HAWTHORNE'S "WORKSHOP METHOD" AND THE METAFICTIONAL MODES OF NABOKOV AND BARTH: NARRATIVE COMMENTARY AND THE STRUGGLES OF THE LITERARY ARTIST IN FOUR SHORT STORIES

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PREFACE

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone . . . . The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them . . . . Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.
>
> T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

> The debt is mutual; a great writer creates his precursors. He creates and somehow justifies them.
>
> Jorge Luis Borges, Other Inquisitions: 1937-1952

Based on the critical assumption that writers of short fiction, like other artists, progressively refine and develop the conventions of their genre, the following study compares two of Hawthorne's experiments in first-person narration with similar experiments of two twentieth-century fiction writers, Vladimir Nabokov and John Barth. The narrative commentary of Hawthorne's "Wakefield" and "The Seven Vagabonds" develops the theme of an artist's struggle to realize his own identity in his art; narrative commentary develops the same theme in Nabokov's "The Leonardo" and Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse." The similarities suggest that Hawthorne, early in his career and early in the

development of the short story as a genre, experimented with narrative techniques and themes that remain of interest in the genre today.

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CHAPTER I

A COMPARISON OF HAWTHORNE'S "WAKEFIELD" AND NABOKOV'S "THE LEONARDO": NARRATIVE COMMENTARY AND THE STRUGGLE OF THE ARTIST

Hawthorne's interest in the problems of the artist, a concern which contemporary writers share, is evident throughout his stories and sketches in his use of characters who are artists or who have professions analogous to creative endeavor.[1] In a number of stories Hawthorne also uses first-person narrators who, like the showman of "Main Street," provide commentary on the stories they present, emerging in the process as personalities of considerable interest. Although Emerson remarked that in the "workshop method" of these stories Hawthorne "invites his readers too much into his study," the technique is similar to the metafictional mode of contemporary writers whose narrators intrude with reflexive commentary for an antirealistic effect.[2] In "Wakefield," a story often judged artistically inferior and interpreted chiefly along philosophical, religious, or sociological lines,[3] the narrative commentary suggests the theme of an artist's struggle with the materials of his story. In this respect, the frame becomes as

significant for its contemporary method as the story is for its portrayal of an eccentric's twenty year isolation. A similar use of narrative commentary on the process of composition develops the theme of the isolated, struggling artist almost one hundred years later in the metafictional mode of Nabokov's "The Leonardo," the story of a counterfeiter whose profession mirrors that of his author-narrator. A comparison of the two stories provides an instance of how, as Borges states, contemporary writers create their precursors, justifying the older fiction by refining our critical reading of it.[4] In "Wakefield" as in "The Leonardo" an author-narrator deliberately breaks the illusion of his invented story so that setting, character, and action are shown to belong clearly to the realm of the imagination. Lapses in his rhetorical control of the story suggest that the conflict of the narrator as well as the characters is embodied in the plot, and ultimately the fate of the protagonist in the fiction mirrors that of the author-narrator who has projected an aspect of himself into the story.

In each of the stories, the narrator's invented story is framed by his commentary on the process of composition. The setting of "The Leonardo" belongs, as the author-narrator reveals without apology, to the realm of memory and fantasy:

> The objects that are being summoned assemble, draw near from different spots; in doing so, some of them have to overcome not only the distance of space but that of time . . . . Here

> comes the ovate little poplar . . . and takes its stand where told, namely by the tall brick wall, imported in one piece from another city. Facing it, there grows up a dreary and dirty tenement house, with little balconies pulled out one by one like drawers.[5]

The setting is still incomplete when the characters appear; indeed, the narrator admits: "All this is only sketched and much has to be added and finished, and yet two live people--Gustav and his brother Anton--already come out on their tiny balcony, while rolling before him a little pushcart . . . Romantovski, the new lodger, enters the yard" (p. 11). While they are comfortable, already moving about the setting naturally, the narrator asserts that the setting is still unstable, "not having yet conclusively and totally turned into solid matter" (p. 12). The fluid quality of the setting thus hastily established seems designed, as Julia Bader says Nabokov's English novels are, "to suggest the interior process of creation rather than the exterior world of empirical objects."[6] The setting exists, then, ultimately in the imagination of the author-narrator and his reader, where they become co-creators: "Now this is the way we'll arrange the world . . . ," the narrator begins, reasserting the existence of the story in a world with its own systems. The narrator asserts that here "every man shall sweat, every man shall eat," is their corporate decree (p. 12). Moreover, artists and other "idlers" have no place here (p. 13). The continual intrusions of the narrator to discuss the mechanics of the created world have the paradoxical function of taking the

reader into the very real process of composition. As William Carroll says of Nabokov's self-conscious authors in Pnin and "Signs and Symbols" (for "The Leonardo" has been largely overlooked by critics), "the narrator's self-consciousness in these cases does not distance us, as the critics tell us it usually does; rather it draws us into the web of esthetic responsibility."[7] Continually reminded that we are observing a world the narrator's imagination creates, readers share momentarily the god-like perspective of an author.

The lengthy introduction of "Wakefield" suggests that the story, like "The Leonardo," belongs primarily to the realm of the imagination. After discussing the account of a man who, parting mysteriously from his wife for twenty years, returned as if from a short journey, the narrator extends readers a casual invitation to imaginatively reconstruct the story on their own, or with his help: "If the reader choose, let him do his own meditation; or if he prefer to ramble with me through the twenty years of Wakefield's vagary, I bid him welcome."[8] The character of Wakefield develops quickly as a result of their concentration, even before a realistic milieu has been established for him. The narrator begins with a question designed to take his readers into the process of characterization: "What sort of a man was Wakefield? We are free to shape out our own idea and call it by his name" (p. 131). A secretive and selfish individual of some complexity appears

as alive in his way as the brothers and Romantovski are in theirs in "The Leonardo." Throughout the story the narrator reminds the readers of their necessary cooperation in visualizing the scenes of the invented story: "Let us now imagine," he begins, for example, before calling forth a scene in which the details seem as carefully and artifically selected as the objects assembled for the initial scene of "The Leonardo." As Wakefield leaves home, the narrator sets the stage: "It is the dusk of an October evening. His equipment is a drab greatcoat, a hat covered with oilcloth, top-boots, an umbrella in one hand and a small portmanteau in the other" (p. 132). Together the narrator and readers follow Wakefield into London "ere he loses his individuality" by their lack of concentration (p. 133). The scenes, once created, are as easily dissolved when the narrator chooses to call his readers away from Wakefield's adventure: "We must leave him for ten years or so, to haunt around his house . . ." (p. 137). And the narrator introduces succeeding episodes in the fashion of a showman, exclaiming, for instance, "Now for a scene!" as a final dramatic scene begins (p. 137).

The narrator's continual intrusions unify the story and have, in addition, an antirealistic effect by creating a rhetorical relation between narrator and reader which is analogous to the "neutral territory" of the romance mode which Hawthorne found congenial to presenting a mixture of reality and fantasy. In the intermediate realm of the

imagination, the issue of mimesis could be avoided, Hawthorne revealed in his "Custom House" remarks: in an intermediate realm" somewhere between the real world and fairy-land . . . the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbues itself with the nature of the other."[9] The metafictional mode of "Wakefield" provides such a situation. Outside it, we might fear, as Hawthorne did, that "the beings of the imagination are compelled to show themselves in the same category as actually living mortals; a necessity that generally renders the paint and pasteboard of their construction but too readily visible."[10] Wakefield and the characters of "The Leonardo" belong, however, to imaginary worlds established and maintained by the power of the narrator's voice and the response of the reader's imagination. The worlds exist for their pleasure in the creative process.

Despite the narrator's near omnipotence in creating a story like "Wakefield" or "The Leonardo," he is still engaged in the on-going processes of a dynamic form. Sometimes to his delight, sometimes to his consternation, the fiction develops a life of its own, as when, for example, the "live people" emerge in Nabokov's story before their setting is complete. The narrator sometimes reports their dialogue as if he, and the reader, were only observers, members of an audience at a play perhaps: "We hear Anton's voice," he asserts at one point; and in a later scene, "That's Anton's voice," he states as if he is merely an

eavesdropper instead of their ventriloquist (pp. 14, 22).

Although Nabokov may or may not be identified as the narrator of "The Leonardo," one of his remarks about writing supports the suggestion that the events of a story may evolve independently of an author's conscious intention:

> The greatest happiness I experience in composition is when I feel I cannot understand (without the presupposition of an already existing creation) how or why that image or structural move have come to me.[11]

The narrator of "The Leonardo" seems, however, more than merely pleasantly surprised when the rapidly emerging personalities of his story become nearly autonomous. Ambiguities in the narrative voice suggest, for example, that Anton and Gustav are struggling against the narrator's control. When the brothers confront Romantovski in his room, their presence seems stifling, perhaps terrifying, to the narrator as well as to Romantovski. As if the narrator cannot control their shape, their physical appearance becomes distorted and surreal:

> The brothers began to swell, to grow, they filled up the whole room, the whole house, and then grew out of it . . . . Gigantic, imperiously reeking of sweat and beer, with beefy voices and senseless speeches, with fecal matter replacing the human brain, they provoke a tremor of ignoble fear (pp. 15-16).

The voice which intrudes at this point is ambiguous and may express the response of the frightened author-narrator as well as Romantovski, who remains, at least outwardly, calm:

"I don't know why they push against me; I implore you, do leave me alone." In addition, while they refers to the brothers, the second person pronoun carries multiple ambiguities. Obviously Romantovski may be silently begging the brothers to go away. On another level, however, the remark may be Romantovski's entreaty to the author-narrator asking him to go away and stop telling his story. And, it is also possible that the author-narrator may be petitioning the brothers to leave Romantovski in peace. The voice continues: "I'll give in, only do leave me alone," representing on the most immediate level Romantovski's agreement to buy the brothers' pipe (p. 16). The narrator may, however, also be giving assent to the powerful characters who, he senses, want to destroy Romantovski and who have already overwhelmed him despite his authority as creator of the story.

Another similarly ambiguous situation develops between the characters and their author-narrator when Romantovski is entertained by the brothers in their room. This time Romantovski's appearance alters as the brothers slip into a drunken stupor: "The brothers, stooped, toppled, yawned, still looking through sleepy tears at their guest. He, vibrating and diffusing rays, stretched out, thinned, and gradually vanished" (p. 18). Perhaps he is presented as he seems through the eyes of the inebriated brothers; yet he may be also eluding the persistent author-narrator by disappearing entirely when he has the opportunity to escape

the hateful brothers. As in the earlier distortion of appearance, there seems to be a lapse in the narrator's rhetorical control allowing the voices of the impatient brothers to intrude:

> This cannot go on. He poisons the life of honest folks. Why it can well happen that he will move again at the end of a month--intact, whole, never taken to pieces, proudly strutting about. It is not enough that he moves and breathes differently from other people; the trouble is that we just cannot put our finger upon the difference, cannot catch the tip of the ear by which to pull out the rabbit (p. 18).

In this instance as before, the plural pronoun reference is ambiguous, and though the context suggests that the thoughts here belong to the brothers, they may be shared also by the author-narrator who, in his role as a magician, feels that his characters are escaping his control.

Ambiguities in narrative voice also indicate the narrator's struggle with the main character and plot of "Wakefield." Beginning perhaps more securely than the narrator of "The Leonardo" because he has an outline in hand, Hawthorne's narrator progressively encounters difficulty in controlling Wakefield's headstrong and irrational movements. Wakefield's escape, a parody of a quest,[12] is interrupted at intervals with rhetorical questions and exclamations of surprise and wonderment that, while they represent the character's thoughts, may represent also the thoughts of the narrator. Pondering, for example, how Wakefield can covertly determine his wife's reaction after

his absence of a week, the narrator and character seem to collaborate on his next move: "How is he to attain his ends?" At this point Wakefield, like the brothers in "The Leonardo," seems to seize control, venturing out of his rented quarters before a decision has been made and eventually reaching his own doorstep as habit reasserts itself (p. 134). And his thoughts and the narrator's appear to merge at the moment of realization: "Wakefield! Whither are you going?" Then Wakefield hurries away in a flurry of conjectures which reflect perhaps his own egocentrism and the narrator's perplexity: "Can it be that nobody caught sight of him? Will not the whole household--the decent Mrs. Wakefield, the smart maid servant, and the dirty little footboy--raise a hue and cry, through London streets, in pursuit of their fugitive lord and master?" (p. 135). The narrator also seems uncertain about Mrs. Wakefield's survival of the ordeal. He exclaims: "Dear woman! Will she die?" (p. 136). But Wakefield is only aroused to "Something like energy of feeling" and remains apart. Some contradictions in the story, pointed out by Nancy L. Bunge in her demonstration of the narrator's unreliability, are further evidence that once absorbed in the narrative he is uncertain about how it will be resolved.[13] While the written account of Wakefield provides for his eventual return home, the narrator asserts at one point that the runaway can never return (p. 136). And although the account suggests that Wakefield became upon his return

"a loving spouse until death," the narrator casts him in the role of an eternal "Outcast" (pp. 130, 140). In effect, the physical return of Wakefield disproves the narrator's claims concerning the literal resolution of events.

The outcome of "The Leonardo" similarly contradicts the narrator's expectations. As he admits with disappointment, he has been deceived by his characters. Only after the police reveal to the brothers that Romantovski was a counterfeiter does the narrator receive this knowledge, exclaiming in surprise, "My poor Romantovski! And I who believed with them that you were indeed someone exceptional. I believed, let me confess, that you were a remarkable poet . . ." (p. 23). This narrator, like the narrator of "Wakefield," has made an assumption about his character which, although faulty on the surface level, is justified in the respect that the counterfeiter by producing false currency performs symbolically the work of a literary artist.

The narrator has been, in addition, pursuing the identity of a character in whom he has a personal interest. With the mystery solved and his hopes for Romantovski unfulfilled, the narrator comments that the purpose for his story no longer exists: "It is all over now," he remarks as the setting begins to dissolve (p. 24). Also subjective are the efforts of "Wakefield's" narrator, who tells the story, he states, because it has often occurred to him, "always exciting wonder . . . with a sense that the story

must be true and a conception of the hero's character" (p. 131). The source of both narrators' subjectivity and their ensuing struggle with their narratives may be suggested by referring to one of Hawthorne's notebook entries in which he confronted the possibility that an author might project himself into a story with disastrous results:

> A person to be writing a tale, and to find that it shapes itself against his intentions; that the characters act otherwise than he thought; that unforeseen events occur; and that a catastrophe comes which he strives in vain to avert. It might shadow forth his own fate--he having made himself one of the personages.[14]

It appears that the narrators of "Wakefield" and "The Leonardo" have been engaged in precisely this activity; parallels between each author-narrator and his protagonist indicate that, in the fashion of the author described by Hawthorne, the narrators have been pursuing aspects of their own identities which, consciously or unconsciously, they projected into their art.

Romantovski, for example, is the author-narrator's favorite throughout the story, as the narrator unabashedly admits in the end. He has sympathized with Romantovski all along, imagining in the meantime that the counterfeiter was writing poetry or fiction, thereby celebrating a "victory" over the brothers (p. 24). In this respect Romantovski belongs in the class of characters that Douglas Fowler calls Nabokov's "equivalents," characters who could have authored the work in which they appear.[15] Romantovski, by

"poverty obliged to dwell in that sinister district," could easily have written the story of two roughs' murder of a counterfeiter (p. 24). Indeed, he could have been, in the course of the story in which he appears, writing that story, the story of his own death.

Numerous additional parallels can be drawn between Romanovski and the author-narrator of his story. Nabokov's introduction to the story supplies two meanings, the literal kinglet and the cant term counterfeiter, for "Korolyok," the Russian title for the story (p. 10). Thus the name for Romantovski's occupation suggests that he is simultaneously a demi-god or creator and a deceiver; certainly an author fulfills these roles in telling a story. Further, as a "kinglet," Romantovski is mirrored by the baron pursued in the film he watches; and here, too, the image of the authority-figure is also a deception, appearing in a medium as artifical as forged currency or fiction (p. 20).

The imagery of light associated with Romantovski also aligns him with the narrator as creator of the story. For in the story light and dark seem to suggest the opposing forces of creation and destruction: the world spoken into being by the narrator is by his command "sunny"; even the young poplar is "nictating," winking or pulsating with light (p. 12). The narrator's comment that this newly created world still has "sundry regions of an intangible and hallowed nature" alludes apparently to the account of creation in Genesis, which begins with the appearance of light in

darkness. Significantly, Romantovski, like the narrator, seems to be a source of light and order: the light beneath his door, a "golden thread," has the mythological association of the thread of life spun by Clotho, one of the Fates;[16] its waxing and waning is compared to the resurgence of life in an insect. And Romantovski's body is imaged in light when "vibrating and diffusing rays" he vanishes like a spiritual being (pp. 16, 17, 18). On the other hand, the brothers, his destroyers, are associated with darkness and chaos, appearing first from the dark interior of the tenement and turning toward "dark, vacant lots" after stabbing him (pp. 12, 23). Because of Romantovski's death, the "golden thread" is no longer spun in the darkness, the desception he performs comes to an end, foreshadowing the dissolving of the fictional "world," a process in which the lively young poplar "dims" (p. 24).

The narrator and main character of Hawthorne's story also share a number of significant characteristics. Wakefield is given to "long, lazy musings" with no apparent purpose; similarly, the narrator wishes to "ramble" through a story which, he admits, lacks a clearly defined purpose. Unable to justify his story at the outset, he proceeds anyway, "trusting that there will be a pervading spirit and a moral, even should we fail to find them, done up nearly, and condensed into the final sentence" (p. 131). Wakefield's self-banishment also lacks an articulated purpose, as he realizes after his first night away from home:

> In the morning he rises earlier than usual, and set himself to consider what he really means to do. Such are his loose and rambling modes of thought that he has taken this very singular step with the consciousness of a purpose, indeed, but without being able to define it and sufficiently for his own contemplation (p. 134).

In a similarly vague, hasty fashion the author-narrator has begun his story. Another statement made in the context of Wakefield's strange journey can also be read as a further revealing comment on the narrator's aimless introduction: "The vagueness of the project, and the convulsive effort with which he plunges into the execution of it, are equally characteristic of a feeble-minded man" (p. 134).

Throughout the course of events in the story, Wakefield's confusion and indecisiveness mirror those qualities in the narrator as he struggles with the circular plot suggested by the account. First, when Wakefield becomes vaguely aware that he wants to determine the reaction of his household to his disappearance, he is "hopelessly puzzled" as to how to attain his purpose; and the narrator of the story seems equally irresolute. As if unable to provide his character with rational guidance, he allows Wakefield to venture up even to his own doorstep, a flaw in planning that makes possible Wakefield's discovery and a premature end to his isolation, both results violating the pre-established design of the story which calls for an absence of twenty years (p. 134). After gaining control and returning his breathless character to solitude, the

narrator faces still another bewildering problem, the necessity of accomplishing Wakefield's reunion with his wife, an event that becomes progressively harder to engineer as the years pass. Wakefield, of course, believes, vaguely and erroneously, that he can easily return home, reassuring himself at intervals: "It is but in the next street!" (p. 136). Yet the narrator knows better: ". . . a great moral change has been effected" which leaves Wakefield "spellbound" (pp. 135, 137). Yet the narrator seems similarly powerless to overcome the static situation he has allowed Wakefield to enjoy. Unable immediately to supply Wakefield with the motivation to return home (Wakefield has always been sluggish), the narrator first manages what seems a chance encounter between Wakefield and his wife on the street. But the setting chosen by the narrator works against him: "The throng eddies away and carries them asunder" (p. 137). Yet something has been gained, for Wakefield's heart is awakened: "The latent feelings of years break out; his feeble mind acquires a brief energy from their strength . . ." (p. 138). By analyzing the feelings of Wakefield at this moment, the narrator at last realizes how the Wakefield of the news account could return home after twenty years, an understanding he lacked and badly needed at the beginning of the narrative: "It was Wakefield's unprecedented fate to retain his original share of human sympathies, and to be still involved in human interests, while he had lost his reciprocal influence on

them" (p. 138). Wakefield, unaware what a transformation his absence has wrought, feels as much affection for his wife as he ever has. With this knowledge, the narrator can accomplish Wakefield's physical return home easily: he need only, in the fashion of the showman of "Main Street," produce atmospheric conditions which drive Wakefield into the shelter of his former home (p. 139).

Achieving an emotional reunion between Wakefield and his wife is impossible, however, because Wakefield has, during the period of his isolation very appropriately termed a "vagary," lived too long in the realm of the imagination apart from human concerns. And in this respect, also, the narrator and Wakefield correspond. For Wakefield is like an artist who becomes engrossed in his work and loses touch with the people around him. Like Rappaccinni and Aylmer, Wakefield has, by neglecting his wife for so long a period, been conducting an experiment which dramatizes the heartlessness of an isolated artist. The narrator seems, similarly, withdrawn from the world of human sympathies, pursuing the narrative of Wakefield largely as a curiosity at the outset and showing himself unable to understand the meaning of Wakefield's situation through much of the story. But despite his wanderings the narrator does come to terms with the story and seems, like Wakefield, to achieve a form of reunion with the world of human experience. The narrator indicates his own symbolic return by leaving behind the story of Wakefield and addressing to the reader a moral

which both he and the reader may immediately practice together, withdrawing from the fictional world as the story comes to an end: by reuniting themselves with their respective "systems," they may ensure against becoming permanently isolated.

The theme of a literary artist's struggle to realize his own identity in the story relates the framing commentaries of "Wakefield" and "The Leonardo" to the invented stories of Wakefield and Romantovski. The similarities revealed by comparing these stories, separated by a century of development in short fiction, demonstrate how the concerns of Hawthorne, the father of the genre, persist in its development:[17] the narrator and reader of "Wakefield" are reminded of the dangers of remaining too long in the realm of the imagination; the narrator and reader of "The Leonardo" recognize that what an author creates are illusions. Whether the narrative technique used in the stories is called a "workshop method" or a metafictional mode, it provides access to a theme of not merely contemporary but universal significance, the efforts of a creative personality to express itself.

NOTES

[1]Robert H. Fossum, Hawthorne's Inviolable Circle: The Problem of Time (Deland, FL: Evert/Edwards, 1972), pp. 86-87, 102.

[2]Terence Martin, "The Method of Hawthorne's Tales" in Hawthorne Centenary Essays (Columbia: Ohio State University Press, 1964), p. 10, discusses the "workshop" method. Mary Rohrberger, Introduction, Story to Anti-Story (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), p. 7, and Philip Stewick, Introduction, Anti-Story: An Anthology of Experimental Fiction (New York: The Free Press, 1971), p. xvi, discuss use of intrusive commentary in contemporary short fiction.

[3]Readings emphasizing existential aspects of "Wakefield" include Andrew Schiller, "The Moment and the Endless Voyage," Diameter, 1 (1951), 7-15; Robert E. Morsberger, "Wakefield in the Twilight Zone," American Transcendental Quarterly, 14 (1972), 6-8; and Roberta F. Weldon, "Wakefield's Second Journey," Studies in Short Fiction, 14 (1977), 69-74. "Wakefield" has also been used to discuss Hawthorne's philosophy by Peter L. Thorsley, Jr., "Hawthorne's Determinism: An Analysis," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 19 (1964), 141-157; and Hawthorne's theology by Henry G. Fairbanks, "Sin, Free Will and 'Pessimism' in Hawthorne," PMLA, 71 (1956), 975-989. "Wakefield" has been viewed as a reflection of its setting by John Gatta, in "'Busy and Selfish London': The Urban Figure in Hawthorne's 'Wakefield,'" Emerson Society Quarterly, 23 (1960), 164-172.

[4]Jorge Luis Borges, "Nathaniel Hawthorne" in Other Inquisitions: 1937-1952, trans. Ruth L. C. Sims (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), pp. 56-57. Borges here refers to Kafka and Hawthorne.

[5]Vladimir Nabokov, "The Leonardo," in A Russian Beauty and Other Stories (New York: McGraw-Hill, 973), p. 11. Subsequent references to "The Leonardo" are cited parenthetically in the text.

[6]Julia Bader, Crystal Land: Artifice in Nabokov's English Novels (Berkeley) University of California Press, 1972), p. 7.

[7]"Nabokov's Signs and Symbols," in A Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov, ed. Carl R. Proffer (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1974), p. 215.

[8]Nathaniel Hawthorne, Twice-Told Tales, Vol. IX of The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. William Charvat and others. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974), p. 131. Subsequent references to "Wakefield" are cited parenthetically in the text.

[9]The Scarlet Letter, Vol. I of Works, p. 36.

[10]Preface to The Blithedale Romance, Vol. III of Works, p. 2.

[11]Alfred Appel Jr., "An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov," in Nabokov: The Man and His Work, ed. L. S. Dembo (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), pp. 24-25.

[12]Robert Durr, "Hawthorne's Ironic Mode," New England Quarterly, 30 (1975), 486-495.

[13]"Unreliable Artist-Narrators in Hawthorne's Short Stories," Studies in Short Fiction, 14 (1977), 147.

[14]The American Notebooks, Vol. VIII of Works, ed. Claude M. Simpson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1932), p. 16.

[15]Reading Nabokov (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 14.

[16]Edith Hamilton, Mythology (New York: New American Library, 1940), p. 43.

[17]Rohrberger, p. 2 In her Hawthorne and the Modern Short Story (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), she demonstrates Hawthorne's relation to stories in the modern mode. In Story to Anti-Story she notes similarities between Hawthorne and contemporary short fiction writers.

CHAPTER II

THE VOICE OF THE STORY TELLER AND HIS SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN HAWTHORNE'S "THE SEVEN VAGABONDS AND BARTH'S "LOST IN THE FUNHOUSE"

Early in his career Hawthorne planned to create a sequence of tales around the figure of a wandering story teller,[1] but because the collection was never completed, modern readers interested in this early phase of Hawthorne's narrative development may only speculate about what he would have made of the project. However, in "Passages from a Relinquished Work," which would have been the introduction to the collection,[2] the narrator (and perhaps Hawthorne) comments on his plan for an extended commentary framing the stories.

> With each specimen will be given a sketch of the circumstances in which the story was told. Thus my air-drawn pictures will be set in frames perhaps more valuable than the pictures themselves, since they will be embossed with groups of characteristic figures amid the lake and mountain scenery, the villages and fertile fields of our native land.[3]

These speculations about the significance of the framing commentary are surprisingly accurate, for Hawthorne's

frame tales, including "The Seven Vagabonds" and "Wakefield" are valuable to readers today not merely for their historical and geographical details but for their portrayal of the "characteristic figure" of the story teller.

Hawthorne's "The Seven Vagabonds" presents the story teller as he begins his search for identity in art.[4] Although the story has formerly been treated as merely a reflection of the youthful Hawthorne or a depiction of his earliest narrative persona,[5] the story is also significant for the remarkably contemporary technique of presenting the theme of the searching young artist through the commentary of a self-conscious story teller. An emphasis upon the teller rather than the tale, upon voice rather than character, and the use of intrusive narrative commentary, characteristics that Philip Stevick uses to describe contemporary experimental fiction,[6] indicate that "The Seven Vagabonds" belongs among the tales in what Emerson called Hawthorne's "workshop method." Although Emerson and later critics have complained that in these tales Hawthorne reveals too much of the process of creation, the "workshop method" actually serves Hawthorne's purposes well, for in presenting a narrator's attempts to shape his own story, Hawthorne depicts the intersection of the narrator's world with the world of his fiction, a blending of real and imaginary elements that Hawthorne found conducive to his art. Indeed, the "coincidence or confusion of the aesthetic plane and the common plane, of art and reality," that Borges notes in Hawthorne's "workshop" or self-referential

mode[7] is also characteristic of much contemporary fiction dealing with the problems of the artist. A comparison of "The Seven Vagabonds," one of the "workshop" tales, with John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse," a contemporary work in the self-referential mode, demonstrates how much Hawthorne's treatment of the searching young artist has in common with contemporary treatments of the same theme.

As Kenneth Dauber points out, in the stories associated with Hawthorne's wandering story teller, the "focus is shifted from the tale to the teller."[8] This shift in focus is particularly evident in "The Seven Vagabonds," which presents the adventure of the story teller, or would-be "itinerant novelist" among six other vagabonds with whom he sought shelter in the wagon of a traveling show man (p. 366). Although the apprentice story teller strives to present the colorful personalities of his associates, his highly self-conscious style also reflects his own personal and literary ambitions. Similarly, in "Lost in the Funhouse," the narrative commentary on the events of a family vacation also reflects the would-be story teller's efforts to achieve social and artistic maturity.[9]

As Edgar H. Knapp points out, the narrative structure of "Lost in the Funhouse" combines the ongoing action of the story with the narrator's memories, fantasies, and commentary on the process of composition. Although Barth's narrative mode is much more complex in this regard than Hawthorne's, the stories are comparable on one basic level

of narration. For example, in Barth's story the narrative is apparently objective, presented from the third-person point of view, the narrator's self-consciousness suggests that he may himself be Ambrose, the "precocious adolescent" who is, as Knapp emphasizes, both hero and creator of the story.[10] Like the apprentice story teller of "The Seven Vagabonds," the youthful narrator of "Lost in the Funhouse" self-consciously displays his literary gifts. Both of the young artists emphasize, for example, the power of their imagination. Ambrose finds that the designers and operators of funhouses, like the inept fiction writers with whom they become identified in his story, lack the imagination that he believes he has: "Nobody had enough imagination. He could design such a place himself, wiring and all" (p. 93). Hawthorne's youthful story teller similarly asserts the power of his imagination as perhaps his most distinctive trait: "If there be a faculty which I possess more perfectly than most men, it is that of throwing myself into situations foreign to my own . . ." (p. 352). And with that introduction of himself, the story teller proceeds to recreate the life experiences he imagines that his fellow travelers have had.

In addition to emphasizing the imaginative faculty that literary narratives require, both narrators also attempt to demonstrate their literary knowledge through the use of literary allusions. As James Williamson notes, Hawthorne's young story teller reveals some knowledge of English

literature.[11] Indeed, the frequency of allusion suggests some self-consciousness on his part. For example, he states that his first view of the show man's wagon reminds him of "Gulliver's portable mansion among the Brobdignags" (p. 350). Then, he compares the show man's work with his puppets to Prospero's "Masque of shadows" in The Tempest, and he hastens to note that the trampling hoofs of the horse puppets "might have startled Don Quixote himself" (p. 352). Then, the arrival of two more travelers suggests to him that they are "two doves that had flown into our ark," and the female of the pair, a lovely dancer, becomes "Mirth" from Milton's "L'Allegro" (pp. 358, 366). Ambrose of "Lost in the Funhouse" also uses literary allusions in a rather self-conscious way, taking pains to identify both title and author in some cases. In describing his family's automobile ride to Ocean City, for example, Ambrose pointedly remarks that when his father was a boy, "the excursion was made by train as mentioned in the novel The 42nd Parallel by John Dos Passos" (p. 70). Similarly, in commenting on the impatience that he and his brother Peter usually felt when the family stopped two miles inland from Ocean City, where the tantalizing sounds and scents of the ocean filled the air, Ambrose again adds a detailed allusion: "The Irish author James Joyce in his unusual novel entitled Ulysses, now available in this country, uses the adjectives snot-green and scrotum-tightening to describe the sea" (p. 71). With such obvious use of allustions, both narrators determine to show that they are literary men.

The narrators also self-consciously call attention to their uses of heightened language. Ambrose, for example, is so self-conscious that, as Knapp points out, the young narrator allows advice from a textbook on creative writing to flow into his story.[12] When he describes his father lighting a Lucky Strike cigarette "with a match forefingered from its book and thumbed against the flint paper without being detached," Ambrose adds the following commentary on the literary possibilities of the situation:

> A fine metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech, in addition to its obvious "first-order" relevance to the thing it describes, will be seen upon reflection to have a second order of significance: it may be drawn from the milieu of the action . . . or be particularly appropriate to the sensibility of the narrator . . . . (p. 71)

The narrator's comments suggest several possibilities for a metaphorical interpretation of "Lucky Strike": perhaps the physical action of the father, perhaps the fact that he is fortunate in his son's eyes. Later Ambrose calls attention to the metaphorical possibilities of swimming, commenting that "the diving would make a suitable literary symbol" (p. 79). The story teller of "The Seven Vagabonds" also explicitly emphasizes his own literary devices. When he describes his conversation with the lovely young dancer before the two of them gaze into a show box containing pictures of other countries, he notes his own clever use of language:

> "Come," said I to the damsel of gay attire, "shall we visit all the wonders of the world together?"

> She understood the metaphor at once; though indeed it would not much have troubled me if she had assented to the literal meaning of my words (p. 357).

And in another instance, as the narrator describes the party of vagabonds emerging from the show wagon after a rain, he is again careful to demonstrate his literary sensibility:

> Above our heads there was such glory of sunshine and splendor of clouds, and such brightness of verdure below, that, as I modestly remarked at the time, Nature seemed to have washed her face, and put on the best of her jewelry and a fresh green gown, in honor of our confederation (p. 47).

In "Lost in the Funhouse," Ambrose goes even further than the narrator of "The Seven Vagabonds," for in presenting what Ambrose feels are particularly clever expressions, he adds italics to emphasize his use of figurative language. For example, in considering what it would be like to go through the funhouse with a girlfriend, Ambrose imagines that by the time they had navigated the area they would be "bound together <u>by the cement of shared adventure</u>" (p. 83). Thus Ambrose, like the story teller of "The Seven Vagabonds," emphasizes his literary efforts. The effect of such highly self-conscious narration is irony, which becomes increasingly comic as the stories progress and which points also to the narrators' other, more serious concerns.

For if both Ambrose and the story teller exhibit their literary interests to impress their readers, the would-be artists also reveal much more about themselves in the course of their tales. The adventure that each recounts suggests,

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for example, his efforts to discover his identity through social relationships associated with his artistic efforts. At the onset, both are estranged from fathers who offer them no guidance in their literary endeavors. In "Passages from a Relinquished Work," for example, the story teller as a now older man, provides a description of himself at the time he met the other vagabonds. "I was a youth of gay and happy temperament . . . wayward and fanciful" (p. 407). Because he refused to adopt a serious practical vocation and spent his time traveling about the country in a light-hearted desperation," his foster father, Parson Thumpcushion, expressed only stern disapproval of his "extravagant project" (pp. 408-409). In "Lost in the Funhouse," Ambrose also feels separated from his father, who Ambrose wishes would provide him with "the simple secret of getting through the funhouse" (p. 87). But both narrators find themselves entirely on their own as they approach the adventures they describe.

In each of the stories, the narrators depict characters who may represent critical aspects of themselves as social and artistic personalities. In "The Seven Vagabonds," each of the would-be novelist's six new acquaintances embodies, as Robert H. Fossum suggests, vocations related to art,[13] callings which the young narrator could choose for himself. And by including his fantasies concerning the life of each traveler, the narrator indicates his own interests. For example, the old show man, whom the narrator

compares to a magician, becomes the object of the youth's envy because he believes that the show man's profession provides the opportunity for "safe and pleasurable adventure" in the New England countryside. Moreover, he undoubtedly has numerous occasions for displaying his almost magical power to delight children, to amaze learned men, and best of all, to honor "pretty maidens" (p. 34). The story teller sees the old man as gallant and dignified and wishes that he, an ambitious young man, were "assured as happy a life" as the show man must enjoy (p. 34).

Next, the youth imaginatively explores the possibility of identifying himself with the young bookseller travelling with the show man. In the narrator's view, the bookseller is as enviable a social success as the old show man. The story teller imagines, for example, that the "man of literary taste" receives the appreciation of isolated clergymen, lovely schoolmistresses, and the unlearned larger community (p. 36). And although the story teller temporarily resolves to become a bookseller, he shortly encounters yet another traveler whose situation he also finds appealing. For as soon as the story teller meets a young violinist traveling with a lovely dancing girl, the story teller decides that he, rather than the violinist, ought to share her journey (p. 39). Both her utterly joyous behavior and her skill in describing the scenes they view in the show box suggest to him that they perhaps belong together, sharing a most pleasant existence (p. 39).

Next the youthful story teller encounters an old mendicant whose skill in fortune telling, an art of the imagination such as story telling, also strongly impresses the youth, even though he readily identifies the old man with devilish, and therefore undesirable, wisdom (pp. 42-43). Finally, the story teller meets the last traveler to seek shelter in the wagon. The Penobscot Indian stimulates the youth's imagination perhaps more than any other character, for his "aboriginal character" embodies, in the narrator's view, "the primeval instinct" and a "freshness of youth" which stand in stark contrast to the dullness of civilized society (p. 44).

As Fossum points out, each of the vagabonds presents the narrator with an alternative way of expressing his artistic impulse, yet instead of rationally weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the possibilities, the narrator merely indulges himself in colorful speculations about each of them (p. 89). Thus the narrator's role in characterizing the other travelers is essentially manipulative, with the result that he becomes as much a puppeteer as the old show man. Curiously enough, the puppets assume at one point in the story the role of active characters, at least in the narrator's view, for after he announces his plan to travel on with the others and after "Mirth," the young dancer, voices their acceptance of him, the narrator imagines that the show man's puppets share in the general revelry of the group and that the "Merry Andrew" puppet, a

jester, winks at him (p. 46). Surely the show man's wagon provides an appropriate symbolic setting for a story in which the narrator's imagination controls his interpretation of characters as the show man manipulates his puppets.

In "Lost in the Funhouse," the funhouse provides a similar metaphysical setting for Ambrose's imaginative experiments with his story. The characters that he creates, for example, are distorted by his imagination just as reflections are typically distorted in the mirrors of a funhouse. In seeking an older experienced character with whom to identify, Ambrose generally exaggerates the manly, self-assured traits of the other male characters in his story--his father, his Uncle Karl, and his cousin Peter--all or whom he imagines will find their way through the funhouse easily (p. 86). In characterizing Uncle Karl and Peter, for example, Ambrose depicts them joking easily with his mother and Magda, a young guest whom he finds very attractive (p. 77). Peter, more nearly Ambrose's peer than anyone else in the story, even shows off for Magda when the group goes swimming, but Ambrose, feeling insecure, feigns a stomach ache in order to stay out of the water (p. 78). Not surprisingly, he resents Peter enough to rationalize his own superiority in a fantasy about Magda:

> Peter didn't have one-tenth the imagination that he had, not one-tenth . . . . Ambrose knew exactly how it would feel to be married and have children of your own, and be a loving husband and father . . . . (p. 80)

But Ambrose's most significant fantasy centers on his longing for a revelation of the secret to the funhouse and to social success, which he believes only his father might provide. As Ambrose sees it,

> his father should have taken him aside and said: "There is a simple secret to getting through the funhouse . . . . Here it is. Peter does not know it; neither does your uncle Karl" (p. 87).

But Ambrose does not achieve this measure of identification with his father, and the struggling young narrator becomes increasingly enmeshed in the "funhouse" of his own fiction.

The narrator's treatment of female characters also indicates conflict concerning his sexual identity. His portrait of Magda, like the story teller's depiction of "Mirth," emphasizes primarily her fantasy characteristics. Ambrose remarks repeatedly that her figure is "well developed for her age," and he imagines her frequently in sexual roles as his wife and the mother of his children, or more realistically, as his girlfriend (pp. 71, 78, 80-81). He dwells on an immature sexual experience that occurred while he and Magda were children (pp. 80-81). His treatment of the other females similarly suggests their role in sex or flirtation. He presents his mother, for example, teasing the boys or the men. When Magda wins a game used to pass the time during the trip to Ocean City, for example, Ambrose's mother suggests that the boys have let Magda win because, as the amused mother puts it, "somebody had

a girlfriend" (p. 73). Later, when the group visits the beach, Ambrose's mother chides the older men for looking at the "pretty girls," and she restrains the boys, too, when they wrestle with Magda in an attempt to throw her into the water (p. 78). Ambrose's adolescent fascination with the controlling sexual role of the female persists throughout the story.

He also creates a character who represents from his point of view the extreme of the threatening female: Fat May, the "Laughing Lady" advertises the funhouse. Her characteristics reflect in a distorted way the sexuality of Magda and her mother: "Larger than life, Fat May mechanically shook, rocked on her heels, slapped her thighs while recorded laughter--uproarious, female--came amplified from a hidden loudspeaker" (p. 76). Her laughter, like the behavior of the other women, disturbs Ambrose so much that his voice cracks (p. 77). And throughout the struggle to tell his story and to get out of the funhouse, Fat May's laughter echoes (pp. 86, 93). In the process of the narrative, however, Ambrose also presents another fantasy character whose role alternately comforts and disappoints him. Ambrose imagines that the funhouse must surely have a designer and operator who controls the progress of the various people who travel through it (p. 80). Yet when Ambrose pursues the image of the controller, he discovers only the figure of a sleepy old man seated at a "crude panel of toggle-and knife-switches . . ." (pp. 84, 92).

In one of Ambrose's fantasies, he imagines that when he becomes lost in the funhouse, the operator's daughter falls in love with him after hearing him "telling stories to himself in the dark" (p. 92). Indeed, she alone recognizes his literary gifts. In this fantasy she accepts Ambrose and his literary ambition, a situation which finds a parallel in the young dancer's acceptance of the story teller in "The Seven Vagabonds."

The narrators of both stories also use symbolic objects to reflect their struggle for identity in art. In "The Seven Vagabonds," the show wagon serves, of course, as a symbol of the narrator's manipulative imagination in which the living characters function primarily as puppets. Thus the narrator is furnished with props which suggest his vocation as would-be novelist even as the other travelers are furnished with objects suitable for their efforts. Moreover, the show man has his set of puppets dressed as artisans of all kinds, as fair ladies and gentlemen, as soldiers, and as clowns, including the Merry Andrew and the "old toper" (p. 33). The bookseller has a similarly varied collection of books designed to appeal to a variety of tastes (p. 35). The happy young couple have their violin and showbox, appropriate emblems of the music and visual pleasure that their artistic efforts supply (pp. 38-39). And the old conjuror has his bag of coins, creating music suitable to his greedy and deceitful heart (p. 40). Finally, the Indian carries his bow and arrow, the instruments

of a savage art that recalls the music of the past to the narrator's remembrance (p. 44). Furthermore, each of the objects symbolizes a creative alternative that the narrator may choose as a result of the encounter in the wagon.

Objects also become symbolic of the search for identity in the narrative of "Lost in the Funhouse." Ambrose creates a pattern of images suggesting male and female sex roles.

The funhouse becomes, for example, a representation of the threatening female as Ambrose repeatedly associates the building with Fat May. Moreover, its yawning opening and "labyrinthine corridors" suggest the female genitalia and underline the funhouse as a site of initiation (p. 92). The sexual role of the male is correspondingly suggested by a pattern of objects including the cigar that Ambrose associated with Uncle Karl and with Ambrose's first sexual experience, the banana that Magda peels with her teeth, and the pipe Ambrose anticipates smoking when he is older; by association, the objects become phallic symbols suggesting Ambrose's search for sexual maturity (pp. 73, 71, 93).

The action of the stories also indicates the artist's search to gain acceptance for identity, for in attempting to treat the characters of their stories objectively both young Ambrose and the story teller reveal their insecurity. The story teller, for example, views each of the other travelers as fortunate and fulfilled, while he himself is largely an outcast. He realizes that in his father's eyes, he is no better, and perhaps even worse, than the old mendicant

who tells fortunes for a living (p. 47). Thus the youth's request to travel with the other vagabonds, who have decided to form a confederation, serves as a plea for acceptance (p. 47). Instead of continuing to wander alone, he hopes that by associating himself with such interesting, successful people he may develop professionally also. Moreover, his impression of their pleasant, easy existence provides an end to his loneliness and isolation. Similarly, Ambrose's efforts to tell his story and to escape from the funhouse come to represent a similar effort to overcome isolation and eventually gain security. A troubled adolescent, Ambrose sees other males in control of relationships that he himself desires. Similarly, as the story teller thinks wistfully of the old show man, the bookseller, and the young violinist in pleasant and successful roles with attractive women, so Ambrose creates fantasies in which he functions in a mature way. Indeed, his whole story reflects his quest for fulfillment as an adult, just as the story teller's whole presentation suggests his search for an artistic vocation which will make him secure in his own eyes. Yet neither of the young narrators achieves a heroic fulfillment of his hopes for maturity and success, professionally or socially.

In the course of their stories, the narrators discover that, at best, they may continue their pursuit of maturity and success by continuing to develop their artistic interests. Ambrose concludes, for example, at the end of this

story, that he himself could design a better funhouse than the other people who seem to be in control of things. So he arrives at a decision: "Therefore he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator--though he would rather be among the lovers for whom funhouses are designed" (p. 94). Moreover, he will control the progress of those who pass through his funhouse: "He envisions a truly astonishing funhouse, incredibly complex yet utterly controlled from a great central switchboard like the console of a pipe organ" (p. 93). And his description of his controlling technique mirrors his self-conscious attempts to control the characters of his story: "panel lights would show what was up in every cranny of its multifarious vastness; a switch-flick would ease this fellow's way, complicate that's, to balance things out" (p. 93). Thus Ambrose's efforts to achieve an identity to help him escape from the funhouse results in his exploration of the power of the artist. And the reader realizes that Ambrose has illuminated the parts of his story in much the same way that he conceives a novelist constructs a book (pp. 90-91). Furthermore, Ambrose has reached a decision which gives him direction for the future: from now on, he determines to explore reality by constructing funhouses instead of attempting to navigate them in real life, and this quest represents further explorations of the realm of the imagination in fiction. Hawthorne's young story teller makes a similar decision, for when he learns that the rest of the

party will break up after the rain storm, he attaches himself to the character who stirs his imagination most deeply, the Indian (p. 49). Furthermore, by traveling onward the narrator indicates that he has not wavered in his determination to become a traveling story teller, although he realizes that he has much to learn about art and life.

"The Seven Vagabonds" and "Lost in the Funhouse" provide examples of young artists who reveal their search for identity through highly self-conscious narratives in which the characters, setting, and action reflect their artistic and personal ambitions. The stories are significant for their picture of struggling youth, the incipient artist, and the intermediate realm between reality and art. The similarities between the two narrative methods suggest that the intermediate realm between art and reality, which Hawthorne called the "neutral territory,"[14] continued to provide ideal conditions for portraying the artist's struggle to realize his own identity through art.

NOTES

[1]Nina Baym, The Shape of Hawthorne's Career (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 39-43.

[2]Baym, pp. 41-42. Also see Kenneth Dauber, Rediscovering Hawthorne (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 55-64; and Neal Frank Doubleday, Hawthorne's Early Tales (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1972), pp. 71-84 for discussions of the planned collection.

[3]Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mosses from an Old Manse, Vol. X of The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. William Charvat, Roy Harvey Pearce, and Claude M. Simpson (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1974), pp. 408-409.

[4]Nathaniel Hawthorne, Twice-Told Tales, Vol. IX of Works, pp. 350-369. Subsequent references to "The Seven Vagabonds" are cited parenthetically in the text.

[5]Frederick C. Crews, The Sins of the Fathers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 28: and Mark Van Doren, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), p. 62, provide examples of the biographical approach. Nina Baym, p. 41, Millicent Bell, Hawthorne's View of the Artist (State University of New York, 1961), pp. 136-40, and Dauber, p. 53 provide examples of the second view, which emphasizes narrative persona.

[6]Introduction to Anti-Story: An Anthology of Experimental Short Fiction (New York, N. Y.: The Free Press, 1971), pp. xv-xvi, xx.

[7]Jorge Luis Borges, Other Inquisitions: 1937-1952, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 52.

[8]Dauber, p. 53.

[9]John Barth, Lost in the Funhouse (New York, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1963), pp. 69-94. All subsequent references to "Lost in the Funhouse" are documented parenthetically in the text.

[10]"Found in the Barthhouse: Novelist as Savior," Modern Fiction Studies 14 (1968): 447.

[11]"Hawthorne's Seventh Vagabond: The Outsetting Bard," Emerson Society Quarterly 62 (1971), 25

[12]Knapp, 448.

[13]Hawthorne's Inviolable Circle: The Problem of Time (Deland, Florida: Everett/Edwards, 1972), p. 89.

[14]"The Custom House," Introduction to The Scarlet Letter, Vol. I of Works, p. 36.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Hawthorne's "workshop method" in tales such as "Wakefield" and "The Seven Vagabonds" represents a theme and technique characteristic of modern fiction about the problems of the artist. The figure of a self-conscious narrator struggling to realize his identity in art persists in the genre of the short story, beginning with Hawthorne's early experiments and reappearing more than a century later in the metafictional modes of writers such as Vladimir Nabokov and John Barth. A comparison of their narrative methods in treating the problems of the artist with Hawthorne's experiments with the same theme refines our critical reading of Hawthorne and expands our perspective on the continuity of development in the short story as genre.

The metafictional mode of Nabokov's "The Leonardo" and Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse," which appears also in Hawthorne's "Wakefield" and "The Seven Vagabonds," features narrative commentary revealing the personality of a self-conscious literary artist concerned with the problems of composition, which also reflect his personal quest for identity. The use of intrusive commentary emphasizing the ongoing process of composition makes possible two levels of

conflict in the plot of metafictional stories: the conflict of the characters in the story and the conflict of the narrator as he attempts to tell the story. In Nabokov's "The Leonardo," for example, the narrator deliberately breaks the illusion of the invented story to indicate that setting, character, and action belong clearly to the realm of the imagination; similarly, the narrator of Hawthorne's "Wakefield" invites readers to imaginatively explore the story that the news account of "Wakefield" suggests. Then, in the course of imaginatively constructing the fictional worlds of "The Leonardo" and "Wakefield," both narrators progressively reveal that they have projected their own conflicts into the plot of their stories. The narrator of "The Leonardo" identifies with the character of a counterfeiter who, the narrator believes, has been carrying on the work of an artist, celebrating a victory over the dreary world of ordinary labor; similarly, the narrator of "Wakefield" recognizes in the character of Wakefield the dreamy isolation of the artist who dares to experiment with the feelings of others, treating them, for example, as if they are only characters in a story. And in both stories, lapses in the narrators' rhetorical control of their stories indicate their struggle to control characters who embody aspects of the narrators' artistic personalities. Thus the world of each narrator merges with the world of his fiction, and the stories belong, ultimately, to the "neutral territory" that Hawthorne envisioned "somewhere between the real world and

fairy-land," where "the Actual and Imaginary may meet and each imbue itself with the nature of the other."

In this intermediate realm, Hawthorne and Nabokov deal with the failure of the artist to control his own fictional world; the comments of the narrators in both stories indicate their lack of control over the outcome of their stories. Nabokov's narrator fails to protect his favorite character, Romantovski, from annihilation by the stronger, more violent characters the narrator has also created; Hawthorne's narrator cannot control the headstrong and irrational movements of the Wakefield he has created. Moreover, the revelation that the narrator of "The Leonardo" has believed Romantovski to be an artist pursued by the harsh influences of ordinary life indicates that the narrator identifies with Romantovski in the narrator's struggle to tell the story; similarly, the narrator of "Wakefield" reveals that he identifies with the main character's withdrawal into the world of the imagination, the major temptation facing the literary artist. With Romantovski's death and Wakefield's return to a world where he will be an outcast, however, both narrators lose their objects of interest. The stories end, forcing the narrators out of the "neutral territory" and into ordinary experience. Hawthorne's narrator accepts the change as a warning against remaining too long in the realm of the imagination; Nabokov's narrator admits sadly that what an author creates are only illusions. But the pursuit of identity in art has been a revelation not only of the narrators' conflicts but of the

mysterious "neutral territory" where the creative personality seeks to express itself. The "coincidence or confusion of the aesthetic plane and the common plane, of art and reality" that Borges describes in Hawthorne's "workshop method" adds new dimensions to fiction about the problems of the artist in contemporary works also.

John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse" provides a particularly complex work of metafiction with which to compare another of Hawthorne's "workshop tales," "The Seven Vagabonds." Like "The Leonardo" and "Wakefield," "Lost in the Funhouse" and "The Seven Vagabonds" present self-conscious narrators who project themselves into their fictional worlds in their search for identity. The framing commentary of the stories reveals the artists' conflicts concerning the problems of composition and the problems of achieving maturity as artists and men. In these stories, however, the narrative voice points toward the conflicts of an apprentice artist: Barth's narrator identifies closely, for example, with the adolescent character Ambrose; Hawthorne's narrator depicts himself as a young man setting out on his own to try his fortune. And in these stories, the self-consciousness of the young narrators is obvious from the beginning in their efforts to demonstrate their literary skill. Although the narrator of "Lost in the Funhouse" goes further to emphasize his deliberate use of heightened language and techniques of fiction, occasionally italicizing words and quoting from what seems to be a handbook on creative writing, the narrator of "The

Seven Vagabonds" consciously emphasizes his literary background and skills in a similarly deliberate, often amateurish way. And like the narrators of "The Leonardo" and "Wakefield" the apprentice artists of "Lost in the Funhouse" and "The Seven Vagabonds" reveal through their treatment of various other characters concerns with the problem of identity.

The traveling story teller of "The Seven Vagabonds" encounters six other travelers whose occupations represent variations on the artistic impulse: a show man, a book seller and author, a fiddler, a dancing girl, a fortune teller, a wandering primitive Indian. In characterizing each of them, the narrator considers what their occupations might have to offer him, particularly in the line of travel nd social experience. And while he asserts that he has the imagination to penetrate to the truth of their lives, his treatment of their character is as manipulative as the show man's control of his puppets on the stage of the show wagon. Similarly, in "Lost in the Funhouse," the narrator reveals his obsession with attaining social maturity, which he equates with successfully telling his story and finding his way through the funhouse, perhaps with a girlfriend. As the story teller's efforts are manipulative in "The Seven Vagabonds," so the narrator's focus is distorted in "Lost in the Funhouse." Hawthorne's use of the show wagon and Barth's use of the funhouse emphasize that the setting of these stories is the imagination of the literary artists.

Caught in the "neutral territory," like the narrators of "The Leonardo" and "Wakefield," the apprentice artists of Hawthorne's and Barth's stories reveal but cannot resolve their personal and artistic conflicts. However, the narrator of "Lost in the Funhouse" plans to build other funhouses or tell other stories in his search for identity; the narrator of "The Seven Vagabonds" plans to continue his journey with the Indian, who stimulates his imagination more than any other character. So like the narrators of "The Leonardo" and "Wakefield," the apprentice artists leave the "neutral territory" with the recognition, however, that their future identity is related to their artistic vocation. Both anticipate further explorations of the intermediate realm of fiction, where they may carry the search for identity further in their growth toward maturity.

In "The Leonardo" and "Wakefield," the narrators discover the illusory nature of art in which they may explore aspects of their identity, revealing their own conflicts in the experience of their characters. In "Lost in the Funhouse" and "The Seven Vagabonds," apprentice artists experiment with literature as a possible vocation leading to personal as well as professional maturity. The use of commentary on the process of composition makes possible a narrative mode that merges the conflicts of the narrator with those of his characters, a highly complex method of treating the problems of the artist and the relation between the "actual and imaginary" in the "neutral territory" of the

writer. Although metafiction is a dominant mode of twentieth-century fiction concerned with the problem of the artist, Hawthorne experimented successfully with it in the early development of the short story as genre.

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Thesis: HAWTHORNE'S "WORKSHOP METHOD" AND THE METAFICTIONAL MODES OF NABOKOV AND BARTH: NARRATIVE COMMENTARY AND THE STRUGGLES OF THE LITERARY ARTIST IN FOUR SHORT STORIES

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