

ROMANCING UTOPIA: *THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE*  
IN UTOPIAN THOUGHT

ROMANCING UTOPIA:  
THE PLACE OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S  
*THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE* IN UTOPIAN THOUGHT

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Acknowledgements	iii
2. Introduction	1
3. Chapter 1: The Identity of Genre	15
4. Chapter 2: The Identity of Characters	37
5. Chapter 3: The Identity of Utopia	58
6. Conclusion	79
7. Notes	84
8. Works Cited and Consulted	85

## Introduction

The present study attempts to relate Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* to utopian thought and tradition and to demonstrate the novel's value and significance for it. This task is complicated by a noticeable lack of agreement among Hawthorne scholars about the novel's literary success, its genre, and its meaning, and by an overwhelming lack of agreement among the scholars and commentators of utopian thought and tradition about what properly constitutes the literary genre of utopia. It appears that both *The Blithedale Romance* and utopia suffer from an identity crisis, which provides the first, although by no means the most significant, connection between the novel and the literary genre. Critical attempts to impose a formal structure on Hawthorne's novel inevitably fail, for the book tolerates no rigid identification with any of the established literary genres, transcending any and all of them as life itself transcends artistic attempts to describe it within the narrow confines of a particular genre. The critics are, however, unanimous in acknowledging that *The Blithedale Romance* is the least popular and the most underrated of Hawthorne's four major novels. Since its publication in 1852, the book has caused a good deal of disappointment to Hawthorne lovers, presenting a mystery that even an impressive body of profound and thought-provoking criticism featuring a variety of critical approaches could not resolve fully and successfully. The novel has been regarded by various critics as "failed utopian satire, failed melodrama or failed autobiography" (Crews 195), condemned as an anomaly in Hawthorne's literary art (Rust 96), and blamed for confusing the reader (Crews 194).

In a similar fashion, the literary genre of utopia has resisted the boundaries imposed on it by even the most carefully and conscientiously elaborated definitions. While Northrop Frye suggests that utopia is a subgenre of romance, Negley and Patrick assert that "mere tales of adventure and of romance are not utopias, even though their setting be in a mythical state, an imagined community, or an idealized environment" (5). More recent commentators on utopia tend to elaborate definitions that are predominantly inclusive rather

than exclusive in nature. In her book *The Concept of Utopia*, Ruth Levitas points out that it is precisely one's definition of utopia, sometimes only implicitly present in a study or book devoted to the utopian tradition, that forms the basis for including or excluding certain works from the canon of utopian masterpieces that each critic or commentator writing a major book on the utopian tradition seeks to establish (4). Yet, as Krishnan Kumar argues, there is nothing to be gained "by attempting to be too precise or exclusive" and insisting "on some 'essentialist' definition of utopia." The line of demarcation established for the sole purpose of exploring and studying the genre "must, on various occasions and for particular purposes, break down" (26).

This comment is particularly relevant with respect to *The Blithedale Romance*, for the novel has been almost unanimously excluded from all major surveys of utopian works. It is true that conventions of the utopian genre are not to found in the novel. *The Blithedale Romance* does not offer the reader an imaginative, fictional description of a non-existent perfect place where social, legal and political justice result in material abundance and affluence and provide ideal conditions for the happiness of all its inhabitants. Nor can we successfully attribute the novel to the realm of social and political thought embodied in a literary form: Hawthorne does not seek to provide a blueprint for establishing a harmonious community or advocate specific social or political changes in his contemporary society. Instead, *The Blithedale Romance* refers to a very real place, known in the history of American experimental communities as Brook Farm, where a few seemingly dedicated individuals were engaged in creating a socialist community in the real-life conditions of the nineteenth-century New England. The novel is a narrative portraying a failed attempt to translate a utopian dream into reality, to implement a theory into practice, to take a utopian social theory literally and materialize it in the form of an actual, real-life community.

In writing *The Blithedale Romance* Hawthorne used the notes and diaries of the period when he was personally involved in the Brook Farm experimental community organized by a group of Transcendentalists at West Roxbury, near Boston. Hawthorne's

involvement in the Brook Farm experiment was short. He joined the community in April 1841 and left it in October 1841, having spent less than one year there. Starting as a working member of the community, Hawthorne later became a paying boarder with no work commitments. And although in September, the writer bought two shares in the project, planning to bring his future wife, Sofia Peabody, to live there after they married, he apparently underwent an abrupt change of heart, since in October 1842, Hawthorne left the Farm for good and withdrew completely from the project (Tanner xlvi -xlviii). *The Blithedale Romance* appeared in 1852, ten years after the writer left the farm.

It is commonly believed that “a shy, solitary man...always cool to reform movements [and] always skeptical of the possibility of progress” (Elliott 69), Hawthorne, who had never wholeheartedly subscribed to the Transcendentalist concepts and beliefs, joined the community in search for employment that could potentially bring him an income sufficient to support a family. The disillusionment he frequently expressed in his diaries and letters to his future wife about the unpleasant character of his manual work at a dung-heap, that Brook Farmers euphemistically called “the gold-mine,” has been subsequently interpreted by many a critic as a sign of his disillusionment with the experiment in particular and with socialism or utopia at large. His choice of the romance form for his novel has been understood as the “refusal ...to confront the political and sociological issues posed by Brook Farm” and, in Robert Elliott’s opinion, made *The Blithedale Romance* “tantalizing, slippery, finally unsatisfactory as a work of art” (71). Elliott shares the disappointment of the novel’s earliest readers who looked for “a *roman à clef*, eagerly seeking portraits of Fuller, Channing, and Alcott (Jacobs 173). “Brook Farm,” Elliott writes, “was famous even in its failure.” The interest “in the social theory by which it had operated and in the great personalities who had been attracted to it” “entailed legitimate expectations from readers;” “the setting of the book created its own demands; it cried out for detailed, novelistic treatment” (71).



Hawthorne, however, by almost universal critical consent, completely ignored the demands of his book's setting and the expectations of his readers. In the Preface to *The Blithedale Romance* the writer claims that "his whole treatment of the affair is altogether incidental to the main purpose of the Romance; nor does he put forward the slightest pretensions to illustrate a theory, or elicit a conclusion, favorable or otherwise, in respect to Socialism"(1). Many Hawthorne critics took this statement at face value, completely disregarding the utopian content of the book and focusing instead on the novel's almost universally recognized failure to "successfully blend the realistic details from [Hawthorne's] participation in the Brook Farm community with melodramatic plot." The book was judged to be "too leadenly realistic for a romance, but too fantastic for a novel" (Baym 545). The alleged incoherence and inconsistency of the novel frustrated many a critic who sought to discover an underlying unity behind its fragmented narrative. Finally Richard Brodhead attempted to put an end to critical failures by suggesting that "criticism has less to gain by considering [the novel] in its unity than by noticing the variety of new directions it explores" (92). Although this approach has undeniable merits, critics, like Roy Male and Kelley Griffith, Jr., successfully argue that *The Blithedale Romance* is a remarkably achieved whole. Unfortunately these critics did not bring the utopian factor into the whole of their argument.

Yet, as Naomi Jacobs argues, it would be a mistake to side-step "the utopian context of the novel" or to regard it "as a negative evaluation of Brook Farm or of socialist communities in general"(174). Even if *The Blithedale Romance* is not a literary utopia either in content, form or function; even if some of the conventions of the utopian genre are absent from the novel, one still has to recognize that utopia is central to it -- it is its subject. By dramatizing, in Robert Elliott's words, "certain problematic questions about utopia that have had major consequences for the twentieth century" (68), *The Blithedale Romance* makes a valuable contribution to utopian thought and tradition, providing

valuable insights into the very origin of the utopian dream and into the very possibility of translating a utopian dream into reality.

Nevertheless, this important contribution, as I have already pointed out, has been almost entirely neglected by utopian scholars. In the collection of essays edited by Frank E. Manuel, *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, Hawthorne is mentioned only once as an actual participant of an experimental community in America, whereas *The Blithedale Romance* is not mentioned at all. This omission appears to be particularly inexplicable, since Maren Lockwood in her essay on the experimental communities in America observes that

The intellectual currents of the last century, fed by the notions of the Enlightenment, looked upon the future of mankind with an optimism that is a familiar part of our national self-concept. In the nineteenth century this optimism was not a vaguely hopeful temper of mind so much as a specific belief: *man could improve himself socially and morally* (183, emphasis - mine).

It is precisely the ability of man to “improve himself socially and morally,” this fundamental, commonplace and unproved assumption of all classical utopias, that Hawthorne questions in his novel. Moreover, *The Blithedale Romance*, described by Roy Male as Hawthorne’s “dark comedy” and “his most pessimistic novel”(13), leaves very little room for the optimism described by Lockwood as “a familiar part” of America’s “national self-concept,” revealing both the optimism and the national self-concept to be largely the product of an illusion. Hawthorne does not find human nature irredeemably bad, yet his novel with its focus on human psychology and motivation lends substantial support to what Northrop Frye calls “a common objection to all utopias”: their tendency “to present human nature as governed more by reason than it is or can be”(26). Even so, by calling the reader’s attention to the limits of human reason, the novel still appeals to the reader’s intellectual side.

As much as utopian scholars underestimate *The Blithedale Romance*’s import to their particular field of study, Hawthorne scholars, too, even in recognizing the significance of the utopian theme in the novel, do not exactly focus on *what* the novel contributes to the utopian thought and tradition. Their use of the term “utopia” lacks the

rigor and consistency sought by modern utopian scholars in both defining the area of utopian studies and in using the term itself. Moreover, no attempt has been made, to my knowledge, to relate the elusive form and genre of the novel to its tantalizingly elusive content. Challenging Robert Elliott's statement that "the discussion of utopianism [in the novel] is brief and abstract" (82), I argue in my thesis that *The Blithedale Romance* provides ample food for thought about utopia-related issues, first and foremost by its subversiveness for the classical utopian tradition: the book undermines the very foundation upon which a classical utopian structure is based -- the malleability or changeability of human nature. However, I doubt that Hawthorne uses, as Michael O'Hara maintains, "the literary subtext of utopia" as the moral standard "from which the reader should judge the degraded world of satire portrayed" in the novel (ix). Nor, I believe, does the writer see the main characters of his novel as noble but unfortunate victims of the circumstances which are entirely beyond their control. In dealing with the utopian subject of the novel many critics have suggested that Hawthorne, contrary to his famous and misleading prefatory statement, portrays the failure of the Blithedale community as brought about by the characters' inability to withstand the external pressure of the oppressive and inhuman society they sincerely attempt to escape. Nina Baym in her study of Hawthorne's novel states that the book

is about murder (and suicide) of self-expressive energies in the soul. Utopias do not work because they never succeed in freeing themselves from many subtle pressures of the society they think to leave behind (568).

While, broadly speaking, this is true, my task, as I see it, is to place the emphasis where I believe Hawthorne is placing it in his novel and to show that the writer's intent in *The Blithedale Romance* is to explore how individuals fail the community, rather than how the community fails the individuals. The murder and suicide of self-expressive energies in the soul come as the price for the compromise between two conflicting and largely unconscious human desires: autonomy and submission. The disintegration of the community, thus, is due to internal rather than external factors, and the soul's self-expressive energies are

destroyed from within, not from without. Moreover, Hawthorne effectively shows the impossibility of organizing a wise and just community on the basis of ideas and ideals, because human ideas and ideals are revealed to be rationalizations of deeply buried psychological and emotional needs. In this way the human capacity for intellectual thinking, which is responsible for generating a utopian impulse in the first place, is also shown to be responsible for frustrating this very impulse, for not only are an individual's personal psychological and emotional needs in conflict with those of other individuals, but they are also in conflict with themselves. The central metaphor of *The Blithedale Romance*, that of the Veiled Lady, far from failing, as Robert Elliott suggests, to establish a "meaningful relation with the thematic interests of the work" (79), stands symbolically for human nature as largely unknown to its possessors and observers alike. *The Blithedale Romance* communicates forcibly and unambiguously the impossibility of penetrating behind the facade of an outward appearance or throwing away the veil covering a human identity. Anyone trying to penetrate it creates an identity instead of defining it, in the same way in which the writer himself creates his characters. Therefore, Hawthorne ventures no judgment and pronounces no verdict on human nature. Rather, he adopts the stance of an observer who collects evidence and testifies to the enigmatic, ungraspable, "thinner than air" substance of the human character whose "identity" is not objective, but created by human imagination.

The elusiveness of the novel's genre thus has a definite purpose: to suggest that human characters, human ideas and concepts have no fixed identities or sharply delineated boundaries, that ideas and ideals can never provide a foundation for a concerted action, and that human communities, when they have a chance to survive, are not based on shared ideas or ideals but on shared fantasies which are manifestations of their members' emotional and psychological needs. If Hawthorne's literary characters are not governed by reason, it is not because they lack the capacity for it; it is because the writer, anticipating

discoveries in psychoanalysis, shows them to be unaware of their own psychology and motivation.

My particular focus in this study is on identity -- the identity of the novel's genre, the identity of the novel's characters, and the identity of utopia as a vision embodied in a literary work or in a social theory. These identities are slippery and extremely difficult to define. In trying to impose fixed boundaries on them and to catch their "slippery purport by the tail" (6) --to borrow the words of *The Blithedale Romance*'s narrator, Miles Coverdale -- one inevitably participates in the process of their construction, yet the constructed model of a literary genre, of a human character or of a social theory often fails to account for the complexity of an imaginative literary work, of a contradictory human character, and of an intricate utopian vision embodied in a novel or in a social theory. Hawthorne, as I intend to argue in my thesis, is aware of the enigmatic, ungraspable, "thinner than air" substance of human characters and human ideas, whose "identity" is not objective, but created by human imagination. This awareness manifests itself most intensely in the central metaphor of *The Blithedale Romance* -- the Veiled Lady.

In exploring the vast body of criticism available on *The Blithedale Romance* I have focused on two areas that I hope to bring together to achieve a unified and coherent vision of Hawthorne's design. One area includes very few books, one dissertation, and a few articles and papers dealing with the utopian content and dimension of *The Blithedale Romance*. The other critical path, hardly more substantial in terms of its critical output, deals with various psychoanalytic interpretations of the novel. The psychoanalytic approach to *The Blithedale Romance* is pursued by Frederick Crews in his book *The Sins of the Fathers*, by Monica Mueller-Cooper in her Ph.D. dissertation "Gender, Genre and Homoerotic crisis in Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* and Melville's *Pierre*," and by Allan Gardner Lloyd Smith in his book *Eve Tempted: Writing and Sexuality in Hawthorne's Fiction*. All three works feature a variety of profound and significant insights into Hawthorne's novel; their focus, however, differs from mine, for these authors make

no attempt to relate psychological and emotional issues raised in *The Blithedale Romance* to the novel's significant utopian dimension. Crews explores Hawthorne's emotional engagement in his fiction, arguing that the emotions the writer displays "are those of a self-divided, self-tormented man" (7); Mueller-Cooper focuses on the parallels and similarities between Hawthorne's novel and Melville's *Pierre*, suggesting that "both novels dramatize a crisis in the relationship between the two writers, which occurred in the summer of 1852 when Melville...made some advances toward Hawthorne which the older writer immediately rebuffed" (vi); and Smith chooses "not to deal with historical Hawthorne, an elusive and unknowable figure at this depth of analysis, but rather with the various 'Hawthornes' discoverable in the text." Smith's intention is to provoke attention "to the culture of the 'author' within which the codes for the production of meaning are inscribed, away from a reductive insistence upon overdetermination by personal experience" (5-6).

While one cannot entirely rule out the impact of Hawthorne's personal emotions on his fiction, and while it may be true that an intensely emotional "love" scene between Coverdale and Hollingsworth, judged by Henry James to be the best scene Hawthorne had ever written (128), may be deeply saturated with Hawthorne's personal feelings, my position is that throughout *The Blithedale Romance* the writer maintains a deliberate and calculated intellectual detachment from the events he describes, exercising firm control over his artistic design. This control is not recognized by the critics; even Smith, who states that his intention is to avoid "a reductive insistence upon overdetermination by personal experience," still claims that when Hawthorne refuses the reader "the satisfaction of complete knowledge" of Zenobia's true and mysterious connection to Westervelt, her purpose toward Hollingsworth, and the degree of her complicity in the plot against Priscilla, the writer evades certain issues, and "these evasions [may] register the degree of authorial perturbation over certain sorts of experience" (88). Yet in my opinion, Hawthorne's novel does not evade any issues; it effectively uses artistic means to suggest that humans do not know who they are, what they really want, and what they really believe

in. *The Blithedale Romance*, given its preoccupation with the utopian theme, is the work of the intellectual Hawthorne, rather than of the emotional one.

In approaching *The Blithedale Romance* critically, it is important to remember that the novel presents not one but two narratives, Hawthorne's and Coverdale's. And although the two narratives coincide word for word, the author and his narrator have different interests at heart. While Coverdale attempts to tell a story, Hawthorne aims at exploring and revealing how stories are created and told. *The Blithedale Romance* focuses on revealing that the human process of thinking and human perception of reality are at the same time the processes of constructing this reality to suit an individual's deeply buried and unconscious psychological and emotional needs. The human thinking process works toward the rationalization of these needs, and although Hawthorne's characters are different in terms of their sex, occupation, and social position, the pattern underlying and governing their thinking is the same.

An attempt to bring the two perspectives -- psychoanalytical and utopian -- of looking at the novel together is made by Lauren Berlant in her article "Fantasies of Utopia in *The Blithedale Romance*." One of the few critics who does not express her disappointment with the novel not being something other than it is, Berlant achieves a profound insight into the novel's intent by suggesting that

*Blithedale* stages the relationship between collective and subjective desire not simply as a similitude -- where love and community become simultaneous ends of utopian practice and projection -- but also as a site of tension (30).

Berlant's particular interest lies in exploring *The Blithedale Romance* as "a special instance of national utopian fantasy," which leads the critic to the conclusion that the Blithedale community's

historical amnesia with respect to the utopian projects that have preceded it reveals that American history has never been written or even thought. It has only been repressed (31).

Berlant's work serves as an invaluable support in my own effort to demonstrate that Hawthorne, consciously and deliberately, replaces the personal histories of major

Blithedale characters with their collective history, thus exploring the utopian subject of his novel beyond the genre boundaries of utopian satire or an autobiographical or documentary account of an actual utopian experiment. I, however, attempt to go deeper into the individual psychology of the novel's main characters to establish a connection between the fact, observed by Erik Erikson in his ground-breaking work *Childhood and Society*, "that human conscience remains partially infantile throughout life" (257) and the characters' inability to adjust themselves properly to the communal experience. Erikson's insight into the ego identity and "its anchoring in a cultural identity" (279) provides a theoretical foundation for my discussion of what Erikson calls "the alliance of superego with a high sense of cultural identity" (282). Exploring "the shadow of frustration which falls from childhood on the individual's later life -- and on his society" (277), Erikson bases his work on Freud's earlier discovery of the mechanism responsible for ego and super-ego formation. In "On Narcissism" and in "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud examines the constitutive factors of human emotional life whose combination shapes human personalities in their adult years. Freud for example relates a childhood traumatic experience of losing a love-object with the subsequent mechanism of coping with the loss by incorporating the lost object into the ego and identifying with it. The disappointment suffered from being slighted, neglected or abandoned triggers "opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce[s] an already existing ambivalence" (260). Yet the ambivalence in love relationships, which Freud maintains can be attributed sometimes to real experience, sometimes to constitutional factors, serves as an important precondition of melancholia and leads to a conflict whose resolution may culminate in a subject's depression and severely diminished capacity for social life, or even in suicide. Drawing on Freud's discoveries in the field of psychoanalysis, Judith Butler extends the area of studies of melancholia to include what the scholar calls "gender melancholia." Butler maintains that

masculine and feminine are not dispositions, as Freud sometimes argues, but indeed accomplishments, ones which emerge in tandem with the achievement of heterosexuality (135).



Asserting that gender is performative and that its performance “produces retroactively the illusion that there is an inner gender core,” Butler suggests that “rigid forms of gender and sexual identification, whether homosexual or heterosexual, appear to spawn forms of melancholy” (144). Although, in Lauren Berlant’s words, *The Blithedale Romance*, as “all of Hawthorne’s American romances displays [the author’s] resistance to theory -- about literary genre, about sex, about history”(54), the novel responds well to being treated within the framework of theoretical explorations by Freud, Butler and Erikson. In general, the psychological and emotional conflicts experienced by major Blithedale characters provide valuable support for the theories of the above listed scholars, and in those cases when this support is not forthcoming, its absence may signal the need to explore the reasons that compel Hawthorne to substitute symbolic relationships for natural ones.

I do not seek to establish what Hawthorne actually “meant” when he wrote *The Blithedale Romance*. He himself waived the responsibility for any fixed and definite meaning in his novel by admitting that

Upon my honor, I am not quite sure that I entirely comprehend my own meaning in some of these blasted allegories; but I remember that I always had a meaning -- or, at least, thought I had” (quoted by Jacobs 173).

The admission displays Hawthorne’s awareness of the basic unreliability of the human thinking process and his reluctance to impose his own judgment even on his own work.

Hawthorne’s “intellectual ambiguity,” writes Nina Baym

parallels his moral humility: when properly conscious of its small measure, the mind will not choose between interpretations of reality, knowing that all too probably it will be merely pridefully imposing its own constructs on God’s unfathomable designs (545).

The importance of *The Blithedale Romance* for the utopian tradition is not limited to Hawthorne’s insights into the psychological origin of the utopian dream or into the possibility of translating a utopian dream into reality. The novel also reveals the incorrigible human tendency to impose one’s own constructs on God’s unfathomable designs. In approaching *The Blithedale Romance*, I am interested in what the text says to modern readers and in what it says about what kind of readers we are. In my opinion, the

reason for negative evaluations of the novel, for evaluating it as a failed attempt at a melodrama or utopian satire, stems from the desire to fit *The Blithedale Romance* into the narrow confines of a specific literary genre. In other words, the critic and the reader want the novel to meet their expectations, whatever these are. The novel does thwart all expectations of placing it into a particular genre or providing resolution or definite answers to most of its mysteries. It testifies to the fact that neither critics nor readers are prepared to accept a high degree of uncertainty in a literary work, and they would rather brand it a failed attempt at something than look for a framework within which previously inconsistent and senseless elements will acquire consistency and sense.

Transcending the boundaries of literary genres, *The Blithedale Romance* reminds us of the conventionality and arbitrariness of any assumptions about how a particular literary work should be treated within the framework of a literary form. At the same time, by subverting the expectations of critics and readers alike and leaving many of them unsatisfied, the novel forces a careful reader to look into the sources of this dissatisfaction and examine its roots. My position is that the incoherence and inconsistency of the narrative so often noted and condemned by critics of *The Blithedale Romance* give way to a remarkable unity and wholeness of Hawthorne's fragmented vision, once one is prepared to forego both critically prescribed literary perspectives and readerly expected resolutions.

In Chapter 1 of my thesis I focus on some critical works on *The Blithedale Romance* which, in one way or another, contribute to my argument, yet more often than not, I cannot unreservedly agree with some of the conclusions drawn by even the most perceptive of the critics. Acknowledging that Hawthorne's novel cannot be successfully attributed to any one of the literary genres whose elements are easily detected in the book, I explore the novel's identity as it manifests itself in its mixed and all-embracing genre. My position is that, far from failing to integrate various part of the novel together, Hawthorne maintains a very tight control over his work, its form and content. As Chapter 1 explores the elusiveness of the novel's literary genre, attributing it to the elusiveness of human

identity, Chapter 2 focuses on the elusiveness of human identity, on the ambiguity of human actions, perceptions and mind-sets, on the basic unawareness of the main characters of the novel of their inner motivation. My position is that it is not only Zenobia, as Hawthorne states in his Preface, who bruises “herself against the narrow limitations of her sex”(2). The socially imposed gender roles and socially prescribed behavior are equally harmful for men and women alike, preventing them from realizing their full potential and destroying the “self-expressive energies” of their souls. From the ambiguity of human identity I turn in Chapter 3 to the ambiguity of the identity of human ideas and ideals, as being rationalizations of deeply buried, contradictory and confused emotional and psychological needs. This brings me to the conclusion which I believe coincides with the direction of Hawthorne’s thought: communities are never actually based on the principles they proclaim, but on unconsciously shared fantasies. This conclusion appears to question Hawthorne’s much-quoted prefatory statement concerning the lack of even “slightest pretensions” on his part “to illustrate a theory, or elicit a conclusion, favorable or otherwise, in respect to Socialism”(1). Yet there is no inconsistency between this statement and the novel’s implicit message: the writer refuses to illustrate a theory or elicit a conclusion merely because he does not know what Socialism is.

## Chapter 1: The Identity of Genre

It is perhaps only fitting that *The Blithedale Romance*, whose status in the canon of nineteenth-century American literature is less secure than the status of its author, Nathaniel Hawthorne, should provoke widely different opinions. Henry James, for instance, finds the novel to be “the lightest, the brightest, the liveliest...of unhumorous fictions,” and also “very charming”(125). James is very far from disregarding the tragic denouement of the novel; indeed he recognizes that there is “nothing so tragical in all Hawthorne as the suicide of Zenobia; and yet, on the whole,” he goes on to say, “the effect of the novel is to make one think more agreeably of life” (126). Unfortunately, James does not pause to elaborate on this point, and we never learn why he thought that the novel which ends in a suicide of one major character and in moral and spiritual degradation of two others still makes “one think more agreeably of life.” James’s hopeful opinion of *The Blithedale Romance* is rarely, if ever, shared by other critics. Unlike James, Roy Male finds that “*The Blithedale Romance* is Hawthorne’s most pessimistic book,” explaining the novel’s dark pessimism as the result of the characters attaining no tragic understanding (13). Irreconcilable as these two critical opinions on the same novel appear to be, they tell us less about *The Blithedale Romance* than about *how* it was read by the two critics. Above all other perceivable merits of the novel, James was appreciative of Hawthorne’s exquisite prose and of the abundance in the novel of “deep and delicate” touches, such as Coverdale’s description of Priscilla’s foot-races across the grass (129-130). Male, on the other hand, read the novel on the alert for Hawthorne’s tragic vision, focusing on the characters’ mistaken belief “that the tragic rhythm of the seasons could be obliterated, that winter could be converted into May through intellectual effort and withdrawal to new lands” (13). Both approaches reveal the arbitrariness of the method adopted for the critical study of Hawthorne’s novel and both provide a wealth of illuminating critical insights into it. Yet it is ironic that *The Blithedale Romance* should so often be severely criticized by the

critics who fail to recognize the limitations of their adopted critical method. Ironic, because Hawthorne himself provides a most revealing description of how opinions are formed and characters constructed. *Blithedale's* narrator, Miles Coverdale, recognizes the subjectivity of human opinions in the following passage:

if we take the freedom to put a friend under our microscope, we thereby insulate him from many of his true relations, magnify his peculiarities, inevitably tear him into parts, and, of course, patch him very clumsily together again. What wonder, then, should we be frightened by the aspect of a monster, which, after all -- though we can point to every feature of his deformity in the real personage -- may be said to have been created mainly by ourselves! (69)

This characterization process is reminiscent of some critical approaches to the novel, which lead critics to offer the reader monsters of their own making by insulating the book from many of its true relations, magnifying its peculiarities, tearing it into parts, but not bothering to patch it even clumsily together.

Despite the widely different opinions the novel elicits, this similarity of method underlying various critical approaches results in the emergence of one almost universally heard complaint about *The Blithedale Romance* : many critics regret that the novel fails to be something different than what it is. Even a critic as appreciative of Hawthorne's genius as Henry James, in lamenting that "there is no satire whatever in the *Romance*; the quality is almost conspicuous by its absence," regrets that Hawthorne missed the opportunity "for describing unhackneyed specimens of human nature," and "the queer specimen of the reforming genus with which he must have been surrounded" (90, 129, 90). Other Hawthorne critics, even the best of them, are sometimes much less sympathetic. Robert Elliott, who disagrees with James and finds distinct satirical elements in *The Blithedale Romance*, considers the novel to be failed utopian satire and insists that "what is wanted at the heart of the book is the stringency of the satiric view" (77). The critic regrets that Hawthorne chose to write a romance and avoided by this choice "a moral and political judgment of socialism" (71). "Many readers of *The Blithedale Romance*," Elliott writes

have wished...that in this instance the allurements of the mysterious had given way in Hawthorne's mind to a concern for the actual; we would

gladly trade veiled ladies and handsome villains with false teeth and snake-headed canes for a Flemish portrait of Brook Farm (71).

Condemning the novel for not being “a coherent work of art, a disciplined whole that is informed by a serious moral interest,” Irving Howe goes on to say that

any critic who cares enough to write about *The Blithedale Romance* runs the risk of suggesting that it is a better book than it actually is....And with a novel so abundant in potentiality and so limited in realization there is the further danger of writing about the book it might have been -- a very great book, indeed! -- rather than the one it is. Yet by any serious reckoning *The Blithedale Romance* must be called a remarkable failure of a very remarkable writer (174).

Frederick Crews, indicating that the novel “remains the least admired of Hawthorne’s longer narratives,” comes to the conclusion that “if the book has struck nearly all its readers as confused, then it is blameworthy.” In Crews’s opinion

the book would have been better if it had been wholly devoted either to autobiographical record of Hawthorne’s disillusionment with Brook Farm utopianism or to the melodramatic and legendary events which are conjectured to form the prehistory of Coverdale’s friends (194).

To support the novel’s alleged status as blameworthy and confused, Crews refers to the memoirs of Hawthorne’s son, Julian, who mentions that the book had been extensively rewritten by Hawthorne; and that once it was finished, Hawthorne was unsure of how to title it, choosing the title from “Hollingsworth,” “Zenobia,” “Priscilla,” “Miles Coverdale’s Three Friends,” “The Veiled Lady,” “Blithedale,” and “The Arcadian Summer.” Hawthorne finally made his choice in favor of “The Blithedale Romance,” as Crews suggests, “in lack of better”(195).<sup>1</sup> Stating that “*The Blithedale Romance* is coherent enough to permit critics to call it failed utopian satire or failed melodrama or failed autobiography” (195), Crews, along with many other critics, disregards an important clue to Hawthorne’s design, contained in his “indecisiveness” about the title of his novel: the possibility that Hawthorne was more concerned with the workings of an individual mind or consciousness, than with selecting one central perspective from which to offer his narrative to readers. This insight does not entirely escape Hawthorne criticism. Charles Swann

observes that Hawthorne's text "questions a possibility of authoritative explanation" (239), and he supports his conclusion by Hawthorne's own words in *The Marble Faun*:

any narrative of human action and adventure -- whether we call it history or romance -- is certain to be a fragile handiwork more easily rent than mended. The actual experience of even the most ordinary life is full of events that never explain themselves as regards their origin or their tendency (quoted in Swann 239).

Swann goes on to indicate that this "exceptionally odd statement to come from any nineteenth-century storyteller" suggests that Hawthorne attaches "no authoritative explanatory status" to his narrative because "it cannot adequately be genetic or teleological in its account of life" (239).

In judging the novel to be "failed utopian satire or failed melodrama or failed autobiography" (Crews 195), many critics betray their own failure to discover an inner coherence to *The Blithedale Romance*, which results from their unsuccessful attempts to fit the novel into the narrow confines of a particular literary genre. Since the novel describes, to some extent, the experience of living in a real-life utopian community, where Hawthorne himself was for a short time a member, and since it is well known that Hawthorne was using his notes and diaries of the Brook Farm period to write the novel, some critics have overemphasized the autobiographical elements of the novel, erroneously identifying the novel's narrator, Miles Coverdale, with Hawthorne. Other critics assign the novel to the genre of meta-utopia. Krishnan Kumar in his otherwise remarkable study of Utopian thought, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, dismisses *The Blithedale Romance* in less than three lines as "a somewhat jaundiced memorial of [Hawthorne's] Brook Farm experience"(82). Kumar proceeds from his assumption that *The Blithedale Romance* belongs to the genre of meta-utopia, a characteristic literature of the experimental community, which embraces publications of reports, surveys and autobiographies of founders, sympathizers and observers of numerous intentional utopian communities that sprang up in the United States in the nineteenth century. Kumar provides an impressive list of these publications, indicating that they all combine "to a remarkable degree, personal

involvement and sympathy with a wide ranging outlook and refreshingly clear-sighted analysis" (82) -- all the qualities that, in Kumar's opinion, are missing in Hawthorne's novel. Kumar fails to appreciate the novel due to his excessive and hardly justified overidentification of Hawthorne with the main character of the novel, Miles Coverdale, and also because he attempts to impose the conventions and style of a certain genre onto a novel that transcends the boundaries of genres, styles, identities and characterizations.

At this point it is appropriate to say a few words about the real-life prototype for fictional Blithedale, the Brook Farm experimental community. Indicating that Brook Farmers never recognized *The Blithedale Romance* "as an accurate portrait of their little colony," Henry James observes that the Brook Farm community left almost "no traces behind it that the world in general can appreciate," except a short novel, "the main result of Brook Farm." Yet James asserts that "the principal merits [of this short novel] reside in its qualities of difference from the affair itself" (81). Strictly speaking, this is not entirely true. *The Blithedale Romance* owes more to Hawthorne's actual experience than many readers, misguided by Hawthorne's famous prefatory statement, are willing to recognize. Hawthorne does write in the Preface to the novel that "his whole treatment of the affair is altogether incidental to the main purpose of the Romance" and that he does not "put forward the lightest pretensions to illustrate a theory or elicit a conclusion, favorable or otherwise, in respect to Socialism"(1). Yet paradoxically, this statement should be both respected and challenged to understand Hawthorne's design. The writer refuses to pronounce a judgment, but this does not mean that he does not have an opinion. He merely refuses to impose his own constructs not only "on God's unfathomable designs" but also on the intellectual constructs produced by human thinking. Yet in refusing the judgment, the writer tirelessly draws the reader's attention to the "fictionality" of these constructs. In this way Hawthorne says more in his novel about the actual Brook Farm than is generally acknowledged. Richard Francis in his study of transcendental utopian communities observes that



in establishing his book is a fictionalization of the community, [Hawthorne] is also suggesting that there was something intrinsically fictional about the nature of the community itself...

This insight leads the critic to recognize that Hawthorne subtly implies that members of the Brook Farm community, as well as the Blithedale characters, sought in the community “a refuge from the pressures of everyday reality.” Acknowledging that the writer “is a past master at exploring the relativity of all judgments and at ensuring that his ambiguities are themselves ambiguous,” Francis goes on to conclude that

whatever [Hawthorne’s] own final verdict on the community -- if he ever allowed himself one --this [in Hawthorne’s words] “not very faithful shadowing” can shed some light on the communitarian impulse in general and behavior of the Brook Farmers in particular (54-55).

This light Hawthorne sheds “on the communitarian impulse in general” is precisely the focus of my study, and I will deal with this topic as far as space allows in Chapters 2 and 3.

Nevertheless, neither the Brook Farmers nor the Blithedalers would be willing to recognize that their communities served no other purpose than to provide an escape from the harsh reality of life. Brook Farm was one of the numerous intentional communities that emerged in mid nineteenth-century America. Organized for various purposes and based on different principles, these communities have been given the broader term of ‘intentional’ by Zablocki, to avoid the value loadings of such alternatives as ‘utopian community’, or ‘communistic society’ and to indicate that they involved ‘a group of persons associated together [voluntarily] for the purpose of establishing a whole way of life.” The common features shared by these communities were “common geographical location; economic interdependence; social, cultural, educational, and spiritual inter-exchange of uplift and development” (Zablocki 19). Sharing these common features with other intentional communities, Brook Farm was, however, ‘utopian’ in both the most widely used positive and negative senses of the word. It was one of the transcendentalist social experiments, an attempt to “juxtapose freedom and social organization,” aiming at extolling the individual and representing a search for communal perfection.” For Transcendentalists, a utopian

community provided a way “to connect subjective and objective, inward and outward, contemplation and action.” “Situated exactly halfway between the ideal and real,” the community served as “the bridge the Transcendentalists were seeking” (Francis xi). It sought to establish a microcosm of society to prove to the great world outside that the community’s successful experiment could be easily imitated. On the other hand, the failure of Brook Farm placed it firmly into the category of ‘utopian’ experiments in the sense that the community’s plan was unreal and was doomed to failure from the very beginning, due to its members’ inadequate understanding of forces shaping human societies and destinies. Nevertheless, Brook Farm is often considered as “the most famous intentional community in American history” (Zablocki, 326), since it involved many outstanding intellectuals of the time, who sincerely sought, in Miles Coverdale’s words, to “make the world happier” (30) than they found it.

The analogy with the Blithedale community, which was also motivated by the desire to show “mankind the example of a life governed by other than the false and cruel principles, on which human society has all along been based” (19), is hard to miss. Seeing the community as “a vista into a better system of society” (30) and believing that men are essentially free to choose their own destinies, the members of both the real-life and fictional communities pictured a society in which the means for this better system were ready at hand. They wanted to educate the world by the power of their example through creating a microcosm of life as they believed it should be lived. However, the similarities between the Brook Farmers and Blithedalers go beyond the fact that neither the real-life nor the fictitious community had a written constitution, or a clear understanding of their goals. Crucial for the understanding of Hawthorne’s design and his choice of form for the novel is a realization that both Brook Farm and Blithedale presented a “precarious stance between the world of fantasy and that of hard social reality” (Francis 52). When Hawthorne writes in the Preface to his novel that his Brook Farm experience has been “certainly the most romantic episode of his own life -- essentially a day-dream, and yet a fact,” which offered

him “an available foothold between fiction and reality”(2), the writer does not evade, as Robert Elliott suggests, “a moral and political judgment of socialism” by his choice of the form of romance (71). What Hawthorne actually attempts to do in *The Blithedale Romance* is to suggest a similarity between the fictional world which pretends to be real and the real world which is perceived and constructed as if it were fiction.

Thus, Hawthorne’s artistic choice in *The Blithedale Romance* effectively precludes the novel’s success as a meta-utopia or an autobiography, although it can hardly be denied that the novel does contain strong elements of both. Yet the critical quest for discovering the true genre of the novel does not stop there. Disagreeing with Henry James, who states that there is no satire in novel, Robert Elliott regards *The Blithedale Romance* as failed utopian satire, emphasizing the satirical tone adopted by Westervelt, by Zenobia at times, and by Miles Coverdale occasionally. Nevertheless, As Elliott argues, satire in the novel is incidental, and he concludes that “what is wanted at the heart of the book is the stringency of the satiric view” (77). In Elliott’s view *The Blithedale Romance* fails as utopian satire because Hawthorne creates Miles Coverdale as an “unreliable narrator,” and, even though there are indications that the author at times mocks Coverdale, there is no systematic evidence in the novel of Hawthorne’s deliberate “ironic remove” from his narrator (78). Furthermore, in the critic’s opinion, the author “provides almost no clues by which the reader could redress [Coverdale’s] unreliability” (79). And

although there are many judgments of Blithedale in the book, none of them - singly or in combination --can be said to represent Hawthorne’s own final and reliable judgment (76).

Elliott sees this lack of commitment to any judgment on the part of Hawthorne as a distinctive shortcoming of the novel, resulting in “a major weakness of the work” (76). The critic further argues that since Hawthorne evaded the discussion of “the political and sociological issues posed by Brook Farm” (71) and refused “to judge what he had lived” (83), the discussion of utopianism in *The Blithedale Romance* emerges as “brief and abstract,” bearing on Blithedale “in only the most casual way” (82). Hawthorne’s “choice

of romance as the form to incorporate his material gave him at least superficial justification for evading these issues" (83), yet even in his choice of form Hawthorne "failed to achieve harmony," for

a radical incoherence exists at the heart of *The Blithedale Romance*: the Veiled Lady -- Fauntleroy -- Westervelt business has no meaningful relation with the thematic interests of the work, nor do these interests reveal themselves in notable harmony (79).

By refusing the role of judge, Hawthorne misses the chance "to unify the ideological material with which he worked"(79); he makes "the aesthetic choice [which is] at the same time a moral choice." "It is impossible not to wish," Elliott concludes, "that [Hawthorne] had chosen differently" (83).

Although I do not agree with Elliott's critical opinion on the novel, his discussion of *The Blithedale Romance* raises important issues that I intend to address in my thesis: the novel's relation to the issues of utopia, Hawthorne's choice of the romance form for his novel, and the role of "the Veiled Lady -- Fauntleroy -- Westervelt business," which, in my opinion, bears a most meaningful relation to the thematic interests of the work. Elliott is right in asserting the novel is not utopian satire, and in stressing the fact of Hawthorne's deliberate choice of the form of romance, yet it is hard to agree that the novel fails in being something it has never aspired to be in the first place. It is also doubtful that in choosing the romance form for the novel, Hawthorne was motivated by the decision to avoid the responsibility of pronouncing a judgment.

Although, as Elliott indicates, Hawthorne deliberately chose the form of romance for his novel, *The Blithedale Romance* has never fully succeeded, in critical opinion, as melodrama either. Hawthorne, however, did not entirely ignore, as Elliott asserts, the demands of the reading public. Structurally, the form of romance the writer adopts for his novel represents, as do many other decisions the writer takes for this novel, a compromise between his own creative demands and the expectations of the reading public. As Monika Mueller-Cooper indicates, Hawthorne was not indifferent to how well his books sold; he made a living by his writing, and *The Blithedale Romance* featuring "dark" and "fair"

ladies and seemingly “supernatural” occurrences, was deliberately conceived to contain strong elements borrowed from the conventions of contemporary popular “sentimental” romances (1). Mueller-Cooper points out that this genre in mid-nineteenth-century America was the domain of female fiction writers, and Hawthorne borrowed the conventions of the sentimental romance “to crack the lucrative market of sentimental fiction.” However, even though economic considerations forced Hawthorne “to adopt some aspects of the style of the day, [he] refused to succumb entirely to the genre by arming” his novel with a subtext “that viciously undermine[s] the credibility of romance.” Thus even in following some conventions and providing the required surprise ending to the book, Hawthorne, as the critic argues, figuratively “rapes” the genre. By making Coverdale both his narrator and a writer, albeit a minor one, by disrupting the storyline at points “where the readers expect the continuation of the main plot,” and by relying on “the symbolic significance of other artforms,” Hawthorne draws attention to the narrative process itself and produces a novel that comments upon its own fictionality by focusing on the process of producing fiction (Mueller-Cooper 15, 13). For the sake of my argument it is important to note here that in refusing to follow romantic conventions in the story undeviatingly, Hawthorne forces the reader to approach his novel intellectually rather than emotionally. His focus on the fictionality of his narrative indicates that the artistic concerns that motivate his writing are not generated by his desire to represent reality faithfully or to comply with the demands of a genre. These concerns revolve, instead, around our universal human tendency to construct our human reality in the same fashion in which a writer constructs fiction.

The use of other artforms in the story suggests for example that the characters of the novel, Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla, are not, as Nina Baym observes, exactly “real”: they are the products of Coverdale’s imagination (548). In Chapter 21, “An Old Acquaintance” Hawthorne describes a painting of a drunk man hanging on the wall of a bar-room:

in an obscure corner of the saloon, there was a little picture -- excellently done, moreover -- of a ragged, bloated New England toper, stretched out on

a bench, in the heavy, apoplectic sleep of drunkenness. The death-in-life was too well portrayed. You smelt the funny liquor that had brought on this syncope. Your only comfort lay in the forced reflection, that, real as he looked, the poor caitiff was but imaginary, a bit of painted canvass, whom no delirium tremens, nor so much as a retributive headache, awaited, on the morrow (176).

This passage calls attention to the different levels of fictionality in both Hawthorne's and Coverdale's narratives. Hawthorne's characters, real as they look, are but imaginary: there is no physical reality behind their description. For Coverdale, however, the fictionality is different; his characters are imaginary in a different sense: despite their physical reality for him, what he actually knows about them is the product of his own intellectual construction, as he indicates in a passage I quoted at the beginning of Chapter 1. Yet the mechanism used by the author and by the narrator is the same -- they both construct the characters invented by the former and patched together clumsily as a result of cool observation by the latter. This significant passage provides important clues as to how the novel should be read and testifies that Hawthorne maintains firm control over his deliberate artistic design. The writer establishes and maintains a carefully controlled distance from his narrator. This distance, even if it is not consistent in terms of what Coverdale says, is firmly established through how Coverdale acts. He is shown to be slow to respond to appeals to his generosity but fast to respond to appeals to his curiosity: when Old Moodie asks him for a favor at the very first chapter of the novel, Coverdale responds "in a tone that must have expressed but little alacrity of beneficence," although he was ready, as he says, "to do the old man any amount of kindness involving no special trouble to" himself. Yet when Coverdale's curiosity is incited, he becomes "really anxious to be of service" to Old Moodie (7). This passage, along with many others, indicates that Coverdale's self-analysis does not include a clear comprehension of his motives. Although he is on the eve of his quest to benefit humankind, he hesitates at the prospect of rendering a small service to one of its representatives for fear that this will result in some inconvenience to himself. Hawthorne thus maintains his authorial distance from his narrator by manipulating

Coverdale's narrative in such a way as to provide clues to the real dynamics behind Coverdale's actions.

At the same time Hawthorne refuses to provide credible and consistent psychological portraits of Blithedale's main characters. Their identities are admittedly constructed in the manner outlined by Coverdale in his description of creating a character by patching together a monster (69). Richard Hull makes a fascinating connection between Michel Foucault's work, its application by literary critics to the novel, and Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*. He suggests that when Hawthorne refuses to characterize, he is consciously avoiding "playing cop," operating "an aesthetic and ethic of not knowing" his characters (33). "This device of the narrator," Hull argues,

who in the end does not know and does not want to know avoids complicity in power schemes as *The Blithedale Romance* depicts the possibility of deliberately abstaining from characterization (44).

But while it is certainly true that Hawthorne himself avoids any complicity in power schemes, the point he makes in the novel is not motivated by an ethical decision to abstain from characterization. Hawthorne abstains from characterization because he insists on the human inability to know, and on the human tendency to shape one's concepts and ideas in accordance with deeply buried unconscious emotional and psychological needs.

Remarkably, the fact that many of Hawthorne's critics find *The Blithedale Romance* disappointing, mostly for alleged incoherence and inconsistency, does not diminish the value and depth of their illuminating insights into the heart of Hawthorne's fiction. Their observations about the novel often provide important clues about how the novel should be read, yet for some reason they choose to disregard their own insights, placing the emphasis somewhere else. Thus Irving Howe writes that

The dualism that controls almost everything in *The Blithedale Romance* is that between subject and object, narrator and event. At several points where the novel breaks down, the trouble is not merely of a literary structure, it also involves a radical uncertainty as to the possibilities of knowledge (166).

Similarly, Frederick Crews misses an opportunity to capitalize on his own insight when he notes that

Hawthorne's fictional world is beset with incongruities. Characters sincerely explain their motives, apparently with Hawthorne's concurrence, and then reveal quite opposite motives that are never discussed (171).

Crews rightly senses indecisiveness or ambiguity at the heart of the novel, but he attributes it to Hawthorne's "customary equivocation about social and moral ideas," which the author extends in *The Blithedale Romance*

to include such apparently elementary matters as his moral estimate of his characters, his notions of their feelings about one another, and even his factual knowledge of their previous lives (195).

The ambiguity at the heart of the novel has not, however, prevented a limited number of critics from seeing the novel as a unified whole. Roy Male, who finds the novel to be "perfectly achieved"(40), attributes the novel's status as "one of the most underrated works in American fiction" to a dominant tendency in Hawthorne criticism, which, until recently, "often dwelled upon such peripheral matters as whether or not Zenobia resembled Margaret Fuller." In Male's critical opinion the novel is "as relevant in the age of extrasensory perception as it was in the era of mesmerism." Male suggests that

now that the demands for a prosaic realism in fiction have receded, it is unnecessary to labor the point that *The Blithedale Romance* is not an ineffectual effort at a documentary of Brook Farm, not is it merely Hawthorne's satirical comment on philanthropist and reform movements (140).

Indicating that critical attempts "to find form in [*The Blithedale Romance*] -- aside from consistent themes, tone, and meaning -- has been unrewarding," Kelley Griffith, Jr., correctly, in my opinion, observes that "the form from which Hawthorne works in *Blithedale*...is entirely dependent on the very restricted point of view of Miles Coverdale, not on the omniscience of Hawthorne" (15). Arguing that "the erratic structure of Coverdale's narrative relates to Coverdale's personality, not Hawthorne's," the critic concludes that

the form Hawthorne uses for the book...cannot be defined in traditional structural terms. The plot does not proceed logically simply because



Hawthorne did not intend it to do so. The form of *Blithedale*, rather, is like that of an interior monologue, which represents the narrator's illogical thought process and his attempts to shift events in his mind until he can settle on an arrangement satisfactory to himself (16).

Kelley Griffith, Jr., suggests that, reflecting Coverdale's state of mind, rather than Hawthorne's, the novel can be divided into halves:

In the first half (up to Chapter xv), the narrative moves logically...The second half, however, is extraordinary for its chaotic ordering of incidents and its refusal to fructify many of the crucial developments of the first half. The reason for this difference between the halves lies in Hawthorne's use of Coverdale's dreams. The first part we can accept for the most part as real; the second half we may see for the most part as dream (17).

Coverdale's dream in the second half of the novel is a wish-fulfilling dream which accounts for the psychological inconsistency of the characters of Zenobia and Hollingsworth. Hawthorne uses the first part of the novel to expose the problem which structures Coverdale's perception of reality and the second half to expose the compromise Coverdale reaches between his emotional needs for autonomy and subjection.

My position is that Hawthorne's choice of the romance form and of the title for his novel is misleading, ironic and ... justified at the same time. His reasons for treating his subject in this form, not to discount completely the economic incentive, were most likely manifold. Hawthorne appears to observe certain conventions of the romantic genre only to subvert them, whereas the distinct elements of psychological drama, realistic narrative, and autobiographical details produce a mixed literary form. The mixed form is warranted by the approach the writer pursues in creating his characters. Coverdale, Zenobia, Hollingsworth and Priscilla are not superior to other people or to their environment, as, Frye suggests, the typical heroes of *romance* should be; nor are they inferior in power or intelligence, which would require an ironic mode of their presentation. Being superior neither to other people nor to their environment these characters are clearly like us -- the readers, -- and that, in Frye's classification, requires their appearance in comedy or realistic fiction (Anatomy 33-34). Though Coverdale's acute intellectual faculties, Zenobia's extraordinary beauty, and Hollingsworth's irresistible charisma clearly place these

characters above rank-and-file-mortals, Coverdale's deplorable spying habits, Zenobia's betrayal of Priscilla, and Hollingsworth's emotional blindness expose them as inadequate and weak human beings whose emotional and intellectual capacities are limited. This ambiguity in presenting the novel's characters explains why James deplors the absence of satire in the novel, whereas Elliott detects satirical elements in the novel yet states that the novel lacks "the stringency of the satiric view."

Hence, Hawthorne mixes all the modes of literary representation or all literary genres in one novel, but still insists that his book is a romance. "A great romancer," says Frye, "should be examined in terms of conventions he chose" (Anatomy 305). In Frye's view,

the forms of prose fiction are mixed, like racial strains in human beings, not separable like the sexes. In fact the popular demand in fiction is always for a mixed form, a romantic novel just romantic enough for the reader to project his libido on the hero and his anima on the heroine, and just novel enough to keep these projections in a familiar world (305).

Critical attempts to see the novel as utopian satire, melodrama or autobiography indicate that Hawthorne does produce a form of mixed fiction in *The Blithedale Romance*. Appropriately for a novel of mixed genre the book ends with a funeral and a wedding. The tragic and the comic are closely intertwined. Zenobia's death, however, in the highest tragic sense represents a devastating waste of extraordinary human potential, whereas the union of Hollingsworth and Priscilla is fruitless: it will bear no children, either literally or figuratively. The triumph of "fair" Priscilla over "dark" Zenobia leaves her with a broken and devastated man. But even more significantly, *The Blithedale Romance* flaunts romantic conventions by creating a set of main characters who are denied fulfillment and with whom the reader does not want to identify. There is a significant incoherence between the requirements of the romantic genre and the content of this novel: the protagonists' aspirations are romantic, but they are denied the fulfillment of their wishes. Their quest, that in a romance, according to Frye, embodies "the search of the libido, or desiring self for a fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but still contain this reality"

(Anatomy 193), is not a successful quest. Even if one could point to the fact that the form of *The Blithedale Romance* is dialectical, as, Frye maintains, the central form of romance should be with “everything ... focused on a conflict between the hero and the enemy” (Anatomy 187), there is no “exhaltation of the hero,” in Frye’s words, at the end of the book. Neither Coverdale nor Zenobia “survive” the conflict. Moreover, the central conflict of the book is actually between Zenobia and Hollingsworth with Coverdale being merely caught in between the two warring principles: between the “feminine” and “masculine,” softness and rigidity, warmth and coldness, variety and single-purposeness. Neither masculine nor feminine Coverdale presents an androgen in whom the persistent suppression of both the masculine and feminine attributes paralyzes his strength and creative potential.

At the same *The Blithedale Romance* maintains its important ties with the romantic genre. Hawthorne’s book remains true to what Frye calls “the perennially childlike quality of romance,” which “is marked by its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some imaginative golden age in time or space”(Anatomy 186). The quest, the element that Frye maintains gives literary form to the romance, does represent the book’s major adventure, for the novel’s characters are searching for one true system. Hawthorne also maintains what Frye calls “the essential difference between novel and romance” in his conception of characterization. “The romancer,” states Frye, “does not attempt to create “real people” so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes” (Anatomy 304). Hawthorne’s approach to characterization will be discussed more substantially in Chapter 2 of this study.

“Hawthorne and Romance,” writes Michael Tanner, is “a subject to drown in” (viii), and the relationship between the writer and his preferred genre in *The Blithedale Romance* is far from being a simple one. “The book’s concomitant suppression of the methods of romance” (Brodhead 96), does not diminish the importance of the genre to Hawthorne’s narrative technique. Brodhead writes convincingly that,

the relation of author to genre...is best described not as a productive marriage but as a protracted affair, beginning with the experience of new and strange pleasures, continuing through a period of accumulating misunderstandings and mistrusts, and culminating in a discovery of mutual betrayal (4).

Yet Hawthorne remains true to his "marriage" to romance in a profound and significant way: he subverts the conventionalities of the genre, dispensing with "fantastic, normally invisible personalities or powers" (Frye 64), but he retains the spirit and method of composition. The novel is a romance in its narrative technique, in its use of "some form of simile: analogy, significant association, incidental accompanying imagery" (Anatomy 137), which distinguishes the romantic mode from myth or realistic mode. Hawthorne uses analogies, imagery and associations both for characterization purposes and for communicating his ideas.

The metaphor of the Veiled Lady is relevant not only with respect to people's veiled and unknown identities but also with respect to ideas and concepts whose "identity" is as ungraspable as that of the human personality. By associating the Veiled Lady phenomenon, or mesmerism, described by the author as "either the birth of a new science, or the revival of an old humbug" (5), with the Blithedalers' plan to reform the world, the writer subtly suggests that this plan can also be "either the birth of a new science, or the revival of an old humbug." Hawthorne never explicitly states what he thinks about the idea of a new social arrangement that the Blithedalers pursue; he uses instead the literary devices of metaphor and juxtaposition to communicate his subtle thoughts to the reader. Watching the snow falling from the sky on his way to Blithedale, Coverdale observes that the snowfall alighted on the side-walk

only to be molded into the impress of somebody's patched boot or overshoe. Thus, the track of an old conventionalism was visible on what was freshest from the sky (11).

The sad and tragic end of Zenobia and Coverdale, as well as the failure of the Blithedale community are foreshadowed in this small passage, for their "freshest" approach to

reforming the world will be crushed by “an old conventionalism” of their deeply ingrained and unquestioned beliefs and attitudes of which they are not aware.

Another key to reading the novel is provided in a passage where Coverdale describes his impression of Priscilla a-maying with Zenobia. Zenobia decks Priscilla out with all the variety of sylvan ornament:

being done with a great deal of taste, it made [Priscilla] look more charming than I should have thought possible, with my recollection of the wan, frost-nipt girl, as heretofore described. Nevertheless, among those fragrant blossoms, and conspicuously, too, had been such a weed of evil odor and ugly aspect, which, as soon as I detected it, destroyed the effect of the rest. There was a gleam of latent mischief -- not to call it deviltry -- in Zenobia's eye, which seemed to indicate a slightly malicious purpose in the arrangement (59)

While Zenobia reveals that there is a “weed of evil odor and ugly aspect” in her own character when she tells Coverdale that seeing “a creature so happy” “provokes one's malice” (59), Coverdale displays his unseemly side when he tortures Priscilla, who is in love with Hollingsworth, by the eloquent description of how lovely Zenobia looks next to Hollingsworth. Yet even more significantly this passage illustrates a deep ambiguity that both Coverdale and Zenobia experience with respect to other people or to ideas and social visions. Being artistically a very densely and masterfully executed literary work, *The Blithedale Romance* often allows a careful reader to recognize the most important themes and concerns of the novel as a whole in a small passage, like the one just quoted above.

But perhaps in terms of the particular focus of my study, one of the most significant metaphors employed by Hawthorne in *The Blithedale Romance* links Priscilla, the novel's “fair” heroine, who stands metaphorically for the ideal of community (Jacobs 176), to death and decay. Priscilla, called by Coverdale “the gentle parasite” (123), is significantly associated with the image of the vine that lovingly strangles in its embrace “some of the pine-branches” forming Coverdale's hermitage:

A hollow chamber, of rare seclusion, had been formed by the decay of some of the pine branches, which the vine had lovingly strangled with its embrace, burying them from the light of day in an aerial sepulcher of its own leaves (98).

Hawthorne returns to this imagery in his description of Priscilla's adoration of her unknown sister

Priscilla's love grew, and tended upward, and twined itself perseveringly around this unseen sister; as a grape-vine might strive to clamber out of a gloomy hollow among the rocks, and embrace a young tree in the sunny warmth above (186).

Priscilla's association with death and decay not only foreshadows Zenobia's tragic end, but also highlights the novel's central conflict. Priscilla stands as a symbol of desexualized and dispirited femininity; her "spirituality" is predicated upon a ruthless suppression of assertive femininity. The novel unfolds according to the conventional dialectics of romance: conflict of darker forces against lighter ones. Yet the novel, contrary to conventions of romance, does not end with the victory of the life-asserting principle. The darker forces, which stand for militant and oppressive "masculinity" suppressing ruthlessly life-giving "femininity," win. To see how Hawthorne achieves his design one should consistently distinguish between the writer and his narrator.

In approaching *The Blithedale Romance* critically it is important to remember that the novel presents not one but two narratives, Hawthorne's and Coverdale's, and, although they coincide word for word, they operate at two different levels: while Coverdale is preoccupied with telling a story, Hawthorne is preoccupied with the workings of an individual mind and with the process of how stories are composed and told. Significantly, Frye, who recognizes six isolatable phases in romance, assigns *The Blithedale Romance* to the fifth phase which corresponds to the fifth phase of comedy. He describes it in the following way

it is a reflective, idyllic view of experience from above, in which the movement of the natural cycle has usually a prominent place. ... the mood is the contemplative withdrawal from or sequel to action rather than a youthful preparation for it. It is ... an erotic world, but it presents experience as comprehended, and not as a mystery (Anatomy 202).

Apart from providing yet another demonstration of the infinite variety of ways in which *The Blithedale Romance* is read by critics, Frye makes the mistake routinely made by other critics, of identifying Hawthorne with Coverdale. Coverdale's hermitage, his "leafy cave,

high upward into the air”(98), does allow him a place of withdrawal from society and an excellent observation stand:

Even where I sat, about midway between the root and the topmost bough, my position was lofty enough to serve as an observatory, not for starry investigations, but for those sublunary matters in which lay a lore as infinite as that of the planets (99).

Yet Coverdale never moves any closer to actually comprehending experience, which throughout the novel remains a deep mystery for him. Nor is his contemplative withdrawal from action a deliberate and mature choice. He attempts to structure his comprehension of experience in the same manner in which a writer would compose a romance. Sending a message for Priscilla with a bird which flew past his tree, Coverdale confesses that he does not care for Priscilla “for her realities;” after all she is only a “poor little seamstress,” “but for the fancywork with which” his imagination has “idly decked her out” (100). Coverdale’s isolation and contemplation thus does not serve to embrace experience but to avoid it and embellish it with idle fancywork. The world that Coverdale creates is best described by that phase of romance that Frye isolates as the second one:

the second phase brings us to the innocent youth of the hero, a phase most familiar to us from the story of Adam and Eve in the Eden before Fall. In literature this phase presents a pastoral and Arcadian world, generally a pleasant wooded landscape, full of glades, shaded valleys, murmuring brooks, and other images closely linked with the female or maternal aspect of sexual imagery....It is often a world of magic or desirable law, and it tends to center on a youthful hero, still overshadowed by parents, surrounded by youthful companions. The archetype of erotic innocence is less commonly marriage than the kind of “chaste” love that precedes marriage; the love of brother for sister, or of two boys for each other. Hence, though in later phases it is often recalled as a lost happy time or Golden Age, the sense of being close to a moral taboo is very frequent, as it is of course in the Eden story itself (Anatomy 200).

This passage provides for us a fruitful opportunity to examine Hawthorne’s design in using a romantic setting for his book. *The Blithedale Romance* does not describe “a world of magic or desirable law,” yet it describes an attempt by the novel’s characters to build a world of desirable law. Young Coverdale’s innocence -- his bachelorhood is convincingly shown by Lauren Berlant to stand for his virginity -- his preference for “spiritual” Priscilla over carnal Zenobia, his “brotherly” attachment to Hollingsworth, his obsession with

Zenobia's sexuality and his worry that Zenobia's sexuality can "corrupt" Hollingsworth, reveal that sexuality is equated by Coverdale with corruption, with the Fall that expelled humanity from Paradise. Coverdale runs from experience he unconsciously equates with sexuality; his celibacy metaphorically stands for his immaturity and his desire to remain a child in the prelapsarian world. Yet this insight is allowed to the reader only because Hawthorne writes a different kind of romance. Frye is not completely wrong in noticing "the mood of contemplative withdrawal from...action" in *The Blithedale Romance*; yet this mood is established by Hawthorne, not Coverdale, and it can hardly be described as an "idyllic view of experience from above."

Coverdale pictures a world where the unconscious suppression of sexuality leads to the suppression of femininity. Therefore, the world of "pleasant wooded landscape, full of glades, shaded valleys, murmuring brooks, and other images closely linked with the female or maternal aspect of sexual imagery" is plagued in Coverdale's romance by images of death, decay and frustration. The womb-like security of Coverdale's natural hermitage in the passage I quoted above is not free from the image of decay brought by a loving embrace, and in the only passage where Coverdale speaks of Mother Earth in his narrative he presents an ambiguous picture of nature's maternal aspect. In describing how the Blithedale brethren spend hallowed days when they rested from their labors, Coverdale says,

others went a little way into the woods, and threw themselves on Mother Earth, pillowing their heads on a heap of moss, the green decay of an old log; and dropping asleep, the humble-bees and mosquitoes sung and buzzed about their ears, causing the slumberers to twitch and start, without awakening (118).

This image has profound implications for the thematic interest of my study. David Bleich in *Utopia: The Psychology of a Cultural Fantasy* stresses what he calls "the masculine character of the utopian fantasy." Bleich understands the utopian fantasy "as something peculiarly masculine, or gender-specific, and decidedly unfeminine, because of the imagery of Mother Earth or Mother nature as perceived by all the (masculine) utopists" that he



discusses in his book (3). While there is something disturbing in Bleich's gender-specific approach to utopia, the connection Bleich makes between the imagery of Mother Earth in writings of utopists and masculinity provides an interesting direction for the discussion of *The Blithedale Romance's* utopian content. It is significant that both Coverdale and Hollingsworth, whose utopian fantasy, according to Bleich, is supposed to be motivated by an unconscious desire for a symbiosis with the maternal, are at the same time exhorting, oppressing and suppressing the maternal and the feminine both in their own nature and in the world at large. Can the suppression of the feminine account for the failure of utopias?

## Chapter 2: The Identity of Characters

I argued in Chapter 1 of my thesis that Hawthorne's choice of the romance form for his novel is closely linked to his approach to the characterization of the main actors of the Blithedale drama. Starting with a broad, schematic introduction to his characters, Hawthorne describes Hollingsworth, Zenobia, Priscilla, and Miles Coverdale as

the self-concentrated Philanthropist; the high spirited Woman, bruising herself against the narrow limitations of her sex; the weakly Maiden, whose tremulous nerves endow her with Sibylline attributes; [and] the Minor Poet, beginning life with strenuous aspirations, which die out with his youthful fervor (2-3).

It is important to note that, on the one hand, in his characterization of the book's main actors, Hawthorne observes the difference that Frye recognizes between novel and romance. "The romancer," says Frye, "does not attempt to create "real people" so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes" (Anatomy 304). On the other hand, as the novel starts, the writer provides a wealth of psychological details which makes each of his main characters appear plausible and real. Remarkably, however, the wealth of psychological details Hawthorne provides for his characters does not diminish the value of their broad introductory characterization. Frederick Crews notices that "it is precisely because Hawthorne is not afraid to schematize, to stress underlying patterns of compulsion rather than superficial eccentricities, that he is able to explore the depths of our *common* nature." The emphasis in Hawthorne's narrative falls, as Crews rightly points out, "on buried motives which are absolutely binding because they are unavailable to conscious criticism" (17). Although the characters in the novel "sincerely explain their motives, apparently with Hawthorne's concurrence," they subsequently "reveal quite opposite motives that are never discussed" (Crews 171). Nevertheless, although they are undeniably different, the Blithedale characters, as humanity in general, share some significant common features: they display similar patterns of thinking and behavior, and their human needs are similar.

The wealth of psychological detail on the one hand, and broad, schematic characterization on the other reveal Hawthorne's design to demonstrate how inadequate any attempts at human characterization can be and how little these attempts reveal of the actual character. As the novel concludes, the characters of Zenobia and Hollingsworth come to an end which is inconsistent with their psychological characterization. Zenobia is too smart and too independent to be crushed by the loss of the affection of a man she comes to see in an entirely different light, whereas Hollingsworth is too selfish and cruel to be destroyed by the suicide of a woman he has flung aside. The inconsistency between detailed psychological portraits of the Blithedale characters and their final destiny may suggest at least two different, but equally significant and relevant conclusions for Coverdale's and Hawthorne's narratives. In Coverdale's narrative, the actors of his drama act in accordance with his own deeply buried needs, whereas Hawthorne's narrative suggests that no amount of psychological characterization can result in an accurate comprehension of a human character. The psychological truth in the presentation of his characters is not Hawthorne's aim in *The Blithedale Romance*. His aim is to show that these characters have no psychological reality; they are monsters created by the writer or the narrator. Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla are not, as Nina Baym observes, exactly "real" (548): they are the products of Coverdale's imagination. Similarly, "reality" as perceived by Zenobia, Hollingsworth and Priscilla is the product of their imagination. Any direct knowledge of what a human character is is thus impossible.

The major characters of *The Blithedale Romance* all wear masks and conceal their true identity and motives for various reasons. Yet their success in deluding others pales in comparison with their success in deluding themselves. The author grants the reader a glimpse behind the veil that conceals the core of identity or the personality of his brain's creatures, yet the veil can never be completely lifted, either for the author or for the reader. Coverdale establishes this connection between the veil and the mystery of human identity in

the first chapter of the book when, in discussing Zenobia's name with old Moodie, he evokes the metaphor of the veil:

Zenobia, by-the-by, as I suppose you know, is merely her public name; a sort of mask in which she comes before the world, retaining all the privileges of privacy -- a contrivance, in short, like the white drapery of the Veiled Lady, only a little more transparent (8).

The drapery concealing the identities of all the major characters of *The Blithedale Romance* never acquires full transparency.

The impossibility of knowing the human character and the elusiveness of human identity do not preclude the commonality of human desires and the similarity of patterns underlying human behavior and human emotional dynamics. Hawthorne presents the characters in his novel as being ironically unaware of their own identities and of the motivation behind their actions. Moreover they equally lack insight into the identity and motivation of others. Coverdale's understanding of other characters in the novel is limited by his inadequate knowledge of their lives and circumstances prior to their coming to Blithedale. Intellectually, he is aware of the "deformity in the real personage" caused inevitably by his mental process of analyzing his friends and putting them under his microscope. Coverdale realizes that in the process of analysis, he is actually constructing a character, "patching him very clumsily together" (69). What Coverdale is not aware of is that the process of construction is governed by his own emotional and psychological needs. It is according to these needs that Coverdale assigns parts to the actors of the drama that occurs, as Nina Baym points out, "on the stage of his own psyche" (Baym 547). *The Blithedale Romance* thus

realizes a particular character's imagined world. What Blithedale "is" is inseparable from what it is to Coverdale, for nothing is known in the book but what is known by him....The book's reality is Coverdale's world; ultimately he is its only character and everything that happens in the novel must be understood in reference to him. Of course *Blithedale* has characters, but so do allegories in which characters represent fragments of the psyche. Of course, too, *Blithedale* incorporates much cold fact in its fantasy, but so do day-dreams (547).

Coverdale thus projects fragments of his own psyche, his feelings, needs and emotions on each character of the novel, and he constructs them in accordance with his needs. His emotions, feelings and needs are, however, confused and contradictory, and Coverdale's attitude to each character in the narrative contains a "weed of evil odor and ugly aspect," being colored by a profound ambivalence. Yet apart from representing different parts of Coverdale's own personality, the Blithedale characters also play significant roles in re-enacting his unresolved childhood conflict and shedding light on the emotional dynamics governing Coverdale's actions. Coverdale comes to Blithedale with a solemnly declared intent to establish a brotherhood and sisterhood of like-minded individuals who, united by love, will be able to show humanity that life can be governed on different principles. Starting with a generous aim to see the whole world as one big happy family, Coverdale drastically narrows the boundaries of this world to one small fantasy family composed of Hollingsworth as Father, Zenobia as Mother, Priscilla as Daughter, and himself as Son. Within this fantasy family Hawthorne explores suspicion, distrust and betrayal that appear to be inescapably woven in the fabric of family relationships. Yet the writer's concern in *The Blithedale Romance* goes beyond the exploration of inevitable tensions generated within the human family. Hawthorne expands his vision to the level of society at large: the writer suggests that the behavior of an adult personality in society is shaped by his or her unresolved childhood conflicts. This last insight is of a paramount importance for my discussion of the utopian dimension of the novel in Chapter 3.

Incorporating much cold fact in the fantasy, dreams play an important role in *The Blithedale Romance*. Moreover, the second part of the narrative, as I have noted in Chapter 1, actually presents a dream. This dream, as I intend to argue, is a wish-fulfilling dream which allows Coverdale to achieve a compromise between his conflicting needs for autonomy and subjection. A dream within this larger dream, an "actual" dream that Coverdale sees and describes in Chapter 18, "The Boarding-House," provides a significant insight into the core of Coverdale's emotional conflict. Upon his first short retirement from

Blithedale, Coverdale discovers that his thoughts are still dominated by his three friends, and in his dream he sees that

Hollingsworth and Zenobia, standing on either side of my bed, had bent across it to exchange a kiss of passion. Priscilla, beholding this -- for she seemed to be peeping in at the chamber window -- had melted gradually away, and left only the sadness of her expression in my heart. There it still lingered, after I awoke; one of those unreasonable sadness that you know not how to deal with, because it involves nothing for common sense to clutch (153).

Significantly, Coverdale sees this dream the night after he spends a rainy evening in the room of his hotel observing through the window the life of the inhabitants of the boarding-house across the street. Some elements of the scene he observes are incorporated in the above quoted dream:

At a window at a next story below, two children prettily dressed, were looking out. By-and-by, a middle-aged gentlemen came softly behind them, kissed the little girl, and playfully pulled the little boy's ear. It was a papa, no doubt, just come in from his counting-room or office; and anon appeared mamma, stealing as softly behind papa, as he had stolen behind the children, and laying her hand on his shoulder to surprise him. Then followed a kiss between papa and mamma, but a noiseless one; for the children did not turn their heads (150-151).

The twice repeated scene of parental kiss being exchanged when the children do not see, or are not supposed to see, betrays Coverdale's focus on the parental sexual relationship of which children form no part and his anxiety at being left out of the relationship. Coverdale feels excluded from the affections of the three persons he feels he cares about most, and his narrative provides important clues illuminating his emotional state:

it was impossible not to be sensible, that, while these three characters figured so largely on my private theater, I -- though probably reckoned as a friend by all -- was but a secondary or tertiary personage with either of them (70).

Coverdale's acute feeling of exclusion from the intimate family circle which does not provide for him the expected and needed emotional support is also captured in the description of his mood when he returns to Blithedale after his first short absence:

I had started on this expedition in an exceedingly somber mood, as well befitted one who found himself tending towards home, but was conscious that nobody would be quite overjoyed to greet him there (204).

Coverdale thus transfers his feelings toward the unknown members of his real family and the emotional conflict he experienced in it to Hollingsworth, Zenobia and Priscilla, because their emotional disposition and the conflict they are involved in mirror the drama of his childhood. In his relationship with Hollingsworth Coverdale re-enacts this drama and reveals that his significant relationships are based on an ambivalence that is noted, but suppressed in order to preserve the relationship. Early in their relationship Coverdale has a profound insight into Hollingsworth's character, realizing that the philanthropist's "godlike benevolence has been debased into all-devouring egotism" (71). Yet, being emotionally dependent on Hollingsworth -- after all, Coverdale openly confesses that he loved Hollingsworth (70) -- he is "often filled with remorse" (71) for entertaining such thoughts, and he tries to suppress the ambivalence that comes into the open after Coverdale loses his important friendship with Hollingsworth.

The intense and important friendship Coverdale develops with Hollingsworth, whom he respects and admires as a caring and benevolent father-figure, is threatened by Zenobia's growing romantic interest in the philanthropist. Zenobia is so beautiful and sexually attractive that Coverdale is forced to acknowledge that had Hollingsworth "been ten times a philanthropist, it seemed impossible but that one glance should melt him back into a man" (79). Zenobia's vibrant beauty does not constitute for Coverdale the object of desire, but the object of envy and fear about his own security of tenure in Hollingsworth's affections. Zenobia, conscious of Coverdale's suspicious observation, does not make a mistake when she observes that, although she seems to interest Coverdale very much, she cannot -- "or else [her] woman's instinct is for once deceived" -- reckon him "as an admirer" (47). Although the manifest content of Coverdale's dream presents him as a cold observer and outsider of the tragic consequences of the love triangle between Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla, Coverdale as the narrator of his "dream" has vested interests in the events culminating precisely as they do. *The Blithedale Romance's* traditional love triangle has four corners, and Coverdale, excluded from the affections of

the people he obsessively “cares for,” nurtures and orchestrates his revenge, deriving malicious satisfaction from destroying physically and morally the people responsible for his misery.

The kissing scene Coverdale witnesses through the window of his room, in the same manner in which Priscilla witnesses the kiss of Hollingsworth and Zenobia in his dream, presents the father of the family stealing behind his children to kiss the little girl and pull the little boy’s ear, and it presents the mother also stealing behind the father and the children to steal a kiss the children are not supposed to see. Although the scene of familial love and bliss Coverdale observes through his window in Zenobia’s boarding house appears to be innocent and harmless, the choice of words employed in the passage strongly suggests that this bliss is based on concealment, competition for affection, and violation of trust. This suspicion of concealed envy, resentment, mistrust and competition is reinforced by the behavior of both the real family members and the fantasy ones. Old Moodie, in a stealing and underhanded manner, disinherits one daughter in favour of the other without trying to explain his motives. Priscilla takes away the man Zenobia loves, and Zenobia betrays her sister by giving her away into bondage to Westervelt. Westervelt, who is most likely secretly married to Zenobia, exploits her love and her fear that this secret will come to be known. Hollingsworth betrays Zenobia when in the eyes of the Blithedale community they are as good as married, and he betrays Priscilla, who is entrusted to his charge as a daughter might have been, by not preventing Zenobia’s plan to get rid of her sister by returning her to Westervelt.

The kissing scene exposes Coverdale’s ambivalent feelings toward the father-figure, his resentment directed at the mother for taking the father away, and his fear of being actually kissed by the father in a “grown-up,” erotic way. The ambivalence saturating Coverdale’s feelings finds its resolution in the ending he fantasizes for his family drama. This ending presents a compromise between Coverdale’s desire to get rid of his mother to be in full possession of his father; to punish his father for nurturing incestuous



feelings toward his children and for being seduced by the mother; and finally to recover the full possession of the father by making him fully dependent on his child. Thus Coverdale's narrative orchestrates Zenobia's suicide while leaving important clues in the narrative suggesting that it is actually Coverdale himself who kills "his mother."<sup>2</sup> Significantly, this course of events reverses the classical Freudian Oedipal scenario, for Coverdale longs for possession of the same-sex parent. By symbolically killing his "mother," Coverdale is also able to symbolically "castrate the father" by laying the blame for Zenobia's death at Hollingsworth's door. Hollingsworth, who ends up a morally destroyed and broken man, will never get over his devastating guilt, and Coverdale will succeed in making "the father" fully dependent on himself by substituting Priscilla for Zenobia. Coverdale does not perceive the sexuality of "insubstantial" and "spiritual" Priscilla as threatening; identifying with Priscilla and substituting her for himself, he takes the dangerous sexual element out of the relationship and makes it socially acceptable. Coverdale identifies with Priscilla and projects his own feelings on her on various occasions, making her the carrier of his own emotions. Priscilla peeps through the window when Hollingsworth and Zenobia kiss, and it is the "sadness of her expression" that is left in Coverdale's heart (153). On another occasion, Coverdale maliciously tortures Priscilla with the description of Zenobia's beauty, as they watch the signs of growing affection between Hollingsworth and Zenobia. Coverdale confesses that, in deliberately praising Zenobia, he spoke "out of a foolish bitterness of heart" (126), thus acknowledging that he was no less jealous than Priscilla.

Coverdale's revenge is prompted by his acute sense of betrayal, and it reveals that his desire is not to love but to be loved. "Loving in itself," Freud points out, "in so far as it involves longing and deprivation, lowers self-regard; whereas being loved, having one's love returned, and possessing the love object, raises it once more" (94). Self-regard is not the only motive governing Coverdale's object-choices, yet it still constitutes a strong and

powerful component in his emotional make-up. Coverdale acknowledges a dent to his self-esteem when he complains that

it is an insufferable bore, to see one man engrossing every thought of all the women, and leaving his friend to shiver in outer seclusion, without even the alternative of solacing himself with what the most fortunate individual has rejected (126).

The tone of the passage hardly agrees with Coverdale's confession at the end of the novel when he claims that he was in love with Priscilla; as every other major character of the novel, Coverdale is in love with himself, and, in pursuing outwardly the dream of happiness for humankind, he is actually actively pursuing the dream of his own happiness.

Freud indicates that "the aim and satisfaction in a narcissistic object choice is to be loved" ("On Narcissism" 93), yet the need to be loved stems not only from Coverdale's desire to flatter his self-esteem, but from his understandable human desire for safety, security, and predictability of his environment. He temporarily finds this security and comfort in Hollingsworth when the philanthropist takes care of him during his illness. During that period Coverdale beseeches Hollingsworth "to let nobody enter the room," for he wants to be continually sensible of Hollingsworth's presence "by a grasp of the hand, a word -- a prayer, if he thought good to utter it" (42). Significantly, Coverdale sees in Hollingsworth's tenderness "the reflection of God's own love" (43); Hollingsworth's "more than brotherly attendance" gives Coverdale "inexpressible comfort" (41); and, feeling cherished and secure, he reflects upon what he calls the "ugly characteristic" of his own sex. Men, Coverdale observes, have

a natural indifference, if not an absolutely hostile feeling, towards those whom disease, or weakness, or calamity or any kind, causes to falter and faint amid the rude jostle of our selfish existence. The education of Christianity, it is true, the sympathy of a like experience, and the example of women, may soften, and possibly subvert, this ugly characteristic of our sex. But it is originally there, and has likewise its analogy in the practice of our brute brethren, who hunt the sick and disabled member of the herd among them, as an enemy (41-42).

Although the emotional emphasis of Chapter 6, "Coverdale's Sick-Chamber," lies in Coverdale's growing attachment to Hollingsworth, the above quoted passage is of

paramount significance, for it lets the reader realize the compelling reasons that prompted Coverdale to leave his superficially unproblematic existence: he is seeking refuge from the harsh reality of an unloving and unkind world in the security and safety of a community supposedly based on love. Coverdale sees the world as hostile and threatening; and even though by acknowledging that he “could not always claim to be one of the exceptions” (41) he counts himself among “most men” who are hostile to a display of weakness of any kind, he does fear unconsciously that he is not enough of a “man” to live up to the challenge posed by “men’s” brutality.

Despite his growing emotional attachment to Hollingsworth, Coverdale feels that the philanthropist is guided by an ulterior motive in his display of affection and care. When Hollingsworth expresses his doubts as to the possibility of having Coverdale as a “life-long friend,” except Coverdale strives with him toward “the great object of [his] life,” the poet faces “a horrible suspicion” creeping into his heart and stinging “the very core of it with the fangs of an adder”(57). Coverdale’s early intellectual insight into Hollingsworth’s character finally gets the better of his overwhelming emotional attachment to the man whose friendship he values more than anyone else in the world. He confesses that after their break up “there was no longer the man alive with whom I could think of sharing all” (99). Yet the price he pays for his intellectual superiority in seeing Hollingsworth’s motives, but not his own, leaves him an equally broken and dispirited man. Coverdale’s own post-Blithedale life displays all the signs of “profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings” Freud associates with the state of profound melancholia resulting from a loss of an important attachment (“Mourning and Melancholia” 252). Describing himself as a “frosty bachelor”(9), Coverdale acknowledges that life “has come to rather an idle pass with” him (247). Having nobody but himself in the world to care for, and no worthy cause to care about, Coverdale concedes that his life has been rendered “all an emptiness” (246).

In “On Narcissism” and in “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud examines the constitutive factors of human emotional life whose combination shapes human personalities in their adult years. Freud relates a childhood traumatic experience of losing a love-object to the subsequent mechanism of coping with the loss by incorporating the lost object into the ego and identifying with it. The disappointment suffered from being slighted, neglected or abandoned triggers “opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce[s] an already existing ambivalence” (260). Yet the ambivalence in love relationships, which Freud maintains can be attributed sometimes to real experience, sometimes to constitutional factors, serves as an important precondition of melancholia and leads to a conflict whose resolution may culminate in a subject’s depression and severely diminished capacity for social life, or even in suicide. While Coverdale’s conflict results in a “severely diminished capacity for social life,” Zenobia’s conflict leads her to suicide; different as these two scenarios may appear on the surface, they ultimately amount to what Nina Baym calls “murder and suicide of the self-expressive energies of the soul.” Coverdale and Zenobia deal with the loss of an important attachment by incorporating the lost object of love into the ego and identifying with the lost object. Freud describes the mechanism of the substitution of identification for object love in the narcissistic affections as follows:

an object choice, an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed; then owing to *a real slight or disappointment* coming from this loved person, the object-relationship was shattered. The result was not the normal one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one, but something different....the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. (258).

Intellectually both Coverdale and Zenobia are able to reject Hollingsworth; emotionally, however, they deal with the loss by incorporating unconsciously Hollingsworth’s cultural and ethical standards, refusing thus to give up the relationship. At the conclusion of the

novel, Coverdale states that “as Hollingsworth once told me, I lack a purpose” (246). He applies Hollingsworth’s standards to judge himself. “Awake, disenchanted, [and] disenthralled” (218) Zenobia refuses to let go of Hollingsworth by judging herself by Hollingsworth’s principles: “presume not to estimate a man like Hollingsworth,” says she to Coverdale, “it was all my fault, all along, and none of his”(225).

While classical Freudian psychoanalysis can be successfully applied to discuss Coverdale’s wish-fulfillment fantasies, his transfer of the original family conflict to his fantasy family, and the mechanism of dealing with the loss of an important attachment, the theory is less effective when it comes to discussing Coverdale’s and Zenobia’s subject-positions and the lack of coherent identity in Blithedale characters. Although both Coverdale and Zenobia believe themselves to be gendered subjects -- they emphasize their belonging to their respective genders repeatedly -- they do not fully identify with their own notions of masculinity and femininity. I will return to this topic after I finish my discussion of the limitations of classical psychoanalysis for *The Blithedale Romance*.

Importantly, the complication in applying Freudian or Lacanian theory to *The Blithedale Romance* comes from the absence of the libidinal relation of the child with its mother. The mother, in the role Zenobia plays, is firmly rejected; for the sustenance she offers the convalescent Coverdale in the form of her unsavory gruel is not appreciated by him. Coverdale’s longing is directed at Hollingsworth as the father-figure. Significantly too, there is no evidence that Coverdale has driven his forbidden desire for his mother underground, for there is no evidence that he has ever felt, even unconsciously, this desire. In terms of Freudian and even Lacanian theory, Coverdale fails to resolve successfully the Oedipal stage in his character development, for he does not fully achieve identification with the father. Coverdale, who remains a disillusioned bachelor at the time he writes his romance, does not become a father himself and he does not sustain his society “by contributing to the business of sexual reproduction” (Eagleton 135). In Lacanian terms, Coverdale fails to enter “the symbolic order” or “the pre-given structure of social and

sexual roles and relations which make up the family and society” (Eagleton 145). By rejecting what Lacan calls the Law, and, most significantly, by failing “to recognize in the figure of the father that a wider familial and social network exists of which [he] is only a part” (Eagleton 143), Coverdale remains outside any communal structures, for he is unable to commit to any of them.

Coverdale’s preference of the father over the mother may suggest latent homosexuality which can explain his desire to get rid of the opposite-sex parent to possess fully the same-sex parent. Coverdale drives his desire for the same-sex parent into the unconscious, and he does identify to some extent with the opposite sex, yet there is no socially provided role for Coverdale in his capacity as a masculine subject who unconsciously perceives himself as being feminine. Therefore he remains a bachelor, hopelessly divided between the way he, in his masculine shell, is perceived by the society and the way he actually feels, which accounts for his uncanny perceptions into female psyche. I believe, however, that Hawthorne in *The Blithedale Romance* is not unconsciously preoccupied with issues of homosexuality, as Monika Mueller-Cooper argues; my position is that Hawthorne consciously replaces natural human relationships, such as the life-sustaining relationship of a child to its mother, by symbolic relationships which emphasize human emotional rather than physical needs. The deeply ingrained human need to have an omnipotent parent to trust is the focus of Hawthorne’s exploration of the human psyche in *The Blithedale Romance*. Coverdale, Zenobia, and Priscilla, irrespective of their sex, long for a benevolent authority to submit to and secure their protection in a harsh and hostile world. The rigid forms of gender identification imposed on them by centuries of patriarchal thinking are responsible for their emotional confusion and, ultimately, for their tragedy.

Drawing on Freud’s discoveries in the field of psychoanalysis, Judith Butler extends the area of studies of melancholia to include what the scholar calls “gender melancholia.” Butler maintains that

masculine and feminine are not dispositions, as Freud sometimes argues, but indeed accomplishments, ones which emerge in tandem with the achievement of heterosexuality (135).

Asserting that gender is performative and that its performance “produces retroactively the illusion that there is an inner gender core,” Butler suggests that “rigid forms of gender and sexual identification, whether homosexual or heterosexual, appear to spawn forms of melancholy” (144). The scholar further maintains that “gender itself might be understood in part as the ‘acting out’ of unresolved grief.” “Heterosexual melancholy,” writes Butler, is “the melancholy by which a masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love”(146). Consciously, Coverdale mourns the loss of Hollingsworth as the loss of a friend with whom alone he “could think of sharing all”(99). Unconsciously, his attachment to Hollingsworth is deeper. A few days after “the tragic passage of arms between Hollingsworth” and Coverdale, the latter reports that he appeared at the dinner-table “actually dressed in a coat, instead of [his] customary blouse; with a satin cravat, too, a white vest, and several other things that made [him] seem strange and outlandish to [himself]” (137). Coverdale’s mourning starts with identifying with the masculine gender by resorting to a socially prescribed masculine dress. Obviously, his rejection of Hollingsworth and the melancholia resulting from his unresolved grief leads him to submit to socially acceptable patterns of behavior he previously sought to challenge. By emphasizing by his dress and his conscious thinking that he is, in Butler’s terms, “the strictly straight man,” Coverdale displays himself as “as the ‘truest’ gay male melancholic” (Butler 146). Although the possibility of homosexual attachment between Hollingsworth and Coverdale is not, in my opinion, of primary importance to the thematic interests of *The Blithedale Romance*, Butler’s theory goes further than Freud’s in providing important insights into the novel. Not only does Butler point to “a loss that cannot be recognized and, hence, cannot be mourned,” but she also draws attention to “the cost of articulating a coherent identity position by producing, excluding, and repudiating a domain of abjected specters that threaten the arbitrarily closed domain of subject positions” (149). To illustrate

how this insight works with *The Blithedale Romance*, I will focus on how Coverdale and Zenobia endorse their concepts of the distinctions between the sexes by repeating the borrowed “wisdom” of past generations.

Both characters rarely miss a chance to identify with their respective sexes. Coverdale asserts his “masculinity” through stating that “we men are too gross to comprehend” (33) the kind of “the devoted admiration” (32) poor Priscilla displays for brilliant Zenobia. Yet by focusing on Priscilla’s tokens of silent and “self-forgetful affection,” Coverdale betrays what he lacks and desperately misses in his own life: “the devoted admiration” and “self-forgetful affection” of another human being. Coverdale also mourns what he believes to be his own inability to feel this way toward another human being:

There is nothing parallel to this, I believe -- nothing so foolishly disinterested, and hardly anything so beautiful -- in the masculine nature, at whatever epoch of life; or, if there be, a fine and rare development of character might reasonably be looked for, from the youth who should prove himself capable of such self-forgetful affection (33).

He also speculates on what he calls the “ugly characteristic” of the masculine sex, which he attributes to himself in the passage I quoted earlier, stating that men are hostile to a display of weakness of any kind and concluding that men “really have no tenderness”(42). He also attempts, mistakenly, to justify his interest in Zenobia’s marital or virginal status by resorting to a hackneyed cliché that once again identifies him as a “man”: “A bachelor,” proclaims Coverdale, “always feels himself defrauded, when he knows, or suspects, that any woman of his acquaintance has given herself away” (48).

Delighting in the superiority of her practical “feminine” perception into the true character of Priscilla, Zenobia claims that “we women judge one another by tokens that escape the obtuseness of masculine perceptions” (34). She appeals again to her femininity when she acknowledges her unconscious and, as she has come to realize, unjustified belief in the “masculine” superiority of Hollingsworth:

Now, God be judge between us...which of us two has most mortally offended Him! At least, I am a woman -- with every fault, it may be, that a



woman ever had, weak, vain, unprincipled, (like most of my sex; for virtues, when we have any, are merely impulsive and intuitive,) passionate, too, and pursuing my foolish and unattainable ends, by indirect and cunning, though absurdly chosen means, as a hereditary bond-slave must -- false, moreover, to the whole circle of good, in my reckless truth to the little good I saw before me -- but still a woman! A creature, whom only a little change of earthly fortune, a little kinder smile of Him who sent me hither, and one true heart to encourage and direct me, might have made all that a woman can be! But how is it with you? Are you a man? No; but a monster! A cold, heartless, self-beginning and self-ending piece of mechanism (217-218).

Apart from betraying in this passage her unconscious and unacknowledged opinion of what a “woman” is and what a “man” should be, Zenobia also goes to the heart of the conflict experienced by Coverdale too. Zenobia acknowledges that she unconsciously places herself in the existentially subjected and, in this respect, child-like position vis-a-vis the ultimate authority of God, the earthly extension of which she would like to see in Hollingsworth. She wants to be directed, encouraged and admired for her efforts to be good, and her tragic immaturity, for which she can hardly be blamed -- not because she is a woman, but because she is human -- leads to her tragic end.

Zenobia, understandably, misses the irony of her own words (the irony that must not be wasted on the reader!) when she ascribes weakness, vanity, lack of principles, and a tendency to pursue one’s “foolish and unattainable ends, by indirect and cunning, though absurdly chosen means” to the inadequacies of the “feminine” nature. This description best suits the “masculine” Hollingsworth whom Coverdale, in an earlier confrontation, accuses of “moral obliquity” and “secrecy” in his “operations” (132) in pursuing his “foolish and unattainable ends, by indirect and cunning, though absurdly chosen means.” Since there is no way Hawthorne, as the author of Zenobia’s words, could have missed the irony he himself put into Zenobia’s mouth, his intention to deconstruct the socially-constructed distinctions between sexes by demonstrating their inadequacy to describe the difference between them becomes unmistakably apparent. Hawthorne, in Butler’s terms, risks exposing the incoherence of the genre and the incoherence of identity to draw the reader’s attention to the arbitrariness of critically and socially accepted notions about both.

Although both Zenobia and Coverdale champion equality between the sexes, they unconsciously support the traditional concepts of what is believed to be “feminine” or “masculine” attributes distinguishing the two sexes. In other words, if outwardly, in their intellectual thinking they subscribe to progressive ideas, then inwardly and unconsciously their minds remain structured by the ideology imposed on them by centuries of patriarchal law. This gap between what they think they believe in and what they actually believe, or between what they profess to believe in and what ultimately structures their behavior remains unacknowledged and unrecognized by their conscious thinking processes. Yet the unconscious denial of “feminine” feelings by Coverdale and the unconscious suppression of “masculine” strength and power by Zenobia leads both of them to a tragic end: Zenobia commits suicide, and Coverdale loses his creative gift. These two superficially different scenarios represent, in fact, only one self-imposed defeat split into two plausible responses required for the emotional survival of a personality torn between the conflicting desires for autonomy and subjection.

Butler’s suggestion that “in the act of opposing subordination, the subject reiterates its subjection”(11) is even more significant for *The Blithedale Romance* than her insight into the performativity of gender. This paradox is confronted by Hawthorne in his description of the posture of dead Zenobia:

her arms had grown rigid in the act of struggling, and were bent before her, with clenched hands; her knees, too, were bent, and -- thank God for it! -- in the attitude of prayer (235).

Zenobia’s final act of defiance represents her final act of submission; while her arms protest, her knees are submitting, and this “marble-image” of her death agony suggests the vicious circle that cannot be broken. When Nina Baym writes that *The Blithedale Romance* is about murder and suicide of the self-expressive energies of the soul, she makes no gender distinction between the tragic ends Coverdale and Zenobia both come to. Numerous parallels can be drawn between Zenobia and Coverdale: they are both young, handsome, creative. They both love the same man and both are betrayed by him. They

both make the same mistake of looking for the final authority in the wrong place. They both revolt against the oppressive patterns of patriarchal thinking and both ultimately and unconsciously submit to them. Both remain tragically infantile. Coverdale, like Zenobia, finds a compromise between openly challenging the authority Hollingsworth represents and submitting to it at the same time. Coverdale's tragedy lies in his mind being governed by the binary oppositions his whole experience subverts. In an attempt to impose order on his world, Coverdale continues to think in categories of binary oppositions that require that he suppress his intuitive knowledge of their arbitrariness. Yet the price he pays robs him of the possibility of growing emotionally and intellectually beyond the infantile dependence on authority he is well equipped to outgrow. Coverdale's intellectual development is arrested by his unsatisfied emotional needs and by the conflict between his unacknowledged insights into human nature and his always already present socially constructed concepts and notions he automatically imposes on the world to make sense of it.

“Repudiating a domain of abjected specters that threaten the arbitrarily closed domain of subject positions,” the Blithedale world, as the world the Blithedalers seek to escape, stands on the persistent and unrecognized suppression of the feminine. “The example of women,” in Coverdale's opinion, may “soften, and possibly subvert, this ugly characteristic of our sex,” yet Coverdale is deeply ambivalent about women. Coverdale's ambivalence to women manifests itself in denying them the socially acceptable and desirable role of the mother, in criticizing their motives and manners, and in idealizing them in abstraction while fearing and despising them in reality. Mothers are conspicuously absent from Coverdale's narrative. The mothers of Priscilla and Zenobia die when the girls are still young, and nothing is known of his own personal history or that of the other male characters of the novel. Coverdale's idealization of women who he claims to believe may have a positive influence on the ugly characteristics of masculine sex is hard to distinguish from an ill-disguised mockery. Yet, as the passage quoted below indicates, Coverdale is as

ambivalent about men as he is ambivalent about women. Stating that he hates to be ruled by his own sex, Coverdale admits that:

it excites my jealousy and wounds my pride. It is the iron sway of bodily force, which abases us, in our compelled submission. But, how sweet the free, generous courtesy, with which I would kneel before a woman-ruler!....I have never found it possible to suffer a bearded priest so near my heart and conscience, as to do me any spiritual good. I blush at the very thought! Oh, in the better order of things, Heaven grant that the ministry of souls may be left in the charge of women!....The task belongs to woman. God meant it for her. He has endowed her with religious sentiment in its utmost depth and purity, refined from that gross, intellectual alloy, with which every masculine theologian -- save only One, who merely veiled himself in mortal and masculine shape, but was, in truth, divine -- has been prone to mingle it (121).

In a telling and revealing way, Coverdale confuses earthly authorities with spiritual authorities, starting with "the iron sway of bodily force" of rulers and moving to "the ministry of souls." His extolled praise of women is hard to take at face value, for neither Zenobia, whose mind, as Coverdale maintains, "is full of weeds"(44), nor Priscilla, described as the "gentle parasite" (123), can be visualized in the role of spiritual authorities. The "feminine" attributes of Zenobia fail to impress Coverdale favorably, for her threatening sexuality overshadows whatever positive influence Zenobia as a woman may have on softening the "ugly characteristic" of "masculine" sex. Her playful identification with Eve suggests that Coverdale is apprehensive that Zenobia will be responsible for his own fall out of grace by luring Hollingsworth with her sexual charms away from Coverdale. The poet longs for "femininity" devoid of threatening sexuality, and he finds it in.....Hollingsworth:

there was something of a woman molded into the great, stalwart frame of Hollingsworth; nor was he ashamed if it, as men often are of what is best in them, nor seemed ever to know that there was such a soft place in his heart....Methought there could not be two such men alive as Hollingsworth. (42).

On the other hand, Coverdale's mistrust of men and deep suspicion of their motives form the basis of Coverdale's unresolved conflict with authority he cannot tolerate in any of its manifestations. His ambivalence to men manifests itself in his problematic attitude to any imposed authority, be it the actual society he decides to quit in search of a better life or the

community of Blithedale which attempts to build a new society on the basis of the authority of a social theory.

Emotional and psychological immaturity of the Blithedale characters is hardly the quality for which all of them, men and women alike, should be blamed. I do not use the term in a derogatory sense, but to indicate the tragic limits of Hawthorne's characters' self-conceptions. Although, because of developments in the psychoanalytical and psychological fields of studies, the twentieth-century, or rather the twenty-first-century reader has a distinct advantage in his or her self-knowledge over the Blithedale characters, not even our contemporary men and women always look that far into the heart of their own motives. In this sense, *The Blithedale Romance* with its major focus on what human beings appear to be to others, on what they appear to be to themselves, and on what they actually are, is as modern as modern goes nowadays. At the same time, besides human identity and character, the novel puts under the microscope the utopian aspirations of humans, which Hawthorne, in my opinion, links with the quest for respectable and trustworthy authority to subject oneself to, be it God, another human being, an ideal state or an attractive social theory. This need for subjection does not proceed from human insufficiency or an inherent lack of autonomy in humans; it proceeds from an acute anxiety generated by a hostile environment and the necessity to cope with the harsh reality of the world. Utopias, of any form or content, have at least two undeniable advantages over human reality: they make this reality predictable and assert human control over their environment. Neither Coverdale nor Zenobia makes the final step of acknowledging their existential loneliness and the ultimate lack of authority in human life, although both of them come to a sobering realization of the inadequacy of other people, communities or social theories to take the place of the final authority. Both, however, come to a tragic end, or to what Paul Tillich calls metaphysical disillusionment with their former ideal. This disillusionment paralyses the creative potential of both characters who, apart from being connected to literary activities -- Coverdale is a poet, and Zenobia is a writer -- share other

desirable human attributes: youth, exceptionally good looks, intelligence, sensitivity, appreciation of finer things in life, and dedication to a worthy cause. They also share love for the same man, and they are both mistaken in their expectations -- not because they both choose the wrong man, but because they choose him for the wrong reasons. Their tragedy also has the same root: their emotional needs overcome their intellectual insights.

### Chapter 3: The Identity of Utopia

The purpose of this chapter is to relate *The Blithedale Romance* firmly to utopian thought and tradition, both specifically American and broadly human, by demonstrating that Hawthorne addresses many issues that have been relevant and significant to utopian writers and thinkers of his own century and of the centuries before and after him. Hawthorne's contribution to utopian thought and tradition, as I have indicated before, does not consist in creating yet another model of a perfect community, but in exploring complex issues of human psychology and motivation and in questioning the very possibility of translating a utopian dream into practice.

The utopian impulse is often unquestioningly assumed to be an intellectual impulse, the realm of constructive human thought creating perfect worlds. When following the Enlightenment era, scientific discoveries and the growing belief in the power of human reason made religion and the trust in the omnipotence of God inadequate to sustain human faith, "public trust was put into [intellectual] faculties in the hope of reaching some future utopia" (Bleich 126). Instead of placing its confidence in "the humanized masculine god [who] would personally see to it that his "children" are "saved" and ultimately "united in a single community of eternal bliss" (Bleich 14), humanity put faith in the possibility of designing and implementing a fair and just social system that would satisfy the same requirements. The utopian impulse, as much as the religious one, emerged from the same human need to cope with a hostile and threatening world and the anxious desire to experience, at least vicariously, a secure, predictable and stable environment. Toward the nineteenth century, many intellectual thinkers came to believe that the wished-for security and bliss was becoming a real possibility, and "reality itself was now presumed subordinate to the authority of the wish" (Bleich 16).

If the most famous utopias of the past have never been regarded as blueprints for action, the utopian vision that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century America, under the

influence of European, particularly French, utopian thinkers, actively sought to usher in a contemporary equivalent of the “Kingdom of God” through human efforts. Yet the belief in the possibility of success in this domain was predicated on two insufficiently questioned assumptions about the power of human reason and the malleability of human nature. These assumptions also formed the foundation of literary utopias of the past, prompting Northrop Frye to observe that “a most common objection to utopias” is their tendency “to present human nature as governed more by reason than it is or can be”(Varieties 26). As to the malleability of human nature, utopia, as Kumar emphasizes, has been always firmly based on the belief that man, on the whole, is good:

this certainly has not been seen as a necessary postulate of utopia. Carried to an extreme it would make utopia redundant. But what does seem necessary is that human nature should be seen as almost infinitely malleable - - for practical purposes, a *tabularasa*. There should, above all, not be such intrinsic checks and obstacles to human perfectibility as to doom the utopian enterprise from the start. If ‘old Adam’ will and must out, if ineradicable greed or aggression will continue to plague utopia, then it is futile to invent it (Kumar 28).

The issues of the malleability of human nature and of the power of human reason to govern it are the focus of Hawthorne’s novel. Unlike literary or social utopias, *The Blithedale Romance* does not neglect individual human psychology and motivation. Yet Hawthorne’s vision is not, as it has been suggested by some critics, a dystopian one; nor is *The Blithedale Romance* a dystopian or anti-utopian novel. Hawthorne does not set out to reveal the hypocrisy or inhumanity of an established regime whose proponents, with vested interests in supporting the status quo, indefatigably portray the existing hell as paradise for humanity. This was not the case with the Blithedale community whose members came there voluntarily and were free to leave whenever they wanted. Hawthorne does not criticize the Blithedale community for what it is; he neither portrays an ideal community, nor denounces a nightmarish community pretending to be ideal. What Hawthorne does explore in *The Blithedale Romance* is why a theoretical model for universal happiness, be it literary or social, is doomed to failure. That does not mean that Hawthorne denounces



the ideal as an ideal; it means that he has, sadly and inevitably, come to the conclusion that the ideal is impractical.

Focusing on the utopian impulse as manifested in an outwardly proclaimed desire to make humankind happy, Hawthorne discovers a variety of hidden, unconscious, and thus unacknowledged motives and desires that would be immediately recognized as selfish and egotistical, were they not disguised by a veneer of nobility. Selfish and egotistical ends masquerade as philanthropy or selfless dedication to the good of humanity. Hawthorne's target in *The Blithedale Romance* is not the Westervelts of the world who consciously and deliberately exploit humanity while pretending to have people's best interests at heart. Hawthorne's target are the Coverdales, Zenobias, and Hollingsworths of the world, who delude themselves into thinking that they are intellectually and morally superior to humanity and thus able to provide an example of a worthy life for the rest of humanity to follow.

This tendency of human individuals to delude themselves into thinking that their motives and aspirations are dictated by their "higher instincts," rather than prompted by selfishness or unconscious profit-seeking, financial or emotional, undermines the belief in the power of human reason. Moreover, if humans have no knowledge of their nature, how legitimate are expectations that human nature can be improved? These issues, to my knowledge, have not been addressed by Hawthorne criticism dealing with the utopian content of *The Blithedale Romance*. Regarding the novel as a utopian romance in which Hawthorne gives the reader what the reader expects from a utopian romance -- "a discussion of ideal love," James T. Jones rightly observes that "Hawthorne's treatment of love in *The Blithedale Romance* strikes us today as astonishingly modern." However, the critic further suggests that Hawthorne's intention in the novel is to demonstrate that "the ideals sustained by romantic love cannot co-exist with other ideas, positive or negative, brought into practice" (220). In my opinion, Hawthorne does not merely question the possibility of sustaining the ideals of romantic love when other ideas are brought into practice. There is in fact very little romance and even less love in the novel, which only

appears to be obsessively concerned with either romantic or social interests. The dedication of the Blithedale characters to their ideas of reforming the world is hardly more sincere than their dedication to their romantic interests. They betray their ideals as they betray each other.

Therefore, it is hard to agree with Jones's assertion that Coverdale holds high ideals, but his "reservations pertain not to the impossibility of improving the lot of humankind, but to the impossibility of an ideal state" (222). Coverdale reveals himself as remarkably indifferent to improving the lot of humankind. The Blithedale community, except for Zenobia, Priscilla, Hollingsworth and Silas Foster remain for him largely anonymous: in sitting down to supper the first evening at Blithedale and in portraying this first supper as "the first practical trial of ...theories of equal brotherhood and sisterhood" that made him feel "as if something were already accomplished towards the millennium of love," Coverdale neglects to inform the reader of the names of Silas Foster's "rotund helpmate" and "the two bouncing handmaidens" (24), the very people for whose benefit the Blithedalers started their experiment in the first place. Nor does he inform the reader of the names of other Blithedale reformers who sat with him at the same table this evening. Referring to his social inferiors as "these good people" and "earthen company," Coverdale characteristically projects his own doubts and feelings into his social equals by suggesting that "the equanimity with which we subsequently bore many of the hardships and humiliations of the life of toil" was due to "the cherished consciousness that it was not by necessity, but choice"(24). Coverdale remains unaware of the ambivalence and contempt he feels towards the people he seeks to make happier. Yet Hawthorne carefully structures Coverdale's narrative in such a way as to give the reader an insight into Coverdale's unconscious and unacknowledged attitudes and feelings. As soon as Hollingsworth, who arrives at Blithedale with Priscilla, declares in a lofty manner that the success of their undertaking of making the world happier than they find it will depend on how the

Blithedalers “do by this friendless girl,” Coverdale, irritated by being forced to display compassion when he feels none, focuses on Silas Foster’s less than refined eating habits:

Grim Silas Foster, all this while, had been busy at the supper table, pouring out his own tea, and gulping it down with no more sense of its exquisiteness than if it were a decoction of catnip; helping himself to pieces of dipt toast on the flat of his knife-blade, and dropping half of it on the table-cloth; using the same serviceable implement to cut slice after slice of ham; perpetrating terrible enormities with the butter plate; and, in all other respects, behaving less like a civilized Christian than the worst kind of an ogre (30).

Despite the lack in the farmer of the “superior cultivation and refinement” Coverdale and Zenobia pride themselves on, it is from the farmer’s “unwiped mouth” that the practical and honorable suggestion comes to give a shivering and obviously hungry girl some food. Coverdale thus demonstrates himself to be unable to feel genuine sympathy towards humanity, whose unrefined eating habits or lack of intellectual cultivation break through the veil of anonymity Coverdale is willing to throw on it to pursue his “dream” of “the blessed state of brotherhood and sisterhood.”

Coverdale’s personal habits, as Jones suggests, are undeniably bourgeois, but his thinking is radical only on the surface. He displays the same zeal to judge Zenobia’s behavior as Hollingsworth, but he feels compelled to justify his desire to put himself in the judging position by stating that even if he “might give [his] full assent to the punishment which was sure to follow,” it “would be given mournfully, and with undiminished love” (161). Coverdale displays a remarkable ability to delude himself with respect to his own motives, and his lofty expressions of the nobility of his sentiments should always be taken with a grain of salt. They invariably contain an ill-smelling weed of irony that reduces their effect to thinly-disguised mockery. Given the novel’s stress on ambiguity and confusion of ideas and motives in human character, there is little foundation for stating that Hawthorne upholds “the object of utopian thought -- the perpetuation of the ideal of human improvement,” rejecting “the stasis implied by a perfect society” (Jones 222). Unarguably, Hawthorne’s thinking should not be confused or identified with Coverdale’s. Yet Hawthorne’s thinking, too, can hardly be described as radical. His insight into human

nature suggests that it can be individualistic, libertarian, and comfort-seeking, or undeniably bourgeois; it can also be totalitarian, group- or -clan oriented and masochistic. In both cases its most salient common denominator is found in the sad reality that most people are stubbornly unaware of their real motives and values.

Naomi Jacobs's exploration of *The Blithedale Romance* also goes in the direction of demonstrating that Hawthorne suggests the unattainability of true perfection in life. Jacobs considers the novel to be a meta-utopia. However, she uses the term in a sense which differs from Kumar's use of "meta-utopia." "Meta-utopia" for Jacobs is not a narrative dealing with the description of an actual utopian experiment, its success or failure; it is a narrative meditating "upon utopia as a process, present in ordinary life as well as in utopian projects." Jacobs suggests that all human beings are utopianists, since

in our life projects, in our choices of jobs, houses, lovers, we attempt to build that "good place" or "no place" in which we might be happy; and from time to time, at dinner with friends, in delight with a certain view or a certain piece of music, we find our world to be good. Some people, desiring to establish that place more permanently or to extend it to others, make blueprints for utopian communities that would formalize and fix the harmony intermittently experienced in ordinary life. Hawthorne's peculiar personal history and his habits of mind well qualify him to anatomize utopia in this broad sense of the word (Jacobs 175).

In that sense the Blithedale characters are utopianists too: they all have their private utopias they strive to translate into reality in the course of the Blithedale experiment. Yet it appears to me that in *The Blithedale Romance* Hawthorne traces the utopian impulse to an origin different from a mere desire to share with the world the after-taste of a good dinner. This particular emphasis on the hedonistic enjoyment of life leads Jacobs, who correctly states at the beginning of her study that it would be a mistake either to side-step the utopian content of the novel or to attempt to read it "as a negative evaluation of Brook Farm or of socialist communities in general" (174), to an excessive focus on that definition of utopia which emphasizes the attainability of true perfection in life. Even if Hawthorne was, as Jacobs asserts, deeply skeptical "about the possibility of perfection in human life" (174), his psychological insight into human nature goes deeper than a mere recognition of the fact that

humans are never satisfied with what they have. Thus, starting from the premise that it would be a mistake to dismiss the utopian content of the book, Jacobs overlooks the broader and deeper implications of the novel's utopian content by focusing on the "oscillation between possession and desire, between love for the best of the existing world and love for what can be imagined." The critic further suggests that

In human consciousness, these two worlds are as intimately related as Blithedale's allegorical sisters, who spring from one source and suffer under the same tyrant. The communal project must always compete with personal projects for the psychic energy and commitment of its disciples. Though this ambivalence tends to diffuse an individual's involvement in utopian activity, Hawthorne shows the communal idea as triumphing, even when the utopian project fails (176).

This conclusion appears to me to be problematic; although Priscilla, who is allegorically identified by Jacobs with the communal ideal, comes out as a winner in the deadly competition for Hollingsworth's heart, she gets a broken man and a disintegrated community as her prize. As a symbol of triumphing community she stands amidst devastation and despair, holding on to a conventional marriage as the sole benefit she gets out of the Blithedalers' thwarted endeavor to benefit the world. This does not mean that Hawthorne condemns the communal ideal; this only means that the identification of Priscilla with it has limits.

Jacob's critical approach to *The Blithedale Romance* leaves certain important aspects of the novel unaccounted for, ultimately cheating the novel of its universal and profound significance. For *The Blithedale Romance* does not focus primarily on the human tendency to utopianize; above all else, Hawthorne focuses on the human tendency to present one's personal utopian wish as a noble and commendable desire to benefit humanity. The misleading intellectual rationalization of one's private utopian impulse, generated by unappeasable emotional needs, into larger-than-life schemes of reforming humanity to fit into one's individual perception of paradise strikes a recognizable chord in the mind of the twentieth-century reader. This impulse or its inevitable frustration finds its expression not only in the disillusionment suffered by Coverdale and Zenobia when the

Blithedale community fails to turn into their private versions of earthly paradise; it also finds its expression in the totalitarian terror for which Hollingsworth stands as a likely prototype, prefiguring twentieth-century dictators who sought to “reform” the world by imposing into it their own private version of order. The same impulse is responsible for the belief that one’s private utopia is shared by the world at large, which results in mindless and thoughtless subjection to totalitarian horror, as long as one believes, as Priscilla does, that the world is wonderful if everyone loves her and is kind to her. Eventually it turns out that nobody actually “loves” Priscilla, but she will never go any distance to analyze human motives. Experienced though she is, as the Veiled Lady, in making illusion look like reality, she will experience reality as illusion and support any regime that will make her personally comfortable.

Another exploration of the utopian content of *The Blithedale Romance* is offered by Michael O’Hara. Unlike Robert Elliott, O’Hara maintains that *The Blithedale Romance* has a distinct satiric structure which he bases on a generic model of satire. This model, the scholar claims, allows him “to solve the problem the literary critics have had in distinguishing between Hawthorne, the implied author, and Coverdale, the narrator.” O’Hara suggests that the moral standard ( the one that Elliott believes is missing in *The Blithedale Romance* ) “from which the reader should judge the degraded world of satire portrayed” in the novel is provided by “the literary subtext of utopia.” The critic interprets the novel

as a satire on a group of liberal reformers who espouse theories of brotherhood and equality, but who are in fact imprisoned in an ideology of “aristocratic privilege.”

Hawthorne, O’Hara goes on,

ridicules the folly of trying to erect a utopian socialist community in the midst of American capitalism, yet he projects a vision of history in which economic equality and social freedom will finally prevail over class conflict and sexual oppression (ix).

As may be obvious from the above passage, the critic approaches the novel from the perspective of “a total materialist criticism, or Marxist hermeneutic,” asserting that Marxism

has “a semantic priority over all interpretive systems” (x). The value of O’Hara’s work lies in highlighting Hawthorne’s awareness of social inequality and injustice and in demonstrating that the author does address these issues in his novel, yet the Marxist approach O’Hara pursues results in making the characters unidimensional and their motives rigidly socially determined. Thus O’Hara denies the main characters of *The Blithedale Romance* their complexity and their human and intellectual appeal, stating that they “have few if any redeeming qualities” (49). Taking Coverdale’s ungracious and malicious comment on Zenobia’s mind as being “full of weeds” at face value, the critic claims that “Zenobia lacks true intellectual power.” He further claims that “her feminism turns out to be a fraud,” for Zenobia “consents to the enslavement of her little sister when the price is right” and “ultimately supports the absolute superiority of the male sex” (49). Hollingsworth is seen by O’Hara as “a man driven by rational calculation,” and his monomaniacal plan to transform Blithedale into a reform school for criminals as resulting from his “passion to own private property”(50). Asserting that “the most sympathetic character in *The Blithedale Romance* is the poet, Coverdale,” O’Hara suggests that this social reformer’s “most serious shortcoming” lies in his incapacity for “any kind of political commitment,” and he supports this claim by Coverdale’s admission that he lacks a purpose, as Hollingsworth once told him. In my understanding we could hardly take the opinions of the Blithedale characters of themselves or of each other as the basis for judging their true character or motives: what *The Blithedale Romance* strongly suggests is that its main characters remain persistently blind to who they actually are and to what guides their actions. They also, at least at the beginning of their association with each other, nourish a mistaken view of other people’s characters and motives. However if, as the novel progresses, they gradually come to the realization of their mistakes with respect to others, they never gain a clear view of their own character or motives. Hawthorne’s portrayal of the Blithedale characters presents them as complex human being torn by contradictory feelings and emotions; they cannot be reduced to unidimensional, socially-determined,

schematic representations of themselves. Even if Hawthorne's intention in *The Blithedale Romance* is to take "a group of men and women from privileged classes" and to show them "what life is like for the working men;" even if Hawthorne succeeds in bringing these "liberal idealists," in O'Hara's words, to the realization that "culture is incompatible with excessive physical labour," it is doubtful that Hawthorne, as the critic asserts, suggests that for these liberal idealists "a life of privilege is preferable to practicing equality and brotherhood" (69-70). Hollingsworth may appear to seek funds for the realization of his plans beyond anything else, yet when he succeeds in obtaining the money, betraying one woman for another, he never uses it. Zenobia, for all her aristocratic glitter, proves herself capable of throwing her massive fortune at Hollingsworth's feet and renouncing her "aristocratic privilege" for his love. Although Coverdale is openly disappointed by the harshness of physical labour which, contrary to his expectations, generates no flow of poetic inspiration in his soul, he, nevertheless, finds himself "looking forward to years, if not a lifetime, to be spent on the same system" (128). Not denying the importance of one's social environment and the role of social determinants on one's characters and psychology, I tend to disagree with O'Hara in his giving a paramount significance to these factors.

Featuring a variety of important insights into Hawthorne's novel, the three critical works considered above do not make an attempt to relate the utopian aspirations of the Blithedale characters to their deeply ingrained human need to have faith in and trust their environment. All Blithedale characters reveal their need to trust and have faith, yet they are either unable to trust each other completely, or if they do trust, this trust is unjustified. The tragedy that Blithedale witnesses is the result of this lack of trust. "Had he trusted me," says Zenobia, rejected by Hollingsworth, "and borne with me a little longer, I would have saved him all the trouble" (225), yet Zenobia herself is unable to trust Hollingsworth: she surrenders Priscilla to Westervelt because she does not trust his affection and sees Priscilla as a rival. Both Coverdale and Hollingsworth are deeply suspicious of Zenobia's motives,



whereas Priscilla, who trusts everyone, finds herself betrayed by everybody. In matters of faith, the Blithedale characters are hardly more unambiguous.

Coverdale's religiosity, as many of his other feelings or beliefs, is colored by ambiguity and, despite his intellectual acumen, it is never examined or questioned by him. On the one hand, he obviously thinks himself to be a believer in God: he thanks God when Zenobia's dead body is found with her knees bent in the posture of prayer. An open rebellion against God is unthinkable in Coverdale's eyes. He also refers to the "next world" when, resenting Zenobia's stubborn refusal to make him her confidante, he preaches to Zenobia about the impossibility of hiding anything in this world, "to say nothing of the next" (163). On the other hand, he, along with other Blithedale characters, is not openly or devotedly religious. On the very first morning of his stay in Blithedale, Coverdale reports that "of all our apostolic society, whose mission was to bless mankind," only Hollingsworth "began the enterprise with prayer"(39). Coverdale does not reveal whether he himself was in the habit of praying regularly, yet it is most likely that he was not, since he jokingly confesses that on account of his illness even if he said his prayers on that particular day, "it was backward," for he was cursing his day "as bitterly as patient Job himself"(40). It would be a gross exaggeration to state that Coverdale does not believe in God, yet his faith is poisoned by his intellect, for being both clever and educated he is unable to nurture an unquestioning dedication either to religion or to a social vision. As "a man of prayerful habits," Hollingsworth affects Coverdale "with a deep reverence" (39). Unable to believe in anything wholeheartedly, Coverdale admires the intense religiosity of Hollingsworth, observing "that such an one [as Hollingsworth] is decidedly marked out by a light of transfiguration, shed upon him in the divine interview from which he passes into his daily life"(39-40). Coverdale misses the wholeness and simplicity of the unquestioning faith that he realizes is denied to him but is granted to Hollingsworth. Coverdale's romanticizing of Hollingsworth's religious ardor reveals that he is unable to let go of his infantile dependence on authority.

Admiring the manifestations of earnest devotion in others, Coverdale does not recognize his own deep need to experience the same feelings. Reduced to “infantile helplessness” by the sickness that strikes him the next day upon his arrival at Blithedale, he temporarily finds security and comfort in Hollingsworth when the philanthropist takes care of him during the illness. When Coverdale is in a state of complete helplessness, Hollingsworth’s “more than brotherly attendance” gives him “inexpressible comfort”(41), yet Coverdale discovers that to continue to enjoy Hollingsworth’s affection he has to remain in this condition permanently. An autonomous, independent and healthy Coverdale, able to stand “upon his right, as an individual human being , and [look] at matters through his own optics”(135) is not going to be loved and supported by Hollingsworth. Coverdale’s weaknesses, writes Nina Baym, “derive from the simple fact that he has too much respect for authority.” His alter ego is authoritarian; he

supposes that the father within the self will rejoice at the son’s maturity; he supposes that the father is an admirable model, a great emancipator. He assumes that his admiration for Hollingsworth will be reciprocated in kind. But Hollingsworth is a jailer who admires nothing in individuals and desires nothing but their submission. He must dominate, and his morality serves his tyranny (556-557).

Coverdale’s emotional and never completely outgrown needs come into conflict with his intellectual and psychological development. The compromise he achieves between his conflicting needs for autonomy and subjection defeats his creative potential and serves as a painful illustration of Eric Erikson’s contention that “the shadow of frustration falls from childhood on the individual’s later life -- and on his society” (277).

Erikson saw the tragedy of human life in the fact that human consciousness remains partially infantile throughout the human life. Characteristically, Coverdale, Zenobia and Priscilla position themselves as children with respect to Hollingsworth; they all seek in him, in David Bleich’s words, “an omnipotent parent to trust” (8). They also find that maintaining the authoritarian parent-child pattern in their relationship with Hollingsworth is vital for the relationship’s survival. Coverdale’s bid for independence and Zenobia’s bid for subjection in the scene at Eliot’s pulpit are rejected by Hollingsworth; however despite

the fact that both Zenobia and Coverdale grow to see the philanthropist in his true light, they remain hostage to the system of values advocated by Hollingsworth. The childish emotional needs of the Blithedale characters are revealed by Hawthorne through associating each character with childish behavior or occupations. Priscilla's erratically childlike behavior is given a prominent place in the novel; Coverdale climbs trees to find a secret place of hiding for himself, and Hollingsworth plays with stones and pebbles to visualize the future look of his project. More significantly, Coverdale identifies himself and Priscilla with children when in his dream he sees Zenobia and Hollingsworth exchange a kiss.

David Bleich in *Utopia: The Psychology of a Cultural Fantasy* discusses "the emotional correspondence between early childhood and certain phenomena in the larger institutions of civilization," arguing that these larger institutions of civilization, or the "adult embodiments of the infantile emotions are generically viewed as *defenses*, acceptable ways of socializing the spontaneous thoughts and impulses of individuals"(2). The search of the Blithedale characters for a perfect community indicates their need to provide for themselves an environment, or an institution of civilization, where they could feel safe. Bleich bases his analysis on Erik Erikson's contemporary psychoanalysis, associating the search for the lost Golden Age with the fantasy motivated by the initial, the oral-sensory stage of individual development. The adult fantasies of social control and political order are seen to be motivated by the next major stage, the anal-muscular phase; whereas the final, the genital-locomotor stage, is associated with fantasies which revolve around love triangles and harbor "conscious adult wishes to eliminate rivals." Bleich states that

these infantile emotional phases return powerfully in fantasy form and cause some turbulence until the individual can develop adult capacities strong enough to control them and put them to productive use (4).

The characteristic *defenses* or strategies an individual develops to cope with the infantile sources of his or her feelings form what "is seen by others as the person's identity." Since home is the first proving ground for developing the coping strategies, the early domestic

life of an individual provides information on “the regulatory strategies governing the creation of the adult identity,” which express “the person’s deepest emotional needs”(4-5). Contemporary psychoanalysis, however, ‘takes into account that idea that both society and social values play an instrumental role in the creation of the sense of self’(5). Erikson’s contribution to contemporary psychoanalysis lies, in Bleich’s words, “in finding...the social “modalities” which can be said to represent the infantile emotional stages”(5).

Extending Freud’s early speculations, Erikson suggests

that the universality of religion...is traceable to the earliest forms of infantile development, the oral-sensory stage, when the infant puts itself at the complete disposal of the mother, offering all its “faith,” so to speak. This situation is common to all human cultures because of the universal fact of human infantile helplessness (6).

Acknowledging that “religious fantasy is humankind’s earliest form of social response to the earliest individual psychological tasks”(7), Bleich states that in confronting God, “we almost too openly seek an omnipotent parent to trust” (8).

Denied proper parental guidance in their childhood, both Zenobia and Priscilla look for relationships with strong, influential and charismatic men who can replace the missing father-figure in their lives. They unconsciously put themselves in the position of a child to be cherished and taken care of in their relationships with both men. While they both realize that their needs are not satisfied by Westervelt who “takes care” of both women by exploiting them sexually and economically to gratify his own desires and make his own fortune, they both, obviously, have been originally attracted to Westervelt’s intellectual and sexual power. Their disappointment in Westervelt’s cynicism and egoism leads them to Hollingsworth, another strong father-figure of the novel, who, while possessing the power and charisma of rotten Westervelt, differs, in their opinion, from the latter by the nobility of his purpose and sentiments. Both women fail to realize that in their flight from Old Moodie to Westervelt to Hollingsworth, they tragically run to what they are running from. Hollingsworth is no proper substitution for the discredited father-figures in their lives, for “Hollingsworth’s heart,” as Coverdale observes, “is on fire with his own purpose, but icy

for all human affection” (100). Although the philanthropist is interested in life’s financial rewards only to the extent that money can help him to realize his monomaniacal project, he is equally unable, even if for a different reason, to sustain a nurturing and satisfying relationship with a living human being.

Since human consciousness remains partially infantile throughout human life, the search for an omnipotent parent to trust never ends; when humanity cannot place their trust into God intellectually, it still continues longing for Him emotionally. In the actual history of mid-nineteenth century America only those utopian communities survived which were united by the binding component of an unquestioning religious faith.<sup>3</sup> This component cannot, on the surface, provide a solid foundation for a community of intellectuals like Blithedale or Brook Farm. Perfect societies or utopias become a way to place trust in an omnipotent system instead of an omnipotent parent, yet within the Blithedale community the search for one true system degenerates into the search for “an omnipotent parent” almost immediately and imperceptibly for its members. Even so, the Blithedale character’s “childlike surrender to A Provider...who dispense[s] earthly fortune as well as spiritual health” (Erikson 250) does not bring the desired security and contentment. “One of the deepest conflicts in life,” writes Erikson,

is the hate for a parent who served as a model and the executor of the superego, but who (in some form) was found trying to get away with the very transgressions which the child can no longer tolerate in himself (257).

Zenobia discovers that Hollingsworth, quick to accuse her of betraying Priscilla, remains stubbornly blind to his own role in this betrayal which proceeded with his full consent. Her suicide, inexplicable in view of her intellectual acumen, becomes understandable if one realizes that in killing herself she is actually killing her superego. Moreover, to my knowledge, no critic has observed that before Zenobia is betrayed by Hollingsworth, she is betrayed by her own long-lost father, who arbitrarily disinherits and rejects her.

The father-like figures of the novel warrant no respect. The significantly missing, even if they are, like Moodie-Fauntleroy, physically alive, fathers and mothers of *The*

*Blithedale Romance* suggest that perhaps Hawthorne replaced the personal history of his characters by their collective history, making morally deficient Westervelt, fanatical Hollingsworth, and spineless old Moodie stand symbolically as the nation's discredited fathers. Old Moodie's presence in the lives of his daughters, Zenobia and Priscilla, can hardly be seen as a positive example for his daughters to follow. He takes pride in Zenobia's beauty, which reminds him of the days of his former "glory," and he feels crushing pity for his poor Priscilla. Yet, by means of metaphor and displacement, Hawthorne may be actually suggesting that in his less glorious days Old Moodie actually traded Priscilla's sexual favors for money by offering gentlemen of his acquaintance Priscilla's purses for sale.<sup>4</sup> His decision to disinherit Zenobia and transfer the inheritance of his brother to Priscilla appears to be less the result of his parental love than of his egotistical need to live vicariously through his daughters: he decides to "rescue" himself from poverty and humiliation through Priscilla as he has decided, not so long ago, to leave the inheritance with Zenobia who, in his opinion, deserved it by merely being magnificent. His parental egotistical whims sow discord between the two sisters, who are not taught by their father to share but to compete for affection and money. In this way Hawthorne subtly leads the reader to realize that mistrust and competitiveness, deeply ingrained in human nature, stem from the first human experience of a social life within one's own family.

"Utopia as a viable idea," Bleich indicates,

depended on a prevailing cultural faith in some kind of workable "objective" reality or the belief that social behavior is organizable in such a way that individual experience will be conflict free (125).

But individual experience cannot be conflict free. The need to trust and have faith co-exists in individuals with a complete inability to trust which is a deeply ingrained feature of human nature. Moreover, as Paul Tillich observes "the personal and social aspects of utopia cannot be separated. Much of the tragedy of our own situation is rooted in the fact that we do not see it in its unity"(297). Yet Hawthorne certainly does see the personal and the social in its unity.

Coverdale travels both in space (from town to country) and time for his utopia. He repeatedly stresses the continuity between the Blithedale experiment and that “of the Pilgrims, whose high enterprise, as we sometimes flattered ourselves, we had taken up”(117). Ironically, in looking for the air that had not been breathed once and again, Coverdale moves back in time, not forward, running towards the state of affairs he is running from -- as Zenobia and Priscilla do in running from Westervelt to Hollingsworth. His quest for the lost paradise leaves him precisely where he started, for the change of environment does not result in the reformation of the world. Traveling back in time in search of the lost values of early American Pilgrims does not help him either. The persistent association of Hollingsworth with Apostle Eliot, a seventeenth-century missionary who successfully converted the Indians of Massachusetts to Christianity, translating the Bible into their language, merely highlights Hawthorne’s ambiguity toward mythologized American past. As Eliot’s motives have been questioned by some historians,<sup>5</sup> Hollingsworth’s motives, too, are revealed to be less than commendable. The ambiguity in Hawthorne’s perception of “glorious” American past is also revealed through his association of the Blithedale enterprise with the “revival of an old humbug” (5).

Far from being unsympathetic to or ironic with respect to “his former excellent [Brook Farm] associates” (2), Hawthorne seeks to portray through his Blithedale characters the prevalent philosophical outlook and typical psychological mindsets of his contemporary countrymen. He also portrays basic human responses to the social and economic reality of life in mid nineteenth-century America, such as the proliferation of utopian experiments. *The Blithedale Romance* seems to suggest strongly that the impracticality of American projections into the future, lay, among other equally important reasons, in the falseness of the American perception of its past. In Hawthorne’s time, as in many respects in ours, the United States, as John Brown writes,

still seemed to be -- to Americans who believed themselves God’s chosen people and to many European thinkers as well -- “the hope of mankind,” a possible earthly paradise. Here was the vast, new unexploited continent, incalculably rich in natural resources, where land might be had for the

taking. It was a continent, it was felt, that was free from the burden of history, unsullied by the injustice, the superstitions and the cruel social distinctions of tradition-bound European society. Here, truly, man should be able to “live in Paradise anew” (74).

The reality of mid nineteenth-century America, however, with black slavery flourishing in the South and unchecked ruthless exploitation of the poor, the weak and the underprivileged, presented a picture which hardly agreed with the above vision of earthly paradise. Yet the Transcendentalist movement of that time was deeply divided with respect to the appropriate course of action to take to remedy the ills of society. Emerson and Thoreau were openly skeptical about the success of the Brook Farm experiment. Already in 1840, Emerson, who did not care much for Fourier, wrote in his *Journals* that “one man is counterpoise to a city...his solitude is more prevalent & beneficent than the concert of crowds” (quoted in Brown, 74). Thoreau was even more outspoken, strongly affirming his position: “As for these communities, I think I had rather keep bachelor’s hall in hell than go to board in Heaven” (Brown 75). Still other Transcendentalists, like George Ripley, felt “that contemplation must be combined with action,” which eventually led to the establishment of “The Institute of Agriculture and Education,” known to history as Brook Farm. In many respects, Coverdale’s ambivalence towards the Blithedale affair reflects the division in the circle of the Transcendentalists themselves.

Hawthorne’s position in the Transcendentalist debate cannot be used to support either of the sides. His insight into human nature is both deeper and less optimistic than that of his Transcendentalist friends. He sees human nature as seeking community and running from it: community clearly does not work for intellectually inclined individuals, nor are they quite able to work things out for themselves individually. The failure to reconcile the mutually exclusive desires of preserving one’s self-interest, while avoiding the loneliness and alienation that go hand in hand with it, generates a regressive utopian vision of an Arcadian environment where the whole world serves one function: to gratify one’s infantile wishes for communion and security, for unconditional love and acceptance, and for care-free existence devoid of financial worries. Members of the Blithedale



community do not seek to reform the world; they seek to escape it. They are all refugees to the never-never land of easily granted wishes, although they escape from the reality of different evils: Priscilla flies from economic exploitation and poverty; Zenobia flies from the “narrow limitations” the society imposes on intellectually accomplished and financially autonomous women capable of independent thinking; Coverdale flies from the loneliness and purposelessness of his existence; and Hollingsworth flies from himself.

Hawthorne, contrary to Robert Elliott’s assertion, did not evade the political and sociological questions posed by Brook Farm. These issues are addressed in a fictional and artistic form that is deliberately chosen to emphasize the “fictional” character of political and sociological issues -- issues which are tantalizing, slippery and finally unsatisfactory as a way of describing “reality.” The novel starts with Miles Coverdale returning from the exhibition of the Veiled Lady and turning over in his mind the riddle of the Veiled Lady’s response to his query as to the success of the Blithedale enterprise:

The response, by-the-by, was of the true Sibylline stamp, nonsensical in its first aspect, yet, on closer study, unfolding a variety of interpretations, one of which has certainly accorded with the event (6).

Coverdale tries to catch the “slippery purport” of this riddle by the tail when he is stopped by Old Moodie, who will introduce the Veiled Lady to the Blithedale community. This small passage strategically placed at the beginning of Coverdale’s narrative sheds light on the character of the novel itself, “nonsensical in its first aspect,” and draws the reader’s attention to the variety of possible interpretations of it, each of which will to a certain degree accord with the novel. To some extent it stands as a warning to all critical efforts to unveil the Veiled Lady or to unveil to the meaning of the novel, by using a variety of critical approaches. Each of these approaches generates valuable insights, yet none of them can adequately unveil the meaning of the novel. Although the identity of the Veiled Lady is publicly revealed at the end of the novel, the identity of this identity still remains a mystery. The veil shrouds the identities of all the main characters of the book and the veil shrouds the identity of the social and political ideas that the members of the Blithedale community

attempt to implement. In joining the Blithedale community, neither Coverdale nor Hollingsworth has a clear understanding of what Fourierism is. Coverdale attempts to introduce to Hollingsworth some arbitrarily chosen notions about the system and provokes his angry and intolerant response. For both of them neither Socialism nor Fourierism has a clear-cut identity, apart from how these social theories are interpreted by them. Yet both of them have only a very dim and vague understanding of what these theories are about. After all, Coverdale openly admits that the bond between the Blithedalers was negative, rather than positive, suggesting that neither his companions, nor he himself had a clear understanding of what they were aiming at:

Our bond, it seems to me, was not affirmative, but negative. We had individually found one thing or another to quarrel with in our past life, and were pretty well agreed as to the inexpediency of lumbering along with the old system any farther. As to what should be substituted, there was much less unanimity (63).

As to the lack of unanimity about what should be substituted for the old system, there is one important conclusion to be made, a conclusion that Hawthorne does not spell out for the reader explicitly. Although the writer states in the Preface to *The Blithedale Romance* that he does not “put forward the slightest pretensions to illustrate a theory, or elicit a conclusion, favorable or otherwise, in respect to Socialism,”(1) the reader is bound to form a different opinion. This opinion, however, is of a more general character, pertaining not only to Socialism, but to all human visions of reorganizing the world. The extreme categorization of the main characters of the book by the author undermines the reader’s conviction that people with such diverse characters can act in concert. Moreover, their complete unaccountability of their own motives and identities, as well as their lack of knowledge of the true motives and identities of others, makes a concerted effort even less likely. Further, if ideas are created by ungraspable human identities whose real motives are hidden from their followers, who, in their turn, are mistaken about their own identities, what chance does any idea have to succeed? Ideas, then, like identities, have deceiving appearances. In this way, although Hawthorne does not openly take on the responsibility

of denouncing the Socialist ideal, he effectively proves it to be a fiction. Ideas and ideals, then, assume the form of prophetic or Sibylline utterances that, much as the pronouncements of the Veiled Lady, unfold “a variety of interpretations,” one of which can always be stretched to accord with an individual’s personal motives (6).

To define the identity of utopia as a literary genre or as a social vision is no easier than it is to define the identity of a human being. Utopias, as human intellectual constructions in general, are the products of human imagination, which is why utopian visions in their totality remain as ungraspable as the human individuals who create them. If human identity is an illusion, so is the identity of human ideas. The unknown and ungraspable identity of human ideas turns them into an inadequate and illusory foundation for a human community or society. Therefore, ideas or social visions can have no proponents: those who claim to be the followers of an idea or a vision either attempt to qualify the original vision and adopt it to their own needs, or they mistakenly believe they follow the “true” spirit of the vision, while what they really follow is their own, more often than not, unexamined and unquestioned perception of it.

## Conclusion

Contrary to my original intent, my own discussion of utopianism in *The Blithedale Romance* has emerged as brief. This is not entirely my fault. The required length of this thesis which appeared insurmountably long when I started this work, turned out to be deplorably inadequate for exploring all the relevant parallels that can be drawn between the novel and utopian thought and tradition. Yet it was important to establish a remarkable unity, neglected, in my opinion by many other scholars, between the literary form of the book, its content and its thematic interests.

This remarkable unity resists the novel's identification as failed utopian satire, failed melodrama or failed autobiography. The elusiveness of the novel's identity exposes the failure of critically prescribed literary perspectives to appreciate its artistic value in full measure, whereas the lukewarm reader-response indicates that the misleading title of the novel betrays the expectations of romantically and voyeristically attuned readers by appealing first and foremost to their underdeveloped intellectual side. This appeal to the reader's intellectual side firmly links *The Blithedale Romance* to the literary genre of utopia. Hawthorne does not invite the reader to share a fantasy dream; he invites the reader to think about the limits of human reason. "It is a fact, and in some ways a melancholy fact," writes Paul Johnson in *Intellectuals*, "that massive works of the intellect do not spring from the abstract workings of the brain and the imagination; they are deeply rooted in the personality"(69).

Hawthorne's remarkable insight into human psychology long before the emergence and recognition of the theory of psychoanalysis puts the human soul or human self under the microscope, baring the conflicting desires and unrecognized wishes. Coverdale's personality emerges as a compromise between the requirements of internalized parental injunctions, his need to reject parental authority to achieve autonomy as an individual human being, and his deep and unacknowledged need to be loved and cherished. To

realize himself fully as an autonomous and an intellectually and emotionally mature human being, Coverdale needs love which he unconsciously equates with security in a threatening world. Unable to resolve these conflicting needs, Coverdale does not emerge as a mature personality which recognizes the conflicting nature of his needs and is thus able to transcend them. The utopian impulse that drives Coverdale and other members of the Blithedale community seeks to replace the sense of security granted by a close circle of the family by the sense of security granted by a larger community based on family love. Yet within this community Coverdale still seeks his fantasy “nucleus family”: his father (Hollingsworth), his mother (Zenobia), and his sister (Priscilla). He re-enacts his childhood drama by transferring its most traumatizing elements onto the members of the Blithedale community whose personal interests and involvements make them a suitable “target” for Coverdale’s private theater. Yet Coverdale’s fantasy family fails him, and unable to trust the small circle formed by family ties, he finds himself equally unable to trust a larger circle of human community.

In the history of nineteenth-century utopian thought *The Blithedale Romance* stands as a revelation unheeded, unappreciated, neglected. The work of the intellectual rather than the emotional Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* questions implicit and often unexamined assumptions underlying both classical and modern utopian literary and social structures. Hawthorne puts under the microscope the factor most neglected by utopian thinkers and writers: human psychology and motivation. The writer argues through the fictional and literary form of his novel that the utopian impulse is the product of unsatisfied and persistent emotional needs that humans tend to rationalize into a utopian structure, without having a clear understanding of what stands behind the human tendency to utopianize. As there are different emotional needs, there are different utopias motivated by them. The utopian quest for control, the utopian quest for subjection, and the utopian quest for freedom are various manifestation of the human response to the complexity and loneliness of human life which find themselves translated into different types of utopian

structures. *The Blithedale Romance* is different from other utopian novels or theories in that it examines all three utopian responses to the human condition, linking the utopian quest for control with Hollingsworth, the utopian quest for subjection with Priscilla, and the conflicting needs for freedom and subjection with Coverdale and Zenobia. Both Coverdale and Zenobia fail to negotiate successfully the tension generated in their psyche by the conflicting needs for freedom and subjection. Zenobia commits suicide and Coverdale loses his creative poetic gift. The tragic fate of these two characters is brought about by their failure to overcome their desperate need in an trustworthy and “God-like” authority to subject to.

The importance of *The Blithedale Romance* for the utopian tradition is not limited to Hawthorne’s insights into the psychological origin of the utopian dream or into the possibility of translating a utopian dream into reality. As Peter Ruppert maintains, utopia

is not just an ideal vision of the future, nor a blueprint for its realization, but a dialectical method for exploring our limitations and our possibilities, a dialectic that allows us to examine our historical situation with anxiety and hope. The method of this dialectical exploration is unique and its effects can be liberating: utopia displaces social reality with dream, giving us access to the forces of manipulation and domination that constrain us, and invites us to dream our own utopian dreams. The crucial effect of this dialectic is that it enables us to apprehend our own present moment as a moment in history. In defamiliarizing and restructuring our perception of the present moment, utopia becomes an index for history itself, our social history as well as our personal history (166).

There seems to be no better framework for considering Hawthorne’s novel and its import for utopian thought than the dialectical approach suggested by Peter Ruppert. Hawthorne’s novel is only superficially involved with love triangles and romantic conventions. It is a deep and somber reflection on the nature of human ideals and ideas, human perceptions of their past and their hopes for the future, their social and personal history.

As many utopian writers, the Blithedale reformers operate under the assumption that creating a human environment would create a conflict-free environment where people can work and create in conditions close to those of the lost Paradise. What they fail to realize is that the manipulative and exploiting economic systems are created by people

themselves; the roots of social injustice lie deep in the human heart, not in the external circumstances shaping human life. Even more important is Hawthorne's suggestion that, although Blithedale characters pay lip service to the ideals of equality, justice and brotherhood, they at the same time foster ambivalence and doubts as to the possibility of implementing these ideas in practice. However, even though they sometimes express their ambivalence and doubts to themselves and occasionally in frustration to each other, they fail to analyze consciously the implications of the gap between the ideals they outwardly proclaim and "truths" they secretly, and often unconsciously, believe in. In other words, they lack the knowledge most fundamental to the success of any enterprise: the knowledge of themselves. This knowledge is not concealed from the Blithedalers, but they are blind to it. Ironically, the disillusionment experienced by Zenobia and Coverdale at the end of the novel is caused by the revelation of the false facade covering the identity of others. Yet they remain stubbornly blind to the inconsistencies of their own image of themselves, projecting the faults of their own nature onto others and onto the world at large.

Unfortunately space limitations prevented me from providing an adequate treatment of some issues that certainly deserve closer attention. One of these issues is the suppression of the feminine powerfully and painfully explored in *The Blithedale Romance*. It is clear that both Hollingsworth and Coverdale, despite their high-flown rhetoric in praise of women, are profoundly misogynist. Their misogyny, however, is unconscious and thus unrecognized, being the product of centuries-old unquestioned and deeply ingrained attitudes and beliefs. These unquestioned attitudes prevent true equality between the sexes and ultimately prevent the attainment of brotherhood and sisterhood envisioned by a utopian society. Moreover, they prove to be equally harmful for men and women alike. *The Blithedale Romance* provides ample material for exploring gender issues and their role in maintaining the hierarchical structures in existing societies. It would also be essential to explore further what Lauren Berlant calls Hawthorne's resistance to theory by focusing on the missing "mother-child" connection in *The Blithedale Romance*. This connection is

presumed to be of paramount importance by Freud and Erikson; its absence in the novel may, as I argued in my thesis, indicate Hawthorne's deliberate intent to replace people's personal histories by the collective one. At the same time my feeling is that this explanation does not exhaust the significance and the implications of the suppression of the "mother-child" connection in the novel. Some very interesting and promising conclusions can be arrived at if one undertakes a profound study of *The Blithedale Romance* in the light of Judith Butler's "theories in subjection."

Another issue that deserves extensive treatment is the issue of intellectuality. Although Hawthorne effectively undermines an unduly optimistic belief in the power of reason, generated by the Enlightenment and supported by nineteenth-century utopists, it is undeniable that he is able to demonstrate the limits of human reason by using his intellectual faculties. In other words, he proves by his own example that the limits of reason can be discerned only by reason itself. It is perhaps this inconspicuous and unapparent assertion of the power of reason, which manifests itself in the very fact that a novel like *The Blithedale Romance* can be written, that led Henry James to his uncommon and astonishing statement that "the effect of the novel is to make one think more agreeably of life"(126). Even if winter, as Roy Male asserts, cannot be "converted into May through intellectual effort"(13), intellectual effort can and should be used to recognize and overcome the dangerous and self-defeating patterns in human thinking. Better self-knowledge could help us to abandon the ultimately ineffective mechanism of projecting onto the world and onto one's society the undesirable features of one's own nature. If utopian thinking has failed so far to establish an Arcadian environment in human world, it has been rightly credited by Paul Tillich with improving the lot of humankind throughout human history. It is commonly believed that Hawthorne had no faith in progress. If we accept this conclusion, we would find ourselves at a loss in attempting to answer the question of why he wrote *The Blithedale Romance*.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Crews quotes *The Memoirs of Julian Hawthorne*, ed. Edith Garrigues Hawthorne. New York, 1938, p. 34, and Hawthorne's *American Notebooks*, ed. Randall Stewart. New Haven, 1932, pp. 308f.

<sup>2</sup> John Harmon McElroy and Edward L. McDonald argue very convincingly in their article "The Coverdale Romance" that "there is an unusual potential for ambiguity in this Hawthorne novel"(1). The critics suggest that Coverdale "killed Zenobia in a burst of dammed-up sexual frustrations"(9). While, in my opinion, the novel does contain important clues indicating that Coverdale is responsible for Zenobia's death, I disagree with McElroy and McDonald in ascribing Zenobia's murder to Coverdale's sexual frustration. I believe that Hawthorne deliberately includes conflicting evidence in the novel to suggest that different scenarios are equally plausible and to avoid what Swann calls "authoritative explanatory status." Hawthorne, in Swann's opinion, maintains that a narrative can never be adequately "genetic or teleological in its account of life"(239).

<sup>3</sup> Krishnan Kumar provides a detailed discussion of nineteenth-century utopian communities in America in Chapter 3, "Utopia in Nineteenth-Century America," of his study of *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*.

<sup>4</sup> Allan and Barbara Lefcowitz challenge in "Some Rents in the Veil: New Light on Priscilla and Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance*" Priscilla's "ontological status as the personification of an unalloyed spiritual good" (265). They argue that "at least part of Priscilla's strangely cloistered past was spent in the practice of sexual activities of less than a pristine or conventionally wholesome nature" (267).

<sup>5</sup> See "Fantasies of Utopia in *The Blithedale Romance*" by Lauren Berlant.

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