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“Turning the Whole Affair into a Ballad” of Misogyny

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Abstract

The story of Blithedale dwells on an experimental community reminiscent of the Brook Farm Transcendental group with which Hawthorne had briefly been associated in Roxbury, Massachusetts. Indeed, his participation in the communal experiment served as the germ for the novel, which was written ten years after his one-year stay there, but the impact that his experience among the social reformers had upon the fictitious Blithedale community is a point of much conjecture and debate among critics. Many of them see distinct parallels between Hawthorne’s characters and actual persons of the day, while others have rejected any but the slightest resemblance to the actual Brook Farm experimenters. The article focuses on *The Blithedale Romance* as a novelistic indication of the American misogynistic narratives with its archetypal origins.

Keywords: Feminism, women's issues, Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, American literature.

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Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance (1852) follows through on the tradition of ideas about a probable regional utopia in America.¹ According to Fryer (1976), during the years from 1840 to 1900 “the ideas and images which shaped the American mind were those having to do with the urge toward perfection” (p. x). With this urge, over two hundred secular and religious communities were built in America. These communities represented a move in American culture towards individualism as well as disillusionment with the establishment that the city life represented (Curtis, 1961, p. 15; Taylor, 1971, p. 38; Francis, 1997, p. 51; Bowman, 1962, p. 49; White, p. 78). The individualistic drives combined with communal beliefs and principles underlay them (Crowley, 1997, p. 241; Cook, 1996, p. 205). The builders of the communities intended to concentrate “on the regeneration of the soul” and reform the society by “adapting the ideas of European socialists to the New World” (Fryer, p. 16).

Brook Farm was the most famous of the communities in the nineteenth century (McWilliams, 1994, p. 74). It was a utopian community of transcendentalists, established at West Roxbury, Massachusetts in 1841 (Buell, 1986, p. 53; Grossberg, 2000, p. 3). Thinking that the “Christian life could not flourish under existing social conditions,” George Ripley resigned his ministry in the effort to “create an exemplary society” on a small farm (Chevigny, 1976, p. 283). Later the community's ideals were closed on the Church. The community was eventually based on the socialist ideas of mutual responsibility and mutual share. The members of the Brook Farm Institute of Agriculture and Education shared equally in work, benefits, and remuneration (McWilliams, 1994, p. 74). The members consisted of such famous people of New England as Theodore Parker, William Henry Channing, Emerson, Hawthorne, Fuller and others. Tindall and Shi states that the community was abandoned in 1847 because one of the central buildings was burnt down (Tindall and Shi, 1989, p. 8; Howe, 1957, p. 168). This heralded that the experiment of a probable utopia turned into a dystopia in Hawthorne's life. Initially Hawthorne was very enthusiastic about the project. In a letter, dated 13 April 1841, he wrote that he considered the project like an Edenic utopia, and that he felt “the original Adam reviving

within me” (Desalvo, 1987, p. 98). However, he left the community earlier than others upon his disillusionment with the project in 1841 (Codman, 1971, p. 8). He later wrote to his wife Sophia that “labor” was “the curse of the world” (Desalvo, p. 98). Hawthorne left the utopian farm, but revived it in a new, fictional guise, in The Blithedale Romance.

Writing The Blithedale Romance Hawthorne heavily drew on his experience at the Brook Farm (McCall, 1999, p. 29; Kesterson, 1999, p. 66). In her introduction to the novel, Kolodny writes that the book was the first of Hawthorne’s longer fiction to employ a first-person narrator, which reveals how much Hawthorne put his observations into the book (Kolodny, X). The Blithedale Romance carries so many parallelisms between the characters in the book and the actual individuals of the Brook Farm that, upon publication, it was almost taken to be a verbatim account of Hawthorne’s life at the farm (Gollin, Idol & Eisiminger, 1991, p. 33). Zenobia, who is drowned to death in the novel, was soon identified with Margaret Fuller, who had similarly drowned in a shipwreck two years ago as the ship was barging ashore America (Mather, 1940, p. 130; Stovall, 1956, p. 127). Other characters in the book were also associated with real people, including the author himself (Tharpe, 1967, p. 125; Gatta, 1997, p. 53; Snyder, 1999, p. 67).

The community in The Blithedale Romance is not, however, a precise “historical representation” of Brook Farm, but is presented as an interpretation of struggle between men and women and the wish for domination (Bauer, 1988, p. 18; Lawrence, 1923, p. 154). As a matter of fact, in his preface to the novel, Hawthorne says that “he [himself] had this Community in his mind...[and] he had occasionally availed himself of his actual reminiscences, in the hope of giving a more life-like tint to the fancy sketch” (p. 1). His concern is actually “with the Socialist Community” in order to establish “a theatre” where “the creatures of his brain” may play their “phantasmagorical antics” (p. 1). It is clear, then, that Hawthorne wants to create a fictive battleground in the Edenic theater where his characters are in an undeclared sexual politics so that he can link the later failure of the community to Zenobia, the Lilith figure. This Hawthorne does by his “equivocal” position, which puts him in a special status “as a Commentator” on the society of the Brook Farm

(Fryer, p. 28). Moreover, by pitting Priscilla, the pre-lapsarian Eve, against Lilith, he can display the kind of ideal woman in his moral universe. Zenobia emerges as the vanquished party out of this rivalry; on the other hand, Priscilla is declared the victorious angel acclaimed by the male members of the community (Bauer, pp. 18-9).

Writing in The Faces of Eve about of the typology of women in patriarchy, Fryer points out that “the dark lady exists outside the boundaries of the community, while the pale maiden typifies the traditional values of the community”; in the final analysis “they are creatures of the same culture, inventions of the same imagination” (p. 28). Fryer’s analysis is indicative of women in Hawthorne’s The Blithedale Romance. Zenobia and Priscilla are two diametrically opposite halves of Hawthorne’s imaginary woman (Fiedler, 1982, p. 201; Von Abele, 1955, p. 63). Zenobia, “an early leader of the women’s movement,” is a Lilith figure (Fiedler, p. 208). On the other hand, contrasted with her is Priscilla, who plays one of the pre-lapsarian Eves.² Earlier in his notebooks, Hawthorne had pointed to the dichotomy of “the other” that he was planning to create: “OUR BODY to be possessed by two different spirits; so that half of visage shall express one mood and the other half another” (Miller, 1962, p. 767). The result seems to be Zenobia and Priscilla, who are half-sisters of opposite idiosyncrasies in the novel. Though there is a blood tie between them, they are presented as the people of two totally different worlds and worldviews. Hence, as Wendy Martin phrases it, The Blithedale Romance becomes a “secular version” of The Scarlet Letter” (Martin, 1988, p. 230). Just as The Puritans’ Edenic Bay Colony in Massachusetts was disturbed by Hester Prynne, the Blithedalers’ zeal to re-create an Edenic community is first disrupted, and then destroyed by the existence and death of Zenobia (Fryer, p.76).

Zenobia is a defender of women’s rights, like Fuller, and “a sister of the Veiled Lady” (p. 45). According to Von Abele (1955), her name means “having life from Zeus” (p. 80). It is hinted that Zenobia is not actually her name, but a penname, which she uses when writing for magazines, and newspapers (Wineapple, 2001, p. 33; Pfister, 1991, p. 80; Cherniavsky, 1995, p. 65). She wants to escape male stereotyping of

women: “we women judge one another by tokens that escape the obtuseness of masculine perceptions” (p. 34). She hopes that in the future the segregation of sexes in respect to work will be turned upside down: “some of us, who wear the petticoat, will go afield, and the leave *the weaker brethren* to take our places in the kitchen” (p. 16, emphasis added). Thus, Zenobia’s aim is to turn upside down the notion of woman as the weaker sex.

Coverdale is the poet-narrator of the novel, and he is the first to confront Zenobia. His upbringing does not allow him to feel sympathy for her ideas. It is important to observe that the events are narrated through his consciousness. The reader is locked “into Coverdale’s consciousness in every incident” (Desalvo, p. 101). Colacurcio (1984) also discusses that the narrator Coverdale is unreliable (p. 32). In other words, the reader is forced to think and interpret certain situations and characters from Coverdale’s viewpoint. Hawthorne’s choice of Coverdale as narrator is crucially significant because

Coverdale serves as the tutelary power of the community; his presence functions to remind the members of their places in the Blithedale hierarchy...Coverdale's constant surveillance of the community keeps subversive activities in check. In fact, Coverdale reinserts the operation of social control into the community that thought it had escaped such structures (Bauer, p. 30).

As a result of his assigned role in the story, Coverdale’s omnipresent eyes take “note of Zenobia’s aspect” (p. 15). The flower on Zenobia’s hair strikes “deep root into my memory” (p. 15). Owing to her feminist ideas, Coverdale thinks that Zenobia’s mind is “full of weeds” (p. 44), although at times she is an “admirable figure of a woman” (p. 15), and it is a “blessing” to win “Zenobia’s love” (p. 126). A woman is admissible into his emotional and moral universe as long as she is an object of desire, and sight of pleasure. Earlier, Coverdale’s foreshadowing prediction shows that the Edenic community is doomed because of Zenobia. Her very presence causes men’s “heroic enterprise to show like an illusion, a masquerade, a pastoral, a counterfeit arcadia”

(p. 21) She is “like a ghost” no matter if she helps Coverdale recover from his illness when he falls ill (p. 15). Zenobia is also associated with Pandora and Eve, the sources of evil, in the two misogynistic myths of the Western literature. Sometimes she appears in the image of Eve the Temptress: Zenobia’s manners, her “perfectly developed figure” remind the narrator of “Eve in her earliest garment” (p. 16). She is also presented as a replica of “Pandora, fresh from Vulcan’s workshop” (p. 24). Similar descriptions of Zenobia that associate her with evil and male fear of woman are recurrently related in the novel through the narrator’s consciousness.

Coverdale initially thinks that the community is “Paradise anew.” Their “generous” and “absurd” idea in establishing the community is to give up everything they have “for the sake of showing mankind the example of a life governed by other than the false and cruel principles” (p. 19). On the way to Blithedale, having already been informed that Zenobia is there (p. 8), he begins to get sick: “I had caught a fearful cold” (p. 12). Later he also feels that, “we stood in a position of new hostility, rather than new brotherhood” (p. 20), which recalls the hostility Yahweh puts between the serpent and Eve after the fall. The apostolic society intends to reform “the world,” but the narrator also complains about Blithedale in exclamation: “How cold Arcadia was this!” (pp. 38-9). As Coverdale perceives it, in the beginning is the end of the Blithedale Eden.

Coverdale’s coming to the Edenic Brook Farm is, then, like entering the archetypal garden only to find that the serpent, Zenobia, is already there, as is the case in the first chapter of The Scarlet Letter. Zenobia says that she is “the first-comer” (p. 16). The narrator adds that she has an influence coming “from Eve” when she was “made” (p. 17). In fact, it is soon after he comes to the farm that Coverdale falls sick. His illness is like “death,” and “avenue” between life and death (p. 61). This is linked to Hawthorne's disillusionment with the Brook Farm experiment, as Crews (1966) suggests (p. 194). Moreover, Coverdale quickly becomes disillusioned with the agricultural work. He finds in it none of the spiritual significance that he had expected: according to him, labor is merely tiring and irksome toil.

In the eyes of Coverdale, Zenobia's beauty and "her threatening sexuality," let alone her feminism, are "emblematic of the threatening philosophy she espouses" (Fryer, p. 211). Extrapolating from his observations, Coverdale concludes that he should "not have fallen in love with Zenobia," stressing "under any circumstances" because all about her physical attraction is "evil taste," and a "witch's best concocted dainties" (p. 48). Moreover, she is not good at housework such as cooking, and is not eligible for a good homemaker (pp. 43 and 48). It is also hinted that she may have married and experienced sexual intercourse before; so, there is "no folded petal, no latent dew-drop, in this perfectly developed rose!" (pp. 47). His ambiguous supposition that she is not a virgin is a constant source of obsession with Coverdale.

Coverdale's illness right after his arrival and subsequent period of ailment transforms him: "In literal and physical truth, I was quite another man" (p. 61). Nonetheless, the change will not be for the better but for the worse due to Zenobia. As Fryer suggests, in the narrator's eyes these are not the only flaws Zenobia has in her nature (p. 209). She also has mysterious connections with evil through Westervelt, a mesmerist. Her attempts to manipulate Priscilla, to confront the male leaders of the community, and her pride are a source of disturbance among the Blithedalers (Crews, 201). Although Coverdale says that "the truest wisdom is, to resist the doubt--and the profoundest wisdom, to know when it ought to be resisted, and when to be obeyed," he does not let Zenobia experience heroism as the novel advances towards its denouement (p. 10). Some critics even suggest that Zenobia does not actually commit suicide by drowning herself (Desalvo, p. 111; Fryer, p. 89). Rather, they think that she is murdered and thrown into the water by Coverdale because it is he only who sees Zenobia for the last time, and later spreads the news that Zenobia is dead. Hers is quite an unheroic death compared with the distinguished qualities that she had when alive.

Priscilla is pitted against Zenobia in the story as the completely different daughter of the same father. Their mothers are different, and each of them seems to convey the characteristics of her own mother. Whereas Zenobia has "native strength," and needs no "help," Priscilla is weak and miserable. Her coming to Blithedale provides male characters,

such as Coverdale, with an opportunity to compare and contrast the characteristics of the two women. Commenting on Priscilla as “pale maiden,” Fryer says that

pale maidens deprive men, who enshrine them and declare them as objects of their affection, of a necessary vitality (like the amaranthine flower). If there are just as many hints that Priscilla really is a spiritual being, literally the half-sister of Zenobia, her psychosexual opposite, then a squeamish minor poet and his creator might well unconsciously wish to degrade her. Like Hilda and Sophia, Priscilla is associated with doves—one dove...With no identity of her own, then, Priscilla is...”the type of womanhood, such as man has spent centuries in making” - a depressing and devastating portrait of woman in the nineteenth century (pp. 91 and 93).

It is Hollingsworth, a “philanthropist” dedicated to reforming the criminals, who first introduces Priscilla into the community. When Hollingsworth brings with him the shy and nervous woman, Zenobia does not immediately welcome her--though the latter soon becomes attached to her. Priscilla adores Zenobia from the start, and tends to come under her influence. In the course of the novel, a letter arriving at the community from one of the city's missionaries evokes some suspicions about Priscilla's whereabouts as to whether the girl has only just escaped from a mysterious place, or whether she was involved in some perilous or sinful activities. Earlier, when Priscilla arrives at Blithedale, Coverdale regards her as a “stranger, or whatever she were.” His impression soon changes, and he tends to think that the young woman is pitiable in every sense of the word:

she was seen to be a very young woman, dressed in a poor, but decent gown, made high in the neck, and without any regard to fashion or smartness. Her brown hair fell down from beneath a hood, not in curls, but with only a slight wave; her face was of a wan, almost sickly hue, betokening habitual seclusion from the sun and free

atmosphere, like a flower-shrub that had done its best to blossom in too scanty light. To complete *the pitiableness of her aspect*, she shivered either with cold, or fear, or nervous excitement, so that you might have beheld her shadow vibrating on the fire-lighted wall. *In short, there has seldom been seen so depressed and sad a figure as this young girl's; and it was hardly possible to help being angry with her, from mere despair of doing anything for her comfort.* The fantasy occurred to me, that she was some desolate kind of a creature doomed to wander about in snow-storms, and that, though the ruddiness of our window-panes had tempted her into a human dwelling, she would not remain long enough to melt the icicles out of her hair (p. 27, emphasis added).

Initially, Coverdale not only pities Priscilla, he is also defensive of her against Zenobia's scornful estimate, and mistreatment at the beginning. When Priscilla meets “no kindly reception” from Zenobia, Coverdale bitterly says that he “never thoroughly forgave Zenobia for her conduct on this occasion” (p. 28). He is also enthusiastic about Priscilla's being on the farm, and her name reminds him of pristine womanhood: “Priscilla! Priscilla! I repeated the name to myself...as if no other name would have adhered to her” (p. 29). This is also the scene where Coverdale feels that there is something going on between Zenobia and Hollingsworth: “and it was with that inauspicious meaning in his glance [which “no woman” could “resist”], that Hollingsworth first met Zenobia's eyes, and began his influence upon her life” (pp. 28-9). Coverdale promptly decides to save Priscilla from Zenobia's ideas, and Hollingsworth's emotional advances.

Coverdale wants to see a different womanhood in Priscilla from Zenobia's. Nevertheless, he is puzzled to see that “our Priscilla betook herself into the shadow of Zenobia's protection” (p. 32). Just as Coverdale is ambivalent towards Zenobia, being both fascinated and fearful of her, he becomes cynical of Hollingsworth and Priscilla as the novel advances. After the introduction of Priscilla into the community,

Hollingsworth, Priscilla, and Zenobia form a distinct trio from which Coverdale feels partially excluded, which relegates him to the role of a mere observer (p. 39). Both women seem attracted to Hollingsworth, recognizing no opportunity for Coverdale. Watching the two women making advances to Hollingsworth, the narrator feels helpless; so his part in their affairs becomes “subordinate” like that of “the Chorus in a classic play” (p. 97).

Even though Coverdale likens his situation in the novel to the Chorus in the ancient Greek tragedy, his function differs from its in many ways. In a classic play the Chorus does not only watch whatever happens on the stage; it is not merely a spectator. “The chorus,” says Aristotle, “should be thought of as one of the actors, it should be a part of the whole and contribute its share to success in competitive effort....” (Else, 1986, p. 51). The chorus serves several other functions in the classic drama as well: it gives advice, establishes the ethical and social framework of events, reacts to the events and characters, helps set the overall mood of the play and thus contributes much to theatrical effectiveness (Grube, 1945, p. 27). So, once more Coverdale proves to be an unreliable narrator, who distorts historical realities as well as fictional ones in the process of his narration (Crunden, 1996, p. 71). Above all, he is one of the actors in the utopian “theatre” (p. 1). He does not only observe, but also imposes his interpretations of events on the reader. He is a representative of male chauvinism, and uses his narrative, as Irving does against Dame, as a powerful weapon aimed at women, particularly at Zenobia (Bauer, p. 30).

Coverdale also plays the devil’s advocate between Zenobia and patriarchy, flaring up a kind of rivalry between them to win Hollingsworth’s love in later stages (Desalvo, p. 103). Making sure that Priscilla is in love with Hollingsworth, Coverdale tells her that “it is a blessed thing for him [Hollingsworth] to have won the sympathy of such a woman as Zenobia” (p. 126). He also goes to Zenobia, knowing she is also in love with Hollingsworth, and tells her that Hollingsworth “has *certainly* shown great tenderness for Priscilla” (p. 167, emphasis added). After all, “the reader must not take my own word for it,” and many other things in fact (p. 247).

Despite his initial respect and affection for the philanthropist, Coverdale quickly becomes suspicious of Hollingsworth's idealism, and even of Priscilla's purity and naiveté (p. 35). Coverdale gets sick afterwards, disillusioned by the physical and psychological climate of the “Arcadia” (p. 38). Drifting along his psychological vicissitudes, he now thinks that Priscilla is not the type of angelic woman she supposed her to be: “poor Priscilla had not so literally fallen out of clouds, as we were at first inclined to suppose...Priscilla had recently escaped from some particular evil peril, or irksomeness of position” (p. 49). That Priscilla, at the same, involves in a love affair with Hollingsworth infuriates Coverdale gradually, too: Priscilla, he says, “talked more largely and freely with him” than with Zenobia, and “indeed her feelings seemed...as involuntary affection” to Hollingsworth (p. 50). To top it all, Priscilla reminds him of Margaret of Fuller, and he cannot help asking her whether she ever met Fuller (p. 52). Coverdale inquires all these about Priscilla because he is afraid of Lilith-like women, like Fuller and Zenobia, who may possibly undermine the patriarchal structure in the Blithedale Eden. He even presumes that Zenobia has “bewitched” Priscilla (p. 60). This is the last scene in which he sees Priscilla the last time until he comes back to Blithedale after a period of absence.

Shortly after Old Moodie's visit to Blithedale, there arrives Professor Westervelt. Coverdale inadvertently overhears the stranger talking to Zenobia. According to Coverdale's account, Westervelt is apparently telling her something disturbing about Priscilla. When Westervelt has left, Zenobia tells the story of “The Veiled Lady” to the Blithedalers, and dramatizes it. Zenobia's dramatization of the story foreshadows the recognition of the love affair between Priscilla and Hollingsworth. The scene functions like the play-in-the-play scene in Hamlet where Hamlet is trying to assure himself about the truth of his father's murderer.³ The veiled lady is a famous contemporary mesmerist and seer who always wears a veil during her public appearances; nobody knows her real identity (Coale, 2000, p. 181; 1998, p. 65). It seems that she has fled just as Priscilla has done to a pastoral community for refuge, but the magician in charge of her follows her. He asks another woman in the community to throw a veil over the woman to bring her back under

the spell. At the end of the story, Zenobia playfully throws some gauze over Priscilla, who faints, overcharged with emotion. Zenobia is now sure of the love affair between her half-sister and Hollingsworth, which makes her irretrievably dispirited.

The members of the community are in the habit of gathering each Sunday at Eliot's pulpit, a natural spot near the river. On one of these occasions, Zenobia fails to challenge Hollingsworth's contemptuous rejection of women's rights. This disquiets Coverdale since he suspects that Hollingsworth wants to convert Blithedale to his own ends by taking advantage of Zenobia, and her money. Meanwhile, Hollingsworth is slowly becoming skeptical of Fourier's ideas about the perfectibility of human societies. Talking to Coverdale about Fourierism, he gets angry and exclaims:

Let me hear no more of it!” cried he, in utter disgust. “I never will forgive this fellow! He has committed the Unpardonable Sin! For what more monstrous iniquity could else Devil himself contrive, than to choose the selfish principle--the principle of all human wrong, the very blackness of man's heart, the portion of ourselves which we shudder at, and which it is the whole aim of spiritual discipline to eradicate--to choose it as the master-workman of his system? To seize upon and foster whatever vile, petty, sordid, filthy, bestial, and abominable corruptions have cankered into our nature, to be the efficient instruments of his infernal regeneration!... The nauseous villain! (pp. 53-4).

This heraldic speech marks out a turning point in the novel, leading to the gradual decline of hopes about Blithedale. Coverdale himself confesses to himself that “the good we aim at will not be attained” (p. 75). Later, Hollingsworth and Coverdale quarrel over the issue of women and running the farm, which causes Coverdale to leave Blithedale (p. 136), because only the four “porkers” on the farm are happy (p. 144). Soon Coverdale leaves the community to protest the practices unbearable to him (Matthiessen, 1941, p. 228).

Coverdale returns to Blithedale after a while owing to his inquisitive nature. The three characters seem to have “absorbed” his life “into themselves” (p. 195). He interrupts Hollingsworth, Zenobia and Priscilla at a tense moment when they are arguing about their private matters. To Zenobia's anger and disappointment, Hollingsworth announces that he loves Priscilla and intends to go away with her. Soon after she hears this, Zenobia gets disillusioned, and drowns herself in the river near Eliot's pulpit (Herndl, 1988, p. 72; 1993, p. 86). After Zenobia's death, the Edenic Blithedale permanently falls through (Bauer, pp. 30-1). Hollingsworth and Priscilla, now married, lead a secluded life, and the former no longer thinks about his cherished project for the reformation of criminals. Despite all that he has thought of women all along, Coverdale confesses at the end of the story that he had himself been in love with Priscilla: “I--I myself--was in love--with--PRISCILLA!” (p. 247). It is the passive woman that gets the hand of marriage as reward while Zenobia is punished for some poetic justice (Gatta, 1997, p. 26).

In conclusion, it appears that Priscilla has been saved by the prison reformer, Hollingsworth, now her husband. Earlier, Coverdale intended to save Priscilla from dangerous ideas, and dangerous emotions: “If I had any duty whatever...it was, to save Priscilla from that kind of personal worship which her sex is generally prone to lavish” (p. 71); and he concludes that he “would really have gone far to save Priscilla, “the maiden exposed to a dragon,” from the “catastrophe” if he had been “cold-hearted” enough (p. 71). Hollingsworth, who has “a heart of ice,” seems to have accomplished his mission for him as a reformer of criminals (p. 225). The pre-lapsarian Eve, Priscilla, is now a “bond-slave” as was foreshadowed in Zenobia's legend of “The Veiled Lady” (116) (Gatta, p. 53). Priscilla herself confesses elsewhere that “I never have any free will” (p. 171); and she is as “meek-spirited” and “feeble” as her mother was earlier reported to be (p. 185). Lilith's (Zenobia's) efforts fall through altogether in contrast to what she prophesies: “my sex will achieve its rights” (p. 120).

The misogyny of The Blithedale Romance has several facets. Firstly, Coverdale evokes the images of the archetypal image of Eden in the Biblical monomyth, and lets his narrative reenact the destruction of

the Edenic Blithedale as it was projected by the other members. Almost throughout the novel, Zenobia is described as the corrupter of the paradise due to her ideas and her very presence that challenge patriarchy, and its representatives, including her own father. She is also seen as a source of exasperation through her actions on the farm as well as through her polemical and sexual idiosyncrasies. She proves to be as problematic to the Blithedalers when dead as when she was alive. Ironically, the community is disquieted when she is alive, and her death marks the total annihilation of the Edenic Blithedale. Secondly, as the novel moves towards its close, the narrator's descriptions of Zenobia portray her as falling to her desires, and thus her earlier “strong” appearance is humbled before patriarchy (Desalvo, p. 114).

After her rejection by Hollingsworth, and her father, she is no longer the awesome woman whom even the misogynist narrator once admired: she is now the “other” even to herself (Bauer, p. 30). The earlier Zenobia is a staunch defender of women's rights, a proto-feminist: “Thus far, no woman in the world has ever spoken out her whole heart and her whole mind...the vast bulk of the society throttles us” (p. 120). The later Zenobia, disinherited by her father and disowned by Hollingsworth, is diametrically opposite. As she talks to Hollingsworth, she says that women are “impulsive and intuitive” (p. 217); and to Coverdale “extremities die first,” and she is “poor, despised” and intends to become a Catholic nun “for the sake of going into nunnery” (p. 227). In this sense, Zenobia is like Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, who leads a nun's life outside the Puritan settlement, and who comes back to her place of exile even if she has the opportunity to live with her rich and married daughter (Aguilar, 2001, p. 5). Deprived of all that makes her Zenobia, she feels so humiliated that she even decides to shut herself in a monastery. However, the narrator does not allow for it, either. She is divided against herself to the point of committing suicide, as is reported by Coverdale. She is so humbled before patriarchy that her corpse becomes an emblem of obedience when she is taken out of the river: “Her arms had grown rigid in the act of struggling, and were bent before her, with clenched hands; her knees, too, were bent, before her, and--thank God for it!--in the attitude of prayer” (p. 235) (Mills, 2003).

In conclusion, Zenobia’s transformation from the strong to the self-pitying woman states sexual politics in the Edenic Blithedale in terms of a war lost to men by women (Reising, 1996, p. 202). There is also an ironical touch added to Zenobia’s character, which points to the reenactment of her namesake’s failure in the legend. As is known, Zenobia is not her actual name, but she uses it in reference to the mythological queen Zenobia. As the allusions to her indicate, the legendary Zenobia is a beautiful woman of intelligence. Having killed her husband, she rules Palmyra in the name of her infant son. It is under her rule that Egypt and Asia Minor are conquered. However, like the Amazonians in the Greek mythology, whose land is conquered, and destroyed by King Theseus, she later loses a war to Auelin, who “grants her a pension and a villa at Tibur” (p. 250). Then, it appears that the Hawthornean Zenobia reenacts the loss of war between the sexes in the person of the legendary Zenobia (Noble, 2000, p. 196). All the events analyzed and narrated through the consciousness of the poet Coverdale provides him with sufficient material to “turn the whole affair into a ballad” of misogyny (p. 223) (Romero, 1997, p. 97; Zwarg, 1995, p. 128).

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NOTES

¹ All the references to the text are from Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance, ed. by Annette Kolodny (New York and London: Penguin, 1986). Nancy Glazener, Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997) 64.

² Gilbert and Gubar refer to Priscilla and Zenobia as “the Madonna and the Medusa aspects of the veiled.” Theirs is another way of referring to the pre-lapsarian Eve and Lilith. See S.M. Gilbert and S. Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979) 472.

³ See act III in Nigel Alexander (ed.), *Hamlet* (Essex: Macmillan, 1985).