

ANALYSIS

The Blithedale Romance (1852)

Nathaniel Hawthorne

(1804-1864)

INTRODUCTION

This romance derives from Hawthorne's participation in the Brook Farm experiment in communal living (1841-42), an effort to establish a socialist Utopia inspired by New England Transcendentalism. His radical Feminist sister-in-law Elizabeth Peabody wrote the manifesto of Brook Farm. Hawthorne had hoped to bring Sophia there and be married, but he was soon disillusioned and a decade later he wrote this satirical response.

MASTERPIECE

The Blithedale Romance is (1) a masterpiece comparable in quality to *The Scarlet Letter*, though very different except in being allegorical; (2) one of the two--with *Moby-Dick*--most complex fictions in world literature before *Ulysses* (1922), due to unconventional narration and to multiple, coinciding or "layered" allegories; (3) the definitive analysis in American literature of Utopian communal experiments; (4) the first extensive critique of radical Feminism in literature; (5) a vividly effective satire of New England Transcendentalism; (6) a fascinating "redemption" of Margaret Fuller by personifying her traits in both Zenobia and Priscilla, whose spirit prevails; (7) an historical romance that, like *The Scarlet Letter*, contrasts the cultural decadence of the present to the vitality and faith of the Puritans, echoing the legendary courtship by Miles Standish of Priscilla and contrasting Standish the soldier to the timid Miles Coverdale; (8) an analogue of "The Flesh and the Spirit" (1678) by Anne Bradstreet, casting Zenobia as Flesh and Priscilla as Spirit; (9) one of the books most falsified by Feminist critics in the late 20th century.

CRITICS

Failure to discern allegory has led critics to call *Blithedale* a "failure" (Howe); "chaotic" (Griffith); "poorly constructed" (Von Abele); "the poorest of his books" (Van Doren); "an unsuccessful effort to achieve allegory" (Winters); "a strained and foggy quasi-allegory" (Lefcowitz); a romance with "vague intimations of allegorical significance....of no possible interest today" (Elliott); "mystifying to an extent which prevents it from succeeding" (Winslow); with a "craziness of structure" (Arvin); and "a cabalistic meaning that is lost upon the reader" (Crews); a work whose characters have "vaguely assigned allegorical roles" (Justus); and whose "ostensible allegories are impenetrable or nonsensical" (Strychacz). Such readings have deviated so far from the allegories in the text as to argue that Coverdale murders Zenobia (McElroy & McDonald, Hume).

ARCHETYPAL ALLEGORY

Zenobia tells a story, an allegorical legend that condenses the plot of *The Blithedale Romance*: Her hero Theodore declines to kiss the Veiled Lady, refuses to have faith and misses his opportunity for fulfillment. Likewise, Coverdale lacks faith and loses Priscilla, Zenobia refuses faith in Blithedale and loses Hollingsworth, whereas Hollingsworth commits himself to the Veiled Lady and attains in her the spiritual ideal of Blithedale. The experiment "in quest of a better life" requires faith as epitomized in Priscilla, the Veiled Lady. This allegory is archetypal in affirming the quest myth and it encourages the risk of faith, rooting the romance in what Hawthorne called "the depths of our common nature." To miss allegory is to resemble Coverdale, who sounds like Theodore, Westervelt and many critics when he calls this allegory "nonsense."

Zenobia's ability to write such an allegory is evidence of an intellect equal to Hawthorne's--a compliment to women--and she reveals a knowledge of herself that deepens her tragedy. Hawthorne

reinforces the archetypal allegory of faith as natural and conducive to growth and fulfillment by structuring *Blithedale* in accord with the seasons, before Thoreau did the same in *Walden*.

MORAL ALLEGORY

In the latter part of her legend Zenobia identifies the Veiled Lady as Priscilla and reveals her own motives at Blithedale, her animosity toward her sister--allegorically a conflict between worldly and ideal values, Flesh and Spirit. Zenobia confesses that, contrary to her professed faith in love and sisterhood, she is the "deadliest enemy" of Priscilla, the iconic Fair Lady. She casts herself as the Dark Lady, a bewitching agent of the devil figure, the female counterpart of Westervelt.

A moral allegory develops when Zenobia sees Priscilla as an enemy rather than as a sister: "In love, in worldly fortune, in all your pursuit of happiness, she is doomed to fling a blight over your prospects." At the conclusion of her legend, in a gesture of suppression Zenobia flings a veil over Priscilla, exclaiming, "Ah, the dear little soul!" Zenobia draws her inspiration from the eyes of Priscilla, she suggests that the Veiled Lady is an "image of one's self" and she makes her legend a veiled confession of what she has done to her own soul. The critics who disregard allegories cast a veil over *The Blithedale Romance*.

Zenobia treats Priscilla as a rival for the heart of Hollingsworth, who represents New England, Puritan tradition and redeemable mankind. Zenobia feels like killing her sister and abuses her in alliance with Westervelt (the Western World). The two schemers represent "worldly society at large, where a cold skepticism smothers what it can of our spiritual aspirations." The fake spiritualist Westervelt captures the faith of the people, the Veiled Lady, and exploits her for profit through performances comparable to later movies and television starring Zenobia: Materialism degrades spiritual truth to an entertaining mystery show and seduces the people with illusions. As spiritual truth and the ideals of humanity, Priscilla is spellbound, browbeaten, held captive and veiled.

Zenobia is an actress who veils her own soul repeatedly, pretending to believe in egalitarian ideals while behaving with "as much native pride as any queen would have known what to do with," causing Blithedale "to show like an illusion, a masquerade...a counterfeit Arcadia." Asked about her commitment to Blithedale: "'Those ideas have their time and place,' she answered coldly." Her self-destruction is prefigured by her having chosen the name of ambitious Queen Zenobia, who was defeated by the Romans in 272 AD. After her own defeat, she is "dethroned": "She took the jeweled flower out of her hair; and it struck me as the act of a queen, when worsted in a combat, discrowning her self, as if she found a sort of relief in abasing all her pride." Her egocentric male counterpart, Hollingsworth is "off his moral balance" until he too is humbled, reformed and able "to lean on" Priscilla, depending on her spirit.

RELIGIOUS ALLEGORY

In Zenobia's legend, the Veiled Lady promises a "future world." The archetypal and the moral allegories coincide with a religious allegory of salvation, or, in archetypal terms, individuation to psychological wholeness and transcendence. One need not be a Christian to appreciate that Coverdale is spiritless, Westervelt a devil, Priscilla a savior and Hollingsworth graced by her in the end. In the religious allegory, the sisters enact the traditional conflict between the Flesh and the Spirit that Bradstreet personified as sisters two centuries before: Zenobia has "her eye on worldly wealth and vanity," whereas Priscilla rears "her thoughts unto a higher sphere." Zenobia elevates herself in the world, whereas Priscilla, in one of her several aspects, evokes the spirit blessed by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount--poor, meek and pure in heart. Zenobia is the accomplice of the devil within herself, as she admits in her legend. Her "witch's brew" has an "evil taste" and her mistreatment of Priscilla is "deviltry." At her trial at Eliot's Pulpit, Hollingsworth is cast as a Puritan magistrate, Zenobia as a witch and Priscilla as "the pale victim, whose soul and body had been wasted by her spells."

Meanwhile the obtuse narrator Coverdale, ironically named after a devout translator of the *Bible*, is too spiritless to know he is damned: "For there are states of our spiritual system, when the throb of the soul's life is too faint and weak to render us capable of religious aspiration." In contrast, the overbearing but worthy Hollingsworth, the only one at Blithedale religious enough to pray, is redeemed by preserving the

holy spirit, represented by Priscilla, “the poor little soul.” Like most critics, Coverdale does not recognize salvation when he sees it--inferring, ironically, that Hollingsworth is the one who is damned. To Coverdale in the end, Priscilla is still veiled.

POLITICAL ALLEGORY

The archetypal, moral, and religious allegories coincide with an allegory of political history, giving additional dimensions to *Blithedale* that further explain the characters. An allegory of progress toward egalitarian democracy begins in the first sentence of the romance with the introduction of Old Moodie, or human nature as revealed in the past: He fathered both Zenobia and Priscilla. The two sisters embody multiple thematic polarities--Flesh and Spirit, rich and poor, aristocracy and democracy, etc.--and their relationship allegorizes the political as well as the spiritual conflicts of humanity. The favor that Old Moodie asks of Coverdale turns out to be saving Priscilla by conveying her to Blithedale, a pastoral retreat from the city where she may be united with her sister and “restored to spiritual health.” This initiates the movement of the spirit toward reform and progress that has especially characterized New England ever since the Puritans founded their Utopian communities in the 17th century. The Blithedalers see themselves as “descendants of the Pilgrims, whose high enterprise, as we sometimes flattered ourselves, we had taken up, and were carrying it onward and aloft, to a point which they never dreamed of attaining.”

SATIRE OF TRANSCENDENTALISM

In contrast to the dedicated Puritans, however, the self-absorbed Coverdale is willing to help only if it involves “no special trouble.” He embodies New England Transcendentalism, depicted by Hawthorne with comic irony as spiritless, pretentious, ineffectual, effete and timid. Old Moodie entrusts Priscilla instead to the more reliable Hollingsworth, the spiritual descendant of the Puritans. Coverdale is also unreliable as a narrator, one of the first in world literature, making allegorical structure the most reliable conveyance through *The Blithedale Romance*.

OLD MOODIE

As human nature in the allegory of political history, Old Moodie hopes that aristocratic Zenobia and poor Priscilla will get along, but he doubts they will. He is a sadder urban counterpart of the realistic farmer Silas Foster, who is skeptical of the Utopians on his farm. Coverdale suggests that Old Moodie would be an appropriate corrective at Blithedale, to “an over-exulting sense of prosperity.” Moodie serves exactly this function, representing Providence in the religious allegory and democratic human nature in the political allegory: He withdraws support from Queen Zenobia after she disappoints his democratic hopes when he sees her through the farmhouse window: “For Zenobia suddenly put Priscilla decidedly away, and gave her a haughty look, as from a mistress to a dependent.” Justly then, in response, both Old Moodie and Hollingsworth put Zenobia decidedly away.

Old Moodie as human nature continues the political allegory in “Fauntleroy” by confessing to a fall that is comparable to Zenobia's: He was Fauntleroy, a man so rich he lived in a virtual palace, but he committed a crime growing out of his “artificial state” and fell into shame and poverty. His “princely” wealth in early life recalls the aristocratic past before the American Revolution, as does the early life of his queenly daughter. When he loses everything he moves to New England and starts a new life, renting a humble room in a house built by an old colonial governor that is now a democratic boarding house.

He remarries poor and Priscilla is born: “The younger child, like his elder one, might be considered as the true offspring of both parents, and as the reflection of their state.” As Moodie's status changes, his mood and vision change. When he visits Blithedale out in the country and is hopeful until disappointed by Zenobia, he is wearing a patch over his *left* eye. Later, in the city, when he tells Coverdale his history he is wearing a patch over his *right* eye. As human nature he tends to see only one side or the other, always one-sided, yet at the same time he represents both sides of society--rich and poor, etc.--and contrasting moods. He has been proud of Zenobia as “the brilliant child of my prosperity! It is Fauntleroy that still shines through her!” Yet he says of Priscilla, “I love her best--I love her only!--but with shame, not pride. So dim, so pallid, so shrinking--the daughter of my long calamity!”

AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Moodie, or human nature, is torn between aristocratic and democratic values embodied in his daughters. Ironically, his long calamity is not material but spiritual poverty. Priscilla is “shrinking” and frail because she personifies the spirit in Moodie, in decadent New England and “worldly society” at large, the spirit that seeks regeneration at Blithedale. In shame, Moodie chooses poverty, but he is able to “live again” through Zenobia. At the end of his account to Coverdale, however, he is moved by a sense of justice to consider what is fair. In this, Hawthorne expresses his democratic faith in human nature in the long run: Moodie redeems himself by taking away support from Queen Zenobia (aristocracy) and giving it to Priscilla (democratic ideals)--an analogue of the American Revolution.

The romance of Blithedale seems pessimistic to liberal critics because they are Utopians themselves and Blithedale is a failure, epitomizing the many Utopian experiments of the period. Like the Brook Farmers then and liberals today, the Blithedalers propose to reform society without reforming themselves, believing in their own goodness, or merely playacting and veiling their true selves like Zenobia. Hawthorne portrays the liberal Utopians as oblivious of Moodie and of human nature.

PURITAN TRADITION

The conservative Hollingsworth, in the tradition of Puritanism, sees the socialist experiment as a liberal illusion: “There is not human nature in it!” He is a man of iron, a former blacksmith associated by temperament with the “iron frame-work of society” he wants to reform. Iron is the icon of Puritanism. His own plan to reform criminals is Utopian too, but at least he knows like his Puritan ancestors that reformation of the individual is the only foundation of a better world. Hollingsworth is the only character at Blithedale who reforms himself. Ironically, he becomes the only criminal he reforms. The allegorical focus on “Hollingsworth,” an original title of the romance, is on how to become whole, holy and worthy. Through his own redemption, Hollingsworth redeems the best in Puritanism, which “still gives its prevailing tint to New England character.” The political allegory shows how his Puritan character, supporting and supported by Priscilla, prevails over the liberalism of Coverdale, the radicalism of Zenobia and the devilry of Westervelt.

In his preceding romance *The House of the Seven Gables* Hawthorne allegorized New England history by prefiguring a synthesis of the best in the aristocratic and the democratic traditions with the engagement of Phoebe and Holgrave. They move west in the end with relatives and friends, to a country estate that represents an alternative to the socialist project of Blithedale. There is to be a “bond” of hearts, with privately owned cottages “while yet the inhabitants should continue to share the advantages of an associated life.” This approximates the many agrarian communities of pioneers to the west that were united by churches, granges and harvests. In *Gables* social progress toward the democratic ideal is dramatized by Phoebe’s transformation of Holgrave from a radical somewhat comparable to Zenobia in his politics to a conservative democrat; and in *Blithedale* social progress is represented by Priscilla’s transformation of Hollingsworth from an overbearing conservative zealot into a humble Victorian husband. Westervelt lives on as the devil in us all, but there is faith too, “for Priscilla has not died.”

COVERDALE

All the allegories in *Blithedale* coincide in the psychological allegory of Coverdale, transcending his limited consciousness much as implications transcend the consciousness of Huckleberry Finn in his story. Coverdale and Huck are prototypes of the unreliable narrator. Coverdale is also a model for Henry James in his use of a limited “central intelligence” such as John Marcher in “The Beast in the Jungle,” who much resembles Coverdale, as does T. S. Eliot’s “J. Alfred Prufrock.”

The romance opens with Coverdale trying to figure out the meaning of the Veiled Lady, saying with obtuse complacency, it has “little to do with the present narrative.” The indolent bachelor lacks meaning in his life. During the performance of the Veiled Lady, when she responds to his query, he does recognize her as a source of truth, but as a liberal, a lover and a poet he lacks “faith and force.” Like Dimmesdale in *The*

Scarlet Letter he conceals his true feelings and covers his “dale” or heart, but unlike the Puritan minister he never confesses the truth until it is too late.

“PARADISE ANEW”

Zenobia calls herself “the first-comer” and Coverdale sees her as Eve. She makes Blithedale an inverted Eden like proud Rappaccini makes his poisonous garden. In one of his premonitions, Coverdale sees her as Pandora, and shortly after that she is cruel to Priscilla--a fall in her moral stature that he “never thoroughly forgave.” He arrives in snowfall with a chill in his heart, immediately falls ill and is transformed during “this period of my weakness, into something like a mesmeric clairvoyant”--like Priscilla: He sees Zenobia as having been a wife, but also as a witch: “I should not, under any circumstances, have fallen in love with Zenobia.” She is sexually attractive, but “not deeply refined” enough to inspire his love. His illness under her spell is “like death” and his rebirth corresponds to Priscilla’s. For Priscilla reflects his own soul: “I would really have gone far to save Priscilla.”

LOSING PRISCILLA

Coverdale has his first of several opportunities to save his soul when he encounters Westervelt (Satan) in the woods, compared by Hawthorne to Dante’s. Under the spell of the skeptic he loses his inclination toward Priscilla and chooses to play the “calm observer”: “I recognized, as chiefly due to this man’s influence, the skeptical and sneering view which, just now, had filled my mental vision in regard to all life’s better purposes.” When Zenobia stifles Priscilla by covering her with the veil, Coverdale calls it “a great pity” yet approves of it. Whatever bond there is at Blithedale is broken when he refuses to join Hollingsworth in his plan to actually do something to reform people.

He is so deficient in commitment he soon quits the farm and returns to his comforts in the city. When he asks Priscilla for one of her little silk purses as a keepsake, she assents, “if you wait till it is finished.” Her heart is like the purse and he could have had it, but he gives up too soon. Lacking faith, he declines: “Priscilla’s heart was deep, but of small compass; it had room but for a very few dearest ones, among whom she never reckoned me.” The defamation of Priscilla by feminist critics extends to an argument that her little purses with their mysterious apertures represent her *genitalia* and imply that she is a *prostitute!* (Lefcowitz and Lefcowitz) Quite the opposite, her purses express her modesty and the practicality of her spiritual values, the currency that counts most in the end. According to the text, her kind of purse is not easy to access and responds only to the right touch. What she gives is from the heart and she keeps “her virgin reserve and sanctity of soul, throughout it all.”

Back in the city Coverdale dreams that “Hollingsworth and Zenobia, standing on either side of my bed, had bent across it to exchange a kiss of passion. Priscilla, beholding this...had melted gradually away.” A union of Hollingsworth and Zenobia would displace spiritual ideals with passions of the flesh. Coverdale’s feeling of exclusion parallels Zenobia’s feeling of rejection later, and he commits spiritual suicide: If Priscilla, or faith, must perish, “then be it so!” Ironically, while visiting Zenobia in her drawing room he doubts whether Priscilla is safe with Hollingsworth, but he does not try to intervene on her behalf, leaving Hollingsworth to save her, an ironic echo of Miles Standish losing his Priscilla. He takes Priscilla’s hand with only “a feeble degree of magnetism.” When asked by Zenobia why it never occurred to him to fall in love with Priscilla, Coverdale covers his dale and makes an ass of himself: “I should have demonstrated myself an ass, had I fallen in love with Priscilla.” On the contrary, he has previously hinted, “if any mortal really cares for her, it is myself.” Now, however, veiling himself, he retreats from Priscilla--the soul. He left his ideals at Blithedale and has resumed a superficial life in the city like Zenobia.

At the end of the story after he has lost Priscilla, he expresses love for her in the past tense. His confession should come as no surprise. The many critics who argue that he is lying or deluded, that actually he loved Zenobia, do not distinguish between Flesh and Spirit, sexual attraction and love, eros and agape--or they simply ignore Hawthorne and prefer “Eros” (Baym). Zenobia embodies the seductive values of the flesh and the world as in Bradstreet’s poem, whereas Priscilla is the true spirit of Blithedale. That he was in love with Priscilla for awhile is the best that can be said of Coverdale and is the final measure of his character.

HISTORICAL MODEL FOR PRISCILLA

Priscilla was a real person. She is modeled on a little seamstress from Boston who interested Hawthorne at Brook Farm. At that time, the seamstress was a social type and icon of the poor working girl, a sympathetic figure common in popular culture. Born into poverty, an innocent, frail, nervous girl with a loving heart who supports herself and her elderly father by making purses, the character Priscilla is deprived by her father, exploited in public by a con-man, abused by a malicious sister, and so handicapped by confinement in childhood that “she ran falteringly, and often tumbled on the grass.” Priscilla is disabled. She is a victim, a complex young woman and a personification of democratic ideals. Yet she gets no sympathy from Feminist critics.

MARGARET FULLER

Early in the book Hawthorne contradicts the Feminist accusation that Priscilla represents an outdated “feminine ideal” by having her deliver a correspondence from Margaret Fuller, confounding virtually all critics, who have argued, contrary to the evidence, that Fuller corresponds with Zenobia. Furthermore, Coverdale notices in Priscilla “a resemblance to what I had often seen in a friend of mine, one of the most gifted women of the age.” It is “her air, though not her figure, and the expression of her face, but not its features...a partial closing of the eyes, which seem to look more penetratingly into my own eyes, through the narrowed apertures, than if they had been open at full width.”

This is not a physical but a spiritual resemblance—“in” Priscilla--a state of being and a way of seeing. When Coverdale tells her of the resemblance, and that the correspondence she has delivered is from Fuller, Priscilla confirms the resemblance by protesting with an independent spirit that was not ideal for women in her day: “I wish people would not fancy such odd things in me!” she said, rather petulantly.” She is displeased because she wants to be appreciated for herself, in a different spirit, and not like a friend. Her approach is both independent and feminine: Before she offers him the correspondence from Fuller she gives him a soft warm nightcap she knitted for his cold head. She emphasizes its usefulness rather than its beauty, for the feminine has its uses too. In her femininity, Priscilla differs from Fuller: “It was a singular anomaly of likeness co-existing with perfect dissimilitude.”

Most Feminists have ignored all this evidence. A few have acknowledged but dismissed it, saying the correspondence and the resemblance between Priscilla and Fuller are intended “to confuse readers” and “put the reader off the track” (Kolodny, Auchincloss). The Feminist polarization against Priscilla disregards her complexity and has encouraged a misreading of Hawthorne as anti-feminist, even “misogynist” (Orsagh, DeSalvo). In *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne criticizes the Puritans for punishing Hester with their reductive thinking in signs and replies with a complex allegory of symbols. In *Blithedale* when Priscilla holds the letter from Margaret Fuller “against her bosom” she brings to mind the scarlet letter and the way she likewise is reduced, belittled and victimized by Zenobia—and by later Feminists.

PRISCILLA STEREOTYPED

Just as the Puritans did to Hester, the Feminist critics of Priscilla have reduced her to a sign: “To accept Priscilla is, for Zenobia, to accept the very shape of womanhood she is in rebellion against, society’s version of the feminine” (Baym). “As the Veiled Lady, Priscilla stands for the feminine ideal” (Wershoven); she is “the embodiment of a social stereotype” (Bell); “she is the literalization of a fictional stereotype” (Orsagh). To the Feminists who reduce her to a stereotype, Priscilla’s sin is femininity. In opposition to her, to Hawthorne and to most women of the 19th century, they have idealized Zenobia as the “New Woman” (Baym, Wershoven, Carpenter, Cronin, Rahv, Smith, Sprague, Montgomery, Stout, Orsagh, Crews, Marks, Morgan, Strychacz). Priscilla is not politically correct. The Feminists who deny her spiritual resemblance to Fuller deny her the independence and complexity they accuse her of lacking. Like Zenobia, they veil Priscilla.

The identification of Priscilla with Margaret Fuller is a tribute to Fuller and an affirmation of her transcendental feminism in contrast to the radical Feminism of Queen Zenobia. Zenobia was no doubt inspired to some extent by what Hawthorne disliked in the queenly Fuller, and she embodies what for him are the worst characteristics of radical Feminism--pride, selfishness, cruelty and hostility to the institution

of marriage--especially as represented by his sister-in-law Elizabeth Peabody. Hawthorne transcended what he disliked in Fuller and affirmed her higher spirit. He elevates the spirit above the flesh by implicitly contrasting the plain Fuller with the voluptuously beautiful Zenobia.

PRISCILLA IS COMPLEX

Priscilla is too human to be perfect. She has "imperfections and shortcomings," is a poor cook, breaks crockery, and is "as unserviceable a member of society as any young lady in the land." This is not the "feminine ideal." Nor is Priscilla by nature dependent, as alleged by the many critics who accept the most disparaging remarks about her by Coverdale, Westervelt and Zenobia. When allowed to be free, Priscilla has "a singular self-possession" and "often showed a persistency in her own ideas, as stubborn as it was gentle." Coverdale overlooks the fact, as do nearly all critics, that Priscilla is an independent small businesswoman. She makes purses. In the city she is "taken over" by Westervelt, the male-dominated world, and exploited to an extent that weakens her spirit and worsens her health, but she liberates herself and escapes to Blithedale, where she asks her radical Feminist sister for help.

RADICAL FEMINISM

Priscilla appears to have "read some of Zenobia's...tracts in defense of the sex, and had come hither with the one purpose of being her slave." No critic has noticed that Priscilla is a feminist. Not one. She blossoms to some extent through exposure to Zenobia, who is likewise complex and can be nurturing as well as competitive, so long as she is dominant. Zenobia tries to control her sister "as a child does its doll." She plays with her and covers her with flowers, but sticks in "a weed of evil odor and ugly aspect, which...destroyed the effect of all the rest," indicating "a slightly malicious purpose in the arrangement." She admits, "It is quite ridiculous, and provokes one's malice, almost, to see a creature so happy--especially a feminine creature." The Feminists who condemn Priscilla for being weak or "feminine" blame the victim and miss her complexity, her transformation, her assertions of herself and why she prevails in the end. As Hawthorne says of Hester at the end of her story, Zenobia could not be a successful model of reform because she is a bad example.

Zenobia tries to demystify the soul and the feminine by proclaiming that the Veiled Lady is merely "a seamstress from the city, and she has probably no more transcendental purpose than to do my miscellaneous sewing." Priscilla is "wounded by Zenobia's scornful estimate of her character and purposes." In fact, "Zenobia's continual inequalities of temper had been rather difficult for her friends to bear." Zenobia betrays her sister behind a veil of Feminist ideology and returns her to bondage. Westervelt, embodying the worst traits of the male, is the primary hypnotist, but Zenobia is a "sorceress...with a force reciprocal to his own." In betraying Priscilla, who is identified with the higher spirit of Margaret Fuller, radical Feminism betrays the ideals of the women's movement for reform, loses the support of human nature, is humiliated and destroys itself.

Zenobia loses support not because of "her unconventionality" (Stout), nor "because she refuses to surrender on society's terms" (Baym), nor because she "steps outside society's tightening image of womanhood" (Montgomery), but because she is so unkind: "Be kind" to your sister is the only condition of her prosperity. At the outset, Hollingsworth prophesies, "As we do by this friendless girl, so shall we prosper!" Zenobia loses support because she is too proud and determined to prevail like a queen at any cost to others. Society is exceptionally tolerant of her: "Whatever Zenobia did was generally acknowledged as right for her to do... The sphere of ordinary womanhood was felt to be narrower than her development required." Zenobia "grew up in affluence" with exceptional advantages and extraordinary freedom: "Her character was left to shape itself. There was good in it, and evil...she had a warm and generous nature; showing the richness of the soil, however, chiefly by the weeds that flourished in it, and choked up the herbs of grace." She lacks cultivation, "her mind was full of weeds," and at the end, weeds grow out of her heart in the grave. Weeds are the icon of vice, as in *Gables*.

ZENOBIA'S ARTIFICIAL FLOWER

Zenobia identifies herself with artificial society, not with Nature, in opposition to the ideals of Blithedale embodied in Priscilla. She enjoys her status in the city, the realm of “falsehood, formality, and error.” The text stresses her artificiality, her playacting, the “costly self-indulgence” of her drawing room in the city and the expensive hot-house flower she wears in her hair, a fresh one every day, “indicative of the pride and pomp, which had a luxuriant growth in Zenobia’s character.” Her hot-house flower identifies her with the “hot-house warmth of a town-residence.” Her commitment to Blithedale and the natural values of the heart connoted by the country is as much “put on” as the flower, which is “languid” her first night on the farm. She flings it aside in the gesture that causes the Blithedale experiment to show as “counterfeit.” Soon after that she is cruel to her sister. Later, she and Hollingsworth toss aside Priscilla, or carelessly let her fall, “like a flower which they had done with.” That Zenobia becomes increasingly artificial is indicated by her replacing her hot-house flower with a fake—“a flower exquisitely imitated in jeweler’s work.”

In the light of her opulent drawing room, the antithesis of Blithedale, Coverdale beholds “the true character of the woman, passionate, luxurious, lacking simplicity, not deeply refined, incapable of pure and perfect taste.” Her artificiality is emphasized by her father when he tells the story of her life in “Fauntleroy.” Even her suicide is tinted with “Arcadian affectation.” Partisans of Zenobia notice her hot-house flower but not its replacement by an artificial one, calling it, typically, “a token of her natural vitality” (Lefcowitz), and “an emblem of her sexual vitality” (Levy), and saying--incredibly--that Zenobia is “incapable of artifice” (Baym), even a “Queen of Nature” (Orsagh).

Zenobia is “natural” in the sense defined in *The Scarlet Letter*: not “illuminated by higher truth.” She represents one aspect of Nature--the flesh. She is dominated by passionate ambition in the world at the expense of the spirit. Her perfection is “material,” associating her with the materialism of Westervelt. Unable to transcend, she drowns herself in wounded pride and self-pity. Nature, including her own, is too much for her to tolerate. Nature in Hawthorne is the allegorical handiwork of God, whose Providence operates through Nature, including human nature, as in *The Scarlet Letter*. Zenobia makes Nature her enemy, just as she regards Priscilla. Margaret Fuller proclaimed, “I accept the Universe!” Zenobia dies in rigid defiance of it, “as if she struggled against Providence in never-ending hostility.”

PRISCILLA IS A SYNTHESIS

In contrast, Priscilla is natural. She is called a “living flower,” a plant, a leaf, a shrub, a bird, a butterfly. If flowers are “traditionally a symbol of female sexuality” (Stout), then Priscilla is as sexual in her own way as Zenobia. Critics have disregarded the evidence that she is sexual as well as spiritual: Her “animal spirits waxed high.” Zenobia puts on an artificial flower, whereas Priscilla’s heart is a “rosebud” and she is repeatedly said to have a natural “rose-bloom in her cheeks.” Again, the rose is an icon in Hawthorne of the natural sympathy essential to true democracy, a capacity Queen Zenobia lacks.

Out in the country Priscilla thrives in the *ideal* of Blithedale: She “progressively grew more robust” and “kept budding and blossoming.” She has a “wildness” and “played more pranks, and perpetrated more mischief, than any other girl in the community.” She is spontaneous and playful, whereas Zenobia is calculating and controlling. When she is taken back to the city, manipulated and veiled by Zenobia, she loses her freedom and her natural self. She is dressed in pure white, yet her eyes are “dark” and her hair is “shadowy.” Contrary to the stereotype, she is not “blonde” (Carpenter, Rahv, Birdsall, Lefcowitz, Stout). The word does not occur in the text. Nor does she have “blue eyes” (Carpenter).

Traditional womanhood and new womanhood are reconciled in Priscilla, who has *both* femininity and the spirit of Fuller. Both fair and dark, she has blossomed into a full humanity but lost her free will under the spell of Zenobia, just as Verena is under the spell of Olive in *The Bostonians*, the analogue satire of radical Feminism by Henry James. Though she puts her faith in the ideals of Blithedale, Priscilla is also practical enough to continue to manufacture purses. She is a balanced New Woman. Hawthorne represents his own soul as a butterfly in “The Artist of the Beautiful” and he calls Priscilla a “butterfly...who passed out of a chrysalis state and put forth wings,” ideally a soul both refined and free, but in the real world often

a captive of hostile forces. Feminists have not noticed that both Coverdale and Hollingsworth fall in love with the *spirit* of Margaret Fuller. Even more, the literal correspondence from Fuller is to Coverdale, implying with comic irony that he is her feminist New Man.

GENDER ALLEGORY

Zenobia self-destructs in her relationships all along, and is last characterized as a “vindictive shadow.” She married or became the lover of Westervelt, who represents the prevailing values of the patriarchal society: status, wealth and power. She comes to hate the man, but she shares his values. Her artificial flower parallels his artificial teeth. She admits to being “unprincipled...and pursuing my foolish and unattainable ends, by indirect and cunning, though absurdly chosen means.” She admits that she enjoys tormenting men: “There is no pleasure in tormenting a person of one’s own sex.” Coverdale reflects that if he took a protective attitude toward Zenobia, she “would only make me the butt of endless ridicule.” Even as it is, she makes him feel an “effeminacy.” She tells him that she has considered making him a confidant, “for lack of a better and wiser one,” but “you would not thank me for treating you like one of those good little handmaidens, who share the bosom-secrets of a tragedy queen!” Coverdale is left “impotent” even to “regulate his thoughts.” He concludes, “A female reformer, in her attacks upon society, has an instinctive sense of where the life lies, and is inclined to aim directly at that spot. Especially, the relation between the sexes.” In *Blithedale* the sexes are polarized by Feminism and reaction, as in the late 20th century.

Hollingsworth reacts to Feminism by advocating suppression of the female. His patriarchal views have provoked critics into stereotyping him as well, blinding them to his complexity and to the allegories. The matriarchal Zenobia suppresses femininity and the masculinity of Coverdale. She is “deficient in softness” while Priscilla has a “softer spell.” Between the sisters, in many ways poles of womanhood, Priscilla is the only hope for Coverdale, as she is for Hollingsworth, in many ways an opposite pole of manhood from Coverdale, the submissive male who is too weak for women: “How little did these two women care for me, who had freely conceded all their claims, and a great deal more.” Both poles of womanhood prefer Hollingsworth, the man both strong and tender, comprising within himself the qualities most pronounced, respectively, in Zenobia and Priscilla. The intellectual Zenobia is attracted to him “as a great heart.” Coverdale feels “a deep reverence for Hollingsworth,” his nurse, and sees “something of the woman” in him. In his patriarchal speech at Eliot’s Pulpit, however, Hollingsworth expresses his predominantly masculine nature with the egotism and pride that make him a match for proud Zenobia.

When she courts Hollingsworth by offering him financial support for his reform project, he collaborates and tells Priscilla to go along with her back to the city, betraying her. He and Zenobia are equals in egotism at this stage. When he realizes what is happening to Priscilla, he must face the wrong he has done. He discovers Priscilla in his heart, is moved by “his divine power of sympathy” and saves her from her entrapment with “the whole power of his great, stern, yet tender soul.” His moral outrage at Zenobia is prepared for by his earlier denunciation of the socialist Fourier for basing his system on “the selfish principle.” Under the softer influences of Priscilla, his anima, the complement he needs, Hollingsworth softens and accepts that he was basing his own conduct on the selfish principle, and in this way she saves him. Allegorically, she corresponds with his “tender soul.”

The extreme change in Hollingsworth, his guilt over the fate of Zenobia and the tone of the final chapters are the measure of Hawthorne’s feminist feeling. Great sympathy is evoked for Zenobia, especially after her drowning when the iron man jabs the iron hook into her breast. Just as Priscilla is not all light, Zenobia is not all dark. There is little sympathy for Hollingsworth, the abject male who accepts Zenobia’s accusation that he is a murderer. This is accepting a lot, since even Zenobia admits in one of her fair moments that her life remains “hopelessly entangled” with Westervelt, who is cast as Satan, most pointedly in the scene of dancing in the woods. Priscilla is the Christ-evoking figure, but Hollingsworth takes upon himself the sins of his gender. The male starts to reform himself when he accepts responsibility for the wrong he has done to womankind, represented by both his betrayal of Priscilla and by his degree of responsibility for the suicide of Zenobia.

VICTORIAN FEMINISM

Hawthorne was a Victorian feminist raised in a household of women and throughout his work he defers to the moral authority of women, represented by a diversity of redemptive female characters, most notably Phoebe in *Seven Gables*, who is mentioned almost 5 times as often as Holgrave and is the one most closely modeled on his wife Sophia. The independent and outspoken Hilda in *The Marble Faun* is mentioned in almost two hundred instances more than Kenyon. Love of Priscilla reflects the souls of decent men, both Coverdale and Hollingsworth, in the domestic feminist culture of the Victorian Age. The undomesticated male, Westervelt, is a devil. Social progress depends upon reformation of the male and *Blithedale* ends with a Victorian feminist reversal: After her reform of Hollingsworth, Priscilla grows stronger, she becomes “the guardian” and he depends upon her both financially and spiritually. In the beginning she is weak, but by the end she is strong enough to support Hollingsworth. His “childlike” or childish tendency to press close, and “closer still” to her indicates his spiritual need, if not his rebirth.

The ambiguity about Hollingsworth that has troubled critics is necessary to his allegorical role as mankind in an openended history. Priscilla is “submissive,” but Man is more so, now, in this Victorian social revolution, and there is a “veiled happiness in her fair and quiet countenance.” In more ways than the literal, Priscilla inherits through Zenobia, but she is wise in not wearing a crown, and “fair” in not playing the queen. The reformation of the world begins at home.

HAWTHORNE'S VEIL

In a culture under the sway of Westervelts and Zenobias, Hawthorne veiled himself by narrating through the medium of Coverdale, coinciding and differentiating himself through irony and allegory. Discretely, he displaced his critique of radical Feminism while affirming the Victorian feminist ideals of his wife and the majority of women in his culture. Coverdale unveils himself at the end, whereas Hawthorne is unveiling himself through irony and allegory all along.

Priscilla is affirmed by all the allegories in chorus. Coverdale compares his own subordinate part to “that of the Chorus in a classic play,” but he is not very reliable as a Chorus except as a medium for the allegories. For example, he thinks that the housebroken Hollingsworth is damned in the end, not himself. The characters transcend the limited consciousness of Coverdale and cannot be reduced to signs because they figure in half a dozen allegories at once and also display the complexity of real people.

The coinciding allegories--archetypal, moral, religious, political, psychological, gender--produce ironies throughout the narrative. For example, Priscilla frequently lacks free will in the religious allegory because she is faith enslaved in the world by Westervelt, but in the gender allegory it is because she is femininity enslaved by Zenobia and by Hollingsworth before his reform, a criticism of both radical Feminist hypocrisy and the patriarchal social order.

PRISCILLA'S INHERITANCE

As in Hawthorne's two preceding romances, the inheritance at the end symbolizes a spiritual enrichment, a figurative echo of the old Puritan belief that God rewards virtue with prosperity. That Priscilla becomes affluent yet chooses to live in humble circumstances with her devoted Hollingsworth affirms the Victorian ideals of modest domesticity and spiritual egalitarianism. Lack of such humility, faith and love as theirs is what ruins Zenobia and Blithedale.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

A discrete version of this analysis of *The Blithedale Romance*, documenting errors of critics politely, was rejected by over a dozen Feminist editors. The Feminists who took over the journals and presses during the 1980s felt threatened by objective scholarship. They called this analysis “revisionist,” declared that it should never be published and refused to discuss it.

Priscilla is “the pale victim,” yet she has been crucified by the radical Feminists: “Zenobia's defeat is intolerable” to them because the values represented by Priscilla are “anachronistic.” Priscilla is “passive,”

Zenobia is “power.” Priscilla is alleged to be a “flimsy paradigm” of suspect moral character with “a background of prostitution” (Lefcowitz). Her relationship with Hollingsworth is “vicious” (Bales). “It is about Zenobia, and not Priscilla, that [Coverdale] ought to be writing poems” (Baym). Priscilla “has no character at all”; is “not altogether wholesome”; is “sterile”; “insipid”; “vapid”; “spiritless”; “asexual”; “parasitic”; “spurious”; “destructive”; “diseased”; and “without soul” (Hoffman, Griffith, Birdsall, Stanton, Crews, Morgan, Kolodny, Hume, Bell, Wershoven). She is “witless” and “evil,” an effigy of Hawthorne’s wife Sophia, who in her picture looks like a “genial horse” and “had to be, if not murdered, transformed into Phoebe, Priscilla, and Hilda” (Donohue). These professors agree with satanic Professor Westervelt that Priscilla should be veiled. Feminist critics are Zenobias. Some are worse. Elaine Showalter advocates murder: “A woman writer must kill the Angel in the House, that phantom of female perfection who stands in the way of freedom.” Her hit list includes Jane Austen, George Eliot and Virginia Woolf.

Priscilla is a moral test: She mirrors the soul and “Nobody seems to welcome her.” Certainly not Jacqueline Orsagh, for example, who equates Hawthorne with Coverdale and argues that to both of them “all women are witches.” Yet both love Zenobia. “Priscilla rarely enters his mind.” On the contrary, Coverdale uses the name of Priscilla 216 times, 37 additional references are made to her as the Veiled Lady, the book opens with such a reference, it ends with her name, and the word *little* used to describe her was Hawthorne’s favorite word, as recorded in *A Concordance to the Five Novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 2 vols. (Garland 1979) 2: 826, 885-87.

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