Every culture has stories that it tells about itself: stories about where it comes from, about its place in the universe, about its essential characteristics. Indeed, one of the key functions of “culture” is to impress these stories on each succeeding generation. When successful, this process makes these stories so “obvious” to insiders as to be self-evidently true (despite the fact that these same stories remain self-evidently dubious to outsiders). In these respects, the American people and American culture are no different than any others. From the beginning, Americans have constructed stories—political, historical, and literary—as a way of defining themselves and their place in the world and thus as a way of shaping their destiny. A look at works as diverse as The Declaration of Independence, The Federalist Papers, The Scarlet Letter, The Gettysburg Address, and “Paul Revere’s Ride” can illustrate this phenomenon and help us temporarily stand outside ourselves as we seek a better understanding of who we truly are.