand things that would have been ridiculous in the poor, thin, weakly characters of other women. (p. 177)

Zenobia even has an answer to the evidence he has for charging her with inconsistency. He tells her that seeing her in town, "it appears all like a dream that we were ever [at Blithedale] together" (p. 177). Her response directs Miles (and us) to look to himself: "I should think it a poor and meagre nature, that is capable of but one set of forms, and must convert all the past into a dream merely because the present happens to be unlike it" (p. 177). For our narrator, whose preference is to consider his friends as if they were on his "mental stage, as actors in a drama" (p. 170), rather than risk actual involvement with all its unpredictable emotional messiness, Zenobia's remark rings true for more than she might then mean. As Crews notes, "he wants his three friends to act out a ready-made romance. Like other artist-heroes in Hawthorne's work, he has a private failure of emotional capacity at the base of his need for aesthetic distance."51

Coverdale's limitations as a friend are no surprise to Zenobia. We might look to her as the one who best understands him. Prior to their departure from Blithedale to Boston, she tells him that she had decided against making him her confidante because, "you would be only too wise, too honest. Honesty and wisdom are such a delightful pastime, at another person's expense" (p. 157). Although Zenobia appreciates his intelligence, wit, and perceptiveness, she understands that the role of confidante would appeal only to
Coverdale's curiosity about her and not to his loyalty to her as a friend. Possibly, she also recognizes that though Coverdale might seem hurt because, "while these three characters figured so largely on my private theatre, I . . . was at best but a secondary or tertiary personage with either of them" (p. 92), he is really grateful to avoid being personally caught up in the emotions and demands of their complicated relationship.

When Zenobia finally turns to Coverdale as a confidante, she does so as part of moving away from life. After the last confrontation with Hollingsworth and Priscilla, she accepts Coverdale's offer to be of service, requesting him to tell Hollingsworth, "he has murdered me! Tell him that I'll haunt him!" (p. 231). In answer to Coverdale's, "Whither are you going?" she replies, "No matter where. . . . But I am weary of this place, and sick to death of playing at philanthropy and progress" (p. 232). In the most intimate gesture we have seen from Coverdale, but one at the same time reminiscent of Priscilla's unwillingness to touch him and his unwillingness to touch Hollingsworth, Coverdale takes Zenobia's hand and brings it to his lips. He is surprised: "how very cold! . . . What can be the reason? It is really death-like" (p. 232). The sole kiss he bestows cannot revive the dying queen: "'The extremities die first, they say,' answered Zenobia. . . . 'When you next hear of Zenobia, her face will be behind the black veil; so look your last on it now—for all is over! Once more farewell'" (p. 232). Just as Coverdale earlier refuses to come to the obvious conclusion that Priscilla is the Veiled Lady, now, with all this testimony before
him, he refuses to admit that Zenobia intends suicide. He allows her to walk off alone in the woods and gives no thought to the message he has been asked to carry. Thus, he becomes the suicide note she leaves behind, secure that no one will know of it until she is safely dead. Zenobia is right, of course, as she always seems to be in her judgments of Coverdale. Miles finds the experience of sharing Zenobia's last moments too taxing and complains, "I was listless, worn out with emotion on my own behalf and sympathy for others, and had no heart to leave my comfortless lair beneath the rock" (p. 233).

When he awakens and comes out from under the rock, it is to organize the search for Zenobia's body. This is as actively involved as we have ever seen him. While he has refused to reach out for the living, he now seems eager to find the dead. Perhaps his uncharacteristic participation can be explained by understanding that Coverdale, who, according to Lentz and Stein, "wants nothing so much as an interesting narrative,"52 sees himself as the author engaged in discovering the perfect ending of the romance he has been composing. Zenobia understood this possibility: "Ah, I perceive what you are about! You are turning this whole affair into a ballad" (p. 229); nor would it be unlike her to take a perverse pleasure in offering him that ending: "as for the moral, it shall be distilled into the final stanza, in a drop of bitter honey" (p. 229). The bitter honey of Zenobia's suicide is much more bitter than bitter-sweet. Viewing her body, wounded in its rescue from the river, Coverdale is shocked into realizing that just as Zenobia alive resisted pressures to conform so too does her corpse refuse to be shaped to any romantic
norm. She is rigid in a pose unaccommodating to a coffin, in a parody of prayer: "But her arms! They were bent before her, as if she struggled against Providence in never-ending hostility. Her hands! They were clenched in inmitigable defiance. Away with the hideous thought!" (p. 240).

Since her corpse horrifies him and defies attempts at romanticization, \textsuperscript{53} he turns instead to belittlement:

could Zenobia have foreseen all these ugly circumstances of death, . . . she would no more have committed the dreadful act than have exhibited herself to a public assembly in a badly fitting garment. . . . She had seen pictures, I suppose, of drowned persons in lithe and graceful attitudes. And she deemed it well and decorous to die as so many village maidens have, wronged in their first love. (p. 241)

It seems appropriate to ask whether the disappointed expectations he describes were Zenobia's or his own.

It also seems appropriate to ask why she commits suicide at all. Coverdale's facile comment that Zenobia chose to imitate a romantic literary formula wherein the "wronged" maiden died beautifully for love does not fit Zenobia's original and assertive character. True, she angrily accuses Hollingsworth of "murdering" her; and her anger is natural enough, but suicide does not logically follow. Zenobia's suicide confronts us with the inadequacy of Coverdale's portrayals. Allowed to speak for herself, she has made us come to know her as a force for life; now, at her death, we are left to wonder what has happened so terrible as to turn her from the life she lived so exuberantly. Earlier, Zenobia suggests a reason for Coverdale's inability to bring us close enough to see beyond Zenobia's anger, to understand and share her pain: "This long while past, you have been
following up your game, groping for human emotions in the dark corners of the heart. Had you been here a little sooner, you might have seen them dragged into the daylight" (p. 220). Whether Coverdale gets to experience a display of emotion depends on his being at the right place at the right time, instead of depending on people's willingly and freely exposing their thoughts and feelings to him, confident he will also share his deepest thoughts and feelings with them.

As a man who prefers to observe rather than engage in human intimacy, Coverdale is most comfortable when he establishes a barrier to insure that the distance he needs from the demands of others will not be broached. The barrier is physical—a tree hermitage that hides him from view, glass windows that block him from direct contact, but, as Rose suggests, it is metaphorical as well:

> if we take the freedom to put a friend under our microscope, we thereby isolate him from many of his true relations, magnify his peculiarities, inevitably tear him into parts, and, of course, patch him very clumsily together again. What wonder, then, should we be frightened by the aspect of a monster, which, after all,--though we can point to every feature of his deformity in the real personage,--may be said to have been created mainly by ourselves. (p. 91)

Even when a physical hiding place is not available for Coverdale the character, a metaphorical screen for Coverdale the writer is always at hand. Just as being in the tree hermitage or behind closed windows means he cannot hear conversations which he observes, and, therefore, must imagine those conversations, his positioning a metaphorical microscope between himself and his subjects causes, by his own admission, sufficient distortion to invalidate his
interpretations. He issues his readers a warning, but at the same
time, through his use of first-person plural, he implicates those
readers in the process of making monsters out of the humans whose
mysteries he wants to disclose. As informed and forewarned readers,
we must attempt to correct for the distortion by studying the
dialogue and actions of characters separate from Coverdale’s
commentary. However, no matter how meticulously we adjust the sights
and sort the data, we cannot scrutinize information we have never
received. Justus argues that, "Disallowing him the final and most
important revelations is a deft tactic. It not only sustains the too
little too late aspect of Coverdale, [but also] . . . the romance
form is . . . skewed just enough to deprive both narrator and reader
of full gratification. Both must be content with the "conjectures"
of one limited man whose partial view is not only self-evident but
also self-admitted."55 Our questions about the motivations of
Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla must remain unanswered, and our
suppositions remain impossible to prove because Miles Coverdale’s
ability to present these characters is limited not only by human
necessity but also by the distance from them he maintains to protect
the feelings he never seems to risk.

"Bartleby the Scrivener"

Melville’s short story contradicts the notion that there is a
necessary correlation between the proportion of a character’s direct
speech revealed by the narrator and the reader’s ability to
understand that character. The narrator of this story offers
virtually all of Bartleby's statements made in his presence, yet Bartleby's words ill equip us to understand him. However, the point is not to lead the careful reader to a definitive interpretation of Bartleby. In fact, the impossibility of accomplishing that goal directs the reader, by default, into an examination of the lawyer and how he handles a problem that challenges all his assumptions.

The lawyer introduces his subject and its frustrations by saying, "Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable" (p. 19). While readers might begin studying the story convinced they will surely ascertain something definite about Bartleby, the same readers must ultimately admit that, theories, aside, they cannot get much further than the narrator with his advantage of first-hand experience: "What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, that is all I know of him; except, indeed, one vague report, which will appear in the sequel" (p. 19). The focus of attention cannot be Bartleby himself; it must be what the "astonished" narrator saw and made of Bartleby or as Maurice Friedman puts it, "the true story is not Bartleby in himself but his employer's relation to him."56

The fact that the lawyer suppresses nothing Bartleby says does not mean that the distance established between the narrator and Bartleby is not a factor in determining his relative reliability. Although the narrator gives his readers a view of Bartleby apparently unchanged from his original impression, that view is always a partial one, obscured by the screen the lawyer puts around Bartleby as soon as he settles the scrivener in his office. The screen makes tangible
the formal separation of employer from employee that functions to limit the narrator's view of Bartleby and therefore ours as well. The screen as one of the walls of "Wall Street serves as a metaphorical metaphor of confinement and barriers to understanding," according to Kingsley Widmer. The possibility is always there that if, from the beginning, the narrator had been open to seeing Bartleby as a complete human being, a complete human being is what he might have seen. Perhaps the meaning of Bartleby's taking up residence in the attorney's office is to demonstrate that the whole person, public and private, is available at the office. Since personal considerations are perceived as out of place in business, they are usually ignored. Only half of a person, the public functionary half, is welcome at the office; the private half, full of feelings, is expected, like one's family, to stay away from the job. The expectation that a human being can work best in this situation, as Turkey and Nippers prove, is ridiculous, but it is also the ideal of business efficiency. Ironically, the lawyer hopes that Bartleby who appears so emotionless will facilitate a more businesslike atmosphere: "a man of so singularly sedate an aspect ... might operate beneficially upon the flighty temper of Turkey, and the fiery one of Nippers" (pp. 28-28).

When this expectation is disappointed and it turns out that the attorney cannot get from Bartleby even the half day's work he has come to accept from his other employees, the question inevitably arises—why does the lawyer put up with Bartleby? Why does he not fire him as soon as Bartleby refuses to meet the minimum job
requirements of a copyist? The answer is not simply that the attorney, as Morris Beja suggests, is "fundamentally kind and impressively patient,"\textsuperscript{58} a truly Christian gentleman who knows instinctively if not rationally how he should treat so sad a case as Bartleby. The answer is that he treats Bartleby just as considerately as he treats everyone else in the story who opposes him in any way. He complains, feels abused, and then adapts to the conditions of his antagonist. When he thinks of a comforting platitude to suit the occasion, his adaptation is complete.

The structure of the story establishes that the narrator's patterns of social interaction exist before the appearance of Bartleby and all the complications he creates for his employer. "Ere introducing the scrivener, as he first appeared" (p. 19), the narrator describes in considerable detail the personalities and habits of his office workers, people who have little intercourse with Bartleby and less influence on the story's outcome. The extent of this background material is justified when we realize we are to learn from it the way the lawyer chooses to deal with the world.

It is clear the narrator puts up with a lot in a typical business day. Not only does he get just a half day's work each from Turkey and Nippers, but he must bear with the angry curses Nippers addresses to his desk in the morning and the drunken insolence Turkey addresses to him in the afternoon. Nippers' anger and shady dealing seem more admissible to him then Turkey's sloppy alcoholism. Once he suggests Turkey should remain at home after lunch, but Turkey disagrees and the narrator does not insist: "at all events, I saw
that go he would not. So, I made up my mind to let him stay"
(p. 23). Surely this is more a case of Turkey's refusal to go than
his employer's allowing him to stay. In another instance, when the
lawyer was "within an ace of dismissing him" (p. 27), he was
"mollified . . . by . . . an oriental bow" (p. 27) and Turkey's
quasi-apology. Since neither clerk will curb the idiosyncracies
which characterize his work day, the narrator changes his
expectations to match the reality: "This was a good natural
arrangement, under the circumstances" (p. 26).

In his relations to Turkey, we can also examine his
understanding of charity. Since Turkey's dirty clothes were becoming
a "reproach" (p. 25) to his office, the attorney bestows on him his
old but "highly respectable-looking" (p. 25) winter coat and "thought
Turkey would appreciate the favor, and abate his rashness and
obstreperousness" (p. 25). Turkey shows no more gratitude for such
charity than Bartleby will; in fact, the coat "made him insolent. He
was a man whom prosperity harmed" (p. 25). The lawyer's gift costs
him nothing and is prompted by his concern for appearances, not by
his concern for Turkey. Yet he expects his charity will be rewarded
not merely with thanks but with a change in Turkey's behavior. He
has already made clear that Turkey's habits are fixed, so his hopes
that Turkey will reform for so little cause have no more basis in
reality than his later assumption that Bartleby will leave because
the attorney wants him to.

There is not much difference between the way the lawyer deals
with his other clerks and the way he deals with Bartleby, and he gets
as little response to his requests to them as he does to his requests to Bartleby. However, as long as Turkey and Nippers seem to be working, the lawyer accepts their limited endeavours. If Bartleby would at least pretend to work all day, the lawyer would, no doubt, accustom himself to all of Bartleby's preferences. The process of adaptation to his new clerk has begun when, even as upset as Bartleby's refusal to proofread has made him, he says, "The conclusion of this whole business was, that it soon became a fixed fact of my chambers, that . . . Bartleby . . . was permanently exempt from examining the work done by him" (p. 36).

Unfortunately, the manner in which Bartleby quietly flouts appearances cannot be covered up by wrapping him in a warm old coat. When Bartleby stops copying documents, his employer is unable to make Bartleby correspond to an image of business as usual. If Bartleby will not work and will not take his money, then what is the lawyer's relationship with him to be? As Bartleby's employer, the attorney knows how he must act. Deprived of this clearly defined social role, the narrator feels lost. He seeks another socially acceptable model on which to pattern his behavior and finds it in the role of philanthropist. Thus Bartleby is transformed from an inexplicable presence in his office to an object of his charity:

I shall persecute you no more; you are harmless and noiseless as any of these old chairs . . . I penetrate to the predestined purpose of my life . . . others may have loftier parts to enact; but my mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office-room for such a period as you may see fit to remain. (p. 53)
The lawyer is destined to fail in this role as well. As commendable as is his generosity toward Bartleby, readers should not confuse his decision to allow Bartleby to stay with the lawyer's capacity for genuine understanding of Bartleby's plight. When faced with the experience of momentarily identifying with Bartleby's loneliness and acknowledging private human suffering as part of everyone's life, he turns away from this painful knowledge. The narrator does not want to feel the magnitude of misery that Bartleby's example presses on him, so he turns his attention from the universal in which he undeniably shares to the particular of Bartleby whom he can set apart from himself. He traces his emotions from pity and melancholy to fear and repulsion, or from feelings that allow him close to Bartleby's sense of things to feelings that keep him distant. The apparent wisdom of concluding, "I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach" (p. 42), is belied by his need to protect his own soul from a recognition of the depth and inclusiveness of human adversity. William Bysshe Stein believes "this passage divulges the lawyer's utter perversion of the basic principles of Christianity. He wants a comfortable religious faith wholly divorced from suffering."^59

Since the charity that the lawyer is able to give is by necessity and his own admission only superficial, it is hardly surprising that it cannot last. Although the role of philanthropist enables him to deal with Bartleby, it is a private rather than a
public arrangement, and as a private arrangement comes in conflict with his public role in the business world. Because the narrator sustains his self-image from his position as a professional, he cannot long withstand threats to his reputation: "The constant friction of illiberal minds wears out at last the best resolves of the more generous" (p. 53). Soon he realizes that generosity toward Bartleby does not coincide with his policy that "the easiest way of life is the best" (p. 20) and that even the limited help he means to offer Bartleby is much more than he really wants to give:

the idea came upon me of his possibly turning out a long-lived man, and keep occupying my chambers, and denying my authority; and perplexing my visitors; and scandalizing my professional reputation; and casting a general gloom over the premises . . . and in the end perhaps outlive me, and claim possession of my office by right of his perpetual occupancy. (p. 54)

Solicitude for Bartleby's welfare only lasts as long as it is convenient; solicitude for his own status in the world seems to project beyond his lifetime.

Neither the role of employer or the role of philanthropist furnishes him with the means to manage Bartleby. Without the structure such roles provide, the attorney is no more willing to interact with Bartleby, human to human, than Bartleby is willing to undertake to do his bidding. The narrator reacts to his failure with Bartleby, first, by trying to escape him, and, then, when that too fails, by trying to justify his actions in writing. Widmer notes that while the attorney "feels compelled to explain away that perverse individual will and pessimistic sadness of his accusingly silent clerk, . . . [Melville] aims at the devastatingly quiet truth
by showing us the loquacious substitute for the truth."60

Though the narrator claims to be composing "a few passages in the life of Bartleby" (p. 19), we learn little about Bartleby aside from the frustrations of dealing with him. Indeed, no matter how well or ill we think of the lawyer, we share in his frustration and doubt whether we could possibly do any better faced by such an individual as Bartleby. The narrator's kindness and patience may well be suspect, but readers will identify with him in spite of that; for even as we criticize the lawyer for his attempt to "cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval" (p. 34), as Beja has pointed out to us, we criticize ourselves for the lack of generosity we are sure we would show should we be in his shoes. When, in the Tombs, Bartleby keeps his back to the narrator and says, "I know you . . . and I want nothing to say to you" (p. 61), we take this judgment as one meant for ourselves as well.61 But what other choice have we than to identify with the narrator? Norman Springer explains that "we join the narrator in his pursuit of Bartleby because we are caught up with a man so sane and knowledgeable, so in control of most situations. . . [However,] we also recognize that the terror evoked in the narrator is related to the reader's own efforts to come to terms with Bartleby."62 Since Bartleby is drawn as a "metaphysical problem,"63 according to Widmer, and not as a character, we are engaged intellectually in the issue of alienation that Bartleby raises, but we are engaged emotionally in the dilemma of responsibility that the lawyer confronts.
One aspect of the difficulty we experience in getting in touch with Bartleby's humanity is that the narrator's involvement with Bartleby is based solely on Bartleby as a problem to be solved instead of a person to be befriended. The lawyer tries to discover the most appropriate way to act regarding Bartleby; he does not really try to discover much about Bartleby's character, except as it might serve to extricate him from his quandary. The request for Bartleby's birthplace and other personal information, for instance, follows the lawyer's thought that he could help Bartleby "return to his native place, wherever that might be" (p. 42), and thus be rid of Bartleby by doing him a kindness. What Bartleby's reasons are for refusing to give information, refusing to do work, refusing to leave, or refusing to accept aid, we can never know.

Since there is so little we can know about Bartleby as a fellow human, the tendency is to see him symbolically. But our cues for what he symbolizes do not come directly from any suggestion of the narrator; they come from the story as a whole. The possibility that Bartleby is the narrator's double or his conscience or a projection of his mind is clearly not a formulation of the lawyer. Although the narrator finds Bartleby unreasonable, he never thinks to see in him the working of an unfeeling irrational universe. Nor does Bartleby remind the lawyer of Christ. All of these symbolic readings and more are arrived at independently of the narrator.

By viewing Bartleby symbolically, readers avoid having to attribute to him personal motives. If Bartleby embodies a protest against Wall Street, self-interest, or watered-down Christianity,
then, for us, the question of motivation is answered. However, the narrator cannot avail himself of a symbolic interpretation of Bartleby; he has had Bartleby before him in the flesh and needs some framework for understanding his behavior. It hardly matters whether the explanation upon which the lawyer decided has its basis in truth. Any explanation is better than none. After Bartleby's refusal to copy documents, the attorney asks for his reason, but the narrator's query gets turned back to him: "Do you not see the reason for yourself?" (p. 45). Presumably, this would require the narrator to question the value of his own work as well as the scrivener's, an impossibility for the lawyer, who never once expresses any doubt over his dedication to his profession. A quick response to Bartleby is imperative, one that can both provide a motive for Bartleby's inactivity and allow the narrator to ignore the implications of Bartleby's challenge: "Instantly it occurred to me, that his unexampled diligence . . . might have temporarily impaired his vision" (pp. 45-46). The narrator stares at Bartleby and notices "his eyes looked dull and glazed" (p. 45), but Bartleby's eyes might have looked the same earlier had the narrator checked. No further verification for this theory is offered; the scrivener acts no differently and gives no sign of agreeing with this description of what troubles him. The narrator gains a few days' peace while he waits for Bartleby's sight to improve, but this gain adds nothing to his or our understanding of Bartleby's character. What we should realize, according to Charles Mitchell, is that "the lawyer ascribes the moral cause within himself to physical blindness in Bartleby."68
The narrator creates a rational excuse for Bartleby's decision to stop work, but, like many of his other suppositions, it "was simply my own, and none of Bartleby's" (pp. 48-49), as he later acknowledges about his assumption that Bartleby will leave on request. He wants to identify Bartleby's motivations in order to determine how he should act towards Bartleby; his search is for a rationale for his own behavior as much as for Bartleby's. Whether Bartleby suffers from eyestrain is beside the point; whether he ever worked in a dead letter office is also beside the point. What is essential is that these beliefs give the anxious lawyer some indication how to approach Bartleby in his office and in his writings. The lawyer's feelings of guilt over Bartleby's death in the Tombs encourage him to continue seeking an explanation that shifts the emphasis away from their interaction and on to Bartleby himself while it fits Bartleby into some known frame of reference.

As Herschel Parker's convincing argument explains, in the process of authoring the scrivener's "biography," the narrator finds a way to shift that emphasis—he lends the "vague report" (pp. 19, 64) of the sequel enough significance (through its position as the last word and through its dramatic language) to convince himself and his readers that they have learned something that actually makes Bartleby comprehensible. Such a conclusion also has the advantage of demonstrating that Bartleby's unhappiness predates his time with the lawyer, thus minimizing the responsibility the lawyer might feel.

The cry, "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" (p. 65) does not show that, from his personal crisis with Bartleby, the narrator has learned that
he too shares in the world's suffering. Rather his final note shows individual pain being so removed and so generalized as to lose much of its impact on him. Widmer advises that "the attorney's final statement . . . must be read with some irony; it marks his moralizing and rationalizing failure to understand Bartleby; he makes a last sentimental gesture when confronted with overwhelming resistance to his faith."71

Writing his document thus proves to be an effective form of catharsis for the lawyer. Should we learn how and why he achieves his release from Bartleby's unyielding presence, then we have gained what is possible to be gained from this story. Due to Bartleby's preference for stillness and the attorney's preference for the status quo, the distance between Bartleby and us, like the distance between Bartleby and the narrator, is impossible to close. Readers must accept that Bartleby and his motivations are unknowable. Neither narrator nor readers can ever offer anything but educated guesses as to the meaning of Bartleby's existence. Yet this does not imply that all our struggles to interpret the story will be frustrated. While the narrator has not been able to tell us what is necessary to fathom Bartleby, he has told us more than enough to enable us to analyze his own character. Our frustration with Bartleby should lead us to the conclusion that we are not intended to see a single significance in him. We can be certain only that his intrusion into the narrator's life has presented a problem with which the lawyer's assumptions of business as usual will be unable to cope. The reactions of the narrator to Bartleby are open to examination and interpretation and
with these we must be satisfied.

"The Fall of the House of Usher"

In this story, readers are presented with the fewest opportunities to use dialogue as the measure of the narrator's relative reliability. Aside from the narrator, Roderick Usher, and the silent Lady Madeline, no one is available to comment on what occurs at the House of Usher; no one engages the narrator in discussions which could reveal to the reader the narrator's otherwise unacknowledged opinions. We are almost totally dependent on the narrator for our view of the Ushers, their house, and their fate. If the narrator is not entirely fair, especially in his portrayal of Roderick Usher, then it is only with the greatest difficulty that we are able to see his unfairness.

In his letter, Roderick Usher poignantly describes the narrator, whom he has not seen for many years, "as his best, and indeed his only personal friend" (p. 398). The narrator regards his friendship with Roderick with less intensity, as part of his childhood: "as boys, we had been even intimate associates" (p. 398) but goes on to indicate the limits of that intimacy: "I really knew little of my friend. His reserve had been always excessive and habitual" (p. 398). From the difference in their perceptions of the childhood relationship, we sense that maybe Roderick's expectations of the "cheerfulness" (p. 398) and "solace" (p. 402) of his old schoolmate are based more on wishful thinking than on familiarity with the narrator's capacity for understanding him.
Having confirmed their friendship as a boyhood one and their last meeting as long past, the narrator's shock at how Roderick, whom he knew was ill, has "so terribly altered, in so brief a period" (p. 401), seems odd. But the remarks that follow help explain both the change in his notion of time and the way he comes to regard the man whose plea he answered: "It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to admit the identity of this wan being before me with the companion of my early boyhood" (p. 401). He repeats this point within three sentences: there "lay so much of change that I doubted to whom I spoke" (p. 402). The narrator, who is already "unnerved . . . [by his] contemplation of the House of Usher" (p. 397), faces someone his own age and sees death. Suddenly his school days do not seem so long ago, merely a "brief" time since he was a boy; he is, he feels, still young. He can hardly identify Roderick Usher as the same friend of his youth partly because he does not want to identify with Roderick Usher, whose "cadaverousness of complexion" (p. 401) and "ghostly pallor" (p. 402) unconsciously remind the narrator of the inevitably of death. During the first minutes of his visit, he begins to establish his distance and dissimilarity from his host. He presents Roderick to us almost as if Roderick were a member of another species. The comment, "I could not, even with effort, connect its arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity" (p. 402), which depicts Roderick's hair, seems to have a wider application by its being given as the final detail in a description of Roderick's appearance. As the narrator starts to close himself off from a relationship of equality with his stricken friend, he also
closes us off from the chance to know Roderick. The distance he maintains from Roderick is reflected in the even greater distance his readers stand in, in relation to the main actor in his narration.

The most obvious evidence for the distance imposed on us is seen in the scarcity of reported speech. Since we hear so much about Roderick Usher, it is possible to miss the fact that we hear very little from him, merely three direct quotations. Usher's speeches give us our only opportunity to attain a point of view, separate from the narrator's, from which we might be able to assess the two men's behavior and judgment. However, that opportunity is simply not exploited. Although the narrator tells us that Roderick has given up his habitual reticence, and, "a closer and still closer intimacy admitted me more unreservedly into the recesses of his spirit" (pp. 404-05), readers get to share in none of this new intimacy. Not once does the narrator repeat both sides of one of these discussions, allowing us to draw our own conclusions.72 His approach is to summarize his impressions of Roderick's life gained in the course of one or more conversations, omitting any indication of what he ever had to say in response to Roderick. Always, embedded in the summaries, more or less subtly, are the narrator's opinions of Roderick: for example,

I shall ever bear about me a memory of the many solemn hours I thus spent alone with the master of the House of Usher. Yet I should fail in any attempt to convey an idea of the exact character of the studies, or of the occupations, in which he involved me, or led me the way. An excited and highly distempered ideality threw a sulphureous lustre over all. (p. 405)
While the narrator often points out his inability to do justice to Roderick's creativity, this does not lead the narrator to grant Roderick more occasions to speak for himself. However, through his use of indirect quotations, the narrator can produce the effect of having done so: "'Her decease,' he said, with a bitterness which I can never forget, 'would leave him (him the hopeless and the frail) the last of the ancient race of Ushers'" (p. 404). The impossibility of determining whether these words were chosen by Roderick or by the narrator emphasizes the more important problem, the impossibility of our evaluating Roderick's character free of the narrator's influence.

Robert Crossley in "Poe's Closet Monologues" also takes seriously the implications of this story's lack of dialogue:

The literary failure of the narrator of 'Usher' is contingent on his moral failure; he resists Usher's efforts to engage in therapeutic dialogue and he takes few initiatives to explore or relieve the morbidity of Usher's "hypochondria". . . . Because of his failure in thought and expression, he becomes the protagonist by default. Intending to write the book of Roderick Usher, the narrator ends up telling so little about Usher, so frequently misjudging the most problematic features of Usher's character and conduct, making himself so prominent a bystander to the catastrophe that he inadvertently manages to write only the book of himself. . . . The narrator's crime is what the theologians would call a sin of omission rather than that of commission.73

There are, however, the three direct quotations of Roderick's which need to be studied as much for what we can learn about the narrator as for what we can learn about Roderick. Why does the narrator have Roderick make these particular speeches in his own words? Certainly, we are meant to recognize Roderick's agitated condition in all three statements; can we not also see, though
indirectly, some signs of the narrator's uneasy mental state?

In the first of Roderick's utterances, he relates his feelings:

'I must perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results. I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident, which may operate upon this intolerable agitation of soul. I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect—in terror. In this unnerved—in this pitiable condition—I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR.' (p. 403)

Roderick has found language to express his sense of an overwhelming anxiety which is the more intense because it cannot be attributed to a specific cause. There is no question in Roderick's mind that an actual danger could ever threaten him as much as his own feelings. Such alarm when no physical danger is imminent, the narrator believes is evidence of Roderick's mental instability. The narrator does not appreciate that the sensations of "insufferable gloom . . an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart" (p. 397) he experienced at the sight of the Usher estate have everything in common with the emotion Roderick describes. The narrator allows Roderick to make the above declaration because it accentuates what the narrator believes is a vital difference between them. While the narrator will not acknowledge his own anxiety and dissociates himself from it (in ways to be discussed in the next chapter), Roderick Usher both dwells on anxiety and confronts his guest with what Joel Porte sees as, "Usher's truth—that the world's worst horrors are unendurable because they are unaccountable."74
The narrator chooses to consider the problem as Roderick's alone and thinks that by having Roderick speak at length on the subject, the reader will find Roderick's admission of sourceless anxiety ridiculous and the narrator's rejection of it admirable. Instead, this speech should draw our attention to anxiety as a matter of concern for the narrator as well as his host.

Until the last evening of the action, we hear nothing else from Usher directly. When he does speak, he again confronts the narrator with a reality the narrator would rather deny. Both the storm raging outside, which Roderick insists his guest behold: "You have not then seen it?—but stay! you shall" (p. 412), and the sounds marking Madeline's approach within, which Roderick describes and then announces, "... Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!" (p. 416), are initially ignored by the narrator. Roderick, possibly aware by this point that the narrator will never admit they share common feelings, attempts to force the narrator into an admission that at least they share a common perception of external reality.

From these last two speeches, we get our only glimpses of Roderick's attitude toward the man he invited to help him. While, at first, some hope of being understood might have prompted the Usher heir to offer the narrator an explanation of his deepest fears, by the end, his bitter comparison between the "Mad Trist" and Madeline's movements expresses no such hope. The certainty that Madeline is rising from her tomb is what has driven Roderick to seek comfort in the company of the narrator. Yet he keeps his fear to himself, as he
has been doing for days; that he "dared not speak" (p. 416) might have had as much to do with the narrator's unwillingness to listen to such a horror as it does with Roderick's sense of guilt and terror. Roderick twice calls the narrator a "Madman" (p. 416), perhaps because he has seen the narrator's rejection of his theories extend to a rejection of the physical facts of life in the House of Usher. It is not just the sight of the storm on which the narrator draws the curtain, but also the indications that Madeline still lives. The narrator's presence has not offered an alternative to Roderick's fears; rather, if the narrator communicated just part of the criticism included in the narrative we read, Roderick finds his ideas ridiculed and his perceptions discredited.

To the last instant, even when the narrator's ears corroborate Roderick's more acute senses, the narrator refuses to accept what Roderick tells him. It is not Madeline who pushes open the door, "It was the work of the rushing gust" (p. 416). The narrator's recognition that in the House of Usher, the improbable event of a human rising from a tomb could and did happen does not affect the manner in which the narrator relates the improbable beliefs of Roderick Usher. The narrator writes about Usher as if there is no connection between the tale's ending and Roderick's ideas and behavior. He persists in judging Roderick Usher in terms that remain unmodified by the final scenes of death and destruction he witnesses. It seems appropriate to apply to the narrator one of his criticisms of Roderick: "There became manifest an opinion . . . which I mention not so much on account of its novelty . . . as on account of the
pertinacity with which he maintained it" (p. 408); there is nothing original or particularly insightful in attributing Roderick's conduct to "the mere inexplicable vagaries of madness" (p. 411), yet the narrator does not revise his estimation of Roderick after being given good reason to do so. He does, however, give us sufficient cause to question whether Roderick's responses are not often more fitting than the narrator's. Unfortunately, the narrator only gives us enough data to question his rendering of Roderick Usher, while he withholds the conversations and daily habits that could aid us to understand Usher in terms of the principles that inform life and death in the House of Usher.

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One observation to be drawn from the analyses of the four texts is that the distance the narrator maintains between himself and his subject(s) and the readers and his subject(s) is about equal.

In "Louisa Pallant" and The Blithedale Romance, the narrators see themselves primarily as investigators uncovering secrets intentionally kept from them. They pursue the secretive parties, their goal being to get close enough to see into their hearts and then to expose them. To this end, characters' conversations and actions are set down and meticulously studied. We too get to share in this process as the narrators assume that our interests are the same as theirs. Since the intention of the narrator of "Louisa Pallant" is to expose the sordid motivations of Mrs. Pallant, he attends to her and not her daughter. We, in turn, come to know
Louisa Pallant and her opinions but Linda remains so distant we are unable to confirm, with certainty, Louisa's judgment of her. When Miles Coverdale feels close to Hollingsworth, readers can listen in on their discussions. When Coverdale closes himself off from Hollingsworth, our access is closed off as well.

These two narrators' confidence that they and their readers are in the mainstream of society while the characters they present are on society's fringes removes the sting from the criticism others direct at them. With the writers' power to communicate their rebuttals directly to the reader, they feel they have little to fear by such openness. The narrators of "Bartleby the Scrivener" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" also possess the security of knowing they and not their subjects have the reader's ear. Yet the openness of the other two narrators is missing.

However much the lawyer and the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" may be intrigued by the mysteriousness of Bartleby and Roderick, their main intention is not to track down the mystery. What is more important to them is to come to understand these characters in terms of their ordinary experience. Since neither Bartleby nor Roderick can be understood through ordinary experience, the narrators will not gain their ends through intense scrutiny. The closer they look at Bartleby or Roderick, the less confirmation will they find for the principles organizing their lives, so they avoid close scrutiny.

The attorney's assumption of superiority, his expectations of obedience, can only be undermined if he approaches Bartleby simply as
another human being. It matters little that the lawyer is open about all of Bartleby's statements when the employer-employee relationship established before they spoke determines that nothing meaningful will be said. The attorney never wants to know Bartleby as an individual; he wants to force him into some pre-existing category. When Bartleby refuses to be categorized, the lawyer sees him as a threat and tries to run away. When Bartleby is safely placed in the Tombs with others of society's rule breakers, thus solving all the attorney's practical problems, the narrator endeavors to close the distance between them. His efforts are rejected. Since our attempts to identify precisely what Bartleby represents resemble the lawyer's attempts to fit Bartleby's behavior into socially acceptable forms, why should we succeed in coming nearer to Bartleby than does the narrator?

To accept Roderick and his theories requires that the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" open his mind to the possibility that human responses and natural processes do not always follow a rational and predictable pattern. But the narrator is not about to risk his orderly worldview just to understand an old school friend. By means of classifying Roderick within his system of normal and abnormal as a hypochondriac and deranged besides, he can assume he knows all that is necessary to know about Roderick without paying serious attention to what Roderick tells him. If Roderick is mentally unstable, then there is also no reason to bother the reader with Roderick's insane ideas.

By keeping dialogue to a minimum, the narrator interferes with the reader's opportunities to see the narrator as a character. The
narrator of Poe’s tale simultaneously maintains his and our distance from Roderick and exerts maximum control and authority over our interpretations. Yet, in spite of the privileges and powers the role of narrator provides, it is as characters interacting with the characters they portray that we finally judge the participant-observer narrators.
CHAPTER 3 FOOTNOTES


11. Lubbock, p. 140.

12. Lubbock, p. 139.


20. Robert L. Gale notes in The Caught Image: Figurative Language in the Fiction of Henry James (Chapel Hill: Univ. of N. Carolina Press, 1964) p. 42, that James "usually employs the general terms 'flower' and 'bloom'; when he is more specific, it is for a particular purpose." Gale then cites this same description of Linda Pallant.

21. "At the Bottom of All Things in Henry James' 'Louisa Pallant,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 7 (Summer 1970), p. 410. To my knowledge, Nicoloff has published the only extensive treatment of this story in English.


25. Nicoloff, p. 410; Wright, p. 158.


27. Wright also believes that "Archie is not rich" p. 159.


30. Nicoloff, p. 413.

31. James H. Justus in "Hawthorne's Coverdale: Character and Art in *The Blithedale Romance*," *American Literature*, 47 (1975), p. 21, calls this novel "Hawthorne's only major fiction whose dialogue consistently reproduces the authentic ring of actual speech."


33. Canaday, p. 31.

34. Vern B. Lentz and Allen F. Stein in "The Black Flower of Necessity: Structure in *The Blithedale Romance*," *Essays in Literature* No. 3 (Spring 1976), 88, see "This initial hesitancy toward Priscilla . . . [as] the first in a whole pattern of failures to commit himself to others."


40. James Walter in "A Farewell to Blithedale: Coverdale's Aborted Pastoral," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 76 (1977), p. 78, believes that the reason Coverdale rejects Hollingsworth's prison plan is because it requires that he live with the imperfect where he prefers Blithedale's pretense of perfection.

41. Lentz and Stein, p. 88.

43. Vandeweghl, pp. 291-92 and p. 295. Vandeweghl cites five modes of description that Coverdale employs, each one more removed from the event: 1) realistic—matter of fact rendering in concrete detail 2) mythic—references to Arcadian or Paradisical 3) romantic—extraordinary feats like those of legendary heroes, quest motifs 4) dramatic—especially tragic (Coverdale catches cold after fighting the snowstorm to get to Blithedale 5) generalized—narrates in first and second person plural, generalizes his feelings to include others.

44. Baym, p. 555.


47. Crews' "New Reading...", p. 160, argues that Coverdale made up Zenobia's tale of the veiled lady. He cites as evidence that Zenobia's "maliciousness" makes no change in her relations with others, nor is Priscilla treated any differently.


49. Baym, p. 554.

50. Justus, p. 29.


52. Lentz and Stein, p. 92.

53. Crews in "New Reading" comments that "Coverdale's romance has been partly truth, partly fiction, but its catastrophe is entirely true—so true that it invalidates the rest," and he points, correctly, to the scene of dragging for Zenobia's body as the most vivid in that it is the only one that "Coverdale makes no attempt to touch up" (pp. 166-67). However, Crews has not proven to my satisfaction that from this experience Coverdale learns "at the end of his romance" that all "worldly success... is less real than death, and less important than... love" (p. 167).

54. Rose, p. 57.

55. Justus, p. 34.


60. Widmer, pp. 104-05.


63. Widmer, p. 107.


69. "The 'Sequel' in "Bartleby,"" in Inge, pp. 159-65.

71. Along with Widmer (p. 119) and Parker (p. 162) Emery (p. 186) and Marcus (p. 113, 113n) share this view of the sequel.

72. Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate take this argument farther, saying that, "there is not one instance of dramatized detail. Although Poe's first person narrator is in direct contact with the scene, he merely reports it; he does not show us scene and character in action; it is all description," from *The House of Fiction* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), rpt. in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Fall of the House of Usher*, ed. Thomas Woodson (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969) p. 29.

73. *Genre*, 10 (1977), 228-29.

CHAPTER 4

WORLDVIEW, AVOIDANCE, AND PROJECTION:

THE PARTICIPANT-OBSERVER AND RESPONSIBILITY

When a dramatized first-person narrator is telling his or her own story, then that narrator must account for his or her actions, decisions, and emotions. Because a participant-observer narrator sees his function as relating the actions, decisions, and emotions of characters other than himself, he typically does not bother to hold himself accountable for what he does, says, and feels. Since this form of narration allows the narrator to focus attention away from himself, the fact that he avoids taking responsibility for his feelings and behavior toward others is not always apparent. Yet the participant-observer is a character in the story he narrates. He is involved with the other characters and influences them, although by emphasizing his role of observer and his habits of passivity, he tries to minimize the importance of his involvement and his influence. The view of himself as a passive observer is one that the narrator acknowledges and consciously uses, but it is not his sole means of avoiding moral responsibility for what happens. In this chapter, I will examine how the narrator's worldview establishes an underlying rationale for his passivity which, taken with his reliance on the strategies of avoidance and projection, enables him to ignore
not only his responsibility to others but also the need to accept and deal with his own emotions.

Worldview

Compared to the characters they describe, all four participant-observers I consider are models of conformity and conventionality. They behave according to fixed conservative ideas about how the world operates and resist any alteration in their views. Should the evidence of their senses contradict these beliefs, they react by overlooking that evidence or by constructing a defense against it. Their inability to learn much from interacting with those they study and about whom they write can be traced, in part, to their rigid commitment to an established worldview. Brian Barbour’s discussion of Poe’s narrators is pertinent to other participant-observer narrators and suggests their worldviews have been shaped by the American tradition of individualism which was encouraged by "a certain utilitarian sense of mind, a kind of didactic-rationalism that emphasized the immediate solving of practical problems and derided speculation. The drive was toward domination by the self rather than towards integration with other selves." Barbour goes on to say that, "the tradition frustrates the person’s growth to wholeness, even leaving, in the emphasis on domination as opposed to integration, a basic and dangerous confusion over what it means to be human; and the utilitarian habits of mind keep this growth obscured, unfelt and unprepared for."
Barbour looks to Poe as an author whose "most valuable stories embody a critique of this tradition," and we can look to the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" to see a character who turns to logic for his understanding of the world to the detriment of his understanding of humanity. As Charles Feidelson, Jr., points out in *Symbolism and American Literature*, the narrator is the "personification of rational convention. Like all Poe's narrators, even the most unbalanced, he would like to cling to logic and to the common sense material world." The narrator seems to have been educated to think in terms of Locke's influential theory of knowledge which, as George Hochfield explains:

> conceived of the mind as a blank page on which ideas of the external world were inscribed through the senses, or as a kind of mechanical organizer of sensations which were fed to it by 'experience.' This view appeared very well-suited to explain the processes of scientific classification and experiment or the formation of common-sense judgments on practical matters, but it tended to create the assumptions that only the physical, the tangible, the measurable were real, and that consciousness was a prisoner of the senses.

J. O. Bailey notes that as "a rationalist and a skeptic regarding the supernatural . . . [the narrator] habitually dismissed any explanation not in accord with commonplace fact." Because the narrator believes that reason alone should meet his needs, he does not acknowledge the validity of emotional needs in himself and others since they do not respond to reason. When he can find no obvious cause for the "sense of insufferable gloom . . . an utter depression of soul" (p. 397) he experiences on first sight of "the mere house and the simple landscape" (p. 397), he discounts the importance of his emotions and tries unsuccessfully to explain away his own
reaction: "I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth" (p. 398). This admission of incomplete comprehension has built into it an attempt to objectify what he has been previously describing in such emotion-laden language as "bleak walls . . . vacant eye-like windows . . . rank sedges--and . . . decayed trees" (p. 397). He first reduces the House of Usher and its surroundings to "very simple natural objects" and then comes up with an experiment which he hopes will reduce their impact on him: "It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression" (p. 398). The diction of this statement discloses much about the narrator's state of mind. The words he now chooses to portray the Usher estate substitute abstractions for the specific images of walls, sedges, and trees in an endeavor to intellectualize what has been an emotional reaction. However, when he represents his own feelings, the verb "annihilate" overthrows the temperate "modify" and indicates that his feelings threaten to break loose from the restraint he imposes on them. Joel Porte observes the irony in the fact that "The rational narrator, a device which Poe uses ostensibly to convince us that reason is man's 'natural state,' ends up making us suspect precisely the opposite."7
If the narrator could have allowed himself the right to be frightened of the strange mansion in its isolated setting, then he might also have been able to fulfill the purpose of his journey, that is, to help Roderick Usher. The capacity to accept one's own emotions is a prerequisite for the potentiality to empathize with another. Through empathy, the narrator might have come to an understanding of Roderick's anguish that would be more therapeutic by being less judgmental. But for the narrator, there is just one way to know the world and that is by means of one's reason. If Roderick will not respond to reason, he is beyond help.

The narrator of "Bartleby the Scrivener" is also in the position to help someone, but, like Poe's narrator, he is hampered from the start by his commitment to an established set of expectations about the world. The element of unpredictability that Roderick and Bartleby represent has no more place in the attorney's approach to life than it does in the life of the visitor to the House of Usher. To both narrators, the necessity for change in the world and in their worldview is threatening. While the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" relies on his ability to explain away the unexpected, the attorney of "Bartleby the Scrivener" counts on his allegiance to the status quo to protect him from any such obligation. In fact, Henry A. Murray suggests the basic theme of "Bartleby the Scrivener" is the "opposition between the requirements of the on-going social system and the requirements of the individual with his innate need for autonomy. In Melville's narrative we have a miniature social system . . . operating within the frame of the Protestant ethic and
the utilitarian philosophy, in terms of which, as usual, rationality and sanity are defined. . . . [The lawyer is] the administrator of this system."8 Leo Marx feels, "As a spokesman for the society, he is well chosen; he stands at its center and performs a critical role, unravelling and retying the invisible cords of prosperity and equity which intertwine in Wall Street and bind the social system."9 Instead of saying, "The easiest way of life is the best" (p. 20), the lawyer might caution, "Don’t rock the boat." His willingness to placate his employees is as much a part of his policy as his unwillingness to challenge the ethical standards of his fellow lawyers.

Where Poe’s narrator honors reason before all else, Melville’s narrator honors security. The easiest form of security for him to achieve is financial security; certainly, emotional security is nowhere near as dependable. The lawyer avoids worrying over the possibility of conflict and loss involved in an intimate relationship by having, so far as readers can tell, no such relationships. The connection on which he prides himself is as a one time employee of "the late John Jacob Astor," whose authority the narrator cites numerous times in one paragraph as "a name which, I admit, I love to repeat; for it hath a rounded and orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion. I will freely add, that I was not insensible to the late John Jacob Astor’s good opinion" (p. 20). Apparently, Astor agreed with the public valuation of the narrator as "eminently safe" (p. 20) and complimented the lawyer on his "prudence" and "method" (p. 20). In Astor, the narrator sees a trinity of great wealth,
business acumen, and social position. Because, as Marjorie Dew
notes, "he has confused God with the late John Jacob Astor,"¹⁰ he can
consider himself with the self-satisfaction of a true believer.

At Bartleby's arrival, the narrator is as close to his goal of
total security as he is ever likely to be. The "not . . . very
arduous . . . but pleasantly remunerative" (p. 20) office of Master
in Chancery had been awarded to him and with it the promise of "a
life-lease of the profits" (p. 20), a promise broken, however, after
a few years when the New York State's new constitution did away with
the Master in Chancery.¹¹ Although drafting a constitution is hardly
a speedy process, the lawyer, years later, writes of this change in
his fortunes as if he still suffers from the shock of a life and
death announcement given without warning: "I seldom lose my temper;
much more seldom indulge in dangerous indignation at wrongs and
outrages; but, I must be permitted to be rash here, and declare, that
I consider the sudden and violent abrogation of the office of Master
of Chancery . . . a--premature act" (p. 20). The narrator seems
barely able to cope with a change which came about through a legal
system familiar to him and which does not significantly endanger the
income of his "snug business among rich men's bonds, and mortgages,
and life-deeds" (p. 20). He is reacting without grasping the fact
that change is unavoidable; no matter how narrowly he limits his
world, any guarantee of a "life-lease" on anything but life itself is
illusory.

While the faith of the narrators of "Bartleby the Scrivener" and
"The Fall of the House of Usher" in a predictable world implies their
general satisfaction with living in such a world, the narrators of "Louisa Pallant" and The Blithedale Romance, in spite of their personal comforts, see life on earth more pessimistically. The likelihood that individuals or society itself could change for the better is met by these narrators with disbelief. Hawthorne deals directly with this issue by contrasting the idealism of the Blithedale experiment with the cynicism of Miles Coverdale.

Coverdale would have his readers believe that he began his adventure in communal living with high hopes for its success, that he, as William Hedges argues, went "in good faith" to Blithedale, and became disillusioned only after his participation gave him reason to be: "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" (pp. 38-39). A bit later he adds, "I rejoice that I could once think better of the world's improvability than it deserved" (p. 47). But from his companions in this effort, we get a different estimate of his original dedication. On their way to their first gathering at Blithedale, one fellow traveller remarks, "Ah, Coverdale, don't laugh at what little enthusiasm you have left!" (p. 39). That this opinion of Coverdale's attitude is shared by many is obvious when his suggestion that the community call itself "Utopia"... was unanimously shouted down, and the proposer very harshly maltreated, as if he had intended a latent satire" (p. 62).
If Coverdale's cynical worldview was common knowledge, it might explain the scepticism with which the others take his commitment to their cause. The source of his cynicism is tied to the image that Coverdale wants society to have of him. Since he fears being considered ridiculous should he hold idealistic beliefs, he usually claims to have none. Coverdale, himself, points to a connection between his fear of ridicule and the limits of his idealism: "The greatest obstacle to being heroic is the doubt whether one may not be going to prove one's self a fool" (p. 38). Because Coverdale risked his reputation as a cynic by his association with Blithedale, he returns cautiously to Boston society: "my present mood inclining me to avoid most of my companions, from whom I was now sundered by other interests, and who would have been likely enough to amuse themselves at the expense of the amateur working man" (p. 160). But Coverdale readjusts quickly:

My superficial talk, too, assumed altogether a worldly tone. Meeting former acquaintances, who showed themselves inclined to ridicule my heroic devotion to the cause of human welfare, I spoke of the recent phase of my life as indeed fair matter for jest. But I also gave them to understand that it was, at most, only an experiment, on which I had staked no valuable amount of hope or fear. (pp. 203-04)

It would appear that these old friends mean more to him than do the members of the Blithedale community. Yet Miles Coverdale's stated philosophy of friendship makes that possibility unlikely: "we may rest certain that our friends of to-day will not be our friends of a few years hence; but, if we keep one of them, it will be at the expense of the others; and, most probably, we shall keep none" (p. 97). His prediction turns out accurately enough as the book ends
with Priscilla, to whom this was addressed, left with only one friend, Hollingsworth, and Miles Coverdale left with none.

His pessimism, however, is not the result of his experiences at Blithedale. Coverdale says plainly, "It had taken me nearly seven years of worldly life to hive up the bitter honey which I have offered to Priscilla" (p. 98). Much as he might hope that his readers, in contrast to society at large, see him as a disillusioned idealist, he offers too much evidence to the contrary. While we might consider cynicism justifiable when it applies to schemes of human perfectability, cynicism about human potential for friendship can hardly be thought of in the same way. Miles Coverdale's worldweariness comes to appear an escape from the necessity to attempt success in intimate relationships. He arrives at Blithedale committed only to the knowledge that "if the vision have been worth the having, it is certain never to be consummated otherwise than by a failure" (p. 38).

If the narrator of "Louisa Pallant" has not shaped his ideas into a recognizable philosophy, he still shares some of Coverdale's conclusions. His notion of friendship, for instance, precludes the possibility of honesty or support: "It seldom ministers to friendship, I believe, that your friend shall know your real opinion, for he knows it mainly when it's unfavorable" (p. 84). However, the narrator of "Louisa Pallant" shows much less concern than Coverdale for society's opinion of him. Instead, he worries about protecting his private view of himself and his past from contradictions that the present might offer. He qualifies his "fondness . . . for the
explanations of things" (p. 92) with the necessity that these explanations coincide with what he already believes to be true. When he meets Mrs. Pallant many years after their broken engagement, he insists to the reader that she could not possibly have changed during that time. He thinks he must prove she is immoral now in order to perpetuate his version of the past and his image of her as the "wronger of my youth" (p. 123). Although he says he "had forgiven her" (p. 84), he soon belies this claim: "I foresaw that before I left the place I should have confided to her that though I detested her and was very glad we had fallen out, yet our old relations had left me no heart for marrying another woman" (p. 88). Like that of the other three narrators, his sense of life being governed by unchanging relationships frees him from the obligation of loving or even just caring for other human beings.

How much difference is there between the optimistic faith in rationalism of Poe's and Melville's narrators and the pessimistic reliance on cynicism of Hawthorne's and James's narrators when both lead to what Barbour describes as "a world empty of nourishing relationships where characters exist in an atomistic void, condemned to the resources of their autonomous selves, a world in which no one is recognized as a person."13 All four of the narrators seem to gain strength from believing that their views of the world conform to their notions of what society expects. The expectations of individuals, however, seem to demand they question their values and change their lives. It is easier and safer, then, to avoid change by avoiding friendships.
Having examined the narrators' overall expectations of life, we must now consider how they handle evidence that reality does not coincide with their pictures of it. Actually, their responses to contradictory data are not especially complex; they just choose not to acknowledge that certain occurrences affect them. Metaphorically and sometimes literally, they turn their backs on what they do not want to apprehend. Their tendency to withhold information from themselves protects them from self-knowledge as well as knowledge of the world around them.

If Joel Porte's argument that "the keynote of [Poe's] fiction is so frequently evasion" is true, then we should not be surprised that only the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" offers an explanation of what motivates his policy of avoidance: "There can be no doubt that the consciousness of the rapid increase of my superstition—for why should I not so term it?—served mainly to accelerate the increase itself. Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical law of all sentiments having terror as a basis" (p. 339). The process of translating his vague but growing apprehensiveness into the specific wording of a "law" enables him here to own his feelings because they have been shown to conform to his expectations of a scientifically predictable universe. But the "paradoxical law" has more to teach us than the narrator realizes. Through it we can understand the principle that guides the narrator in his intercourse with the Ushers. Since "the consciousness of a rapid increase" of
feelings creates a further increase, then, in the interest of preserving a cool and logical mind, that "consciousness" should be avoided.

As one anxiety-producing situation after another confronts him, the narrator employs various strategies to block his own awareness. We see him turn away from what bothers him, change the subject of his discussions, examine details rather than respond to them, and engage in busy work. When he fails in his attempt to demystify the appearance of the House of Usher by turning from it to its mirrored image in the tarn, he shifts his attention from the house to its inhabitants and speaks of his early relationship with Roderick until he is sufficiently composed to come up with the "paradoxical law." When disturbed by Roderick's theorizing about the effect "of the sentience of all . . . things" (p. 408), the narrator changes the subject with the dismissive summation, "Such opinions need no comment, and I will make none" (p. 408), and abruptly begins a review of Roderick's library. So long as the narrator can restrict his responses to those of "the eye of a scrutinizing observer" (p. 400), he can limit himself to manageable sensations: "Shaking off from my spirit what must have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building" (p. 400). The impression that the building made on his emotions is thus rendered unreal and he is left to remark on the "undeniable" relationship of one stone to another. This same exchange of emotionally charged territory for neutral ground is found when the narrator moves from Roderick's thoughts to Roderick's library, where the narrator can soothe himself by busily listing
books by title and author. Frederick S. Frank comments that the narrator, "unable to tabulate the Gothic data before him into a logical whole or to reduce his wild feelings to a formula . . . is obstinately committed to putting things in their right order as he probes for an explanation."15

Even the narrator's attempts to distract Roderick from his symptoms can be taken as another evasive tactic. He introduces nothing new into Roderick's daily literary and artistic occupations except his company: "during this period I was busied in earnest endeavors to alleviate the melancholy of my friend. We painted and read together; or I listened, as if an a dream, to the wild improvisations of his speaking guitar" (p. 404). Their activity, as the phrasing, "I was busied," indicates, seems as much designed to keep the narrator busy as it does Roderick. If the medical terminology were available, the narrator would surely recommend a program of occupational therapy to divert Roderick from the strange notions that trouble him. However, since it is the narrator and not Roderick who, when faced with subjects that frighten him, chooses a policy of avoidance, the treatment actually best suits the narrator.

In what Robert Crossley calls "the only significant action the narrator ever takes during Usher's decline, he chooses not to talk with Usher but to read to him. . . . With apocalypse unfolding all around him, the narrator hides in his book."16 When he reads the "Mad Trist" aloud, ostensibly to calm Roderick, his purpose is really to calm himself by devoting his attention to anything other than the menace of the storm and the anxiety he cannot understand. In spite
of the fact that he had grabbed "the only book immediately at hand" (p. 413), he feels compelled to argue that Roderick will benefit from listening to this specific text: "I indulged a vague hope that the excitement which now agitated the hypochondriac, might find relief (for the history of mental disorder is full of similar anomalies) even in the extremeness of the folly which I should read" (p. 413). However, the romance ironically focuses Roderick's attention on the specific sounds of Madeline's progress, while it provides the narrator with a way to ignore the significance of the fearful noises he cannot help but hear:

At the termination of this sentence I started, and ... paused; for it appeared to me (although I at once concluded that my excited fancy had deceived me) ... that, from some very remote corner of the mansion, there came ... the very cracking and ripping sound which Sir Launcelot had so particularly described. It was beyond doubt, the coincidence alone which had arrested my attention; for, amid the rattling of the sashes of the casements, and the ordinary commingled noises of the still increasing storm, the sound, in itself, had nothing, surely, which should have interested or disturbed me. I continued the story. (p. 414)

In spite of the fact that Roderick seems to be slipping into a catatonic state, the narrator continues to read.

Until, at the conclusion of the tale, Lady Madeline interrupts the narrator's reading, he succeeds, with little effort, in avoiding her. The first sight he had of her was, apparently, enough to make him refrain from seeking out Madeline. Her sudden ghost-like appearance in the midst of his initial interview with Roderick has every reason to shock him, though he cannot warrant this reaction: "the lady Madeline ... passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared.
I regarded her with an utter astonishment not unmixed with dread—and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings" (p. 404). Because this introduction to her frightens him in a way he cannot explain, he sounds relieved that she soon takes to her bed: "I learned that the glimpse I had obtained of her person would thus probably be the last I should obtain—that the lady, at least while living, would be seen by me no more" (p. 404). The reader is left filled with curiosity over Roderick's twin while the narrator seems happy to forget about Madeline and her perplexing ailment. Yet, logic should have led the narrator to interview Madeline simply because of the likelihood that brother and sister, both ill, might be at different stages of the same disease. Neither the value of satisfying his readers' curiosity nor the opportunity to understand his host's health problem even enters his mind. He wants only to deny that he can be horrified without knowing exactly why or of what.

Just as Poe's narrator establishes that his purpose is to help Roderick Usher recover from his illness but then avoids Madeline, who could possibly aid that effort, so too does James' narrator establish his purpose, "in view of [his] prospective mentorship to [his] nephew . . . and to show him only the best of Europe . . . to be very careful about the people he should meet . . . and the relations he should form" (p. 83) and then ignore the very responsibility he assumed. From the accounts the narrator gives of their activities, Archie Parker is not guided through museums, castles, or cathedrals; instead, he is encouraged to remain in the company of two women whom the narrator takes "for granted . . . were of an artful intention"
When Mrs. Pallant warns the narrator of Archie Parker's increasing involvement with her daughter, the narrator questions Louisa's motives for giving the warning. But he does not question his own motives even after he admits to us that, "To put him in relation with a young enchantress was the last thing his mother had expected of me or that I had expected of myself. Moreover it was quite my opinion that he himself was too young to be a judge of enchantresses" (p. 98).

In spite of the fact that the narrator cannot claim ignorance of the probability of Archie's romantic interest in Linda or the probability of Linda's mercenary interest in Archie, he never takes up the problem of why he seems to be promoting their relationship. "Furious" (p. 100) rather than grateful when mother and daughter leave Hamburg, he seems as eager as Archie to rejoin them. The narrator reacts to Linda's letter containing the Pallants' whereabouts with a "small private cry of triumph" (p. 101) and pleases Archie that he is "so easy to deal with" (p. 101) on the matter of changing their travel plans. Although the narrator might have argued the wisdom of seeing sights other than Linda and Louisa Pallant, he does not bother: "I judged it idle to drag him another way; he had money in his own pocket and was quite capable of giving me the slip" (p. 102). At every point where he might have served as the guardian he was intended to be, he either denies the necessity to act in that capacity or pleads the powerlessness of his position. Yet he still alleges, "in the way of supervision I had done enough in coming with him" (p. 103).
The narrator adjusts the concept of his role as Archie Parker's mentor from one which requires the active guidance of an innocent nephew's interest in both person and place to one which only requires his passive attendance as his nephew's companion. This change is not due to a discovery that his nephew is as worldly-wise as himself, and, therefore, needs no such advice. Rather, the narrator overlooks his duty to protect Archie because that responsibility interferes with his desire to pursue Louisa Pallant and, once again, find her guilty.

Much as the narrator might wish it, Louisa Pallant never allows him to forget his responsibility to his nephew and sister. Neither is the narrator of "Bartleby the Scrivener" allowed to move from the office occupied by Bartleby and leave the problem he represents behind. Just as Louisa Pallant threatens to write the narrator's sister, a crowd threatens to expose the attorney to the newspapers. That prior to this efficacious threat, he refuses all responsibility for the man he had earlier idealized as "the predestinated purpose of my life" (p. 53) should surprise readers no more than his later escape to the suburbs. According to Marjorie Dew, "The narrator's way of life is evasion,"17 and we have been prepared for his evasive tactics by the lawyer's customary reliance on delay in place of decision-making.

In the first half of the story, whether the narrator describes his reactions to Bartleby's work habits in terms of anger, confusion, or sorrow, all these emotions are followed by the same response: the attorney postpones taking any action. When Bartleby first declines
to check copy, his employer puts aside his inclination to fire Bartleby in order to consider, "What had one best do? But my business hurried me. I concluded to forget the matter for the present, reserving it for my future leisure" (p. 30). The next such incident calls forth almost identical reasoning: "I pondered a moment in sore perplexity. But once more business hurried me, I determined again to postpone the consideration of this dilemma to my future leisure" (p. 32). But pressing business cannot always excuse the narrator's eagerness to avoid doing something about Bartleby. After egging on his employee to one more refusal of work, he backs away from "intimating the unalterable purpose of some terrible retribution" (p. 36), to notice, "as it was drawing toward my dinner hour, I thought it best to put on my hat and walk home for the day, suffering much from perplexity and distress of mind" (p. 36). When he finally determines that Bartleby is a bad influence on his other clerks and therefore must go, he still "thought it prudent not to break the dismissal at once" (p. 45).

The narrator cannot bring himself to take any action against Bartleby which would leave the attorney with an uneasy conscience. By walking away from the problem, he believes he can avoid both guilt and action. He is at least partially successful. As Charles Mitchell says, "the lawyer in Bartleby avoids, leaves, and finally gets rid of his conscience-figure (by the terribly ironic means of letting his conscience go to jail)."18 Although sufficiently uneasy in mind to write this account of his scrivener, the narrator manages through strategies of procrastination and evasion to force others to
act where he would not. This allowed him on visiting Bartleby in the Tombs to say with conviction, "It was not I that brought you here, Bartleby" (p. 610). Because the memory of Bartleby huddled dead against the jail wall stays with him, the attorney composes the document we read to convince himself that he did all that was possible to help Bartleby.

Miles Coverdale's conscience seems not especially bothered by the memories of death and disappointment his narrative contains. His complacency points to how successfully he cuts himself off from the objects of his interest. He avoids admitting to himself that he does not really want genuine intimacy with Zenobia, Priscilla, or Hollingsworth, by frequent descriptions of his involvement with them and complaints of their making an outsider of him. But his voyeurism and eavesdropping are what make him an outsider and best represent the relations he chooses to have with others.

When Coverdale introduces the tree hermitage, he presents it in idealistic terms as his hold-out from the demands of socialism: "This hermitage was my one exclusive possession while I counted myself a brother of the socialists. It symbolized my individuality, and aided me in keeping it inviolate" (p. 118). However, the narrator does not use his retreat to withdraw from the world for purposes of meditation; he uses it "to serve as an observatory, not for starry investigations, but for those of sublunary matters" (p. 119). On the day that he meets Westervelt in the woods and tells him how to find Zenobia, he goes next to his tree hermitage, "not to be out of the way, in case there were need of me in my vocation [of calm observer],
and, at the same time, to avoid thrusting myself where neither
destiny nor mortals might desire my presence" (p. 117). In hopes of
witnessing a scene between Zenobia and Westervelt, Coverdale
positions himself; yet, when the couple appear near his observatory,
he does not congratulate himself on his foresight, but begins "to
think it the design of fate to let me into all Zenobia's secrets"
(p. 122). Similarly, upon later discovering the two plus Priscilla
in town, he decides, "there seemed something fatal in the coincidence
that had borne me to this one spot, of all others in a great city,
and transfixed me there, and compelled me again to waste my already
wearied sympathies on affairs which were none of mine, and persons
who cared little for me" (p. 170). Although there is no denying the
coincidence that puts Zenobia, Westervelt, and Priscilla in
Coverdale's field of vision, for him to present his habits of
voyeurism and eavesdropping as the workings of destiny and fate is
grandiose and self-deceptive. This strategy, however, is
particularly effective in that it not only glorifies his socially
unacceptable behavior but also removes the responsibility for that
behavior from him who feels "compelled" to continue it.

Vern Lentz and Allen Stein view Coverdale's references to fate
differently. They argue that the reason Coverdale "tends to assert
that he and others are driven by fate to be as they are and act as
they do" is because "the fundamental assumption of this novel is an
inherently deterministic one."\(^{19}\) Perhaps they realize they are on
shaky ground since they note that, "although this might seem to be
merely a means for Coverdale to cheer himself up, by convincing
himself he is not culpable for his shortcomings, this is not the case. One of Coverdale's virtues... is his self-awareness." Lentz and Stein, I think, have mistaken Coverdale's intentions for Hawthorne's. While Hawthorne might well agree, "that man, himself intrinsically imperfect, is deluding himself if he believes that he can reform society," it does not necessarily follow that Hawthorne also believes that even an imperfect man like Miles Coverdale should not be held responsible for his own behavior.

The narrator frequently uses language which implies he does not have control over his desire to pry into others' affairs: "What it was that dictated my next question, I cannot precisely say. Nevertheless, it rose so inevitably into my mouth, and, as it were, asked itself so involuntarily, that there must needs have been an aptness in it" (p. 150). Even when Coverdale acknowledges the inappropriateness of his curiosity, he has not the power to restrain himself: "No doubt it was a kind of sacrilege in me to attempt to come within her maidenly mystery; but, as she appeared to be tossed aside... like a flower... I could not resist the impulse to take just one peep beneath her folded petals" (p. 142). This choice of words and metaphors suggests to readers motivations that the narrator never examines—for the sexual and emotional satisfaction of intimate relationships, Miles Coverdale substitutes the satisfaction of his curiosity.

The narrator of The Blithedale Romance would like us to imagine him as fated to tell the story of this love triangle. But the control which he describes as being imposed on him by destiny is
actually his need for total control over his fate. To be truly involved with Zenobia, Priscilla, or Hollingsworth would require that Coverdale give them some power to affect his life. But Coverdale cannot risk going where his feelings for others might take him, or as James Walters puts it: "he has refused to love another unreservedly because he cannot stand the mystery of losing himself to find himself again in a way beyond reason."²² His voyeurism, then, could be seen as an expression of a need to know all the dangers that could threaten his ascendancy:

I felt an invincible reluctance . . . at the idea of presenting myself before my old associates, without first ascertaining the state in which they were. . . . Perhaps, should I know all the circumstances that had occurred, I might find it my wisest course to turn back, unrecognized, unseen, and never look at Blithedale more. Had it been evening, I would have stolen softly to some lighted window of the old farmhouse, and peeped darkling in. (p. 214)

Miles Coverdale's voyeurism is an attempt to avoid his humanity. Not only does he want to be free of the demands of other people, he also wants to be free of the uncertainty of life itself. In a world made to his liking, he would never have to enter into a situation to familiarize himself with it; he could simply observe it, and, from the advantage of his special perspective, decide whether he could safely slip into the scene. Allusions to fate and destiny permit him to see his deviant behavior as allied with the gods who might look down on mere humans and comment as Coverdale does: "At my height above the earth, the whole matter looks ridiculous" (p. 119). Perhaps, by trying to escape from shared feelings and responsibilities, all participant-observer narrators are, in some
way, denying their humanity, seeking power to preserve themselves from mortal vicissitudes.

Projection

The strategy that especially meets the needs of the participant-observer narrator is projection, which "always appears as a defense, as the attribution to another (person or thing) of qualities, feelings or wishes that the subject repudiates or refuses to recognize in himself" according to Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis in _The Language of Psycho-Analysis._

In the previous chapter, the suggestion was made that the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" projects his anxiety onto his host. While the narrator struggles to subdue the illogical fears that the House of Usher awakened in him, Roderick Usher struggles, not to repress those fears, but to live in spite of them. Roderick's assumption that there is no way to avoid his "intolerable agitation of soul" (p. 403) is impossible for the narrator to accept. The narrator believes that logical constructs, laws, can explain and control his reactions to the House of Usher. Roderick forces on him the possibility that such neat constructs of logic do not necessarily apply. It is certainly easier for the narrator to doubt Roderick's capacity to reason than to doubt reason's capacity to control anxiety. If the narrator cannot count on reason to save him, he might find himself without defenses against the anxiety that has contributed to the terrible change in Roderick Usher.
When the narrator first looks at and listens to Roderick, he witnesses a form of anxiety so extreme it cannot be ignored. Roderick expresses his agitation physically, emotionally, and intellectually, becoming almost an embodiment of anxiety itself. In an analysis of Roderick's skill as an artist, the narrator remarks, "If ever mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher" (p. 405). Roderick is able not only to paint an idea, he represents one. In his person, the abstraction of anxiety is made tangible. All the vague and uncomfortable feelings regarding the House of Usher that the narrator has been experiencing come to focus on Roderick. Porte has observed that the narrator even describes Roderick in the same terms he has already used to describe the house. Roderick articulates "this pitiable condition" (p. 403) for the narrator who becomes convinced that such "an anomalous species of terror" (p. 403) can have nothing to do with him. Anxiety has, thus, become Roderick's problem, alone, since Roderick represents it so well. When the narrator senses that he might be losing his battle to suppress his illogical fears, he blames Roderick: "It was no wonder that his condition terrified—that it infected me. I felt creeping upon me, by slow yet certain degrees, the wild influences of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions" (p. 411). His anxiety is not accepted as an appropriate response to an atmosphere so menacing; no, the narrator insists he has caught this affliction from Roderick; the feelings come not from within but from without. The last night spent under the roof of the House of Usher, the narrator, desperate but still unwilling to look inside himself for these feelings of
"causeless alarm" (p. 411), demonstrates his dependence on projection: "I struggled to reason off the nervousness which had dominion over me. I endeavored to believe that much, if not all of what I felt, was due to the bewildering influence of the gloomy furniture of the room" (p. 411). While the wording used here intimates that the narrator sees through his attempt to hold furniture responsible for his feelings, he never shows any understanding that he has written the entire tale so as to focus on Roderick's emotions and deny his own.

The narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" needs to protect his self-image as a man of reason and the narrator of "Bartleby the Scrivener" needs to maintain his self-image as a man of charity and conscience. One of the times the attorney is tempted to fire Bartleby, he says he cannot help but attend to the "superstitious knocking at my heart ... forbidding me to carry out my purpose, and denouncing me for a villain if I dared to breathe one bitter word against this forlornest of mankind" (p. 43). As we have already seen, the narrator strives to model himself after philanthropists as well as businessmen. The attorney welcomes the opportunity to "cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval" (p. 34) by helping Bartleby almost as much as he cherishes the memory of "the late John Jacob Astor's good opinion" (p. 20). In his encounter with Bartleby, the narrator learns that integrating the two roles is no simple matter. His charity towards Bartleby jeopardizes the efficiency of his office and his reputation as a professional. After a number of "unsolicited and uncharitable remarks" (p. 53) about
Bartleby, the lawyer finds "that the constant friction of illiberal minds wears out at last the best resolves of the more generous" (p. 53). Confronted by the choice between his philanthropic and business interests, he chooses business.

The choice, however, is not made without qualms. Although the narrator is proud of the attributes of "prudence" and "method" (p. 20) which gained him Astor's esteem, he is not eager to claim other virtues crucial to capitalism. The necessity to base his decisions on expediency rather than morality dismays him but, as Herschel Parker points out, the attorney still "ranks . . . among Melville's characters who advocate expediency rather than absolute morality."25 There is little question in his mind that the greatest number of people would benefit if he could send Bartleby away, but he cannot imagine being so heartless:

what does conscience say I should do with this man. . . .
Rid myself of him, I must; go, he shall. But how? . . . you will not thrust such a helpless creature out of your door?
you will not dishonor yourself by such cruelty? No, I will not, I cannot do that . . . surely you will not have him collared by a constable, and commit his innocent pallor to the common jail? And upon what ground could you procure such a thing to be done? (p. 55)

The narrator is cognizant of the expedient action to take but rather than accept the damage to his self-concept that would follow such action, he runs away. George Bluestone observes that, "He vacillates continually between self-interest and compassion, but he will only admit compassion."26

The attorney wants to be successful within the capitalist system without violating his image of himself. His less generous
inclinations he projects onto others whom he leaves to do what
offends his conscience. Unlike the use of projection by the other
narrators I am discussing, the attorney does not blame someone else
for his abandonment of Bartleby, but he does attribute to another
"qualities, feelings, and wishes that [he] repudiates or refuses to
recognize within himself."27 "Let the scrivener be handled—roughly
if need be—by someone who is not encumbered by my paralyzing
scruples,"28 Henry A. Murray says, assuming the voice of the
narrator. When he returns from his escape to the countryside to find
that Bartleby has been jailed, he notes with relief, "At first I was
indignant; but, at last, almost approved. The landlord's energetic,
summary disposition had led him to adopt a procedure which I do not
think I would have decided upon myself; and yet, as a last resort,
under such peculiar circumstances, it seemed the only plan" (italics
mine p. 60). A commitment to self-interest and the values of Wall
Street lead the lawyer to accept a policy of expediency so long as he
is not required to acknowledge that he would have implemented that
policy himself.

While the attorney projects his desire to solve the problem of
Bartleby expediently, the narrator of The Blithedale Romance finds
that projection allows him to attribute the genesis of his very
thoughts, not to his own mind, but to another person altogether.
Through this strategy, Coverdale can be his most cynical without
giving up the notion that he joined the community out of idealism and
not curiosity or ennui. The first evening at the farm, Zenobia
discards her wilted flowers, which has an "irresistible effect"
(p. 48) on Coverdale, who thinks, "the presence of Zenobia caused our heroic enterprise to show like an illusion, a masquerade, a pastoral, a counterfeit Arcadia, in which we grown-up men and women were making a play-day of the years that were given to us to live" (p. 48). Such a statement insinuates that Zenobia is responsible not only for his present doubts about the Blithedale experiment but also its future failure.

Coverdale makes his most obvious use of projection in his relationship with Professor Westervelt, a character whom Nina Baym sees "as the demon of sexual cynicism and fear, the internalization of society's life-denying strategies . . . [who is] linked to all the other images of rigidity and coldness in the book, to the rigid, passion-repressing, 'puritanical' part of the personality." In spite of the initial antipathy Westervelt evokes by addressing Coverdale as "friend" (p. 110) and in spite of his devilish appearance which causes Coverdale to remark, "I hated him, partly, I do believe, from a comparison of my own homely garb with his well-ordered foppishness" (p. 112), Coverdale regrets the close of their interview. He has enjoyed hearing Westervelt's opinions of Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla, opinions that so approximate his own, and he realizes that the Professor's "evident knowledge . . . might have led to disclosures, or inferences, that would perhaps have been serviceable" (p. 116).

There is little doubt that Westervelt, whose walking stick is "carved in vivid imitation of that of a serpent" (p. 112), is meant to suggest evil; there is some surprise that Coverdale so easily
accommodates himself to Westervelt's company that he contemplates how he could have used the meeting more to his advantage. After disclosing his affinity for Westervelt by his willingness to give and take information from him, Coverdale still expects his readers to blame his "mood of disbelief in moral beauty or heroism, and a conviction of the folly of attempting to benefit the world" (p. 120) on his interaction with Westervelt: "I recognized as chiefly due to this man's influence the sceptical and sneering view which, just now, had filled my mental vision, in regard to all life's better purposes" (p. 120). But we should be familiar enough with Coverdale's cynical worldview to be able to identify this expression of it as his own.

Coverdale's projection onto the Professor of "a cold scepticism [which] smothers . . . our spiritual aspirations" (p. 121) ends with an acknowledgement that, "a part of my own nature showed itself responsive to him" (p. 121). This confession is likely to undercut whatever suspicions of Coverdale's reliability might have just occurred to us. His intention, in fact, is to reassure his readers and himself of his capacity for self-criticism, thereby maintaining his trustworthiness. This too should be considered a strategy of projection designed to accept a small parcel of responsibility for himself while the main burden of guilt is still shifted elsewhere. A conversation with Priscilla about Hollingsworth, meant to evoke her doubt and jealousy, is followed by the thought, "There may have been some petty malice in what I said . . . yes; it was out of a foolish bitterness of heart that I had spoken (p. 143). Having admitted to his own imperfection and jealousy, Coverdale feels the more justified
in blaming the situation on Hollingsworth's "own huge egotism" (p. 143). Coverdale disarms us with how blunt and perceptive his self-analysis can be: "The cold tendency, between instinct and intellect, which made me pry with speculative interest into people's passions and impulses, appeared to have gone far towards unhumanizing my heart" (pp. 167–8). Nevertheless, his next breath denies all liability for the composition of his character: "But a man cannot always decide for himself whether his own heart is cold or warm. It now impresses me that, if I erred at all in regard to Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla, it was through too much sympathy, rather than too little" (p. 168). Presumably destiny or fate has created him as he is, not his own decisions on how to live.

Miles Coverdale is not alone in his reliance on this specific tactic of projection; the narrator of "Louisa Pallant" also finds it useful to concede a flaw before advancing his attack. After puzzling over Mrs. Pallant's possible reasons for encouraging him to take Archie away, he frames the solution by first pointing to a minor fault of his: "As I haven't hesitated in this report to expose the irritable side of my own nature I shall confess that I even wondered if my old friend's solicitude hadn't been a deeper artifice. Wasn't it possibly a plan of her own for making sure of my young man" (p. 99). Like Coverdale, the narrator can sound as if he is close to self-knowledge without being so. When, towards the end of the story, the narrator reflects, "I might have been, from the way I suddenly felt, an unmasked hypocrite, a proved conspirator against her security and honor" (p. 118), we appreciate the appropriateness of
his self-portrayal. However, "unmasked hypocrite" is a description of his sensation of temporary embarrassment before Linda Pallant, not a sign of any understanding of his relationship to Louisa Pallant. Indeed, he implies that Linda's innocent appearance which causes his discomfort must prove her mother's guilt: "She had never been fresher, fairer, kinder; she made her mother's awful talk about her a hideous dream" (p. 118). The narrator employs occasional self-criticism to set up opportunities to further criticize Louisa Pallant.

Although in the beginning of the story the narrator presents himself as a "selfish bachelor, little versed in the care of children" (p. 87), he soon reveals that he does not hold himself accountable for the life he has come to lead: "She pronounced . . . I ought to have had children; there was something so parental about me. . . . She could make an allusion like that—to all that might have been and had not been—without a gleam of guilt in her eye. . . . If I had remained so single and so sterile the fault was nobody's but hers" (p. 88). The narrator wants no responsibility for the choice he made to continue his adult life a bachelor. Most of those years, Louisa Pallant and he never saw each other, yet he still projects on her the responsibility for decisions over which he had control.

At the close of the story, the narrator, who three sentences before refers to Louisa as "the wronger of my youth" (p. 122), avows, "I am convinced [Linda's] mother was sincere" (p. 122). He then attributes to Archie's mother, his sister, the opposing view: "such is the inconsequence of women—nothing can exceed her reprobation of
Louisa Pallant" (p. 122). His last words manage to suggest doubt as to Mrs. Pallant's integrity while showing himself sufficiently generous in spirit to believe her. We should question his sincerity. Is his belief in Louisa Pallant any more genuine than his earlier forgiveness of her? The narrator wants to have things both ways—we are to appreciate him for his charitable attitude toward Louisa and to continue our suspicions of her. By projecting his judgment of Louisa onto his sister, whose reaction, we must remember, is to "the incidents here recorded" as he "put [them] before her" (p. 122), he can accomplish his goal.

The participant-observer narrators' reliance on projection allows them to recognize possibilities that conflict with their worldviews and sense of their own identities without their having to make any accommodations to these conflicts. The narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" acknowledges how powerfully anxiety can influence every aspect of human life, but the life he sees being influenced is Roderick's, not his own. Emotions obviously do exist and have an impact on him, yet the narrator thinks they need not affect the way a rational person such as he views the world. The recognition that Bartleby forces on the attorney is that genuine charity is not usually compatible with expediency. The narrator sees the need to oust Bartleby if business is to continue as usual, but he projects the capacity to act according to that need onto another. In spite of his total acceptance of the values of John Jacob Astor, the lawyer believes he can excuse himself from the consequences of being guided by utilitarianism which demands ruthlessness toward anyone who
threatens the well-being of the many. Miles Coverdale's use of projection allows him to play down his cynical worldview while he is involved in the idealistic Blithedale experiment. Since he does not want to examine his real reason for joining the Blithedale community, the emptiness of life without personal commitments, he claims an idealism which he does not have. He blames Westervelt's influence for thoughts that only confirm to us the shallowness of his belief in the reform of society. In the narrator of "Louisa Pallant," we see a man who wants to accept no responsibility for how he has chosen to live. Although little in the story suggests he is unhappy, he cherishes his grudge against Louisa Pallant and projects onto her his decision to remain "so single and so sterile" (p. 88) and therefore so safe from the likelihood that someone will so disappoint him again. Emotions, action, thoughts, and decisions of the narrators are projected onto others in order that the participant-observers can defend themselves against the need to change and grow.

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Throughout this analysis, the issue that keeps recurring is that of the participant-observers' unwillingness to hold themselves accountable for who they are and how they act. Their worldview and their dependence on the strategies of avoidance and projection facilitate what begins as a choice of narrative method that allows the narrators to turn away from themselves and look to others for all the answers.
The narrators' reliance on defense mechanisms to protect their worldviews and their views of themselves contradicts claims that they are less influenced by self-interest than are protagonist narrators. However, Poe, Melville, Hawthorne, and James are doing more than simply faulting these narrators for their lack of objectivity, they are criticizing the value of objectivity itself. The four writers want their audiences to examine an assumption they probably share with the narrators—that the more removed from a situation a person is, the more able that person is to assess the situation. The participant-observer narrators make a point of their status as observers, standing apart from the people who interest them. While we have seen that the point of view of an observer cannot guarantee objectivity or even access to information, it does seem to guarantee that the narrators will never gain the intimacy with their subjects necessary to understanding them. By employing the participant-observers as storytellers, the authors can suggest that it is involvement, not objectivity, which leads to understanding and that any involvement with others that is more than a superficial commitment is impossible without first learning to accept responsibility for their own words, actions, and thoughts.
CHAPTER 4 FOOTNOTES


11. Herbert F. Smith, "Melville's Master in Chancery and his Recalcitrant Clerk," American Quarterly, 17 (1965), 734-61, discusses the office of chancery as "the underlying metaphor of the story" (p. 734). He explains the office as an anachronism since the
"Master in Chancery draws his power from his association with the king, not at all from "below," from the common-law courts and, in a democracy, from the people" (p. 736). Furthermore, he points out that the Courts of Chancery were also called the Courts of Equity and were "concerned with ideal application of justice" (p. 736), rather than simply keeping order.


17. Dew, p. 98.


20. Lentz and Stein, p. 94.

21. Lentz and Stein, p. 94.


CHAPTER 5
INDIVIDUALISM,
THE PARTICIPANT-OBSERVER NARRATOR, AND THE READER

I

The work of fiction which results from an author's choice to tell a story by means of a participant-observer narrator will be marked, as we have seen, by certain similarities to other participant-observer narratives. Yet, no matter how many similarities exist, there are differences too, which deserve acknowledgment. The approaches of the four authors studied here are not identical, nor are readers intended to respond identically to the four narrators. Certainly, the lawyer who eventually offers his own home to Bartleby demands more sympathy than Miles Coverdale who prefaces his experiment in a life of brotherly love by refusing the pathetic Mr. Moodie a favor. While Melville confronts his narrator with an extreme situation which, once underway, allows no practical resolution, the circumstances created by Hawthorne and James put the most direct pressure on characters other than the narrators. Although Poe's narrator prefers not to admit the extent to which he is terrified by the family and the house of Usher, we recognize and, to some degree, share the stress of being in so ominous a setting in such haunted company. Poe's special intention of thrilling readers
through a horrifying and suspenseful plot is united to his
classifications of not one but two anxiety-ridden men. We should
remember that Poe's interest in gothic horror sets his story apart
from the other participant-observer narratives included in this
study. We must be aware that Poe and Melville both place characters
in extreme conditions, but that Melville asks the impossible of his
pragmatic narrator; that Hawthorne and James are as concerned about
moral and ethical issues as Melville is, but that they direct us to
examine the psycho-sexual implications of their narrators' behaviors
which Melville omits from "Bartleby the Scrivener" and at which Poe
only hints in "The Fall of the House of Usher."

Yet, the similarities in these works must continue to claim our
attention, especially if we hope to gain some understanding of why
the participant-observer narrative was so fully developed by
nineteenth-century American writers. Common to each of these works
of fiction is the author's insistence on the necessity for human
beings to be responsible for themselves and for the effect their
behavior and emotions have on others. In spite of the fact that much
of the critical discussion of the uniqueness of American literature
takes as its starting point Lionel Trilling's remark "that American
writers of genius have not turned their minds to society,"¹ my
analysis assumes that the social consciousnesses of Hawthorne,
Melville, Poe, and James determined in large part their choice of the
participant-observer form of narration. Perhaps one reason this form
of narration so appealed to these writers is that it allowed them to
show respect for and at the same time criticize the American
tradition of individualism. By placing responsibility on individual readers to come to terms with ambiguous texts without the guidance provided by omniscient narrators, the authors show their respect. By exposing the participant-observer narrators' denial of their responsibility to others, they offer their criticism.

While the dictionary's definition of individualism as "the leading of one's life in one's own way without regard for others" might surprise those for whom individualism has only positive connotations, this tension between denotation and connotation helps us to see that American individualism is a term whose very familiarity covers up its contradictory beliefs. Yet, individualism viewed as a tension of opposites is hardly a new idea. F. O. Matthiessen points out in *American Renaissance* that "many observers have noted as the consequences of our American theory of the self-sufficient individual--our double tendency towards standardization and anarchy." The inclination to conform to society's norms without admitting there is a need to question the morality of those norms is as much a part of American individualism as the notion that a person can live best outside of or above the laws of society. Within individualistic approaches, rationality and intuitive emotion vie as the best means of understanding the world without a mediating authority. The person who reasons out her or his problems, conforms to social norms, and benefits from a laissez-faire economy has as much claim to be known as an individualist as the person who relies on her or his intuition and emotion, lives unconventionally at a distance from an established community, and
maintains a subsistence existence off the land. The real issue is not whether the "true" individualist is or is not a conformist; the real issue is the problem of living "without regards for others." To be a responsible human being means considering others besides oneself and depends on self-knowledge which is derived from trusting the insights of both reason and emotion. Through the device of the participant-observer narrator, Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, and James endeavor to make us understand this.

These four authors recognized that Americans are apt to romanticize individualism, to associate it with frontier heroes like Daniel Boone, who seem to have created American civilization even as they escaped from it. But the works of fiction we have been examining show that Americans need not prove themselves as individualists by facing the dangers of a forest wilderness; they are able to remain such in comfort at home or abroad, since in the mid-nineteenth century, Milton Stern informs us, "we reach an American moment when individualism has carried the day in the ideologies of the nation, in the metaphysics of the romantics, in the cultural effects of a consolidated Protestant revolt, in the economics of robber baron capitalism."4

This is not to say that individualism could not inspire the creative responses to the world that so excited Emerson when he reflected on his time in history:

There was a new consciousness. The former generations acted under the belief that a shining social prosperity was the beatitude of man, and sacrificed uniformly the citizen to the State. The modern man believed that the nation existed for the individual, for the guardianship and education of
every man. The idea, roughly written in revolutions and national movements, in the mind of the philosopher had far more precision; the individual is the world. ⑤

Yet, individualism can also encourage denial of responsibility of one citizen for another that we have seen evidenced by the participant-observer narrators. Brian M. Barbour suggests that although "Emerson was attacking American materialism, . . . he possessed no coherent social theory; by exalting atomism and individual will he unwittingly strengthened the development of society along lines in which . . . the will to dominate [was] increasingly normative and morally reputable." ⑥

Individualism allows the participant-observer narrators to see the choices and habits of their lives in the best possible light. It even permits them to idealize their isolation from others in the tradition of the American "loner", as we have seen when Miles Coverdale hides in the "hermitage" he describes as his "one exclusive possession while I counted myself a brother of the socialists. It symbolized my individuality and aided me in keeping it inviolate" (p. 118). Certainly the pattern of retreat from commitment which dominates and concludes these narratives has often been presented in other works of literature as part of the romantic myth of the outlaw-hero. William H. Gilman remarks about this image of the hero that "'lighting out for the territories' . . . involves a resource not usually available to the average man, either in a physical or a moral sense." ⑦ What Gilman is describing is a position of privilege (however questionable its desirability is) in which a character is free of or insensitive to obligations to others in the community and
thus is able to leave the community should something threaten his or her freedom or peace of mind. But it is in the nature of individualism to deny the impact of privilege. Rather than address the institutional, societal bases of inequities and alienation, the individualist wonders what is wrong with the person who suffers. Bartleby's failing eyesight and Louisa Pallant's mercenary qualities are the problems, not alienation from the capitalist system or the institution of marriage. Real heroism, Gilman suggests, lies in social involvement, in working through personal relationships and working for social change.

But the danger is not only that if self-fulfillment is the primary value, people will reject all social responsibility. Sam B. Girgus summarizes Isaiah Berlin's fear "that positive liberty easily becomes a license to violate the rights of others in the name of the 'higher' or 'real' self from which its authority came." We have noted this tendency in Miles Coverdale's explanation of his manipulations and voyeurism as "bringing my human spirit into manifold accordance with the companions whom God assigned me—to learn the secret which was hidden even from themselves" (p. 173).

Individualism serves two main purposes for the participant-observer narrators. First, it allows them the opportunity to romanticize their isolation from the community in the role of the "loner", and at the same time to find security in their ideological conformity to the mainstream of society. Second, it provides a socially acceptable rationale for their lack of commitment to others. A. N. Kaul's statement in The American Vision comments on the
necessity for American authors to discover a means (one of which, I would argue, is the participant-observer narrator) to examine the ambiguous nature of nineteenth-century concepts of individualism:

Here the freedom and supremacy of the individual constituted not a battle to be fought and won but rather a generally accepted principle, the starting point rather than the end of further search and struggle. In a society where equality was becoming increasingly a compulsion toward conformity and where individualism was rapidly draining social relationships of their human content, democratic values needed to be critically appraised as well as celebrated ... The principle of individualism could become self-stultifying unless it was related to the responsibilities of a larger social life. The problem of the novelist was thus not only to vindicate individual freedom in all its moral and psychological complexity but also to show how it could acquire positive meaning only when it was defined within the needs of the family or the civil community.

By placing too much emphasis on remaining free of society's influence, individualism undermines itself. The worth-while values of the individualist must be able to be maintained within the context of the community, since no one lives apart from society for long. Through the participant-observer narratives, the authors demonstrate the need for individualists to acknowledge the fact of their participation in society.

By making the participant-observer narrators bachelors, living alone, without economic responsibility for others, the authors can develop characters who define themselves primarily as individuals rather than as family members. As single men, it is far more simple for them to pursue their own ends and follow their own ideas, which individualism, as a principle, requires. As a means to achieve a clearer grasp of one's inner thoughts and needs, individualism
advocates a certain isolation from society at large. This isolation appeals to the narrators, who see themselves as observers and not participants in society. But in the relative seclusion provided by the absence of close relationships, they do not seek self-knowledge; they believe they have discovered their destiny, which is to unravel the mysteries in the lives of those they observe. The confidence they express in their right to observe and to judge is part of their over-all sense of superiority. This attitude is more easily maintained by their being infrequently subjected to the comments and criticisms people ordinarily receive in the course of daily life from those with whom they work and live intimately. Their own capacity for rational thought also convinces them that they are well qualified to evaluate what they see.

Although the narrators consider themselves rational-minded observers, we see them as fully-involved participants who refuse to acknowledge either their own actions or their responsibility for the impact they have on other characters' lives. Yet, when people are encouraged, as they are by individualism, to view themselves as self-sufficient units, it should be no surprise when one individual denies responsibility for another.

An essential part of the participant-observer narrators' unwillingness to perceive themselves as active members of a community can be seen in their lack of intimate ties of friendship or family. The writers present an important aspect of their critique in their portrayals of the relations between the sexes. As readers of participant-observer narratives, we have had to examine images of
women as filtered through male authors and male narrators. The images that appear, when they appear at all, are far from flattering. In Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," there are no women, either in the bachelor-narrator's life or in the world of his story. In Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," there is, as Nina Baym explains, "an equation of the feminine with death and a depersonalization or transmutation of woman into symbol. . . . [Poe] puts these images to highly theoretical uses, creating works that are only ostensibly women but in fact represent ideas."10 Poe's narrator's desire to avoid discussing the silent Lady Madeline suggests that even as an idea she is too potent for him, too evocative, not only of death, but of sexuality, which he avoids as he does all things which do not yield to reason. Although both of these stories offer readers cause to critically evaluate the narrators' relationships with another male character, neither gives us the chance to measure how the narrator relates to a fully developed female character.

Works by Hawthorne and James, however, do give us such opportunities. In The Blithedale Romance, Hawthorne relies on the convention of the dark and the fair in his depiction of Zenobia and Priscilla. While the virginal and submissive Priscilla is made to seem lifeless in comparison to the vital Zenobia, it is Priscilla who prevails at the book's conclusion. But we must appreciate that even in the traditional context of the virgin and the temptress, Hawthorne has given us in Zenobia a character who inspires admiration.

Through developing Zenobia's character, Hawthorne experiments with the tradition that identifies women with marriage and marriage
with the most confining of society's rules and regulations. Zenobia exposes Miles Coverdale to the iconoclastic aspects of individualism which should point out to him his need to examine his relationships with others and his position in society. In Baym's understanding of Hawthorne,

The males in the long works are oversocialized rather than isolated—timid, conventional, and repressed. The women represent the values of passion, creativity, self-assertion, and sincerity. Where in the stories women offered men a healthy connection to society, now they offer a healthy independence from society. Though the values change, positive values continue to be associated with women throughout Hawthorne's career.11

In James's "Louisa Pallant," we find a tendency similar to Hawthorne's to present women in conventional roles but then to complicate how readers see them in those roles. The opening situation of the story in which we believe the narrator will be protecting his innocent nephew from the marriage-hunting Pallants is almost instantly reversed. Her daughter's marriage prospect becomes less important to Louisa Pallant than her concern for Archie Parker, his uncle-narrator, and her own integrity. Although the narrator never relinquishes the notion of his ex-fiancée as the conniving mother, he adds to the portrait that of Louisa Pallant as an "unnatural" mother, since she criticizes her adult daughter and withholds unqualified love and approval. But the overriding impression that the narrator gives of Louisa Pallant, twenty years after she broke her engagement with him, is true to the stereotype of the castrating female. If he did not marry, it is her fault; if his nephew never marries, that will be her fault as well. In the midst
of an extensive critique of the narrator of this story, Philip Nicoloff calls Archie Parker "Mrs. Pallant's second emasculate victim." The assumptions seem to be that women must be responsible not only for the men they do marry, but also for the ones they do not marry; that women alone are responsible for creating and sustaining intimate relationships; and that women are at fault if and when men find themselves incapable of those relationships.

James makes these negative stereotypes available for us to analyze, not just accept. He gives us the tools to do so by making some of his narrator's limitations fairly apparent and by allowing Louisa Pallant opportunities to reveal herself and her motives. Yet, there is no guarantee his readers will choose to consider the issue at all. It is possible to accept the narrator's version or to doubt it without ever questioning the narrow roles within which women are supposed to develop their full humanity as well as their characters.

Leslie Fiedler in Love and Death in the American Novel suggests that "There is no heterosexual solution which the American psyche finds completely satisfactory, no imagined or real consummation between man and woman worthy of standing in our fiction for the healing of the breach between consciousness and unconsciousness, reason and impulse, society and nature." But in the fictional world of Edenic "make-believe," Fiedler finds evidence in "the tie between male and male" of the existence of the perfect, innocent relationship "at once erotic and immaculate, a union which commits its participants neither to society nor sin." But that tie usually does not foster further ties. It flourishes outside of society, part
of the individualist myth of the "loner," and, indeed, a "make-believe" alternative to living in society.

The creation of participant-observer narrators indicates a considerable degree of scepticism about this male bonding. At the house of Usher, remote from ordinary existence, the narrator cannot respond to Roderick Usher; on a commune promoting brotherhood, Miles Coverdale cannot accept the friendship of Hollingsworth; on a European pleasure trip, an uncle cannot earn his nephew's trust; in an office on Wall Street, the lawyer cannot reach and, therefore, cannot help the scrivener Bartleby. As creatures of individualism, the participant-observer narrators are unprepared for the demands of sexual bonding or friendship. When the possibility of loving and giving relationships with men or women appears, no matter what the setting, the narrators demonstrate their complete inability to meet those demands.

Perhaps one explanation for their lack of emotional responsiveness is the high valuation the participant-observers place on the capacity for rational thought. In their unwillingness to give credence to intuition and emotion as well as sense perception, the participant-observer narrators may be paying tribute to Locke's influence on nineteenth-century American thinking, an influence which might well have contributed to the association of rationalism with individualism. To refer again to Brian Barbour's analysis, there is a "tendency . . . to locate the experience of being in the exercise of the will; making straight the way was a certain utilitarian sense of mind, a kind of didactic rationalism."
on reason was capable of cancelling out other responses was a commonplace of Transcendental thought. Matthiessen records that Emerson "was in reaction against the formal logic of the nineteenth century, since he believed it not merely to confine but to distort."\(^\text{18}\) This effect is apparent when the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" refuses to recognize the sounds of what he knows is impossible—the ascent of Lady Madeline from the tomb. Tony Tanner in *The Reign of Wonder* argues that Poe is not alone in his insistence on the need to go beyond reason:

> Many American writers have shown a persistent antipathy to 'analysis'. (Of course from one point of view this can be subsumed under the general romantic nineteenth-century distaste for 'analysis': but there is something specially, and significantly, virulent and programmatic, even fearful, in the American attitude.) In American writing the word is nearly always used pejoratively, and a deep-rooted hostility to the analysing faculties is . . . obvious.\(^\text{19}\)

We might want to entertain the possibility that American writers are not so much attacking 'analysis' as they are criticizing the absence of feeling that so often typifies the analytical approach.

II

Nineteenth-century American authors were not alone in their criticism of individualism and its rationalistic aspects. However, European writers did not express their concern in a form so well adapted to forcing readers into participatory roles; the forms they relied on employed varying degrees of omniscience and dramatized narrators relating their own stories. As readers of omniscient narratives, we are guided to the appropriate judgments to make about
the characters and situations involved. As readers of dramatized
protagonist narratives, we are expected to judge the lives of the
characters about whom we possess the most knowledge. But as readers
of participant-observer narratives, we are given little guidance on
which we can rely and must try to judge not only the narrators but
also characters and events about which we often have little or no
direct knowledge.

The experience of reading fiction that employs participant-
oober narratives is one that in many ways echoes the experience of
the participant-observer narrators themselves. Like the narrators,
we too can control the extent to which we are willing to be involved
and responsible. It is possible to take these narratives at face
value and accept the narrator's values or judgments. It is even
possible to doubt the narrator's values, yet still decide to accept
his interpretations of events and other characters. When we find
that we have begun to question the narrator's moral vision, and
realize that that moral vision is not unlike our own, do we then
pursue the self-examination suggested by that realization? Or, do
we, like Miles Coverdale, place a scholarly "microscope" (p. 91)
between ourselves and the narrator and use it to attain a safe
distance from which we can "tear him to pieces" (p. 91) while we
remain in one piece ourselves?

The responsibility that we have is not only to do justice to the
text, but also to allow ourselves to respond fully to that text, even
if that means giving up our claim to professional objectivity.
Walter Slatoff urges us in With Respect to Readers: Dynamics of
Literary Response to come to an "awareness of the fact that distance, detachment, impersonality, and objectivity have affinities not only with certain kinds of truth and beauty but with indifference, complacency, callousness, and finally inhumanity." One might even argue that the extent to which a participant-observer narrative calls on us to question our own assumptions might be the measure of how well that work fulfills its main purpose. Rudolf E. Kuenzli, reviewing and explicating Wolfgang Iser's *The Act of Reading*, states:

The central function of fictitious texts, according to Iser, is their potential to make the reader aware of his familiar norms and codes and thereby to effect a certain degree of liberation from the limitations of his accustomed views and beliefs. In order to have this potential effect, the literary text has to have certain properties. It has to invoke and problematize, question and even negate the reader's norms, i.e., his expectations, in order to make him aware of their limitations, and to make him imagine "new" codes.

The authors hold up the participant-observer narrators as mirrors of their readers' social consciousnesses. First impressions of the participant-observers make identifying with them easy for most readers. The attitudes and beliefs they represent are familiar and are expressed by rational, cultivated men with sufficient imagination to become interested in people far less conventional than they. But then we see the participant-observer narrators treating the objects of their curiosity in ways we hope we would not treat them ourselves. The narrators' voyeurism alone might well cause us to back away from identifying with them even if we could accept their unwillingness to admit being implicated in the situations they describe. Once readers begin to distinguish between their values and those of the
participant-observer narrators, it then becomes possible for readers to recognize the authors' dissatisfaction with individualism as it is tied to rationalism. In looking into the mirror of the participant-observer narrator, readers discover first their similarities to and then their differences from the image there reflected. Through this process, readers are drawn into applying the values they have discovered in the literary work to themselves. Unlike the participant-observer, readers who come to be this involved can experience an increased awareness which could lead to a reexamination of values, not only as they exist in the text but also as they exist in readers' lives. The authors who developed the participant-observer narratives were showing not only their respect for their readers, but also hope for the future of America.
1. "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," in The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (New York: Viking Press, 1950), p. 212. According to Nicholaus Mills in American and English Fiction in the Nineteenth Century: An Antigenre Critique and Comparison (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1973), many of those influenced by Trilling subscribe to "one or more of the following genre assertions: American fiction is free from the ordinary and can be distinguished in terms of certain technical qualities, for example, myth or symbolism. The American writer was at best tangentially interested in society. Separateness from Europe, as a negative fact of cultural deprivation or a positive fact of a new experience, is sufficient to account for the uniqueness of American fiction" (p. 30n.). Mills finds these criteria in most of the "classic" critical works about American fiction: Richard Chase's The American Novel and its Tradition, Marius Bewley's The Eccentric Design, Leslie Fiedler's Love and Death in the American Novel, Charles Feidelson's Symbolism and American Literature, Edwin Fussell's Frontier, Daniel Hoffman's Form and Fable in American Fiction, Harry Levin's The Power of Blackness, R. W. B. Lewis's The American Adam, Leo Marx's The Machine in the Garden, and Joel Porte's The Romance in America (Mills, p. 18).


14. Fiedler, p. 351.

15. Fiedler, p. 350.


18. Matthiessen, p. 3.


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