

Recklessly Intimate and Very Far Away:
Daguerrean Method in *The House of the Seven Gables*
by
Hannah D. Ensor

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the effects of early photography on Nathaniel Hawthorne's approach to his subject, specifically focusing on *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). By discussing the first American canonical novel to integrate the new cultural phenomenon of photography—specifically daguerreotypy—into its narrative, I seek a set of new answers—and radically new approaches—to the question: What does it mean to write a photographic novel?

I begin by examining a current literary understanding of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "photographic" writing as objective and visually indiscriminate, featuring narrators who practice "disinterested vision." By fully engaging with this definition of photographic writing, even while asserting that Hawthorne's narrative method is too complex to be accommodated by such a claim, I begin to gesture toward different modes of what photographic writing could be. The governing principle of this section is that complicating and expanding our understanding of "the photographic" facilitates complicating and expanding our understanding of *The House of the Seven Gables* and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

The next section examines certain narrative observational desires of Hawthorne's that predated both *Seven Gables* and the invention of photography in 1839. Because those narrative desires did not yet have the terms for realization—or even for articulation—in the early- to mid-1830s, I look forward to a photographic discourse that both names and models the fruition of those desires: the covert subway photography of Walker Evans. In expanding the timeline of observational desires and showing the development of these themes across the disciplines, I argue that Hawthorne's narrative trajectory must be considered in terms of a photographic history. Indeed, placing Hawthorne's desires as an early point on this timeline also expands a photographic discourse that we tend to think of as technologically-driven, but that begins much earlier, and much more conceptually, with a visionary core articulated by Nathaniel Hawthorne in—and before—*The House of the Seven Gables*.

With a photographic method in mind—that of Walker Evans's distant intimacy—I return to *Seven Gables* to discuss how Hawthorne's narrative observational desires from the pre-photographic era appear and shift in his 1851 novel. Rereading this canonical novel with its photographic moment in mind allows me to explain an otherwise inexplicably strange narrative approach, one that embodies and combines certain photographic binaries: subjectivity and objectivity, purely visual observation and revealed inner truths, and—attaining what his stories from the 1830s could only wish for—distance and intimacy.

In this thesis, I argue that what Hawthorne finds in the new daguerrean art is a promise, a possibility, and a methodological paradigm shift, all of which come to fruition in *The House of the Seven Gables*.

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Short Titles

- CE:* Nathaniel Hawthorne. *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne: Vol XV, The Letters 1813-1843*. Eds. Thomas Woodson, L. Neal Smith, Norman Holmes Pearson. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984.
- SG:* Nathaniel Hawthorne. *The House of the Seven Gables*. Ed. Robert S. Levine. New York: Norton, 2006.
- TTT:* Nathaniel Hawthorne. *Twice-Told Tales*. New York: Modern Library, 2001.
- WE:* Evans, Walker, et al. *Many Are Called*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Prologue

This thesis explores interactions between the verbal and the visual in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, yet it does not contain a single image. I have included neither a daguerreotype portrait of Hawthorne (though one survives) nor an etching of an early photographic studio (though many survive); there is no appendix with a sample of nineteenth century portraits, illustrating the different types and genres of portraiture mentioned within the text of *The House of the Seven Gables*. Turning to the last page of this thesis yields only a bibliography, and flipping through the pages shows only page after page of text: twelve point, standard text, double-spaced, with uniformly even margins, formatted to be as visually unobtrusive as possible.

Although my focus and arguments shifted in the course of this project, at no point did the inclusion of images—*illustrations* may be a more apt term—seem either relevant or useful. While this choice to write about the visual without also reproducing it seemed natural during the writing process—and seems natural still—I begin this thesis by wondering: in a project that strives to be informed by visual culture, by photographic theory, and by nineteenth century portraiture, a project that aims to expand literary discussions of photography beyond abstractions, why are visual images so markedly absent?

A preliminary answer is that I am in good company: Nathaniel Hawthorne made no attempt to illustrate his novels nor his short stories, a fact that is no less true for *The House of the Seven Gables* than it is for his less overtly image-oriented prose.¹ Hawthorne certainly had an

¹ While *Transformations*—the British publication of *The Marble Faun*—was published with a single illustration, it is unclear whether this was an editorial decision or Hawthorne's (and if it was editorial, it is unclear whether Hawthorne even knew about the image). For more

affinity for images: he personally had a startling number of portraits taken (in his lifetime, he was painted, photographed, sketched, and even sculpted, at least seventy times) and, as we will see, his novelistic project is at times devoted—in both content and in method—to negotiating the reader’s relationship to the visual.² The absence of images in Hawthorne’s writing is a notable fact: one that, from the start, leads his reader to question the role and nature of his visual language.

Leaving images out of the text allows me—as it allowed Nathaniel Hawthorne—to focus on language. My aim in exploring the effect of daguerreotypy on Hawthorne’s writing is not to determine whether he had a stronger affinity to a certain type of visual image after seeing a daguerreotype, but instead to discuss the effects of the new methodological model on his persistent narrative concerns. I emphasize in this thesis that Hawthorne’s negotiations with the new photographic representational possibilities were not necessarily about photography, but were certainly about representation.

By rereading *The House of the Seven Gables* with its photographic moment in mind, I strive, in this project, to begin reading Hawthorne’s narrative peculiarities in a slightly different way: one that simultaneously expands and contextualizes Hawthorne’s interaction with new representational possibilities made available by the invention of photography. While conversations about *Seven Gables* are abundant, neither literary critical discourses—specifically narratological conversations—nor photographic histories seem, on their own, adequate in their

regarding the ambiguity of this editorial history, see Carol Shloss, *In Visible Light* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 39. All further citations in parentheses as “Shloss.”

² I conservatively approximate the figure of seventy portraits that were made during Hawthorne’s lifetime based on counting the portraits mentioned by Rita Gollin in *Portraits of Nathaniel Hawthorne*; there were certainly no fewer than seventy images made, and perhaps as high as one hundred. Rita K. Gollin, *Portraits of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1983).

explanations of how Hawthorne's approach to his subject shifted in the face of the daguerreotype. For this reason, a large goal of this project is to bring the two discourses together, finding where they might productively meet.

This goal presents certain challenges: first, for the simple structural reason that writing is not photography. Whereas the evolution and discussion of photography is largely based around technological and mechanical advances—for instance, we explain that lifelike portraits became possible when exposure time dropped below an hour, that Walker Evans's subway portraits became possible when the camera was finally small enough to be concealed and finally capable of snapshot rapidity—the movements and shifts in literary history are largely seen as separate from technology, even if certain technologies influence some aspect of an individual text. At least since the invention of the press, its moments of development have seemed fairly continuous: due to its very fictionality, literature tends to be more dependent on the momentum of literary movements than on a single revolutionary technology. The truism that fiction need not be limited to contemporaneous technological possibilities is what makes the genre of science fiction possible; indeed, in defining *The House of the Seven Gables* as a “Romance,” Nathaniel Hawthorne “asserted his rights [...] to depart from strict verisimilitude.”³ Because of this gap in discourses, because the terms of their progress do not always align, it can be difficult to discuss them together.

Another struggle in this project of bringing literary and visual discourses together is that, traditionally, we discuss the two together in terms of ekphrasis: a subset of literary criticism that

³ Robert S. Levine, introduction, *The House of the Seven Gables*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Norton, 2006), ed. Robert S. Levine, x. For a comprehensive study of the genre of “Romance” as defined and “practiced” by Nathaniel Hawthorne, see Richard H. Millington, *Practicing Romance: Narrative Form and Cultural Engagement in Hawthorne's Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

discusses verbal representation of the visual.⁴ The study of ekphrasis, however, often phrases ekphrastic expressions in terms of product: we most often discuss a poem that describes and evokes a painting, for instance, rather than what it means to write like a painter paints. But to this project, what matters most is not the photograph, but the photographic approach: that is, the method, and not the product. The true question in this thesis is what the availability of photography—the methodological model, promise, and symbol—meant to Nathaniel Hawthorne. I am less interested in what the technology *is* than in what the technology *does*: what it allows and what it facilitates.

⁴ For a more prolonged discussion of ekphrasis and how it appears in *The House of the Seven Gables*, see pp. 19-26 herein.

Introduction

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* is the first American canonical novel to address photography as a subject in a serious way. Published only twelve years after the Frenchman Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre's invention of the "daguerreotype"—the first prominent photographic technology—*Seven Gables* integrates daguerreotypy into its narrative. In the novel, an itinerant daguerreotypist named Holgrave boards with the Pyncheon family (Hepzibah, her brother Clifford, and cousin Phoebe) in one of the gables of the Old Pyncheon House. Throughout the novel, his profession is made a prominent point of conversation and a source of mystery, two of his daguerreotype images significantly further the plot, and daguerreotypy, as it turns out, becomes central, providing objects of meditation, symbols for the broader concerns of the novel, and—I argue—an important methodological model for Hawthorne's approach to his subject.

The publication date of *Seven Gables* in 1851 coincided with a tenuous moment in the history of photography: just over a decade into the still-unsteady American engagement with photography, the daguerreotype was just on the verge of being replaced by newer technologies. While the daguerreotype was ubiquitous and (largely, though not universally) well loved, it was also still an unsettling novelty: the first representative of new photographic possibilities and promises, it generated a number of often-contradictory cultural anxieties. Daguerrean discourses hailed the new medium in terms that combined science and art, articulating the daguerreotype both as a form of purely visual documentation (depicting a surface with incomprehensible fidelity) and of revealed inner truths (the unflattering lens capable of showing the soul of its sitter). With a tone of bright-eyed simplicity, its practitioners and enthusiasts celebrated that the

process was straightforward and simple, as the camera did all the work; the same phenomena, however, also led to fears of an unknowable magic taking place in the camera—an undercurrent that itself was internally contradictory, sparking both unnerving connotations of witchcraft and the glamorous appeal of mysticism. As Alan Trachtenberg writes in *Reading American Photographs*, “The dialectic of strange and familiar, of astonishment mingling with recognition, points to the predicament into which the medium was born, a predicament of comprehension.”⁵

But for whatever else we culturally attach to a daguerreotype, it is also simply “an object endowed with a structural autonomy”: something that can be held, described formally, and—at least on a purely physical level—understood.⁶ Typically small enough to be held in one’s hand, daguerreotype images had a physical presence quite their own. The plate itself was made of copper and coated with silver, which was buffed to a smooth, reflective sheen (initially by hand, but in later years with the assistance of steam buffers, due to American ingenuity and love of mechanization). The image itself was formed by a slow monochromatic buildup on the surface of the plate, which was sensitized with iodine and mercury vapors. Daguerreotypes were so finely

⁵ Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989) 4. Notably, these seemingly contradictory binaries within the history of photography continue to resonate, a century and a half later, in discourses of cultural criticism; across the disciplines—from poetry to sociology to art history and beyond—people have continued to be taken with the paradoxes of early photography and their relevance to later times. To offer a brief and partial catalog of contemporary discussions regarding daguerreotypy: scholars such as Alan Trachtenberg continue publishing critical articles on the history and relevance of the daguerreotype; in recent years, artists such as Chuck Close and Margaret Atwood have offered their takes on the daguerreotype (Close took and published a number of daguerreotype portraits of contemporary artists and friends, and Atwood wrote and published a poem entitled “Daguerreotype Taken in Old Age”); and The Daguerrean Society is an active organization “dedicated to advancing an understanding and appreciation of the art, history, collection, and practice of the daguerreotype, as well as other photographic processes as they relate to the daguerreotype, through the holding of an Annual Symposium, the publication of the *Daguerreian Annual* [...], [n]ewsletters for its members, and by maintaining a [w]ebsite.” See Works Consulted page for full citations.

⁶ Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 15.

detailed that viewers found themselves astounded upon their first experiences with the medium. The realization—often facilitated by an itinerant or studio daguerreotypist offering a magnifying glass—that, while this image may look like a carefully painted sepia aquatint or a spectacular pencil sketch, the daguerreotype continues to reveal further fidelity and detail without “dissolv[ing] into brushstrokes or pencil lines.”⁷ While the detail never “dissolved,” it did “flicker”; the appearance of the image, due to the particular way the chemicals built up on the plate, depended on the angle of viewing, and could suddenly flicker into a reversed version of itself. Unlike the photographic technologies that followed, daguerreotypes were unique images; the process yielded the one image, with no negative. Further contributing to the sense of the daguerreotype as a precious object, most daguerreotypes were encased in glass to prevent oxidation and deterioration of the incredibly delicate surface. Because of this encasing, the image sat suspended between one reflective surface (the silver sheen) and another (the glass casing). Holding and viewing a daguerreotype was a considerably intimate and interactive experience: not only did the encased and unique metal image have weight and mass, but it also had a three-dimensional quality, flickering and standing out and even reflecting the viewer’s own face depending on which way it was held.⁸

Of the many contradictions that sprang up around the daguerreotype, some lasted and proved to be fundamentally photographic contradictions, while others were more distinctly tied to the particular daguerrean medium. The contradictions that are relevant to our reading of *The*

⁷ Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989) 5.

⁸ A number of sources—most prominently Naomi Rosenberg’s *A World History of Photography*, Alan Trachtenberg’s “Likeness As Identity: Reflections on the Daguerrean Mystique” and *Reading American Photographs*—as well as first-hand experiences with daguerreotypes have contributed to my understanding of the daguerreotype’s formal and physical qualities. All sources cited in “Works Consulted,” p. 51 herein.

House of the Seven Gables are generally ones that also apply to our contemporary experience of photography, though we may not routinely be aware of them. As one example, both subjectivity and objectivity factor into the making of each silver-coated daguerreotype image—as into the making of each snapshot or digital image. But, in our invocation of the binaries regarding the daguerreotype, we must also remember that, so early in photographic history, many of these now-established contradictions were still *questions*. Is the photograph objective? Is it subjective? Who is the artist? Is this art? Who created this picture (the sun, God, the daguerreotypist, the sitter)?

Hawthorne gave voice to these questions—often experienced and articulated in the form of anxieties—in such an astute and culturally perceptive way that we can read much of *Seven Gables* with a historical lens, finding in its pages a composed consideration of photography’s early life in this country. Alan Trachtenberg, for one, has done just that; drawing on *Seven Gables*—specifically the interactions involving Phoebe’s discomfort and Holgrave’s defenses of the medium—to discuss common public responses to daguerreotypy. He writes that Hawthorne, through the character of Phoebe, “invokes an early moment in the career of photography in America, a moment of shudder, suspicion, and refusal.”⁹ A historical reading, however, is not my aim in this thesis; rather, my project is to offer a historically-informed reading, expanding our sense of how Nathaniel Hawthorne’s method may have been influenced by photographic history.

To begin the conversation of how we can conceive of *Seven Gables* in terms of its photographic context, I open this project by identifying and engaging with the most prevalent

⁹ Alan Trachtenberg, “Seeing and Believing: Hawthorne’s Reflections on the Daguerreotype in *The House of the Seven Gables*,” *American Literary History* 9 (1997): 460-481. The statement Trachtenberg refers to comes when Phoebe tells Holgrave that she does “not much like pictures of that sort—they are so hard and stern; besides dodging away from the eye, and trying to escape altogether” (*SG*, 91-92).

definition of what it means to write “photographically.” By contending with certain assumptions about what comprises the photographic, specifically placing those assumptions alongside *Seven Gables* and showing what Nathaniel Hawthorne did *not* choose for his narrative method—I begin to explore the different possibilities of addressing the novel through a discourse that is both photographic and literary. The governing principle of this section is to complicate and expand how considering *The House of the Seven Gables* in terms of photography changes both our understanding of Hawthorne’s project and our literary understanding of the photographic.

From this starting point, I then move into a methodological inquiry regarding photographic writing (or writing photographically), asserting that certain perennial narrative interests and preoccupations of Hawthorne’s—predating and coinciding with the daguerrean era—were given a new model for realization in the medium of photography. Exploring different points on a timeline of observational desires allows us to examine how a language of distant intimacy developed across the discourses, influenced by—and simultaneously boldly independent of—technological advances.

By expanding the category of “the photographic” and exploring Hawthorne’s place in a set of discourses beyond the literary, we are freed from choosing between either making ontological defenses of photography or accommodating the text of *The House of the Seven Gables* to easily-articulated concepts of what photography is and was. We can choose, instead, a route that allows us to expand our understanding of *The House of the Seven Gables* and of Hawthorne’s concept of the offices of the author.

The comparisons between writing and photography are comparisons Hawthorne himself explicitly takes up in his letters and within the body of *Seven Gables*; but an attentive approach to these comparisons—one in which a reader considers the environment in which Hawthorne

wrote and attends to the specificity of the comparisons he makes—is required to understand more fully what is to be gained (for Hawthorne, as for his readers) in such an inhabitation of photographic methods within the distinctly different project of writing a novel.

Recklessly Intimate and Very Far Away:
Daguerrean Method in *The House of the Seven Gables*

I. The Camera-like Narrative; The Photographic Narrative

To define Hawthorne's method in *The House of the Seven Gables* as "visual" is to join a discourse that predates the novel itself.¹⁰ In 1850, Hawthorne wrote that his goal for *Seven Gables* was to attain the "minuteness of a Dutch picture," referring to the highly detailed genre painting tradition exemplified by painters such as Johannes Vermeer, Pieter de Hooch, and Rembrandt van Rijn.¹¹ Apparently, his goal was realized; Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote in 1854, "*The House of the Seven Gables* is a succession of Rembrandt pictures, done in words instead of oils."¹² And while the role of daguerreotypy in the novel is a similarly familiar topic of discussion, as it is the first American novel to take the newly ubiquitous technology as a subject in a serious way, only in recent years has the question been raised of photography as a methodological or conceptual model for the novel.

Hawthorne was a thoughtful and engaged citizen of the mid-nineteenth century, intellectually curious about exploring different modes of representation, and was well aware of daguerreotype technology; it was difficult not to be, in the decade following its American arrival. Hawthorne began writing about the new technology's representational strengths just months after the arrival of the daguerreotype in 1839, and he sat for his first daguerreotype portrait (of an

¹⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, ed. Robert S. Levine (New York: Norton, 2006). Hereafter cited in the text as "SG."

¹¹ Robert S. Levine, "Introduction," *SG*, x.

¹² Harriet Beecher Stowe, "[A Succession of Rembrandt Pictures]," in *SG*, 331.

eventual six) in 1848.¹³ Despite Hawthorne's interest and awareness, however, positing that a novel might employ a photographic method is neither a self-explanatory nor a simple claim. We must begin by asking: what would a method of daguerrean writing be? And how would we recognize and discuss such an approach?

As one of the critical voices beginning this inquiry, Carol Shloss offers one possible response: she suggests that Hawthorne was "himself the camera turning a scrupulous eye on the life spread out before him, a mechanical and indiscriminate transcriber of an alien scene."¹⁴ Within this claim lie assumptions of sterile objectivity, of an inhuman, mechanistic approach to a distant subject matter: faithfully recording, but not engaging. Certainly these can be considered photographic traits; additionally, Hawthorne certainly would have been capable of such a camera-like approach; in a letter sent to his publisher from England in 1860, he wrote:

Perhaps I might find some sketch of rural or town scenery that would do [to send to you]. There is a long account of a visit to places connected with the memory of Burns—not in the least thoughtful or imaginative, but of the photographic kind.¹⁵

Hawthorne explicitly cites photography to describe a writing style in which artistry does not intervene: a "thoughtless" record of his surroundings. This self-reflective comment shows awareness of his options as a writer to adopt different modes of engagement with the world around him, including what Shloss calls "indiscriminate transcription." It would be premature, however, to extend this usage of the word "photographic" to the very different context of *The*

¹³ Nathaniel Hawthorne, letter to Sophia Peabody, 11 December 1839, in *CE*, 384; Rita K. Gollin, *Portraits of Nathaniel Hawthorne*.

¹⁴ Shloss, 26.

¹⁵ Nathaniel Hawthorne, letter To James T. Fields, 19 July 1860, St. Lawrence University Library, cited in Shloss, 25.

House of the Seven Gables; while we can easily imagine what a camera-like approach would look like in the context of a few factual journal notes sent from abroad, it is less self-evident what such a method would mean in the context of a full-length novel (complete with plot, character development, and other novelistic elements that tend to exist beyond the purely visual or factual), such as *Seven Gables*. In order to carefully consider what we mean when we call a literary work “photographic,” I would like to begin by isolating the notion of a camera-like method, “not in the least thoughtful or imaginative” in its approach, but rather “mechanical and indiscriminate,” so as to explore how such a “photographic” novel would manifest itself, and to place the idea side-by-side with the text of *Seven Gables*.

Perhaps the most direct approach to writing like a camera would be to assume an observational—and *only* observational—perspective. To borrow a term from Gérard Genette, the narrator would be “externally focalized,” holding a position of equal-opportunity limited omniscience, recording what is externally apparent and nothing more.¹⁶ In this externally focalized, objectively “photographic” novel, the narrator would—camera-like—have no independent thoughts, make no thoughtful intimations about the scene around him, and would neither report nor speculate on the interior states or knowledge of the characters. Indeed, we may not even be able to speak of a “narrator,” per se; the objective novel would more likely feature a “narrative agent”—in Mieke Bal’s words, “a function and not a person.”¹⁷ Such a narrative agent

¹⁶ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 189-194.

¹⁷ As summarized by Jeremy Hawthorn, Bal’s literary theory emphasizes the unreality of a personified narrator: “whereas the term [‘narrator’] evokes a sense of a human individual for most people, many narratives do not stem from recognizably human or personified sources.” One example of a narrative in which we struggle to describe narrative voice as “the narrator” would be J. D. Salinger’s *Nine Stories*, a collection that is frequently described as “filmic” or “theatrical,” as its stories are largely told through dialogue and observational physical

would necessarily remain on the outside of plot actions and, more crucially, on the outside of characters; he would have no insight (the domain of an artist or person capable of intuition), only “outsight” (the domain of a camera or distant observer). In *Narrative Discourse*, Genette describes a fitting style of “objective” narrative: “what [Jean] Pouillon calls ‘vision from without’” (189). Pouillon represents this style with the mathematical inequality, “*Narrator < Character*,” meaning “the narrator says less than the character knows” (189). In the case of our mechanistic comparison, we can carry this inequality beyond what the narrator simply says, and move into what the narrator feels or desires: the “indiscriminate transcriber” would want less than the characters want; would care less than they care; would be less invested in the actions of the plot that, by definition, could not touch him. In other words, a “photographic”—or a photographically objective and visually receptive—narrator would practice a wholly disengaged and disinterested observation.¹⁸

To a reader of *The House of the Seven Gables*, however, imagining such a narrative agent is tantamount to imagining a stranger; from the very first page, it becomes improbable at best to sustain the illusion that Nathaniel Hawthorne chooses this “camera-like” approach. Upon entering the text, the reader immediately encounters a first person subjective narrator:

On my occasional visits to the town aforesaid, I seldom fail to turn down Pyncheon-street, for the sake of passing through the shadow of these two antiquities: the great elm-tree, and the [Old Pyncheon House’s] weather-beaten edifice. The aspect of the venerable mansion has always affected me like a human countenance,

description, and not by any semblance of a present or embodied “narrator.” Jeremy Hawthorn, *Contemporary Literary Theory* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994) 190.

¹⁸ We are still well in the realm of Shloss’s assessment of the “photographic”; the subtitle of her chapter on Nathaniel Hawthorne is “Disinterested Vision.”

bearing the traces not merely of outward storm and sunshine, but expressive also of the long lapse of mortal life, and accompanying vicissitudes, that have passed within. (*SG*, 5)

This is an undeniably present, personified, even embodied, narrator: a person and not a function (to invert Bal's dictum), complete with memories, habits, preferences, and affective traits.

Richard Millington, in *Practicing Romance*, asserts that Hawthorne's choice to begin *Seven Gables* this way locates "the genesis of the book in [the narrator's] private experience [and in] his capacity to respond to the experience of others."¹⁹ Indeed, this personal and human perspective not only inhabits a first person voice to describe the sight of the house, but, additionally, inhabits a "thoughtful [and] imaginative" first person voice, making an affective metaphorical gesture to meditate on his own history of personal and private reactions to the house. Comparing the narrator's introduction to the Old Pyncheon House with an objective statement of fact, such as "Water boils at one-hundred degrees Celsius," proves that we can read the narrator's statement only "with respect to the person who utters it and the situation in which he utters it" (Genette, 212). Indeed, that we can describe this narrator as a person—as having a *character*—is an important step away from the previously established concept of a mechanistic method. Already, the reader knows that this narrator is more person than machine, more narrative character than narrative agent, more subjectively affected than impersonally detached.

It is true that the unabashed boldness of the narrator's first person voice fades by the second chapter, from which point he no longer shares personal memories and rarely again uses the first person singular (though he often speaks in the first person plural). However, the narrator continues to display his subjectivity, personality, and character, continues to express his desires

¹⁹ Richard Millington, *Practicing Romance: Narrative Form and Cultural Engagement in Hawthorne's Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 108.

and personal vicarious interest in what he narrates. In fact, the presence of this narrator is so pronounced throughout the text that critics have described him as a town gossip.²⁰ At times, this is indeed the tone he adopts, in such conversational addresses to the reader as “Can [the portrait] have been [of] an early lover of Miss Hepzibah? No; she never had a lover—poor thing, how could she?—nor ever knew what love technically means” (*SG*, 25). These frequent asides are certain moments of personhood, bursts of subjective—empathetic, sympathetic, at times even antipathetic—emotion about the characters. The narrator even goes beyond sympathizing with what he narrates; at times, his narrative style itself is affected by the tenor of his responses to what he describes. Apparently surprised by the behavior of a young boy, the narrator exclaims (and one can almost hear the amused chuckle attached to such exclamations), “What a grand appetite had this small urchin!—two [cookies], immediately after breakfast!—and now an elephant [cookie], as a preliminary whet before dinner!” (43) He even explicitly acknowledges his emotional tendencies and his interest in the actions he describes: relaying the sight of Hepzibah straining herself to comfort Clifford, the narrator tells us, “There could be few more tearful sights—and Heaven forgive us, if a smile insist on mingling with our conception of it!” (95). Beyond merely saying that one could find himself affected by such a sight, the narrator puts his own subjectivity in the foreground, announcing that his perception and transmission of information are innately tinged with emotion, with his own emotional, human responses.

So far, we have established that this narrator has character, a history and memories and a childhood to refer back to; that his emotions, desires, and personal sympathies affect his style of telling; that he is excitable and interested in the action he relays. But we must also note that

²⁰ Among others, Robert Levine and Richard Millington have discussed Hawthorne’s narrative style in this way. Millington interprets the gossip-like tone as a form of free indirect discourse, in which he speaks as, or on behalf of, “a cultural position,” giving voice to the townspeople’s speculation and opinions of the Pyncheon family (Millington, 110).

while the narrator is subjective, emotional, and person-like, he is not also a not quite a person. He is an omniscient narrator, a nameless voice who is not a character in the action, who does not interact with the Pyncheons or with any of the townspeople, and who is never seen, felt, or known within the diegetic space of the novel. His sympathetic interest is only vicarious; he never once inserts himself into the action or steps forward to implicate himself. In other words, he is neither purely distant nor completely intimately present, neither in the story nor removed from it. The problem of understanding this narrator, then, is larger than we can solve by simply contradicting the camera-like project; Hawthorne's narrator contradicts any definitive sense of locating or describing "him."²¹

Another paradox of this sort, further complicating both the idea of a camera-like narrator and the reader's attempt to understand the narrator, exists in his location with regards to "vision from within" versus "vision from without"; novelist Catharine Maria Sedgwick, in an 1851 letter, praised *Seven Gables*'s pairing of "microscopic observation of the external world, and the keenest analysis of character."²² Indeed, this is exactly the pattern of Hawthorne's narrative motion: while his narrator in *Seven Gables* often begins in an ostensibly objective, descriptive mode, that scrupulous visual objectivity is almost always followed by a more probing narrative movement. For instance, describing Clifford, the narrator writes, "The guest leaned back in his chair. Mingled in his countenance with a dreamy delight, there was a troubled look of effort and unrest. He was seeking to make himself more fully sensible of the scene around him" (79).

²¹ The reader of this thesis may notice the fairly consistent use of the third person male pronoun to describe the narrator. This is done both by default—Hawthorne is male, and there is no indication that he makes gender commentary or speaks as a female narrator—and deliberately: while we do not know the narrator's name, we are sure that this is a narrator (a voice intended to be read as a human, a person) and not a narrative agent. Therefore, the use of "he" seems more accurate than any available alternative.

²² Catharine Maria Sedgwick, letter to Mrs. K. S. Minot, 4 May 1851, in *SG*, 320.

Almost imperceptibly, what begins as visual description segues into interpretation (that his face looked dreamy and strained is already a step beyond the purely visual), and is, then, suddenly within Clifford's mind, speaking to his motivations and desires. While much of *Seven Gables* begins from "without," the narrator also writes with confidence of the characters' memories and histories, their private thoughts and desires, none of which would be readily accessible to the outside world. His level of access reaches far beyond that of a camera—even beyond that of a human observer—allowing him to discuss all that is within. Indeed, he explicitly acknowledges his status beyond even the most ordinary human limitations. On one of the occasions when he contrasts his knowledge—and the reader's, by virtue of the narration—with that of "the common observer—who could understand nothing of the [situation], except the music and then sunshine on the hither side of the door," the narrator explains how a scene may appear jovial, and turns to the reader to say, "But, to us, who know the inner heart of the seven gables, as well as its exterior face, there is a ghastly effect" (207-208).

But what does this tell us? If the narrator is too complex, with his character and subjectivity and level of intimate access to his subjects, to be accommodated by a claim of purely mechanistic and objective, camera-like photographic writing, must we then insist that Hawthorne's project in *The House of the Seven Gables* was not photographic (too subjective to be photographic, too human and too interested)? On the contrary, rather than flatly refuting the assertion that this is a photographic project, we can refute the assumed definition of "photographic." I argue that the very traits that seemingly dislocate the narrator, the very traits that would be opposed to an objective, mechanistic, removed model of "photographic" writing, are in fact integral to any self-conscious performance of the photographic. Therefore, what if we were to move our frame back, and consider not the camera—a mere metonym for the category

that interests us—but rather, photography as a whole: not only its mechanism, but its emerging social status and cultural connotations, its artistic aims and attached desires, and—perhaps most compellingly—its representational possibilities and promises?

II. Photographic Project

To think about a photographic project as something other than camera-like writing, we need to consider both what daguerreotypy was to Nathaniel Hawthorne and how he understood it as a form of representation. In 1839, Hawthorne wrote a letter to his then-fiancée, Sophia Peabody, in which he engaged directly with the daguerreotype's possibilities and advantages. He wrote,

I wish there was something in the intellectual world analogous to the Daguerrotype [sic] (is that the name of it?) in the visible—something which should print off our deepest, and subtlest, and delicatest thoughts and feelings, as minutely and accurately as the above-mentioned instrument paints the various aspects of nature.²³

Within months of encountering the daguerreotype, Hawthorne was already considering how this new method of representation could affect his approach to a subject. In this letter, he identifies a wish to emulate aspects of daguerreotypy; but, crucially, he articulates more than a desire for simple imitation. Hawthorne distinguishes between two separate realms, the visual and the intellectual, touching on how he conceptualizes the projects of each and thus what there is to translate from one to the other. To Hawthorne, these distinct realms imply different methods,

²³ Nathaniel Hawthorne, letter to Sophia Peabody, 11 December 1839, in *CE*, 384. Cited by Levine in *SG*, *xiv*.

different subject matters, different limitations and different possibilities. In expressing his desire for “something in the intellectual world analogous to the Daguerrotype,” Hawthorne defines exactly what aspects of the new medium he would want to transfer to the intellectual—which, we can reasonably assume, refers to written language. He expresses a desire for the *subject matter* of the “intellectual world” (that is, human, personal, internal life: “our deepest, and subtlest, and delicatest thoughts and feelings”) to be expressed using the *method* and the *formal advantages* of the daguerreotype (“minutely and accurately”).

This is a different way of framing “photographic writing,” then, one that is consistent with the subjective sympathy and probing insight that we identified as contradictory to a camera-like project. The project articulated in Hawthorne’s letter offers us a different way of thinking about method and approach: one in which a writer can borrow abilities and strengths from daguerreotypy, without shedding the subjective, human aims of a fiction writer. The potentially photographic ambitions of *Seven Gables* become clearer, then, when we think of that specific set of translations: making the formal advantages and method of the daguerreotype available to a decidedly literary project.

Identifying what Hawthorne’s wish connotes, however, also means acknowledging a simple structural problem: writing is not daguerreotypy, and—even more fundamentally—the visual is not verbal, nor vice versa. Of course, the disparity between word and image is not a new problem, nor is the desire to overcome it. Starting with analyses of *The Iliad*, the discourse of ekphrasis—that is, verbal representation of the visual²⁴—has largely been based around

²⁴ In *The Iliad*, Homer describes the Shield of Achilles in great detail, which explains the Greek origins of the word “*ekphrasis*.” While “ekphrasis” can refer to a number of verbal representations of nonverbal experiences – writing about music, about visual art, about other sights or sounds – this definition as “the verbal representation of visual representation” is the most conventional, used by W. J. T. Mitchell in “Ekphrasis and the Other” and by James

discussing a writer's (and readers') relationship to the gap between the written word and vision. This is largely built into the definition of ekphrasis; ekphrastic expressions attempt to forge an impossible relationship between word and image, an impossibility that lies in the fact that any verbal attempt at the visual, no matter how vivid the prose, cannot be anything else but verbal. Genette comments, in *Narrative Discourse*, that while the “terms of *showing* vs. *telling*” have become dominant in aesthetic discussions of novelistic worth—*showing* being the desired goal—

the very idea of *showing* [in a narrative], like that of imitation or narrative representation (and even more so, because of its naïvely visual character), is completely illusory: in contrast to dramatic representation, no narrative can ‘show’ or ‘imitate’ the story it tells. [...] [N]arration, oral or written, is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating (163-64).

At best, Genette asserts, language can *refer* to what can be seen, without a hope of making it present. It makes sense, then, that W. J. T. Mitchell's three categorical phases of ekphrasis (ekphrastic indifference, ekphrastic hope, and ekphrastic fear) all emphasize the author's—and reader's—relationship to that space between word and image. That is, the difference between the three phases is where the writer or reader falls on a spectrum from apathy to anxiety about the distance between the verbal and the visual.

As I have noted, *Seven Gables* has been discussed for its heavily visual writing since its publication. In many ways, it is a classically ekphrastic text, one that takes great pains to relay

Heffernan in “Ekphrasis and Representation” (as cited by Mitchell). Regarding this inquiry into Hawthorne's verbal approach to the visual, it is, additionally, the only necessary or relevant way of understanding the term.

visual scenes verbally, as has been the tradition going as far back as Homer's descriptions of the Shield of Achilles in *The Iliad*. Of the Old Pyncheon House, the narrator writes,

There it rose, withdrawn from the line of the street [...]. Its whole visible exterior was ornamented with quaint figures, conceived in the grotesqueness of a Gothic fancy, and drawn or stamped in the glittering plaster, composed of lime, pebbles, and bits of glass, with which the wood-work of the walls was over-spread. On every side, the seven gables pointed sharply towards the sky, and presented the aspect of a whole sisterhood of edifices, breathing through the spiracles of one great chimney. The many lattices, with their small, diamond-shaped panes, admitted the sunlight into hall and chamber; while, nevertheless, the second story, projecting far over the base, and itself retiring beneath the third, threw a shadow and thoughtful gloom into the lower rooms. Carved globes of wood were affixed under the jutting stories. Little, spiral rods of iron beautified each of the seven peaks (10).

While this excerpt may seem copious, it is but a quarter of this particular series of visual descriptions of the house and its guests on the day in question. It is also not a unique example; much of the body of *Seven Gables* is occupied with visual description of this sort. Recalling Hawthorne's aim to achieve the "minuteness of a Dutch picture"—an allusion that suggests the painstaking work of manually detailing a canvas with the finest visual attention one can muster—we notice that this is consistent with the sometimes-exhaustive breadth of the narrator's

detail-by-detail visual description.²⁵ The countless lengthy passages that fill pages between recognizable plot actions are certainly more ekphrastically aligned, in method and effect, with placing each careful brushstroke, each measured, deliberate detail, on a canvas, than they are with the “shutter release” of photography (no matter the technological limitations of duration). However, at times, the tone of ekphrasis turns from this finely detailed mode—one we could consider both transcriptive and evocative—to something a touch stranger, to a mode that is less easily categorized. It is here, on these oddly indefinable moments, that I want to focus.

In one particularly striking passage, in which Clifford blows soap bubbles—a common juvenile activity, but notably out of place for an older man—the narrator explains Clifford’s “irresistible desire” to blow bubbles from the balcony, then abruptly shifts his tone from description to injunction:

Behold him, therefore, at the arched window, with an earthen pipe
in his mouth! Behold him, with his gray hair, and a wan, unreal
smile over his countenance, where still hovered a beautiful grace
[...]. Behold him, scattering airy spheres abroad, from the window
into the street! (122)

Rather than employing an explanatory, descriptive tone, the narrator urges the reader to *look*. This injunction to “behold” seems an odd insistence – and an echo, perhaps, of the apostrophic tone the narrator takes in advising and warning the characters of *Seven Gables*, to whom he cannot speak. The reader, unlike the characters, can hear him, so the address is less apostrophic,

²⁵ Roland Barthes, in “The Photographic Message,” notes a “structural paradox” of what we call “realism” that can be brought to bear on why Hawthorne’s exhaustive visual description is often read as an attempt at the photographic, which is that, often, “when one wants to be ‘neutral’, ‘objective’, one strives to copy reality meticulously, as though the analogical were a factor of resistance against the investment of values (such at least is the definition of aesthetic ‘realism’)” (19-20).

but certainly no less futile, as the reader cannot turn his or her eyes to what he or she is urged to see. We cannot help but wonder what the narrator expects of his reader at these insistent points in the text. Are his words meant to *replace* the visual (making the sight itself irrelevant); are they meant to *become* visual in the mind of the reader (an evocation of the sight); or are the *words themselves*, our conception of the novel, meant to be the desired product of the visual language? In these injunctive moments, the relationship between the reader's and the narrator's vision leaves the realm of the narrator describing, ekphrastically, that which he can see but we cannot, and enters an odd territory, in which he urges us to turn our eyes toward something.

Taking Mitchell's three categories of ekphrasis as a starting point for discussing these insistent narrative moments, I would like to suggest a deviation from the category of ekphrastic hope, one that could be termed "ekphrastic denial." Mitchell describes ekphrastic hope as "the phase when the impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in image or metaphor, when we discover a 'sense' in which language can do what so many writers have wanted it to do: 'to make us see'" (152). Ekphrastic hope is the creation of an illusion, in other words: a moment when we suspend our notions of what is possible, and imagine a closing of the distance between word and image. An ekphrastically hopeful narrator may find him/herself excited to make the visual come before the reader's "mind's eye" through language, aiming for a successful evocation. However, the approach to the visual in these insistent moments of *Seven Gables* is better described as ekphrastic denial, as the narrator does not seem to understand – or, perhaps, does not seem to find it problematic – that his reader cannot see. The distinction is subtle: the category of ekphrastic hope suggests that the gap between vision and language has been closed; ekphrastic denial, that there is no gap.

When the narrator insists that we “behold” Clifford on the balcony, when he tells us to “Look at the Judge now!” in order to make a fair judgment, he does not seem to think of his writing as a translation from vision to language (*SG*, 93). He turns from the descriptive, even transcriptive, mode of going detail-by-detail, hand-painting the visual scene, and—with much less detailed focus on describing—instead simply tells us to look for ourselves. At these moments, the narrator would perhaps disagree with Genette’s assertion that “whatever [narrative’s] mode, [it] is always narrative, that is, a transcription of the (supposed) non-verbal into the verbal” (165). Instead, he approaches his subject as if the reader has almost equal visual access to what he describes; there is neither an ekphrastic problem to be solved nor anxiety to be quelled.

His tone in these moments is similar to Holgrave’s, when he urges Phoebe to examine the first daguerreotype of Judge Pyncheon. When Phoebe “merely glance[s]” at the image, Holgrave insists, “Look at that eye! [...] At that mouth!” (67-68) His injunctions for Phoebe to “look” share an urgently imperative tone with the narrator’s, but Holgrave’s refer to an extant visual image—extant, at least, within the diegetic space of the fiction, in which the image sits literally before Phoebe’s eyes. The parallels between these two sets of verbal commands strengthen the fiction that there is something that we, the readers, are capable of seeing and, more importantly, that the process we are being asked to take part in is parallel to the process of looking at a daguerreotype. As Holgrave asks Phoebe to behold the daguerreotype, the narrator asks the reader to behold his text.

This is an indisputably strange fiction, the defiant and impassioned narrator urging the reader to “behold!” and to “look!” while, before the reader, there is nothing but text on page. But while the futility of what he asks may cause us to read “ekphrastic denial” as a derogatory

categorization—saying that someone is “in denial” rarely connotes anything desirable—it should also be read as active: that is, a denial as a willful refusal. The narrator actively denies the ekphrastic divide its right to dictate his style of telling, and to dictate how he wants his reader to interact with the text. In these moments, rather than serving as approximations of the visual, I argue that the language itself is the welcome product of his labor.

Holgrave hands his image to Phoebe, and directs her attention, guides her eye: “Here we have the man, sly, subtle, hard, imperious, and, withal, cold as ice. Look at that eye! Would you like to be at its mercy? At that mouth! Could it ever smile?” (67-68) He makes no attempt to describe every detail of the photograph—why would he, as the image itself lies before Phoebe’s eyes—but, instead, offers categorical descriptions to guide her vision. The parallels between Holgrave’s rhetoric and the narrator’s, even in the amount and type of visual description used, suggest a specific alignment in purpose.

In “The Photographic Message,” Roland Barthes writes that captions on press photographs are “designed to connote the image, to ‘quicken’ it with one or more second-order signifieds” (25). Indeed, this is what connects the narrator’s mode of description in these “Behold!” moments with that of Holgrave’s: both assume the role of *adding* connotations to an already present denotative object. Eschewing the kind of detail-by-detail visual description that he uses elsewhere in the novel—the lengthy passages such as the one cited earlier, the passages that fall easily into the category of “ekphrastic hope”—the narrator instead offers a series of complete caption-like summaries in each sentence: the first exclamation annotating a small picture of Clifford with a pipe in his mouth, the next of his smile, and the third of bubbles flowing into the street below. As Barthes writes of captions, “the image no longer *illustrates* the words; it is now the words which, structurally, [illustrate] the image” (25). This idea of

captioning fits well: “Behold him” is primary in the narrator’s urgings, and “with his gray hair, and a wan, unreal smile over his countenance” seems subordinate, as if it is illustrative of “Behold him.”

This approach to a visual subject is one we could, thus, consider “photographic,” even with—or, perhaps, because of—its impassioned tone and subjective, human content. We see in these moments of ekphrastic denial that Hawthorne probes the limits both of visual observation and standard approaches to a narrative: negotiating different relationships to the visual object and to his reader. Within the text of *Seven Gables*, his narrator relays the visual in a variety of different ways, with different aims and effects, ranging from emotional distance (“copy[ing] reality meticulously,” as Barthes writes of aesthetic realism) to an impassioned urgency, rhetorically and functionally aligned with the daguerreotypist (gesturing toward the characters, insisting that we look ourselves). This is a useful way of rephrasing what it can mean to write photographically, not least of all because it shows a thoughtful and deliberate range of possibilities for Hawthorne’s photographic text. Now that we better understand the structural problems of—and solutions to—the distance between word and image, we can return to the model established by Hawthorne’s letter to Sophia, and inquire what it would mean to apply the formal advantages of the daguerreotype to a set of pre-existing literary concerns.

III. “*But none of these things are possible*”: Distance and Intimacy

Because Hawthorne’s literary output predated and continued through the photographic era, he offers us the rare opportunity to consider the development of certain themes in his fiction both before and after the daguerreotype. Of course, with Hawthorne, as with culture at large,

tracing observational and representational desires onto a definite timeline is difficult at best: when wondering which cultural desires predated photography (influencing the cultural need for the medium) and which popular fixations were borne out of the invention of photography (influenced by photography's promises and possibilities), it is challenging to declare a clear genesis of any specific desire. But by locating a few of Hawthorne's literary concerns as they existed before the publication of *Seven Gables* (and before the emergence of photography), we can elucidate post-photographic shifts in how he interacts, in the new daguerrean era, with similar themes.

In "Sights from a Steeple," a sketch written in 1831, the narrator issues a brief manifesto on his ideal of observation:

The most desirable mode of existence might be that of a spiritualized Paul Pry,²⁶ hovering invisible round man and woman, witnessing their deeds, searching into their hearts, borrowing brightness from their felicity and shade from their sorrow, and retaining no emotion peculiar to himself. But none of these things are possible; and if I would know the interior of brick walls, or the mystery of human bosoms, I can but guess.²⁷

This first-person, anonymous narrator thus meditates from the top of a church steeple, where he, unnoticed, observes the bustle of the town below, until a thunderstorm sends everyone he

²⁶ *Paul Pry* is a comedy that premiered in New York in 1826, and was still largely popular for at least forty years thereafter. The title character is "[a]n idle, meddling fellow, who has no occupation of his own, and is always interfering with other folk's business." E. Cobham Brewer, "Paul Pry," *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, 1898); Bartleby.com, 2000. www.bartleby.com/81/. [February, 2009].

²⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Twice-Told Tales* (New York: Modern Library, 2001) 220. Hereafter cited in the text as "*TTT*."

watches indoors and away from his vision. An unabashed voyeur, the narrator wants to watch, unwatched; wants to be emotionally affected and sympathetic to the people below without giving (or, it seems, without even possessing) anything of himself; and wants all the while to remain anonymous and unimplicated. Carol Shloss writes that in this sketch, “we can see Hawthorne searching for a way to represent psychological distance that does not preclude connection to the world” (Shloss, 29). The desire, in short, is to be simultaneously distant and intimate. But, as the narrator knows, “none of these things are possible”; even before the weather sends the townspeople indoors, the limitations of remote, visual observation cannot be bypassed. Even when the narrator can see the people below, he can only guess, can only fill in blanks left by what he gleans from vision alone. Of one young man, the narrator asks, “Is he in doubt, or in debt? Is he, if the question be allowable, in love? Does he strive to be melancholy and gentleman-like? Or, is he merely overcome by the heat?” (221). The narrator’s distance, as might be predicted, prevents the intimacy he longs to attain, and he laments the inability to engage: “I love not my station here aloft, in the midst of the tumult which I am powerless to direct or quell” (226).

Even this particular articulation of desires—framed as wanting direct interaction or responsibility for controlling the scene he observes—is strikingly ambivalent. After all, the narrator’s remove from the scene is of his own choosing: rather than leaving the steeple to talk with a young woman he finds attractive, or to join one of the processions that “stirs [his] heart,” he remains at a distance (148). Perhaps the narrator simply cannot articulate what is inadequate about his position between distance and intimacy; perhaps the terms of that conversation do not yet exist.

In 1836's "The Minister's Black Veil," Parson Hooper alarms the people of his town by abruptly deciding to don a black veil, obscuring his face almost entirely. Once he begins wearing the veil, he never again removes it, wearing the black crepe into his grave. Despite intense pressure from the community—and from his fiancée, who leaves him for refusing to remove the veil in her presence—Mr. Hooper consistently refuses to explain his decision, and only on his deathbed does he offer a statement of purpose. After crying out, "Why do you tremble at me alone? [...] Tremble also at each other!" he elaborates:

When the friend shows his inmost heart to his friend; the lover to his best beloved; when man does not vainly shrink from the eye of his Creator, loathsomely treasuring up the secret of his sin; then deem me a monster, for the symbol beneath which I have lived, and die! I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a Black Veil!

(*TTT*, 69)

Hooper's project—and, arguably, Hawthorne's, in telling this tale—is to emphasize that all people conceal their true selves—whether consciously or not, whether deliberately, maliciously or not—even from those whom they love the most, even from God. Just as Hooper wears the symbolic veil, he warns his fellow townspeople that they, too, hide themselves from true, intimate, observation: in a key sense, they are not visible, or at least imperfectly so. Whereas the narrator's physical distance precludes intimacy in "Steeple," Hooper shows that—even with ostensibly close interaction—people inevitably hide themselves too much to ever be truly and intimately known or seen.

In the 1830s, Hawthorne approached these barriers to observational intimacy, to the ideal of distant sympathetic access, with no concept of a solution: the narrator of "Steeple" accepts

that the intimacy he craves simply cannot be attained from a remove, conceding, “I will descend”; and in “Black Veil,” Hooper dies at the moment of pointing out the limitation inherent in people’s self-concealment, in the masks that hide their “inmost hearts.” Hooper fades away without so much as suggesting an alternative or telling those around him to change their ways: as the “Steeple” narrator has no language to articulate his exact desires in any realistic way, Hooper seems to have no language to even imagine an alternative. Both of these stories gesture toward a persistent frustration at observational possibilities; a reiterated statement that the level of intimacy and sympathetic knowledge we can attain of another’s interior is not enough; an unfortunate, but unchangeable, fact that these observational desires are thwarted whether we are distant or close.

IV: Recklessly Intimate and Very Far Away

While these frustrated desires had no literary model or language in the 1830s, we can turn to an available discourse that offers both a set of terms and a model for observational and distant intimacy: that of twentieth century photography. By looking forward to a moment when photographic methods attained this coveted distant intimacy, I argue that Hawthorne’s observational desires—and the shift in observational method that occurs in *The House of the Seven Gables*—must be discussed with a photographic trajectory in mind. Here, we focus specifically on a figure who was canonized in the history of photography for evading the limitations Hawthorne struggled against in the 1830s: Walker Evans.

Evans, most widely known for his social documentary photography during the Great Depression, became a canonical figure in the history of photography for so potently embodying

binaries of subjectivity and objectivity, for taking photographs that were, at once, emotionally empathetic portraits, and also factual, sparse, and distant. His project that most directly addresses the concerns of distant intimacy as they regard Nathaniel Hawthorne's own approach is his collection of so-called "subway photos:" eighty-nine photographs published together under the title *Many Are Called*.²⁸

Between 1938 and 1941, Evans took hundreds of covert photographs on subway cars, hiding his camera behind his overcoat, pointing its lens at the passengers across the train car from him, and snapping the shutter with a handheld release. The resulting images show face after face, each one as unguarded and unmanipulated as the next, each one as casual, tired, distant. The subjects of these photographs have no thought of being seen, not only because Evans's camera was hidden, but also because of the implicit law among subway passengers never to make eye contact. The passengers are therefore freed from conscious self-presentation: what Roland Barthes describes as our tendency to "[transform] in advance into an image" when faced with a camera, the expressions that Ralph Waldo Emerson calls "forced smile[s] which we put on in company where we do not feel at ease."²⁹ None of the sitters in *Many Are Called* have been given the opportunity to feel that change come over them that comes over us all when we believe we are being observed or recorded.

²⁸ Walker Evans et. al., *Many Are Called* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Rpt. of *Many Are Called* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966). Hereafter cited in the text as "WE."

²⁹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), trans. Richard Howard, 10; Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957) 152. Emerson continues: when presenting oneself, "[t]he muscles, not spontaneously moved, but moved by a low usurping willfulness, grow tight about the outline of the face with the most disagreeable sensation."

Evans's sometime literary collaborator James Agee emphasizes the rarity of this situation in his introduction to *Many Are Called*, his assertions resonating as an almost surely unintentional echo of Mr. Hooper's deathbed outcry:

Before every other human being, in no matter what intimate trust, in no matter what apathy, something of the mask is there; before every mirror it is hard at work, saving the creature who cringes behind it from the sight which might destroy it. Only [...] in certain waking moments of suspension, of quiet, of solitude, are these guards down; and these moments are only rarely to be seen by the person himself, or by any other human being.³⁰

This twentieth-century statement of self-masking could as easily be taken from the text of Hawthorne's stories of the 1830s; for Hooper, even his fiancée—and even God—are not party to his unveiled face, and for Agee, as for Barthes, even the mirror makes us change our face for our own consumption. When aware of being seen, we cannot help but unconsciously become, all at once, “the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am,” and in the case of photography, “the one the photographer thinks I am.”³¹ But this echoing of Nathaniel Hawthorne's statement of limitation is relevant not only to show how pervasive the observational frustration was—for that, we could just as easily look a hundred years earlier—but because of Agee's context: this introduction to *Many Are Called* announces that Walker Evans, in 1966, has bypassed the limitations to observational intimacy.³² Whereas Hooper's statement points out the masks we inevitably wear, Evans evades or gets underneath those masks, documents the coveted moment

³⁰ James Agee, “Introduction,” *WE*, 16.

³¹ Barthes, 1982, 13.

³² Evans himself agreed, announcing, “The guard is down and the mask is off.” Cited in Jeff L. Rosenheim, “Afterword,” *WE*, 198.

in which they are absent; Hawthorne, in the 1830s, cannot conceive of the possibility of observing others without their veils, and Evans uses the camera to do just that.

But does this juxtaposition of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Walker Evans—who is discussed in photographic discourses as being among the first, in the 1930s, to achieve this kind of intimate observational access—serve simply to underscore that Nathaniel Hawthorne never could have known such a realization to his desires? After all, there is a simple technological and generational way to phrase Evans’s twentieth-century success: he had a 35mm camera (a relatively new advancement that made snapshot rapidity and concealment possible for the first time) and Nathaniel Hawthorne did not. I suggest, instead, that there are answers that move more uncertainly between the two dates and between any specificity of medium: answers of approach and method, of new representational promises that were made as early as 1839, and which were certainly in play by 1850, when Hawthorne began work on *The House of the Seven Gables*.

It is undeniable that Evans never could have produced these intimate covert photographs without the developments in photography that took the entirety of its first century. But while *Many Are Called* represented a new technological possibility, it also came out of a visionary core from much earlier: the familiar voyeuristic desire for unidirectional intimacy. Partially as a response to this desire, and hinting toward Evans’s eventual realization of this desire, the original rhetoric of photography promised the possibility for a self-created image. While photography was an improvement upon previous visual media because of its higher fidelity and because it was a cheap alternative to having a professional portrait painted, it was *revolutionary* to visual representation because it was a medium that alleged to need no artistic mediation or presence. When the daguerreotype was invented in 1839, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre declared that his invention was “a chemical and physical process which gives [Nature] the power to reproduce

herself.”³³ The technology was purportedly autotelic, in that the daguerreotype allowed self-created images, so the practitioner of the daguerreotype could facilitate these images “without any idea of drawing, without any knowledge of chemistry and physics,” as it did “not demand any special knowledge” (Daguerre, 12). Indeed, when the exposure time was still in the range of several minutes, a studio daguerreotypist would sometimes remove the lens cap and leave the room.³⁴ The medium required literally no engagement between the sitter in front of the lens and the practitioner standing behind it; an image would be recorded on the copper plate with or without an artist present. Thus, the artist, the photographer, the facilitator, was allowed to disappear, to remain “out of the picture.”

Because of the continuous trajectory of this photographic promise (from 1839 through Walker Evans and beyond), it is not an unfair comparison to place *The House of the Seven Gables* next to *Many Are Called*; indeed, it is a way to discuss the conceptual possibilities and methodological promises of photography as a trajectory, with Nathaniel Hawthorne occupying a crucial early moment. In order to discuss this trajectory with our eye on Hawthorne, I want first

³³ Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, “Daguerreotype,” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New York: Leete’s Island Books, 1981) 13. Much of the early daguerrean rhetoric insisted that the daguerreotype was *not* a product of an artist, but rather of light, of Nature, of God, or of some hybrid of the three. Indeed, the same rhetoric that deemphasized the role of human facilitation also tended to emphasize the daguerreotype’s ability to represent truth. Hawthorne voiced this paradigm through the character of Holgrave, who praised the daguerreotype’s truthfulness, saying, “There is wonderful insight in heaven’s broad and simple sunshine. While we give it credit only for depicting the merest surface, it actually brings out the secret character with a truth that no painter would ever venture upon, even could he detect it” (*SG*, 67).

³⁴ One extreme and comic anecdote to this effect includes Boston daguerreotypist and perpetual trickster Luther Holman Hale. Hale, annoyed by a customer’s insistence on being photographed that day, carefully posed him and then warned him that, due to low light, the exposure time that evening would be unusually long. After removing the lens cap and telling the sitter to remain completely still, he then left the studio, enjoyed a leisurely supper, and returned to announce that the image had failed. William F. Robinson, *A Certain Slant of Light* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1980) 31.

to examine the nature of Evans's role, presence, and method on the subway car, to elucidate how his photography functioned, how he gained such coveted intimate access, so we can then discover how his photographic project can help us better understand the role, presence, and method of Nathaniel Hawthorne's narrator in *Seven Gables*.

A passenger himself, a stranger among strangers, Evans's presence on the train was not only covert (by virtue of the aims of such photographs, his subjects could not know he had a camera), but also notably—or less-than-notably, as the case may be—detached. Though, looking at these pictures, we recognize Evans's deep interest and sympathetic humanity, to all appearances he must have seemed wholly uninterested in his fellow passengers' presence. The method, then, was to assume a carefully crafted distance, to maintain a measured disengagement. The fruitful irony is that through this very ostensible disengagement, this artistic self-distancing from his subject matter, Evans achieved an unprecedented epitome of emotional intimacy, of sympathetic access to other passengers' interior states that never would have otherwise been available to him nor to his camera. Luc Sante's prefatory description to *Many Are Called* articulates the startling binary that Evans achieved: "It is recklessly intimate and very far away."³⁵

V. Holgrave, the Narrator, and Distant Intimacy

Beginning with the figure of Holgrave, we reenter our discussion of *The House of the Seven Gables* by examining the way Hawthorne's daguerrean era novel approaches these observational desires. Holgrave is an interesting figure for this study for many reasons: first,

³⁵ Luc Sante, "Foreword," *WE*, 14.

because he figures as the explicit insertion of daguerreotypy into this narrative; second, because his presence in this novel—both for professional and personal reasons—represents a step forward in observational possibilities from Hawthorne’s previously-thwarted narrative figures; and, third (encompassing the previous two reasons), because of the ways in which he expands our understanding of the narrator’s presence, and thus Hawthorne’s conception of the post-photographic author function.

An outsider to the Pyncheon family, Holgrave is an odd presence in the Old Pyncheon House. He lives in one of the seven gables as a boarder, and is largely a stranger. A score of suspicions surround the itinerant daguerreotypist, and frequently make him the topic of conversation. At first, Hepzibah and Phoebe find themselves uncomfortable with the liberal company he keeps:

[M]en with long beards, and dressed in linen blouses, and other such new-fangled and ill-fitting garments;—reformers, temperance-lecturers, and all manner of cross-looking philanthropists;—community-men and come-outers, as Hepzibah believed, who acknowledged no law and ate no solid food, but lived on the scent of other people’s cookery, and turned up their noses at the fare. (62)

This caricatured catalogue of contemporary reformer-types, along with the fact that Holgrave “practiced animal-magnetism,” or mesmerism, is as much a parody of the public reaction to daguerreotypists as it is a parody of how young liberals look and act.³⁶ The anxious, distrustful

³⁶ It is not entirely clear whether Hawthorne parodies the appearances of the young liberals or if his target is the set of prevalent conservative opinions of those young liberals; while

atmosphere surrounding the arrival of daguerreotypy needed an outlet, and the embodied target of these anxieties was the new cultural figure of the daguerreotypist.³⁷

The reader knows these simple and predictable reasons to be wary of Holgrave, but also has a sense that there is something more than that. The reader may sit uneasily with this stranger's role in the otherwise insular family drama, with his interest in a historical trajectory that does not seem to affect his life, with questions of why the youthful transient chooses to remain in such a bleak house with such bleak companions. These suspicions, themselves, have a great deal to do with the way that the novel functions – both because mystery holds up the tension of the plot, and also because of how they feed our interest in the ways in which Holgrave is more than just an extraneous visitor to the narrative.³⁸

Phoebe's sense of Holgrave, for the vast majority of the novel, is that he walks a precarious and unnerving line between being "too calm and cool an observer" and having an unnervingly (and inappropriately) intense interest in her family's fate, though one that is merely intellectual or observational (*SG*, 126). While she, exasperated, expresses a wish for Holgrave to "feel more like a christian and a human being!" and, in turn, to be a less "cold-hearted" audience to the drama he witnesses so intimately, she also notices with discomfort how he "studie[s] them

he, himself, had ties to reform movements, he also had a history of leaving certain groups – such as the socialist community of Brook Farm – disillusioned and angered.

³⁷ Itinerant daguerreotypists, as an often-stereotyped group, were known for their transience, for dismissing their previous employment – if they were, in fact, previously employed – at the suggestion of getting rich quick, and for their liberal values and relative youth. Often, depictions of itinerant daguerreotypists in popular literature stressed their untrustworthiness and lack of responsibility, appearing as cultural analogues to sellers of snake oil. The narrative descriptions of Holgrave and the characters' reticence around him, then, are predictable. By setting him up as a member of this easily typified group, suspicion is simultaneously cast over Holgrave and explained away by his profession.

³⁸ See Gordon Hutner's *Secrets and Sympathy* for an insightful discussion of the role and function of suspended mystery in Hawthorne's fiction. Gordon Hutner, *Secrets and Sympathy: Forms of Disclosure in Hawthorne's Novels* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988). All further citations in parentheses as "Hutner."

attentively, and allow[s] no slightest circumstance of their individualities to escape him” (154, 126). At several points, Phoebe becomes puzzled or offended at Holgrave’s manner of engagement with the Pyncheons. At their first meeting, he asks Phoebe about her opinion of Hepzibah’s miniature portrait of Clifford “with an expression of much interest,” speaking “so earnestly that it embarrassed [her],” leading her to respond “a little impatiently” that his chosen line of conversation was “nonsense” (68). Much later, Holgrave goes on at length about the lunacy of the Pyncheon family, to which Phoebe responds:

“You speak very unceremoniously of my kindred,” said Phoebe, debating with herself whether she ought to take offence.

“I speak true thoughts to a true mind!” answered Holgrave, with a vehemence which Phoebe had not before witnessed in him. “The truth is as I say! Furthermore, the original perpetrator and father of this mischief appears to have perpetuated himself [...] with the fairest prospect of transmitting to posterity as rich, and as wretched, an inheritance as he has received! Do you remember the daguerreotype, and its resemblance to the old portrait?”

“How strangely in earnest you are,” exclaimed Phoebe, looking at him with surprise and perplexity, half-alarmed, and partly inclined to laugh. “You talk of the lunacy of the Pyncheons! Is it contagious?” (132).

Indeed, this is a curious – even inappropriate – level of passion for a mere stranger. Even after Phoebe tells Holgrave that she, a closely intimate member of Clifford’s own family, “feel[s] it to be not quite right to look closely into his moods,” because “it is holy ground where the shadow

falls,” Holgrave gives the bewildering response, “I can understand the feeling, without possessing it. Had I your opportunities, no scruples would prevent me from fathoming Clifford to the full depth of my plummet-line!” (127). That Phoebe defines a limit of what is and is not appropriate in such interpersonal relationships is already a result of her feeling that she “could not conceive what interested him so much in her friends and herself, intellectually, since he cared nothing for them, or comparatively so little, as objects of human affection” (127). Thus, his overzealous response, expressing this too-eager desire to probe even further into Clifford’s psyche, is that much more disturbing to Phoebe. She closes with this exclamation: “‘How strange that you should wish it!’ remarked Phoebe involuntarily. ‘What is Cousin Clifford to you?’” (127) The question raised repeatedly—by Phoebe, but also by a suspicious reader—is: why does Holgrave, a supposedly objective outsider who claims and practices detachment to an almost jarring extreme, care so much?

As Gordon Hutner notes in *Secrets and Sympathy*, the mysteries that occupy Hawthorne’s fiction are often “resolved” in disappointing ways. The close of a Hawthorne novel will offer a universal answer—such as that of a hidden identity, a previously unknown family history of apoplexy, or a secret document that provides incredible wealth to the protagonists—that resolves the local plot mysteries scattered through the narrative, but falls far short of the magnitude, intrigue, or all-consuming attention paid to the questions themselves throughout the novel. Hutner writes, “Although each of Hawthorne’s novels ends with a revelation or confession, each ends somewhat inconclusively, offering resolutions of less certainty than they can be argued to perpetrate” (Hutner, 5). This is certainly the case in *Seven Gables*, which offers all three of the “answers” mentioned in the list above. Specifically worth our attention here is the alleged explanation of Holgrave’s secret identity – the answer that is offered to “What is Cousin Clifford

to you?” – disclosed in but a couple of sentences and barely elaborated. Holgrave confesses his true identity within three pages of the end of the novel (certainly well into the traditional territory of narrative dénouement) in the following manner:

My dearest Phoebe, [...] how will it please you to assume the name of Maule [by marriage]? [...] You should have known sooner, (only that I was afraid of frightening you away,) that, in this long drama of wrong and retribution, I represent the old wizard. (223)

Confessing that he is a member of the very family by whom the Pyncheons are said to be cursed, Holgrave reveals that he is not, and has at no point been, either a mere observer or an outsider. Rather than providing an answer that commits to the tension itself—that of a stranger who cares too much—the answer that Hawthorne offers *negates* the tension: Holgrave, it turns out, was *not* a stranger who cared too much. Perhaps as a reflection of how unsatisfactory this rushed and simple revelation is, there is no reaction or noted response to this seemingly critical and paradigm-shifting news from Phoebe (nor from Hepzibah, nor from Clifford, nor from Uncle Venner). She, instead, segues seamlessly into musings on where the newly unified and happy family can all live together. As is common to such resolutions in Hawthorne’s novels, this hurried, easy, last-minute resolution cannot answer the more pressing and lasting questions that have occupied the reader’s mind. The tensions of Holgrave’s character are not simple clues that can then be dissolved by a single dramatic revelation—and if they can be, a baffled reader might ask, why bother elaborating upon them for so long?

The complexities of what would otherwise be banal mysteries—mysteries that could momentarily amuse the reader at the very moment of resolution, but would not inspire further

reflection—come out of not the questions that can be (and are) resolved within the narrative’s arc, but instead by those that necessarily remain, or those that serve a purpose other than leading to the supplied resolution. While the revelation of Holgrave’s secret identity does answer certain mechanical plot questions, we turn our attention instead to the overwhelming preceding tenor of the novel, so as to not let it simply dissolve out of our memory as if irrelevant because Holgrave has been a Maule all along. While we cannot—and may not want to—offer another “answer,” per se, we can, in this particular case, expand our understanding of the complexities by letting them stand side-by-side with another set of complexities: those attending the odd presence—and, we recall, the character—of the narrator.

Indeed, the main criticisms leveled against Holgrave by his fellow characters – that he is too removed, “too calm and cool an observer,” that his persistent visual observation never seems to lead to greater affinity with those he observes (that is, with Phoebe, Clifford, or Hepzibah), that he is an outsider who insists upon remaining so, even while he expresses an intense—and, for Phoebe, discomfiting—intellectual interest in their fates, are not unique to the character of Holgrave. If Phoebe feels that Holgrave cares far too much—and simultaneously, too little—we have already gotten quite a similar impression from the narrator.

Recalling section one’s example of the narrator’s sympathetic subjectivity—such as the example of feeling a tear arise at the sight of “poor Hepzibah” straining herself to care for Clifford, or expressing a chuckle of surprise at the young boy’s cookie consumption—we return to the topic to discuss a much more extreme example. The entirety of the eighteenth chapter, “Governor Pyncheon,” is a painstaking narrative account of what Judge Pyncheon was meant to do on the day of his death, as relayed by an unnervingly excited narrator. In this chapter, the narrator goes beyond merely relating to the emotions of the characters; here, he seems to

experience a bizarre personal catharsis. The familiarly insistent tone (reminding us, uneasily, of his injunctions to the reader to “behold” or “look,” or of when he advises Clifford to enjoy the small happiness he has) takes an uncomfortably sinister turn in the face of the deceased judge. The apostrophic nature of his address, here, is unmistakable, made doubly distant by not only his narrative position as separate from the action, but also by the fact that his addressee is obviously dead. He exhorts, “Pray, pray, Judge Pyncheon, look at your watch, now! What, not a glance?” and “Up, therefore, Judge Pyncheon, up! You have lost a day” (192, 194). The occasion of the Judge’s death is, of course, a moment of climactic release and vindication for Clifford and Hepzibah, whose lives have been held captive by the Judge, and it becomes a passionate moment for Holgrave, who not only wields the daguerrean proof of Clifford’s innocence but also uses the occasion to confess both his love and his true identity to Phoebe; but what are the narrator’s stakes in this death? The narrator’s jubilation and vindictive tone are not—at this particular moment nor elsewhere in the text—resolved, and we are left asking, bewildered and unnerved: What is Jaffrey Pyncheon’s death to the narrator?

Much as Phoebe notices Holgrave’s urgency and ardor, “half-alarmed, and partly inclined to laugh,” we notice, first and foremost, that this narrator’s emphatic diatribes and twelve page obsessive explication of the judge’s unchanging status—deceased, still—are inexplicable, particularly for an alleged stranger, an outsider with no apparent ties to the Pyncheon family. Even the narrative timing is jarring, as the reader suspects at this point that Clifford murdered the Judge. Even in this suspenseful moment, “Hawthorne suspends the operations of the plot, not to elaborate on Clifford’s possible culpability or even to heighten and exploit the reader’s uncertainty, but to chortle over the Judge’s round of missed appointments” (Hutner, 71).

When we ask of the narrator, bewildered, “What is the Pyncheon family to you?” and its corollary, “Where—and who—is this narrator?” we have no affirmative answers, but instead a string of almost-certain distances: the narrator is not in the narrative, not part of the action, not physically present to the characters, neither known nor knowable (remaining at least as anonymous as the similarly unnamed narrator in “Sights from a Steeple,” despite our significantly more sustained contact with the narrator of *Seven Gables*). He is neither implicated in nor responsible for the drama he reports, he remains invisible and inaccessible (both to the characters and to us as the readers). He observes, he speculates, he dashes in and out of the characters’ most private thoughts and emotions, but he, himself, is certainly not “there” except in his reporting (albeit his emotionally affected and subjective reporting) of the story.³⁹ The narrator is not “in” the story he tells, not “in” the picture he takes, no matter how penetrating or revealing his narrative is.

The narrator’s emotional interest in what he narrates (such as his impassioned response to the judge’s death or the “smile [that] insists on mingling” with his narration) may seem to be all we see of him: his sympathetic response to the diegetic action of the novel. But even this seemingly subjective sympathy may not be as revealing as we may think. In an 1842 letter to Sophia, Nathaniel Hawthorne explained that his fiction writing included little of himself, and—even in his prose’s most emotionally wrenching moments—showcased only his sympathetic attunement to others. Speaking of his tendency to withhold himself, he wrote,

It is this involuntary reserve, I suppose, that has given the objectivity to my writing. And when people think that I am pouring myself out in a tale or essay, I am merely telling what is common

³⁹ See Hutner’s *Secrets and Sympathy* for insight on Hawthorne’s understanding and use of “sympathy.”

to human nature, not what is peculiar to myself. I sympathize with them—not they with me.⁴⁰

Hawthorne wrote with the idea that he, himself, was invisible—a stranger—to his reader. According to the author, it was that fact, that very ability to remain outside of the drama, removed and separate, that allowed him to “sympathize” with his characters so successfully, to tap into “what is common to human nature.” Hawthorne—like Walker Evans photographing relaxed and open faces on the subway car—credits the ability to access his characters’ minds to not having a presence of his own, depicting and sympathizing without entering into the picture himself. This is the ideal articulated in “Sights from a Steeple,” when the narrator longed to be “hovering invisible round man and woman, witnessing their deeds, searching into their hearts, borrowing brightness from their felicity and shade from their sorrow, and retaining no emotion peculiar to himself” (*TTT*, 220). Interestingly, when juxtaposed with Carol Shloss’s idea of a camera-like method of “photographic writing,” this method of distant sympathy, this idea of unidirectional intimacy and emotional outpouring, is what Hawthorne termed an “objective” approach, and what we could certainly consider “recklessly intimate and very far away.”

Holgrave, likewise, voices such a position of distant intimacy toward the end of *Seven Gables*, in yet another moment in which Phoebe questions Holgrave’s intentions and level of affection regarding Hepzibah and Clifford. When she says, “And let me tell you frankly, Mr. Holgrave, I am sometimes puzzled to know whether you wish them well or ill,” Holgrave explains his interest and intentions:

“Undoubtedly,” said the Daguerreotypist, “I do feel an interest in [Hepzibah and Clifford]. A kindly interest too, helpless old

⁴⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne, letter to Sophia Peabody, 27 February 1842, in *CE*, 612-613.

children that they are! But you have no conception what a different kind of heart mine is from your own. It is not my impulse—as regards these two individuals—either to help or hinder; but to look on, to analyze, to explain matters to myself, and to comprehend the drama [...]. Providence sent you hither to help, and sends me only as a privileged and meet spectator” (154).

Holgrave’s position to Hepzibah and Clifford is articulated and enshrined as separate: present only as much as he needs to be to “look on, to analyze, to explain matters to [him]self, and to comprehend,” but never to affect that which he observes. Holgrave waives his option—what Phoebe might consider his human responsibility—“either to help or hinder,” to be part of the human drama that emotionally affects and excites him; he announces that it is not his role to intervene, despite having sympathy for, and interest in, the old couple. To allude back to the ambivalence of the narrator in “Sights from a Steeple,” Holgrave does not wish either to “direct or quell” the “tumult” below, but to maintain his observational distance. To compare the pre-photographic observational narrator in “Steeple” to the figure of the daguerreotypist—and likewise the narrator—in *Seven Gables*, we do not find different observational desires, but a different concept of a solution; Holgrave and the narrator do attain the “reckless intimacy” by the very distance that was previously considered a contradiction. The language Holgrave offers for this change is the word, “privileged.” Whereas the narrator in “Sights from a Steeple” could only make ambivalent statements of desire (vacillating between wanting distance and wanting intimacy, conceived as two disparate desires), whereas he could only concede that his ideal was impossible, Hawthorne finds, in the new daguerrean era, a language for the kind of “meet and privileged observer” his narrative figures have longed to be.

Aligning his author function with the figure of the daguerreotypist was no coincidence. The daguerreotype offered a new allowance—indeed, a new *invitation*—for the practitioner-artist to remain outside of the picture, to be remote and distant from his or her subject matter: an allowance that must have felt, to Hawthorne, entirely consonant with his preexisting narrative desires and methods. The confluence of the promise of artistic disengagement in photography and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s preexisting concerns and desires regarding voyeuristic, sympathetic but “objective” engagement with his narrative lined up serendipitously to produce *Seven Gables*. Holgrave, the narrator, and Walker Evans are all equally suited by the description of being mere observers, strangers, who identify and seek out the privilege of gaining access to the interiors of those they observe. What the three figures ultimately have in common is that, facilitated by photography’s representational promise, they embody what may have previously been considered a contradiction: disengagement, deliberate self-distancing, and objective detachment on one hand, and on the other, passionate interest, sympathy, and a subjective desire—an attained desire, at that—for emotional intimacy.

Conclusion

To close this thesis, I want once more to add a complicating factor to our consideration of distant intimacy in *The House of the Seven Gables*: not all characters succeed at being “recklessly intimate and very far away.” Indeed, even Holgrave, the representative of daguerrean capabilities, sets down both his camera and his separation from the Pyncheon family at the end, refusing to remain a stranger, or a distant observer. Likewise, Hepzibah never even risks attaining distant intimacy, consistently remaining as separated by her remoteness as the narrator in “Sights from a Steeple.” In one notable moment of this limitation, Hepzibah, panicked, casts a gaze out from the window of the Old Pyncheon House—which, like the narrator in “Steeple,” she is not willing to leave—and “half saw, half guessed, that a tailor’s seamstress was sitting at her work. Hepzibah flung herself upon that unknown woman’s companionship, even thus far off” (SG, 170). When Uncle Venner passes below her window, “Hepzibah wished that he would pass yet more slowly and befriend her shivering solitude,” but he does not (170).

It seems, looking at the range of observational access even within *Seven Gables*, that only the narrator successfully inhabits both distance and intimacy throughout the entirety of the novel. The narrator proves to be more like Holgrave (as we expect him to be before his revelation of identity) in his strangeness, in his insistence to remain separate, and in his level of access to the characters’ inner states, than even Holgrave is himself. To make one final suggestion—perhaps to be taken up by a future project—the fact that the narrator (and thus the author function) of *Seven Gables* succeeds at a photographic possibility of being “recklessly intimate and very far away” in a way that even Holgrave cannot sustain (and, indeed, that a contemporaneous daguerreotypist could not achieve) is a tension that we can discuss in terms of “Romance.” While

within the bounds of this thesis, I focused primarily on widening a literary conversation about Nathaniel Hawthorne's photographic writing, the dominant branch of Hawthorne criticism that discusses the genre of "Romance" arises alongside those issues, appearing particularly relevant at this endpoint in my project.⁴¹

As I mentioned in my prologue, the notion of writing photographically raises intriguing questions regarding fiction: the bounds (or lack thereof) of fiction do not require being tied to any specific technological consideration. For instance, Nathaniel Hawthorne created a novel remarkably akin in method to Walker Evans's *Many Are Called*, yet he had no need for a camera that could offer the snapshot rapidity or concealment that facilitated Evans's photographs. In 1851, achieving distant intimacy with the daguerreotype camera was still an impossibility; certain photographic discourses that we have today—the "candid" photograph, a "snapshot," for instance—did not yet exist in the language of daguerrean conversation. Part of discussing the way that Hawthorne exceeds the possibilities of contemporaneous photographic technology is discussing his declared "right to present that truth under circumstance, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation," as he states the immunities of Romance in his preface to *Seven Gables* (*SG*, 3).

Part of the complication of current discussions of Hawthorne's preface is the explicitly photographic language he uses in defining the genre of Novel: Hawthorne writes that it "is

⁴¹ As Hawthorne explicitly addresses or alludes to the genre of Romance in most—if not all—of his long fiction, the project of defining and exploring his definitions of such a genre constitutes a significant field of scholarly inquiry. As one example of how these conversations of Romance can be expansive to our conversation of photographic method, Richard Millington writes that Romance is *Seven Gables*'s "way of claiming authority, its attempt to reinvent and perform the work of the novelist," a claim that is consonant with the assertions in this thesis regarding Hawthorne's engagement with the photographic. Richard H. Millington, *Practicing Romance: Narrative Form and Cultural Engagement in Hawthorne's Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 105.

presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity,” leading those who discuss this preface with regard to photographic history to assume that Romance is, at least in part, contradictory to a photographic project. However, if we discuss the claims in the preface in light of the methodological shifts I suggest in this thesis—remembering that Hawthorne’s photographic mode of representation had more to do with mode of representation than the photograph, at times—the definitions of “Romance” read as increasingly photographic.

Therefore, at the close of this project, I suggest that forging a discourse that is both photographic and literary can be productive not only for literature and not only for photography, but also for questions of narrative approach and method, for our understanding Nathaniel Hawthorne and *The House of the Seven Gables*, and, gesturing onward, for expanding conversations of genre.

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