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## **The Power of the Subversive Female in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter and Blithedale Romance**

Jenifer P. Hecht

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MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

The Power of the Subversive Female in Hawthorne's  
*The Scarlet Letter* and *Blithedale Romance*

by

Jenifer P. Hecht

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of


Master of Arts

May 2011

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of English


Certified by:

  
Marietta Morrissey  
Dean of the College of  
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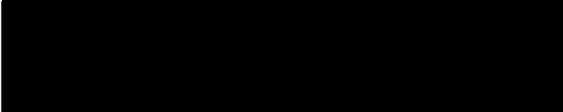
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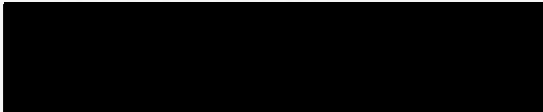
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## Abstract

Nathaniel Hawthorne is an author who has caused much intrigue, especially among feminist critics, some of whom deem him to be misogynistic and wholly supportive of the patriarchy in his texts. Evidence for this has been cited in his choice of the demure and quiet Sophia as his wife, although it is known she was amongst many close women in Hawthorne's life, most of whom were more outspoken female contemporaries like Elizabeth Peabody and Margaret Fuller. Additionally, the assertion that Hawthorne's writing contains misogynistic undertones is oftentimes supported by the plight of his female characters, who often suffer from painful heartbreak and unendurable social struggles at the hands of a more powerful and dominating patriarchal structure.

However, upon analysis of his personal relationships with the aforementioned feminist icons of his day, along with examination of Hester Prynne, of *The Scarlet Letter*, and Zenobia, of *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne ultimately emerges as a pro-female writer who is not criticizing strong women, as some might assume from a surface reading of his work, but championing their cause, while exposing and critiquing the cruel patriarchs who stand as a roadblock to their success.

This thesis will argue that Hawthorne was a writer who used his knowledge of both feminism and the patriarchy to take a stand against the oppression of strong women, and that this stance is primarily shown in the characters of Hester and Zenobia, who, while faced with patriarchal challenges on both personal and communal levels, both triumph in the end. The victories of these women are achieved through their strength, independence, and courage to wield truly progressive outlooks and participate in subsequently progressive behaviors as a means toward reformation. As stated by Nina Baym, the author who created these feminine paragons was undeniably pro-female.

THE POWER OF THE SUBERSIVE FEMALE IN HAWTHORNE'S  
*THE SCARLET LETTER AND THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE*

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts

By

JENIFER P. HECHT

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2011

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## Acknowledgements

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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the most devoted and influential mentor I have ever known, Dianne L. DeRosa, who encouraged me to pursue not only this degree, but nurtured my passions and expertise in the teaching of literature and beyond. Working under her for six years was truly the greatest honor in my career, and I know that I have her to thank for a huge part of my identity as an educator today. Above all, her life and work are a testament to the fact that diligence, passion, and integrity truly pay off, and that a lifelong pursuit of knowledge matters above all else.

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Jenifer P. Hecht  
Thesis Draft - Spring 2011

The Power of the Subversive Female in Hawthorne's  
*The Scarlet Letter* and *The Blithedale Romance*

Introduction

Nathaniel Hawthorne has been labeled as everything from a pro-feminine writer to a misogynist, the latter most likely given due to his famous comment in an 1855 letter to his publisher, William Ticknor, in which he states that "America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women" (Wallace 201). However, when the entirety of Hawthorne's circumstances are examined, this is a strangely out-of-character comment from an author who is also noted for a close relationship to his intellectual mother, a passionate bond with his artistic yet highly-domesticated wife, Sophia, and an equally consuming friendship with her outspoken reformist/writer sister, Elizabeth Peabody, and who can be quoted as stating in 1844, upon the birth of his first daughter, Una, "I think I prefer a daughter to a son; there is something so especially piquant in having helped to create a future woman" (Herbert 286). Somewhat baffling, these seeming inconsistencies of character are further elusive in light of two of Hawthorne's most notable characters, Hester Prynne, of his 1850 novel *The Scarlet Letter*, and Zenobia, of 1852's *The Blithedale Romance*, for these female protagonists are admirable in their strength, beauty, independence, and progressive actions. Despite their many virtues, however, both are ultimately rejected by patriarchal agents, Hester by the shy Reverend Dimmesdale and the Puritan community as a whole, and Zenobia by the philanthropic reformer Hollingsworth, who discards her in favor of a much weaker woman, causing her subsequent suicide.



In both Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Scarlet Letter*, the author features a strong female figure who is ultimately rejected by society despite her strength and unique virtues. Through the intricacies of both *Blithedale*'s Zenobia and *The Scarlet Letter*'s Hester, Hawthorne explores female roles in both society and the home, and poses questions about the role of the female outside the domestic sphere, and the value and cost of female passion in an undeniably patriarchal nineteenth-century America. Integral to this gender-based dialogue is the complicated dichotomy between the male desire for a subservient female and his subsequent interest in an opinionated one, a dichotomy mirrored in Hawthorne's own life through his oddly close relationship with his wife's sister, Elizabeth – who was the most intellectual and independent of the three Peabody women – and his baffling choice to marry the youngest Peabody, Sophia, who was, while not wholly lacking in independence, conservative, obedient, and weak as compared to Elizabeth, Hawthorne's self-professed “best friend”; this issue is further interrogated through examination of the author's complicated personal and professional relationship with feminist Margaret Fuller, with whom he discussed, among many things, “matters of high and low philosophy” (Hawthorne, *Notebooks* 343).

Some feminist critics find Hawthorne's creation of female characters, which embodies his commentary on women, to exemplify the typical nineteenth-century attitude of relegation of women to the domestic realm; included in this discussion are Jamie Barlowe, Louise DeSalvo, Sacvan Bercovitch, Lauren Berlant, Louise D. Cary, and Philip Rahv, who are some of the many critics reading Hawthorne as misogynistic on some level. These critics state that for Hawthorne, all power is patriarchal. However, it is impossible to ignore the blatant criticism of the patriarchy itself in Hawthorne's texts, as

seen to varying extents by critics like Nina Baym, Monika Elbert, Michael Colacurcio, Millicent Bell, David Lerverenz, Lesley Ginsberg and Leland Person, whose arguments and theories will be discussed in detail in Chapters Two and Three. Jamie Barlowe, in short, claims that Hawthorne, like all male scholars, uses the exclusion and oppression of women to define himself as an artist and scholar, and that, consequently, “Hester-Prynneism” has helped to perpetuate the exclusion of female scholarship regarding *The Scarlet Letter*; Barlowe defines her coined term as one which presents the dichotomy between the “good” woman, who is exemplary by societal standards, and the “bad” woman, who needs punishment or instruction from a man. Yet, this is clearly an over-simplified reading of Hawthorne’s women, in light of their complicated natures and virtuous – and often challenging – actions; in addition, Barlowe ignores Hawthorne’s blatant critique of the societies in which Zenobia and Hester exist. Here, she takes issue with Nina Baym, who insightfully states regarding *The Scarlet Letter*, that “the romance originated as an expression of his own feelings of societal defiance and discontent” (Baym, “Again and Again” 146). It is evident, in the examination of both Hester and Zenobia, and their subsequent treatment by society, that Hawthorne is not othering the women, but highlighting, and ultimately chastising, the patriarchal society that does so in its fear and rejection of strong and intimidatingly virtuous female figures.

In her self-proclaimed “collaborative” reading of both Hawthorne and his portrayal of Hester, Barlowe states that her chapter entitled, “The Scarlet Woman and the Mob of Scribbling Scholars,” “rereads Hester Prynne as spectacle, the consequence of the patriarchal gaze” (Barlowe 45). Barlowe muses that, in a mirror of the patriarchy itself, Hawthorne gazes at Hester and looks at – while also directing his readers to look at –

Hester with a simultaneously quasi-sympathetic and obsessive gaze; her claim is that Hawthorne desires to have the best of both worlds, so to speak, in both his view of Hester and his outlook on the Puritan community, which he censures, but by which he is also fascinated to the point of fixation in the setting of *The Scarlet Letter*. Similarly, he appears, at times, to sympathize with Hester, but, in Barlowe's view, stares at her in train-wreck horror and patriarchal condemnation, allowing both the Puritan public and the nineteenth-century reader to do the same. In addition, Barlowe claims that Hawthorne attempts to control Hester, pointing out that his textual flourish is her ultimate return to Boston, which is a device to render her "a sinner who cannot be a spokeswoman" (48); for Barlowe, this return to the site of her sin is rooted only in "endless penance." In her examination of the opening scaffold scene, Barlowe sees her as a "spectacle," defined specifically by both the male gaze and the public gaze, stating that "it is not *her* gaze that counts or is accounted for, but rather Prynne as object of the socially and religiously constructed gaze of Puritan men and women and Hawthorne's nineteenth-century readers" (Barlowe 53). Her citation of Elizabeth Aycock Hoffman's analysis – that "by having Hester undergo lifelong retribution for her adultery, [Hawthorne] indicates an inability to render a completely independent individual" (Barlowe 50) – is a gross overgeneralization of Hester's lifelong plight; her retribution is clearly required by the Puritan society to the point of being societally demanded in the scaffold scene at the opening of the text, but it is an apology neither the Puritan society nor the nineteenth-century reader ever receives. In reality, Hester manages to get into the good graces of the public and stay in the hearts of the reader in spite of her striking lack of apology and regret – this is her independence, and her triumph as both an individual and as a

progressive woman. Barlowe's misreading is both oppressive and dangerous in that it ignores key factors, such as: Hawthorne's presentation of information in "The Prison Door" as juxtaposed with his scaffold scene, which needs to be re-examined, along with Hester's attitude and actions throughout the scaffold scene, and not just her looks – on which Barlowe solely focuses. Most importantly, her changed reputation in society warrants further inspection, as well as the actions that earn this reputation, and finally, her return to Boston and her function in the contemporary society as both visionary and counselor.

The opening chapter of the text, which has been ignored by Barlowe, is placed just after "The Custom House" introduction and is entitled "The Prison Door," serving as a glimpse into the Puritan community to which the reader has been transported. Hawthorne establishes early-on that the founders of this intended "Utopia" immediately allotted space for two crucial cornerstones of society: a graveyard and a prison. The first thing the narrator tells the reader is that these are a people who see sin and subsequent punishment as inevitable as death; he then juxtaposes this detail with the arrival of a sinner herself in the throes of punishment. Certainly the sinner is looked at through the male, patriarchal, punishing gaze of these avengers, but also through the very different, intrigued gaze of the nineteenth-century reader, who is curious about what can be learned from this two-century-wise cautionary tale. Furthermore, Hawthorne communicates prior to Hester's arrival, that even Nature pities the figure of the "condemned criminal" (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 54) in her gift of the rose bush growing just outside the prison door; this rose bush is linked to the "sainted Ann Hutchinson" (54), yet another figure who was billed as a witch, but is seen by contemporary audiences as wise beyond her

years and centuries before her time. Finally, Hawthorne closes “The Prison Door” with the notion that the tale may serve to “symbolize some sweet moral blossom... or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow” (54). While this story may be sad, more importantly, the reader is to learn something from it, and this lesson is to come from the narrator’s bestowal of one of Hutchinson’s – more recently, Hester’s – roses to the reader, who is surely expected to be taught by the actions of yet another strong woman whom society has unjustly punished.

Juxtaposing this introduction with Hester’s entrance is Hawthorne’s way of displacing the reader’s typical support and identification, in that the reader is connected with the condemned, not the condemner, and feels a connection to the marginalized instead of the ruling body. Hester is gazed at not solely by the engrossed reader, however, but also, among others, by the autumnal matrons of the community. While Barlowe fails to address these figures, they are the first from whom the reader hears, and cannot be ignored. Hawthorne discusses the women of the day, how they “stood within less than half a century of the period when the man-like Elizabeth had been the not altogether unsuitable representative of the sex” (55), citing that a masculine physicality for a woman is not completely ill-suited; this is hardly a sexualization or objectification, as Barlowe claims that Hawthorne commits, but an acknowledgement of strength in the female gender as much, if not more than, the male. Hawthorne notes that the Puritan “sun shone on broad shoulders and well-developed busts, and on round and ruddy cheeks” whose voices possessed both “boldness” and “rotundity” (55); these older, hardened, merciless women proceed to discuss the perceivably lenient punishment that Hester has received, suggesting an array of increasingly harsh punishments, ranging from a brand on the

forehead to execution, which is a significant inter-gender commentary on Hester's reputation and punishment, as well as on the symbolism of physical appearance in Hawthorne's text.

While Barlowe fails to examine the autumnal women, Louise DeSalvo asserts, in her article "Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Feminists," that these women, especially in light of the magistrates' lack of harsh punishment, serve to represent female justice as harsher, and less fair, than male. Like Barlowe, what DeSalvo ignores is, among other things, the very significant softer, "young wife," who stands amongst these women, holding a baby and speaking mercy on behalf of Hester Prynne. Unlike DeSalvo's interpretation of Hawthorne's use of the scene – that "he argues that if women had had political power, they would have been harsher to adulteresses" (DeSalvo 509) – this woman testifies that not all Puritan women were barren, elderly, and hardened; some, like this younger, softer woman, were maternal and sexualized, and therefore empowered by both a satisfied life and a fulfilled role in society: enter Hester, as yet another symbol of maternity as power and beauty as benevolence. As Hester is presented as a more maternal, vital female than these aforementioned sour matrons, Hawthorne links her to a more positive, fertile, sexualized woman, detailing her appearance only after describing the barren, hardened autumnal women. In doing so, Hawthorne is pointing out that Hester, with her overt sexuality and fertility, obviously very intimidating and inappropriate to the Puritan community, is truly a woman born in the wrong time; this is from whence her progressive outlook and modern-day strength stem. What Barlowe deems as a fixation on Hester's looks is, in actuality, one of many comments by Hawthorne on her strength.

Additionally, before the reader is privy to details on Hester's appearance, he sees her act: she gestures before she is described, and the action speaks louder than most. As the beadle ushers Hester out into the marketplace, where awaits both the bloodthirsty Puritan crowd and the intrigued reader, on the threshold of the prison door, "she repelled him, by an action marked with natural dignity and force of character, and stepped into the open air, as if by her own free will" (56). Before the reader knows who Hester is, he knows what she *does*, and whatever her looks, this is clearly a woman led by no man, by no person other than herself. Hawthorne describes Hester in the coming paragraphs as ladylike, beautiful, evanescent, graceful, dignified, and elegant. While he does offer detail about her looks, noting her "richness of complexion... marked brow and deep black eyes," this is not to establish her as a sex symbol, but as a woman associated both with strength, and with the nineteenth-century ideals, as opposed to those of the time in which she lives. By featuring Hester as a nineteenth-century woman born into the oppressive seventeenth-century society through both her looks and her actions, Hawthorne establishes that Hester's punishment is not justified, just as her actions are not sinful, but are merely more modern than her people could stand to envision; in this, he pits Hester as righteous and the Puritans as closed-minded and outdated. She is not, as Barlowe claims, "a sinner who cannot be a spokeswoman," but a spokeswoman for a time which has not yet arrived, rendering her a visionary, not a malefactor.

While Hester admits that she is an adulteress, she also knows that she is justified in her actions of falling in love and acting upon that love, a choice that the nineteenth-century reader would support; for this reason, Hester does not apologize for her sin, ever, but especially not during her punishment. She stands with "a burning blush, and yet, a

haughty smile,” showing her embarrassment at and defiance of the scrutiny of the Puritan gaze, which, through Hawthorne’s telling, is rendered as both so oppressive as to be farcical, signifying of the true villain of the tale. Wearing a “glance that would not be abashed” (57), Hester owns her sin as she does both her letter and her fatherless child, wordlessly flashing both gold thread and a screaming infant. Barlowe’s claim, that Hester undergoes lifelong retribution, only holds in the eyes of the Puritan public, for Hawthorne does not condemn her sin, and posits that those who do are Puritanical themselves; the sin lies in punishing actions of the heart, and not allowing a modern woman the right to act on her natural desires, and therefore, be her true self. As Hester stands on the scaffold reflecting upon – but not apologizing for – her actions, it is a woman of strength and courage the reader sees; she recognizes that the mob is against her, and, however much she cannot beat them, she never considers joining, and even in the final moments of this scaffold scene, while “shame” is present, regret is not. She accepts her current realities with fortitude and courage, noting that, “all else had vanished!” (57)

Along with her interrogation of the autumnal women as female punishers, DeSalvo juxtaposes this analysis with Hawthorne’s portrayal of justice as a vicious eagle in his introduction, “The Custom House”; this, of course, precedes “The Prison Door”, and sets up the text as something of a frame narrative, with a recently-hired nineteenth-century Custom House officer discovering Hester’s “A”, which sears him, burning for its story to be told, laying among some notes on the story by one Surveyor Pue, from which the narrator gleans the information to tell his tale. DeSalvo asks, “Why bother to invent the fiction of the autobiographical frame at all if the autobiographical frame is, in fact, a fiction?” (504). In answer to this, DeSalvo deems this a story by Hawthorne, himself,



which roots it in fact and reality, and therefore, is discrediting of history in that, historically, the persecution received by a Puritan sinner would not be so “easily overcome” as is Hester’s punishment, nor would it be so “lenient” as Hester’s sentence. In reality, Hester’s punishment, while not the thrashing or hanging exemplary of the time period, is far from easy; it is, in fact, figurative and emotional rather than physically painful. This is not evidence of Hawthorne’s historical inauthenticity, but of the nature of his fiction, which is an attempt to *re-write* history, fusing the Puritan time period with nineteenth-century, more modern and progressive sensibilities. In addition, his frame narrative fuses the marginalized writer who functions as storyteller – and with whom, of course, Hawthorne identifies heavily – with the marginalized woman who functions as prophet; as Nina Baym states, “‘The Custom House’ is an autobiographical allegory about a blocked artist breaking out by identifying himself with an imaginary, stigmatized woman” (Baym, “Again and Again” 543). Through his fiction and this imaginary woman – both of which are set in a very real and judgmental society – Hawthorne rights the wrongs of the Puritans, and patriarchal culture in general, and, through Hester’s ultimate triumph, he shows that nothing is strong enough to keep a dominant female in a subservient role forever. Hawthorne does not attempt, as DeSalvo claims, to use Hester’s ultimate triumph as a way to forgive his Puritan ancestors, for her triumph is about *her*, not the patriarchy. As DeSalvo accurately notes, the Puritan magistrates are mostly absent from the text, and when they are there, their presence and voices are vague and distant. However, contrary to her claim, this is not Hawthorne’s way of forgiving the Puritan rulers, but rendering them less important than self-government in the grand scheme. Their absence signifies that this is not their tale, but the tale of a woman who makes her own

outcomes; as recognized by Hester, and even Chillingworth and Dimmesdale, “it lies not in the pleasure of the magistrates to take off this badge” (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 136). The wearing of the letter, and the act of adultery itself, become matters between Hester and her God, with little to do with the patriarchy and the officers of its rule. Hawthorne does not forgive them, but stifles their voices, due to the fact that they have no power over a woman who, ultimately, cannot be controlled by anything but her own will and heart.

DeSalvo also claims, interestingly, that “Hawthorne subtly shifts the blame for what happens to Chillingworth and to Dimmesdale onto the shoulders of Hester,” and that, ultimately, Hester, “the person with the least amount of real power in the novel is made, symbolically, the person with the most power, and the most responsibility of the outcome of the tale.” She claims that Hawthorne has done this to “deflect attention away from the reality of Hester’s utter powerlessness in the Puritan scheme” (DeSalvo 506-7). DeSalvo’s discussion of what she calls Hawthorne’s “revisionist” history once again ignores his intent to re-write history through a fictional novel that fuses the reality of the Puritan time period, and the effect this period has had on the time in which the novel is written. While it is indisputable that a woman was wholly powerless within the Puritan culture, Hester, as a construction of the nineteenth-century woman placed within the patriarchal context of the seventeenth-century, serves as a commentary on how beneficial the innate strengths of women can be when allowed to thrive; the minute progress of gender acceptance, even after two hundred years of history, is Hawthorne’s poignant method of cautioning his contemporaries. DeSalvo is accurate in her reading that Hester possesses surprising power and effects major outcomes within the text, but they are not

the outcomes DeSalvo names, for Hester effects change and progress in her own life only, while both Dimmesdale and Chillingworth are responsible for their own reprehensible actions and ultimate downfalls. In featuring these men as perpetrators of their own ruin, Hawthorne attempts to show that divine justice, karma, and conscience are, unlike the Puritan culture, not gender-biased. The reality – that the narrow-minded Puritan community adores Dimmesdale, who is the true sinner – reveals that there is no wisdom in the judgmental Puritan outlook; not only do these men not know themselves, but they do not know one another. Hester, however, redeems herself through her own actions, and, in living for herself, she changes the meaning of her “A” from “Adulteress” to ‘Able.’ This shift inverts DeSalvo’s claim and renders it a reversal of the point of the novel itself: while Hester is the person with the least political power, as the only female character of the text, she ultimately has the most control over her own outcomes, while the men, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, who have much greater power within the patriarchy, are powerless to control their own demons – Dimmesdale his cowardice and Chillingworth his vengeance. In this, Hawthorne trumps social power with inner strength, rendering Hester rich in a currency these two men do not possess.

DeSalvo’s final claim is that Hawthorne allows Pearl to be healed by one kiss from Dimmesdale versus a lifetime of love from Hester, which renders mothering insignificant in light of patriarchal influence. Once again, DeSalvo has ignored crucial issues within the novel. It is true, Hawthorne clearly notes that “a spell is broken” when Dimmesdale confesses himself – to the best of his weak ability, that is – and asks Pearl to kiss him. As she does, however, it is not patriarchal affection that puts the imp at peace, but the “sympathies” which have developed within her due to the “great scene of grief”;

these sympathies are the pledge that “she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle in the world, but be a woman in it” (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 196). She has developed enough compassion and heart to forgive, and as her father owns her, she owns her father reciprocally; Pearl is not redeemed through the actions of her father, but, like her mother, through her own compassion, which is an action of *herself*. Finally, Pearl has learned to “gather her own sunshine,” as her mother raised her to do.

In his article “Hawthorne’s A-Morality of Compromise,” Sacvan Bercovitch also posits that Hester is, on some level, an agent of the patriarchy, in that she is a representation of Hawthorne’s politics; Bercovitch centers his argument on the author’s beliefs against revolution and his commentary on the recently instituted Fugitive Slave Act. He states that “the scarlet letter had not done its office” (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 134) because at that point in the text, Hester has not reconciled – or “compromised” as used by Bercovitch – with her community. This theory is ultimately a commentary on what Bercovitch views as Hawthorne’s own beliefs on the recent cooperation of New England in regards to The Fugitive Slave Act; by reading Hester as ultimately compromising with her community in returning to Boston, Bercovitch sees Hawthorne’s support of New England’s compromise with the recent slave law. Interestingly, this is similar to the argument made by Jean Fagan Yellin in her article “*The Scarlet Letter* and the Antislavery Feminists,” in which she claims that Hester “repudiates tactics like those of the antislavery feminists who were defying social taboos in an effort to move other women to action” (Yellin 654). Ultimately, Bercovitch would agree with Yellin’s claim, that Hester learns she should “accept her lot” and that, in the end, she accepts that

someday things will change, and in the meantime, she must “conform at last to patriarchal definitions of womanhood” (633).

Bercovitch, who claims that the true purpose of the letter remains unfulfilled, states, “the office of the A is socialization,” which renders Hester’s return to Boston and her community service in the end the final message: that the novel is one “bridging self and society” (Bercovitch 344). He analyzes Hawthorne’s narrative choices – especially that of setting his tale in the Puritan time period – as political commentary of an anti-revolutionary nature, bridging, also, “upheaval in the Old World with progress in the New” (347). Bercovitch’s claim, that the fictional time period of the seventeenth century and the time in which the novel was composed, of course the nineteenth century, were linked by Cromwell’s revolt in the Old World and world-wide threats of revolution in 1848, which has been dubbed by historians the “Year of the Red Scare,” due to the fact that America was on the verge of the same political strife occurring simultaneously in Europe. Bercovitch connects all of this, and what he reads as Hawthorne’s deep anti-revolt sentiments, to Hester’s actions at the close of the novel, claiming that, by resuming the letter of her own free will, and ultimately bridging with the community, Hester embodies community consecration. This reading renders Hester, and her actions, as lacking rebellion, and as ultimately pacifying to the patriarchy. While likely accurate in his reading of Hawthorne’s choice of setting as commentary on links between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, Bercovitch ignores the cautionary elements of the novel, at least in regards to commentary on Puritan judgment, and therefore human judgment in general, and its folly. As cited earlier, from his portrayal of the barren and blood-thirsty autumnal women to the public misreading of the character of Dimmesdale,

Hawthorne clearly chastises the Puritans for hypocrisy, judgment, and a general air of frostiness; the fact that Hester works herself into the community's good graces is not an act symbolic of giving-in, but a message of ownership of sin and its subsequent reward, as Hester's lack of apology for her sin grows into a message promoting strength, pride and individuality.

Hester's voluntary return to Boston is not, as Bercovitch claims, her surrender to community; it is, in fact, an act that is about self. She returns because there is "a more real life for Hester Prynne, here, in New England" (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 200) than anywhere else – her homecoming and resumption of the letter occur so that her life will be more "real." This refers to the honesty that comes with owning her sin once and for all and resuming the mark of it, especially now that Pearl, the sin's other signifier, is gone; the letter becomes the defining mark of her life. The reader does not see Hester court the community, but it is the community, in the form of troubled women in need of counseling, that comes to Hester. Her willingness to use her trial to aid and heal others is her ultimate work of redemption, but it does not entail her joining with society once and for all as Bercovitch notes. If her acts were to bridge the gap between individual and community and between rebellion/revolt and peace, Hester would not remain in her cottage, separate from the workings of the social community; instead she would ultimately move into the village that shunned her – *this* would signify her joining, and possibly render Bercovitch's "anti-revolt/pro-community" theory accurate, but such is not the case. While surely containing political sentiments, Hawthorne's tale is ultimately one of the individual plight, specifically that of the female or marginalized party, against the oppressive patriarchy.

Philip Rahv analyses Hawthorne's women, in general, in his article "The Dark Lady of Salem," claiming that Hester, Zenobia, Miriam, of *The Marble Faun*, and Beatrice, of "Rappaccini's Daughter," are all representative of Hawthorne's dark lady, which makes them one and the same: "her unity as a character is established by the fact that in each of her four appearances she exhibits the same physical and mental qualities and plays substantially the same role" (338). This over-generalization is a clearly a gross misreading of the intricacies of these complex women. The only distinction Rahv makes between Hester and Zenobia is that "this vivid brunette (Zenobia) is treated with much less sympathy than Hester – and perhaps the reason is that since she exerts greater sexual power she must needs be subjected to firmer measures of control" (338). Rahv ignores many of the significant distinctions between the women, some of which have been mentioned, and will be further discussed in specific analysis of the texts themselves. These include: Hester's motherhood of Pearl as redemption versus Zenobia's partial lack of maternity/sisterhood for Priscilla; Hester's charitable tendencies versus Zenobia's abandonment – accompanied by her omnipresent doubt from the outset of the tale – of the Blithedale experiment; and finally, Hester's reciprocated, possibly "true" romance versus Zenobia's unrequited love. All of these factors contribute to the fact that ultimately, Hester is redeemed and Zenobia is not, and Rahv's analysis ignores them all. The undeniable intricacies of these women further attest to Hawthorne's clear support of the female gender as strong, worthy, and able to affect both change, and true good.

Before comparison between Hester and Zenobia can be discussed, Zenobia herself must be further examined, for she is a character who is often misunderstood as being a counterfeit feminist in that she appears to give her life for a man at the end of *Blithedale*.

Louise D. Cary comments on what she calls Hawthorne's overt linking of Zenobia to Fuller in her article, "Margaret Fuller as Hawthorne's Zenobia." Cary calls Hawthorne's connection between these two women "insidious," citing the reason that Hawthorne was "bothered by Fuller" for being too outspoken, flamboyant, and dramatic (31-2). Reading Hawthorne's portrayal of Zenobia as entirely negative, Cary claims that he "invariably chose the least charitable construction of both character and motive" (33), citing among many similarities between the actual woman and the fictional to be embodied in "their childhoods, their womanliness, their capacity for sisterhood, their feminism, their 'queenliness', and their deaths" (34). While some of the similarities cited by Cary are accurate, some of her reading is a generalization and an over-simplification of Hawthorne's more nuanced commentary on women. While Cary does notes that Fuller was not conventionally beautiful, whereas Zenobia is, she states that this fabrication is because Hawthorne's audience would "fail to credit the sexual allure of any homely woman" (37); in order for the reading public to appreciate Zenobia's sexuality as symbolic of Fuller's, Zenobia also has to possess beauty. This is not the only instance in which Cary insults both the intelligence and analytical faculties of Hawthorne's audience, for she also posits that, in general, Margaret Fuller as a feminist icon was difficult to support due to her hypocrisy in advocating celibacy, but not practicing it herself. While more on this can be seen in the next chapter, it can be stated in brief that Cary's over-generalized analysis does not do the novel, nor the character of Zenobia, justice. In her discussion of the character, Cary finds Zenobia ultimately a just device Hawthorne uses to illustrate his notion that "personal idealism is vulnerable to animal instinct" (40). While Cary ignores the many virtues of Zenobia, along with her moral victory and her



status as rendered by the unreliable Coverdale, she also wrongfully analyzes Zenobia's suicide as being solely caused by Hollingsworth's rejection of her. In this reading, Cary ignores, as have many other critics, crucial plot aspects pertaining to Zenobia's spirit and ultimate triumph – she is never silenced, and ends the tale haunting a very broken Hollingsworth, which is the sure sign of a victory of her principles, however costly. Regarding Hawthorne's views on women, Cary closes her article by stating, “we can safely say that his portrait of Zenobia finally tells us much about Hawthorne himself, and whether he is redeemed depends largely on whether his judge is an aesthete or an historian” (47). What Cary fails to address is that, whether Hawthorne intended Zenobia to mirror Fuller, even partially, is unknown, and so one *must* judge Zenobia as a character symbolic of an overall message, but not necessarily a historical figure. Cary's narrow reading seems to warrant Nina Baym's judgment in “Passion and Oppression,” in which she states, “Hawthorne has the problem not of works that he cannot write, but of works that his audience cannot understand” (Baym, “Passion and Oppression” 297).

In her article entitled, “Fantasies of Utopia in *The Blithedale Romance*,” Lauren Berlant discusses Hawthorne's views on community, but through a more paradoxical perspective due to the setting and overall premise of *Blithedale*, which blends that of Utopian community with notions on the romance, and which generally, Hawthorne believed should expose human truths, especially about matters of the heart. Berlant claims that, in chapter XV, entitled “A Crisis” – a pivotal chapter in which the irreparable break between Coverdale and Hollingsworth begins – Coverdale's reference to the world as “a hitherto unwedded bride” (Hawthorne, *Blithedale* 132) is a phrase central to the novel's link between utopian pursuits and virginity as a whole. The notion of erasing – or

ignoring – the past as a means of achieving utopian conditions becomes central to Berlant’s argument, in which she posits, “the narrative poses the double articulation of individual and collective identity as a *problem* in history and for the narratives and persons that operate within its sphere” (30). While Berlant is insightful in her readings on tensions between collective and individual in the works of Hawthorne, her readings on the character of Zenobia, and Hawthorne’s feelings on her, are suspect. Berlant specifically claims that Hawthorne shares Coverdale’s fixation on Zenobia’s virginity and sexuality, which is inaccurate, as Hawthorne and Coverdale are not to be seen as one and the same; tying each of the central characters back to the reference to “a hitherto unwedded bride,” Berlant claims that Coverdale, and therefore Hawthorne, “disempowers Zenobia by fully sexualizing her,” and that “having reduced Zenobia from a politically and sexually complex person to a sex effect” (35), Hawthorne, through Coverdale, implies that Utopia cannot exist without virginity, which in turn cannot truly exist without total separation from or denial of the past. In this argument, Berlant misses the mark – Hawthorne uses Coverdale to establish that Utopia is impossible, that the past cannot be ignored, and that the patriarchal values on virginity as a currency are as unrealistic as Utopian visions themselves. There is no better way to read Hawthorne’s male characters – Coverdale, Hollingsworth, Dimmesdale and even Chillingworth, who are, ultimately, defeated – than as a critique of the patriarchy in general. A lengthier discussion of these men will occur in subsequent chapters, but to identify Hawthorne as wholly aligned with any of them, as does Berlant, along with Bercovitch and Barlowe, is to ignore their clear folly and Hawthorne’s general cautionary purpose.

A valid place to begin examination of these intricacies is in the life of Hawthorne himself; his relationship with his intelligent mother must be examined, as well as her death, which so greatly influenced his life and outlook. In addition, Hawthorne's relationships with the Peabody sisters warrant further study – especially his deep connection with the outspoken Elizabeth Peabody, and subsequent and baffling choice, in light of this connection, to marry her sister, the much more acquiescent Sophia. Possibly most telling is Hawthorne's relationship with the famed feminist Margaret Fuller, which was both complex and filled with deep emotion. Finally, Hawthorne's relationship with two more important women must be examined – his creation of and commentary through both Hester, of *The Scarlet Letter*, and Zenobia, of *The Blithedale Romance*. In their analysis of these two women, several critics have acknowledged Hawthorne's progressive attitude toward the female gender, especially in light of the patriarchal times in which he wrote. Among many of these critics, some of the most prominent will be discussed, including Nina Baym, Monika Elbert, T. Walter Herbert, Lesley Ginsberg, Millicent Bell, Leland Person, Michael Colacurcio, Angela Mills and Laura Tanner. Although quite multi-faceted in their viewpoints and analyses, these critics concur that Hawthorne, was, in reality, a writer with deep pro-feminine sentiments, most of which are evinced in an in-depth study of his prominent female characters.

It is through the examination of Hester and Zenobia that Hawthorne can definitively be seen as a true feminist supporter, and ultimately, a promoter of the female sex as equal, and even superior, to his own. But for an author who creates these two females in such an overwhelmingly commendable light, what sense can be made of their ultimate downfalls? Furthermore, how can one reconcile his clear admiration for the

strongest and most talented of women, who are embodied in Hester and Zenobia? This thesis will argue that in Hawthorne's loaded comment lies, not hatred, but admiration, which is only cloaked in aggressive verbiage to hide the true intimidation and natural competition in which it is rooted; additionally, and far more importantly, when examining the tragedies of Hester and Zenobia, this thesis will argue that Hawthorne is not critical of strong women, but of the wholly patriarchal nineteenth-century culture in which enlightened, advanced, progressive women like Hester and Zenobia are forced to exist.

Chapter One: The Influential Women in Hawthorne's Life

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Scarlet Letter* both feature a strong female figure who is ultimately rejected by society despite her strength and unique virtues. Through the intricacies of *The Blithedale Romance*'s Zenobia and *The Scarlet Letter*'s Hester, Hawthorne interrogates the female roles in both society and the home, and poses questions about the role of the female outside the domestic sphere, and the value and cost of female passion in an undeniably patriarchal nineteenth-century America. The complicated dichotomy between the male options for a female partner – subservient versus subversive woman – is mirrored in Hawthorne's own life through several instances, one of which is his oddly close relationship with his wife's sister, Elizabeth, the most intellectual and independent of the three Peabody women, and his baffling choice to marry the youngest Peabody, Sophia, who was, while not wholly lacking in independence, conservative, obedient, and weak as compared to Elizabeth, Hawthorne's "best friend" (Mellow 115). Prior to the cultivation of his intricate relationship with the Peabody sisters, Hawthorne had significant female relationships with his mother and sisters, and even after his marriage to Sophia, maintained intimate relationships with not only her sister, "Lizzie," but with other important feminists of the day, including Margaret Fuller. These personal relationships should be examined to properly answer questions regarding Hawthorne's gender politics.

Hawthorne's father died at sea early in his life – in 1808, when the boy was only four – and was an event that the young child likely did not understand fully at the time. In his biography entitled *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times*, James Mellow notes that his father is rarely, if ever, mentioned in the journals and writings of the author, and that

“there is something tentative and often ominous about the figures who stand in paternal relationships to Hawthorne’s sensitive young protagonists” (14). Subsequently, Hawthorne’s childhood was spent “in a household of active women” (16-17), namely, his mother, Elizabeth (Manning) Hawthorne, and sisters, Elizabeth, or “Ebe,” and Lousia, and several aunts, along with his maternal grandmother, Mariam Manning. Being surrounded by so many women likely heightened what some critics see as effeminacy in Hawthorne and his writing, which will later be discussed in analysis of his emergence as a writer. Under the circumstances, however, it is clear that Hawthorne was raised in an environment of innumerable strong women, all of whom seemed to get along well in a home without an overt patriarchal presence. The influences of this household of women are definite and multitudinous – he was generally attuned early on to the feminine plight, even though he admitted at the end of his mother’s life that, in terms of their specific relationship, “there has been, ever since my boyhood, a sort of coldness of intercourse between us, such as is apt to come between persons of strong feelings, if they are not managed rightly” (297). Hawthorne undoubtedly loved his mother deeply, but had a more familiar relationship with his sisters. However, when separated from his mother to be raised by the other women of the family in Maine, Hawthorne wrote many letters to his mother; regarding one of these, Mellow notes that “he may have been experiencing some difficulty in asserting his masculine independence under the domestic regime of his aunt and grandmother.” The letter states, in a wish to come home and live again under his mother’s supervision, “Why was I not a girl that I might have been pinned all my life to my Mother’s apron?” (23)

Throughout his youth, and even into his adulthood, Hawthorne's letters to his mother are warm, loving, jovial, even approval-seeking. One, written on the eve of his departure for Bowdoin College, states his considerations on becoming a writer. Dismissing the professions of minister, lawyer, and doctor, he writes, "What do you think of my becoming an author, and relying for support upon my pen?" He continues with some jests about his bad handwriting, and how poor he will be, and includes the insecure postscript, "Do not show this letter" (26). The uncertain and self-conscious tone on this topic echoes his narrator's sentiments in "The Custom House" in which he comments on how his Puritan ancestors would view his livelihood: "A writer of story-books!... Why, the degenerate fellow might as well have been a fiddler!" (27). The apprehensive notion that "real" men do not write books for a living would follow him throughout much of his career (Mellow 25).

While there are not many instances that reveal the nature of Hawthorne's relationship with his mother in his adult life, he did – after the births of his first daughter, Una, in 1844 and of his son, Julian, in 1846 – move his mother and sisters into his new home on Mall Street in Salem in 1847, to accompany his budding family, expressing great pleasure at the notion of their presence in his new residence. By this time, Mrs. Hawthorne had fallen ill, and she eventually succumbed to death in the Mall Street house on July 29, 1849. Hawthorne writes of the final moments when he was alone with his mother at the side of her deathbed:

I found the tears slowly gathering in my eyes. I tried to keep them down; but it would not be – I kept filling up, till, for a few moments, I shook with sobs. For a long time, I knelt there, holding her hand; and surely it is the

darkest hour I ever lived. (Mellow 297)

Sophia reported of this time, “my husband came near a brain fever” and Mellow notes that, soon after this, Hawthorne, having recently lost both his mother and his position at the Salem Custom House to political upheaval in the port town, began to write *The Scarlet Letter*, “as if under compulsion” (303). He completed the book in just about four short months, and both his heartbreak at the loss of his mother and his torment at the rejection of his position are evident in the text.

Also evident in this novel, however, is a commentary on yet another of Hawthorne’s women, as he fashioned the mischievous Pearl after his first-born child, daughter, Una, with whom Hawthorne is said to have shared a special bond. In his article “Nathaniel Hawthorne, Una Hawthorne, and *The Scarlet Letter*,” T. Walter Herbert introduces his gender analysis by linking the mysterious Pearl overtly to Una; this discussion and the examination of Hawthorne’s thoughts on Una, in general, are very informative as to his notions on gender. Herbert notes that Una’s infamously strange behavior blurred the accepted gender lines of Hawthorne’s time, to the point that her father noted that the “child appears to him an anomaly, neither male nor female and yet both” (285). The idea of blurring gender lines was not new to Hawthorne, and as Herbert notes: “Hawthorne covertly yet persistently resisted conventional definitions of manhood, and this rebellion gave him strong sympathies with the feminist protest against the restricted role assigned to women” (285). In his observations on Una he found something he always saw in himself – a mix of traditionally-defined gender traits that is likely part of what allows Hawthorne to write such vivid, strong, and admirable heroines, who are clearly much more decisive and virtuous than most of his male characters. Through the



connections between Pearl and Una, and in his general musing on his daughter's behavior, Hawthorne interrogates whether gender traits are inherent, or socially constructed, which becomes his ultimate prediction in *The Scarlet Letter*: Through Hester, Hawthorne forecasts, "As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified" (134). Although Hawthorne composed this novel when Una was only six, he could already clearly see her obstinate and outspoken nature, which would intensify with age; this nature served as both blessing and curse – on the one hand, it allowed her a special connection with, for one, her father's feminist friend, Margaret Fuller; on the other hand, it plagued her with anxieties that manifested in her fourteenth year, and lasted throughout the remainder of her life. A letter to her cousin, Richard, written in 1860, references "my rebellious feelings" and asks, "Did you ever know such a wilful & headstrong young woman as I am?" (Herbert 292). Hawthorne is reported as responding to "Una's difficulties with anxiety" and Sophia's well-known traditional notions on "proper young womanhood" are said to have agitated Una's angst (293). Quite possibly Una was torn between social expectations and innate desires – she never married, but was engaged twice, and upon the terminations of both of these engagements – one due to a breakup and one due to death – seemed more relieved than grieved. In light of these gender battles that took place even within the walls of the Hawthorne home, the author's commentaries on Hester's plight throughout *The Scarlet Letter* and Zenobia's in *The Blithedale Romance* are both insightful and truly prophetic.

Similarly, in examination of Hawthorne's famous "scribbling women" comment mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the notion that he actually identified with the female gender seems inconsistent. Herbert begins to explain this discrepancy:

"Hawthorne was profoundly disconcerted by women who displayed the forthright public assertiveness that he himself lacked" (285), which was part of the origin for the infamous comment that has haunted the author's legacy for centuries. Herbert also notes, however, that no author's entire political belief system can be gauged by one comment, and that, once again, "Hawthorne covertly yet persistently resisted conventional definitions of manhood, and this rebellion gave him strong sympathies with the feminist protest against the restricted role assigned to women" (285). Enter Margaret Fuller, who possessed the most controversial and misread relationship with Hawthorne of all of his women. The legendary author of, among many other feminist works, the influential *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller was an unwavering fan of Hawthorne, both the author and the man. In his article entitled "Margaret Fuller on Hawthorne," David Kesterson delineates much of Fuller's praise regarding Hawthorne's writing and the complicated nature of the friendship, itself, claiming, ultimately, that "Hawthorne's personal relationship with Margaret Fuller remains a puzzle never to be completely solved" (Kesterson 72). What Kesterson does uncover is that many of Hawthorne's statements on Fuller have been taken out of context; he also acknowledges that, while the friendship was undoubtedly mutual, "warm feelings of friendship expressed by both individuals were more ardent on Fuller's side than on Hawthorne's" (72). In surveying some of Hawthorne's commentary on Fuller, it is clear that he was sometimes conflicted about her bold actions, and

especially on what he seemed to view as a rash and mismatched relationship with the father of her child, Giovanni Angelo Ossoli.

On Hawthorne, however, Fuller seemed consistent; she reviewed his stories in *Grandfather's Chair: A History for Youth*, *Biographical Stories for Children*, and *Twice-Told Tales*, always citing his genius, but stating that he is “a favourite writer for children, with whom he feels at home, as true manliness always does” (Kesterson 69). Fuller also notes that Hawthorne’s stories seem to “promise more” than they deliver, and attributed this to his possible lack of life’s “deeper experiences”. While generally favorable in her reviews, Fuller’s slight critiques on what Hawthorne was lacking undoubtedly hit a sensitive spot for him, for to Hawthorne, Fuller was adventurous and fearless, possibly to a fault, and he was a man of great depth, but presumably liked to “play it safe” most times, as can be seen in, not only his habitually shy reserve, but in his choice of domestic partner in Sophia, which will be discussed in detail shortly. In any event, Fuller was supportive, but somewhat hard on Hawthorne; while no one can know their private conversations, at least in Fuller’s public literary criticism and in her letters and journal entries, she demanded from him what he was often too timid to even demand from himself. She was an unending fan, though, and famously stated of their walk in the woods that Hawthorne, “expressed, as he always does, many fine perceptions. I like to hear the lightest thing he says” (66).

Katherine Gilbert attempts to elucidate this intricate relationship, in an article entitled “Two Nineteenth-Century Feminists: Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Relationship with Margaret Fuller”; Gilbert claims that the entire relationship between Fuller and Hawthorne has been misconstrued, echoing Kesterson’s sentiments that many comments,

especially those written by Hawthorne, have been taken out of context, often by Hawthorne's own son Julian in his posthumous biography, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife*. This biography seems to many modern critics to have been a way to promote his parents' marriage as a love story more than an effort to reveal truths about the author's writing and/or politics. Gilbert further claims that Fuller was no romantic threat to Sophia, who adored and respected Fuller, calling her "Queen Margaret" in her journals and letters; while some have taken this to be a sarcastic namesake, Gilbert states that it captures the genuine awe which demure Sophia inevitably felt toward the frank, independent, and therefore, in a way regal, feminist.

Realistically, Hawthorne's feelings toward Fuller were likely somewhat conflicted, especially in light of what Herbert and Mellow both state – that Hawthorne was often intimidated by outspoken women due to his own quiet nature. His journal entries commenting on Fuller's tragic death are the most frequently cited, and cannot be ignored in examination of his friendship, and fascination, with the complex woman; Gilbert notes that the journal entry must be read in its entirety to properly convey Hawthorne's true sentiments, and she rejects the common "pick-and-choose techniques" employed by critics who claim Hawthorne's to be misogynistic. In a journal entry published in *The French and Italian Notebooks*, Hawthorne writes of the end of Fuller's life:

But she was a woman anxious to try all things, and fill up her experience in all directions; she had a strong and coarse nature, too, which she had done her utmost to refine, with infinite pains, but which of course could only be superficially changed. The solution to the riddle lies in this direction; nor

does one's conscience revolt at the idea of thus solving it; for -- at least, this is my own experience -- Margaret has not left, in the hearts and minds of those who knew her, any deep witness for her integrity and purity. She was a great humbug; of course with much talent, and much moral reality, or else she could not have been so great a humbug. But she had stuck herself full of borrowed qualities, which she chose to provide herself with, but which has no root in her...

(quoted in Gilbert 108)

Hawthorne shows a deep insight into Fuller's ambitious plan to perfect and polish herself, and, to a Dark Romantic like Hawthorne, who believes in the innate and unavoidable flaws in humanity, it is no wonder that Hawthorne sees Fuller's attempts to refine and polish herself as disingenuous and unrealistic; he sees this as one of the tragedies of her existence, not because she is a woman, but because she is human, and should strive, above all else, to be herself. For Hawthorne, her aspirations of perfection are admirable, but somewhat harmful. Hawthorne continues on this topic:

Thus there appears to have been a total collapse in poor Margaret, morally and intellectually; and tragic as her catastrophe was, Providence was, after all, kind in putting her, and her clownish husband, and their child, on board that fated ship. There never was such a tragedy as her whole story; the sadder and sterner, because so much of the ridiculous was mixed up with it, and because she could bear anything better than to be ridiculous. It was such an awful joke, that she should have resolved -- in all sincerity, no doubt -- to make herself the greatest, wisest, best woman of the age; and, to that end, she set to work on her strong, heavy, unpliant, and, in many respects, defective and evil nature, and adorned

it with a mosaic of admirable qualities, such as she chose to possess; putting in here a splendid talent, and there a moral excellence, and polishing each separate piece, and the whole together, till it seemed to shine afar and dazzle all who saw it. She took credit to herself for having been her own Redeemer, if not her own Creator; and, indeed, she was far more a work of art than any of Mr. Mozier's statues. But she was working on an inanimate substance, like marble or clay; there was something within her that she could not possibly come at, to re-create and refine it; and, by and by, this rude old potency bestirred itself, and undid all her labor in the twinkling of an eye. On the whole, I do not know but I like her the better for it; -- the better, because she proved herself a very woman, after all, and fell as the weakest of her sisters might. (quoted in Gilbert 108)

This passage is not wholly supportive of Fuller, nor does it, as Gilbert notes, "paint a pretty picture," but it is the voice of a friend who understands Fuller, and appreciates her greatly, even to the point of valuing her faults. While admiring the effort Fuller put forth to make herself "her own Creator," the mammoth task is, as Hawthorne notes, doomed to fail due to its very scope. The end of the entry reveals that Hawthorne admired the talented Fuller all the more for her flaws, possibly because he saw so many flaws in himself, as well; he also clearly admired the fact that she fell, like a human, instead of the goddess she was attempting to be. In taking on "borrowed qualities," Fuller did not live to her true potential, which is the only thing to which a mere human, all doomed to be flawed, can aspire. Like the ultimate theme of *The Scarlet Letter*, Fuller failed, in the end, to "be true" to herself, and this is the source of Hawthorne's somewhat condemning tone. Earlier in this famous journal entry, Hawthorne comments on Fuller's love for Ossoli,

stating that the man “could not possibly have the least appreciation of Margaret; and the wonder is, what attraction she found in this boor, this hymen without the intellectual spark – she that had always shown such a cruel and bitter scorn of intellectual deficiency” (quoted in Gilbert 108). Hawthorne ultimately concluded, in the same journal entry, that, for Fuller, it must have been solely “sensual.” It is clear that Hawthorne condemns choosing the purely sensual over the more ethereal intellectual, especially for an intellectual like Fuller. His denunciation of both her romantic choice and her aspirations for perfection show deep caring and high expectation on his part, and his calling her death merciful is his way of saying that he viewed her choices of late as ones that would ruin the great scholarly reputation she had built for herself; it is not a misogynistic death wish on Hawthorne’s part – his words are somewhat misinterpreted as revealing a similar sentiment – but a wish that Fuller had opted for the intellectual over the sensual, for, as evinced by both *The Scarlet Letter* and especially *The Blithedale Romance*, opting for the sensual, for Hawthorne, seemed to only lead to cerebral downfall, and, as in Fuller’s case, and Zenobia’s, literal death as well.

It is for this reason, among many others, that critics link Fuller’s life and story to Hawthorne’s inspiration for *Blithedale’s* Zenobia, the outspoken feminist who gives herself up to an unworthy, brutish man, ultimately abandoning intellect and dying for love. In his interesting analysis entitled, *Hawthorne’s Fuller Mystery*, Thomas Mitchell, like Gilbert, proposes that any feud between Fuller and Hawthorne was constructed by Julian, who feared the way his parents’ marriage would be portrayed after his father’s death, and who especially feared the feminist’s hold on the author – a hold which his mother could never attain due to her unending subservience and dependence. Mitchell

also claims, regarding Fuller, that Hawthorne's "interest in her is centered in the sexual" (Mitchell 7), noting that his obsession with her relationship with Ossoli is rooted in, on some level, a deep curiosity and envy. Mitchell links Zenobia to Fuller, stating that "Coverdale's attempt to understand the triangular relationships among Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla is Hawthorne's attempt to represent and understand his own past relationships with Fuller and Sophia and his own present relationship with Sophia" (187). Mitchell further points out several parallels between the feminism of Zenobia and Fuller's sentiments in her most famous text, stating, "Zenobia's indictment of Hollingsworth is premised on Fuller's well-known formulation of the fluidity of the supposed boundaries between the masculine and the feminine" (189). Fuller's notions on these supposed dualities are certainly aligned with Zenobia's, and Hawthorne's alike: "Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman" (Fuller 68-9). This sentiment, among many others in Fuller's text, would speak to Hawthorne specifically, who struggled with his own possession of tendencies that were traditionally associated with the feminine.

Almost speaking directly to Gilbert's claim regarding Julian Hawthorne's longing to portray his parents' marriage as the perfect love story, Mitchell links to this Zenobia's predictions about Hollingsworth's choice in Priscilla: "After all, he flung away what would have served him better than the poor, pale flower that he kept" (Hawthorne, *Blithedale* 202). In pointing out emphatically that she can do much more for Hollingsworth than weak Priscilla ever could, Zenobia also states that this subservient



girl can only “tend towards him with a blind, instinctive love, and hang her little, puny weakness for a clog upon his arm!” (202) Mitchell notes that this tirade by the broken-hearted Zenobia echoes Hawthorne’s own life choices, in that he, also, chose the “Priscilla-figure” for his wife, and, especially after Fuller’s death, realized that the feminist would have likely been the more fulfilling companion. Fuller’s commentary on marriage in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* discusses several types of marriage, the two most prominent being one of “intellectual companionship,” versus one of “mutual dependence” (Fuller 42). In the former, “the parties meet mind to mind,” and are equals in all respects; this union is more satisfying and true, and compared to the latter, in which “the parties weaken and narrow one another,” results in an undesirable end: “to men, the woman seems an unlovely syren, to women, the man an effeminate boy” (Fuller 42-44). Further influences of Fuller’s text can be seen in Hawthorne’s writing, even in her prediction of “the woman who shall vindicate their birthright for all women” (Fuller 104) as echoed in Hester’s predictions at the end of *The Scarlet Letter*, but the resemblance between the tragic Zenobia and the even more tragic, because non-fiction, Fuller, are most prominent. This issue will be further discussed in the subsequent chapter on *The Blithedale Romance*, while presently, Hawthorne’s marriage to Sophia – what Mitchell claims was, on many levels, ultimately quite regrettable to the author – will be examined.

Interestingly, James Mellow’s biography opens not with words from the great author himself, nor even words from his devoted wife, Sophia, but with a quote from Sophia’s sister Elizabeth Peabody, who years later recalled the first time she met Hawthorne to Julian, at that point well into his research for the biography of his father; this anecdote introduces yet another strong woman profoundly present throughout

Hawthorne's life. Nathaniel had been summoned by Elizabeth, a local intellectual eager to meet the Salem author whose tales she had been reading. Coming from a "strangely reclusive" family, Hawthorne had not been properly introduced into society, and so, at the established age of 33, was called on by Elizabeth. Mellow describes the meeting as quiet and intimate, with Elizabeth greeting Hawthorne and his two sisters, Elizabeth and Louisa, alone, while Mary Peabody was out and "invalid" Sophia had already retired to bed (Mellow 5). Impressed by Hawthorne's writing, and now his looks, calling him "handsomer than Lord Byron," Elizabeth attempted to call upon her sister Sophia to come down and join the gathering; Sophia, out of illness or apathy, resisted, declaring, "If he has come once, he will come again" (6).

In Hawthorne's first meeting with Sophia, in his second visit to the Peabody home, she is characterized by Mellow as "pale, hesitant, and clad in a white wrapper." While most Peabody family members, and even some Salem residents, viewed Elizabeth as a marital prospect for Hawthorne, the handsome young author seemed to be more taken with the unknown, afflicted and murmuring Sophia than the outspoken intellectual Elizabeth, with whom he had already formed something of a bond. Whether romanticized or not, the first meeting of Elizabeth and Hawthorne was rife with conversation, while the more silent meeting between him and Sophia was later deemed by family – including the couple, Elizabeth, and son Julian – as love at first sight; Mellow, too, characterizes Julian's account of this early meeting as the tale of a "dutiful son" in regards to his "famous father and an adoring wife." The lack of conversation and wordless infatuation does seem to be something like Fuller described in her description of a pairing of "mutual

idolatry,” a pairing based on little of real substance, and ultimately oppressive to the intellectual growth of both parties.

In an informative compilation entitled *Reinventing the Peabody Sisters*, editors Monika M. Elbert, Julie E. Hall, and Katharine Rodier examine the complicated yet close sisterhood among these women, and interrogate cultural perceptions on both their work and relationships. In the Introduction, the interesting relationship between Hawthorne and Elizabeth is touched upon in Sophia’s observations of the closeness between the two and the special bond they shared, in which both Elizabeth and Hawthorne claimed to be the only one to understand the other (xv-xvi). While Elizabeth, according to Elbert, struggled to find her true voice amidst all of the impressive male intellect that influenced her, Sophia, more “conservative” (xv) in her notions, did not even support the idea of coeducational schooling. Clearly these two sisters were quite different ideologically, which warrants analysis as to how Hawthorne, an intellectual himself, can have formed such a deep bond with the outspoken sister, but chose the subservient one as domestic partner.

Despite their unarguable bond, Hawthorne had been known to refer to Elizabeth as “exasperating” at times (*Peabody Sisters* xv). His experience with the youngest Peabody sister, his wife Sophia, was not the same. Referring to her in a veiled way as an “intruder” on his art in one quote (3), he also states that she “speaks so near me that I cannot tell her voice from my own”; again, this certainly seems to echo Fuller’s idea that the marriage of “mutual idolatry” stifles independence and each partner’s ability to distinguish his/her own voice from one another. Conversely, Elizabeth, often accused of being self-centered by her sisters, was bent on consistent self-examination through

journaling; in contrast, Sophia is quoted as having labored to remove herself entirely from her husband's journals while editing and publishing them (4). While it is hardly accurate to label her as jilted, Elizabeth Peabody was admittedly somewhat regretful about Hawthorne's choice to marry Sophia, and claimed it was mostly because she felt she was losing a friend.

John L. Idol, Jr. explores Elizabeth Peabody's diligent championing of Hawthorne in his article entitled, "A Tireless Hawthorne Booster: Elizabeth Palmer Peabody." Idol opens by noting Hawthorne's 1848 dream, which he described to Sophia in a letter the next day:

The other night, I dreamt that I was at Newton, in a room with thee, and with several other people; and thou took occasion to announce, that thou had ceased to be my wife, and hadst taken another husband... Thou wast perfectly decided, and I had only to submit without a word. But, hereupon, thy sister Elizabeth, who was likewise present, informed the company, that, in this state of affairs, having ceased to be thy husband, I of course became her's; and turning to me, very coolly inquired whether she or I should write to inform my mother of the new arrangement! (36)

Hawthorne dreamed this just over a week before his sixth wedding anniversary, and, while several years of marital bliss had passed, he was clearly not fully separated from the woman who was supposedly the object of his initial rumored engagement; Peabody was, as described by Idol, not only the true discoverer of the author, but an avid supporter who, among other things, "published, sold, remaindered and reviewed his books," "actively sought an appointment for him as civil servant," "provided much information

about [him] to his early biographers,” “stepped in as business advisor to Sophia when [she] lost confidence in his publishers,” and “watched newspapers and periodicals to see that errors or false impressions about Hawthorne were corrected” (37). Finally, and possibly above all else, Peabody believed, and shared vocally, that “America had at last produced a writer capable of meeting the nation’s spiritual needs” (38), and simultaneously aided his home life as well, volunteering to help with the children when her sister and Hawthorne needed time alone. Idol notes, “despite her idealistic promotion of Hawthorne as his country’s best hope of becoming its first first-class literary artist, Peabody undertook practical steps to help Sophia and Hawthorne enjoy married life” (39).

However, as helpful and loving as Peabody could be to the couple as a whole, and as tirelessly as she supported Hawthorne, she was equally tireless in her promotion of the causes with which she aligned herself, including feminism and abolition. She would unfailingly try to place abolitionist literature in the Hawthorne home, and, even after both Sophia and Hawthorne requested that she cease, “Peabody singled out Una for indoctrination” and firmly held the conviction that “Hawthorne failed to understand that condition of the slaves” (40). Furthermore, she publicly insulted Hawthorne to his friend Horatio Bridge, declaring that he “knew nothing about contemporaneous history” and that he could “not understand it until it was at least a *hundred* years old!” (40). It is no wonder that Hawthorne often felt exasperated by Peabody and her tendency to rant, for with her passion and brilliance came unavoidable zeal, which was sometimes too much for the habitually reserved author to bear.

Perhaps Hawthorne's choice of a subservient wife, at least by comparison with Fuller and Peabody, has to do with his own struggles with the creative process itself. In a brilliant analysis of what he calls Hawthorne's exploration of autogenetic process, Leland Person, in his article "Hawthorne's Bliss of Paternity: Sophia's Absence from 'The Old Manse'," discusses Sophia's overt absence from the Preface of the text, citing many "influences that wrought upon him" while living there, but never mentioning his wife, whom he usually intimated had a muse-like effect on him. Person explains that, in his transfer of passages from his Notebooks into this Preface, Hawthorne describes giving his wife a bunch of perfect and pure lilies he has recently plucked for her, and, in this moment, the author feels that his wife and the perfect flowers become one being; Person interprets that sharing more of Sophia in his Preface "would obviously publicize something about his wife and his attitude toward her womanhood that he preferred to keep private" (Person, "Hawthorne's Bliss" 49). If it was his desire to be able to separate his wife, and possibly his own domestic sphere, from his writing audience, the separation would never have been able to exist with an outspoken feminist scholar as a partner; on some level, Hawthorne's desires as a patriarch – to protect and create/provide – take precedence over his desires to have an intellectual match in a wife. Person further analyzes that, as also evinced in the Preface and Sophia's absence from it, Hawthorne "feels acute anxiety of influence as he comes to terms with his own masculine and literary originality" (50), citing everything from his weeks of disbelief that he was actually the father of Una, to his innate insecurity as a creator in general. By removing even Sophia – the most doting of non-threatening women – from his Preface, Hawthorne is placing himself as sole creator, and solidifying his own spot as provider and originator.

A similar point regarding Hawthorne's own self-consciousness in his creation is made by James Wallace, in his article "Hawthorne and the Scribbling Women Reconsidered." Wallace also provides several explanations for Hawthorne's view of women, citing Jane Tompkins' point that Hawthorne's "barrage" regarding the scribbling women served to "epitomize distress of the conservative male confronted by the untidy energies of female creativity." He argues that people have used Hawthorne's comment to symbolize something it was never meant to; both Wallace and Tompkins agree with Nina Baym's argument that this comment is taken grossly out of context on most occasions. While Wallace explores many options regarding Hawthorne's attitude toward female writers – some of them being as farfetched and simplistic as the idea that he did not support them because they threatened to narrow his reading public, or that he "supported" but did not "deeply admire them" – the most plausible explanation comes in Wallace's slightly more complicated option: that Hawthorne himself saw his own plight as a writer as similar to that of all writers, women included, in a light that echoes *The Scarlet Letter's* "The Custom House," when the narrator apologizes to his Puritan ancestry for the fact that he is "a writer of storybooks." In this, Wallace states that Hawthorne possessed reservations about the role of the author in general, and that he admitted, "my own individual taste is for quite another class of works than those which I myself am able to write" (Wallace 203). Therefore, Hawthorne's critique of sentimental fiction, which is what the "scribbling women" comment referred to, would also apply, on some level, to his own writings.

In analyzing Hawthorne's choice of Sophia as his wife, feminist critics are often somewhat baffled; to examine a man who created heroines like Hester and Zenobia, the

ultimate combinations of beauty and passion, *and* independence and intellect, it seems inconsistent that he would choose the dotting but weaker Sophia. The only viable option that offers explanation is the notion that his own insecurities as creator got the best of him, and that his choice had nothing to do with misogyny or anti-feminist politics. In any event, Hawthorne, as Mitchell notes, may have been somewhat regretful of this choice, perhaps unconsciously, for he certainly opted for something closer to Fuller's weakening marriage of "mutual idolatry" rather than choosing a scholarly companion like Fuller or Peabody. One may never fully know Hawthorne's feelings about choosing the subservient woman over the intellectual, but there is certainly useful commentary on this concept in *The Scarlet Letter*, in Dimmesdale's choice of reputation over a relationship with Hester, and more acutely, in *The Blithedale Romance*, in Hollingsworth's choosing of the weak Priscilla over the remarkably strong Zenobia. For Hawthorne's life as apart from his fiction, one may have to settle with Mellow's final report – he states that Julian, in his research for his father's biography, visited Hawthorne's old friend and fellow literary giant, Herman Melville, who, in his old age in the year 1883, could recall little in the way of details on Hawthorne's life and times, but did note, that it was his earnest belief that for all of his life, Hawthorne harbored "some great secret, which would, were it known, explain all the mysteries of his career" (Mellow 589). Perhaps Hawthorne did feel torn between these two types of women, and between Fuller's two types of marriage, and this was his final secret, the only lasting clues to which reside in his female characters.



## Chapter Two: *The Scarlet Letter*

There is perhaps no greater crystallization of the concept of Hawthorne as a pro-feminine writer than in Nina Baym's astute observation in "Revisiting Hawthorne's Feminism": she poses the statement, "No true patriarch, I thought, could have invented Hester" (542). While Baym continues on to cite the many critics before her who have attempted to refute this observation, she ultimately argues convincingly that her statement is, in fact, a valid analysis of *The Scarlet Letter*. Through her defiance of unworthy authority, and her autonomy of action, courage of conviction, motherhood of child and community, charity toward those who are powerless, and final status as a visionary woman of the future, Hester is ultimately victorious over the patriarchy.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester is portrayed as strikingly beautiful and defiant in attitude; she never apologizes for her sin, for her baby, or most importantly, for her forbidden love or her rebellious actions. Hester is first seen on the scaffold, an object of public punishment and ridicule, with the baby, her prize and her sin, clasped to her breast – a gesture which is both maternal and yet, alarmingly, somewhat vicious. She is proud and called "defiant," amidst the autumnal women, who discuss a harsher punishment for the sinner; this overwhelmingly austere judgment and condemnation represents the Puritan women's barrenness and sterility, which causes them to fear and denounce Hester's abundant maternity, beauty, fertility, and sexuality.

Early on both Chillingworth and Dimmesdale openly reject Hester, Chillingworth choosing pride over honesty – a grave sin – and Dimmesdale thwarting love in favor of power – a much graver sin. Amidst all of this Hester suffers publicly, and alone, her symbolic letter and her daughter, alike, consistently adorned, her "sinful" profession as

the seamstress of ornately decorated garments, providing the most renowned in society with the vainly beautiful fashions that they simultaneously preach the congregation to reject. It is through these gaping holes in the not-so-holy cloth of the patriarchy – gaps that are built on the human crimes of hypocrisy and judgment, and therefore, are unmendable – that Hester makes her outcast status work *for* her, instead of against her, and she is ultimately redeemed by her status as a mother, as well as by her charity work in both the societal donation of her art and the sharing of her wisdom and the true and rare insight that has come with her plight. As much a community beacon as she becomes, her letter allows her always to be separate – never fully accepted or pinned-down, and, therefore, above the Puritan culture that attempts to hold her back. But Hester’s charitable work as “counselor” to other women in the last chapter is most noteworthy and signifies her ultimate redemption. She helps all types of Puritan women, but especially her fellow sinners, to envision “at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven’s own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness” (200). She is a visionary who imagines a time in which women can be both in a love affair and accepted by society. She is clearly ahead of her time in that she hopes for a plausible future of equality for all of womankind.

Through this tale, several questions are posed, and will be answered in this chapter: First, as posed by Baym, “Why did Hawthorne pick a woman protagonist?” (Baym, “Biographical Speculation” 1). Furthermore, how can a woman who is marked – literally – as a sinner function as a hero of the matriarchy? What is Hawthorne suggesting about creators, embodied in both artists and matriarchs, and maternity in general? Finally,

in terms of the politics of Hawthorne's own nineteenth-century era, is Hester to be seen as a symbol of a woman who fails to make the ideal of True Womanhood work for her, or rather, as an Emersonian self-reliant individual, the picture of Fuller's nineteenth-century woman?

To answer these questions, one must start at the beginning, before the text even opens, and briefly re-examine the origins of the novel. In her article "Hawthorne and His Mother: A Biographical Speculation," Baym reiterates the circumstances surrounding the writing of the novel, including Hawthorne's dismissal from his Custom House position, and the recent death of his mother. Although fully discussed in the previous section as "the darkest hour" of Hawthorne's life, Baym brings this well-known conviction to another level in her connections between Hawthorne's mother and his most famous protagonist, Hester Prynne, noting that, in writing this text, Hawthorne exposes the plight of a person not unlike his mother – a lone woman, a mother as well, who functions and is challenged by the fact that she is both caretaker and individual, that she must balance both personal interests and passions with an obligation and true desire to shape another human being. Hawthorne's mother was a well-rounded and educated woman, but Baym asserts that it was likely only after her death that Hawthorne could fully view and emotionally acknowledge her in this way, as a versatile individual, although logically he knew her to be this throughout his life. It is for these reasons that the link between Hawthorne's mother and Hester, and the ultimate posthumous tribute that the novel offers, must be examined in greater detail. Mrs. Hawthorne's illness, and the time in which it occurred, also further underscores the trauma of Hawthorne's dismissal from the Custom House; as Baym notes, "her sudden serious illness and death at just the moment

when he became unable to provide for her must have seemed profoundly significant to a man who felt so strongly the force that the inner life exerted on the outer world” (Baym, “Biographical Speculation” 19). This clearly prefigures the character of Hester and resonates in all from her struggle, to her displacement, to her motherhood and even to her subsequent triumph, likely something of a wish-fulfillment motive on the part of the narrator/author; Hawthorne saves Hester because he could not save his mother.

Similarly, as noted in her thought-provoking article entitled, “A Change of Art: Hester, Hawthorne, and the Service of Love,” Sandra Tomc notes that just as Hawthorne and the narrator’s dismissal from the Custom House are symbolic of “the modern artist’s severance from the arteries of national life” (Tomc 474), this scenario is one, according to Tomc, of castration and de-masculinization, in that there is rejection, removal, and refusal. The dismissal from the Custom House rendered Hawthorne unable, at least financially, to help his mother when she most needed him, and due to this, stripped him of both his masculinity and his ability to fulfill his obligation as a son. He is forced to envision a woman who can stand on her own and protect herself, for Hawthorne was reminded in his firing that individuals, even ailing mothers – Mrs. Hawthorne physically ailing, and Hester socially – are often ultimately left to fend for themselves, and must be intellectually and emotionally equipped to do so. In light of this convergence of circumstances on the eve of his writing *The Scarlet Letter*, it is no wonder the composition of the text and the formation of Hester herself was conceived during somewhat of a brain fever (Leverenz 552). Baym further links Hawthorne’s choice to write about a heroine of the past as an opportunity to comment upon and link the oppressive patriarchal culture of the Puritan time with his own time, and also to link

Hester to his mother, and use the death as a narrative birthplace. Baym states, “The fact that the woman it writes about is dead is paramount, for her death provides the motive for writing and also the freedom to write. The consciously articulated intentions of *The Scarlet Letter* are to rescue its heroine from the oblivion of death and to rectify injustices that were done to her in her life” (Baym, “Revisiting” 21).

The text undeniably opens with a persecuted woman who has experienced something of a social death: we have already reviewed Hester, on the scaffold, the object of both the judgmental patriarchal gaze and the even angrier gaze of the autumnal women; Monika M. Elbert, in her article entitled “Hester’s Maternity: Stigma or Weapon?”, states that these autumnal matrons align themselves with the patriarchy by judging Hester as a temptress, and consequently, denying their own motherhood. From their presumably menopausal and certainly barren outlook, they render children the sole commodity of women, as does the patriarchy; because they themselves feel that they are without currency, they see Hester as both a threat and an obstacle to their own social well-being. Elbert notes, “These women, depicted by the narrator as harsh, rheumatic, and beyond the age of childbearing, have lost their mothering function and know no other way of gaining power in this closed society than to be as critical as their men in the persecution of one of their sisters” (Elbert, “Hester’s Maternity” 176). By forcing Hester, and therefore, all women, into the category of mother/temptress, and implying that the only other option is their own state – barren, sexless and therefore, in some sense, “holy” – these women betray their entire gender in an effort to integrate with the patriarchy. However, Hester ultimately defeats them by refusing to be categorized. As noted by Baym, in the end, Hester is more successful than any of the males of the text, by far: she

resists the notion that her child is her only commodity, for she succeeds even after Pearl has embarked on her own life, and she resists the categorization that she is solely a temptress by thriving in the social realm even when her sexuality is stripped away. She is triumphant in the end in a way the autumnal women are not – as a well-rounded woman who succeeds by giving to society; Hester is on the scaffold, but it is these women who are rendered the fools, for, as Elbert notes, “in emphasizing Hester’s Eve-like sexuality, these women deny their motherhood, and thus, their own past” (176).

While motherhood itself will be covered in much greater detail in the following pages, the scaffold scene must be further examined as substantiation of Hawthorne’s early message of female independence; even before the harsh voices of the autumnal women are heard, the rosebush adjacent to the prison door is seen. While some of David Leverenz’s arguments regarding Hester do not support Hawthorne’s pro-female sentiments, he features a brilliant analysis of the text’s opening in his article “Mrs. Hawthorne’s Headache: Reading *The Scarlet Letter*”; Leverenz notes, as do most readers, that one of the first details of the tale itself is that this Puritan Eden was begun by the “the virgin soil hav(ing) been appropriated for graves and a prison” which signifies that these patriarchs are consistently “stifling their utopian hopes with a grave distrust of human nature” (556). While detailing the fragile beauty of the rose, Nature’s gift of pity to the persecuted Puritan population, the narrator muses, “This rose-bush, by a strange chance, has been kept alive in history” and notes that it is possible that it may have “survived out of the stern old wilderness” (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 54). As Leverenz notes, the narrator “allegorically intimates that patriarchs will die while tender flowers endure” (Leverenz 556). While the rose-bud in question represents not the woman, but the tale

itself, the reader is alerted to the fact that the moral coming out of this story is destined to outlast even the patriarchy it cautions against; as Hester emerges, waving back the beadle in one deft motion, the “prison door dwarfs the rose” (556). This is clearly a message that the proverbial door is shut against Hester and all women, and that the grey, cold prison, which represents the patriarchy, is not only more formidable, but much larger and more powerful than the rose-bush; but the flower, which should not logically grow in this space, thrives, and further endures in the glowing ‘A’ seen throughout the text – while not always convenient and certainly not nurtured, the flower survives, “the letter ‘A’ gules,” and in this, the reader sees permanent signs of female endurance as well (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 201).

The narrator considers the option that the flower itself “sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson” (54); this statement is a further testimony to the endurance of female strength and subversion. Ann Hutchinson – who is symbolic of the revolutionary female stepping beyond societal bounds – was a Puritan woman who was eventually executed as a heretic; she is associated with free thought, antinomianism, and, women who refuse to be relegated to the role into which society forces them. In his article entitled, “Footsteps of Ann Hutchinson: The Context of *The Scarlet Letter*,” Michael Colacurcio comments on Hawthorne’s loaded allusion, asserting that the early references to the rosebush and to Hutchinson quickly present to the reader the omnipresent dichotomy between the “natural and the social” on which the text heavily hinges (Colacurcio 304). While some of Colacurcio’s reading views Hester as the temptress figure, which, as noted earlier, is a severely limiting label for a woman, he does pose a thoughtful interrogation of the juxtaposition early on between what he deems the

“natural” – the rosebush, passion, and sin – and the “social” – embodied in the prison, punishment, and patriarchy. Hawthorne pairs these spheres to highlight the tension of human tendency and the following of the heart versus social pressure and the following of the rules, a private-versus-public complication which is the embodiment of the conflict between Romanticism and Puritanism; this encompasses not only some of the complications inevitably and ingeniously captured by this text with its nineteenth-century writer and seventeenth-century setting, but more importantly, introduces the problem of a self-reliant woman living within a patriarchy that is based wholly on conformity, especially for women. Colacurcio also notes that Hawthorne names Hutchinson not once, but twice within this novel, first as noted, in his opening, “The Prison-Door”, and then in his chapter “Another View of Hester”, stating that if it had not been for Pearl, Hester “might have come down to us in history, hand in hand with Ann Hutchinson, as the foundress of a religious sect. She might, in one of her phases, have been a prophetess. She might, and not improbably would, have suffered death from the stern tribunals of the period” (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 134). Clearly, the second reference to Hutchinson does not establish a parallel, but a departure. Once again, Hester is redeemed by her motherhood, whereas, at least in this text, Hutchinson – and later on Zenobia – are not.

Before Hester’s maternity can be fully discussed, the preceding institution into which she enters, the institution that both creates her dilemma and solidifies her primary fate, must be examined – that of marriage. As noted by Elbert, marriage functions in this text in several ways, but it is initially embodied in the very male-dominant agreement that creates Hester’s predicament; her partnership with Chillingworth is described as more of a business decision than a true romantic union, which ultimately leads to one of the text’s



largest themes: "Let men tremble to win the hand of woman, unless they win along with it the utmost passion of her heart!" (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 141). In her essay "Hester on the Scaffold, Dimmesdale in the Closet: Hawthorne's Seven-Year Itch," Elbert insightfully notes Hawthorne's choice of seven years from the initial scene to the closing scaffold "confession" as the duration of the text; this is linked to the fact that this same duration is required to acknowledge desertion of a marriage as grounds in the granting of a divorce in the antebellum period. Elbert further points out that there are solid bonds between Hester and both men in this text – she is linked to Chillingworth by legal marriage, of course, and she is linked to Dimmesdale through their love and their child; by defining the idea of marriage as a romantic union that joins two vested adults – just as Hawthorne identified himself as Sophia's "husband" even when he was legally her mere fiancé – Elbert notes that Chillingworth is Hester's "legal" husband, whereas Dimmesdale is Hester's "natural" husband due to both their love and their child. At the opening of the text, Hester certainly feels more emotionally linked and therefore, more emotionally loyal, to Dimmesdale, which, for Hawthorne, was what linked him to Sophia as her "husband" well before their nuptials (Elbert, "Seven-Year Itch" 235). Ultimately, Elbert identifies these two husbands' respective abandonment of Hester as the true sins of the text, stating that Hester's larger sin was not breaking the rules of the patriarchy by committing adultery, but breaking a commitment to the self by marrying a man she did not love. Elbert notes that "this emotional dishonesty with oneself, and not the act of adultery, is the worse sin for Hawthorne" (242). Furthermore, the larger offense is committed by both men when they abandon Hester: Chillingworth first, for two years as Hester settled in the New World alone, and then for the remainder of the text by not

acknowledging himself as Master Prynne, and Dimmesdale as denying both his paternity and his relationship with Hester until the final scaffold scene. Both of these desertions certainly fulfill the requisite duration of time to warrant legal termination of a relationship; in this point, Elbert proves that, because Hawthorne “does not allow us to forget the ensuing seven years of negligence by either of Hester’s men” (244), Hester is not the sinner, but is sinned *against*. Furthermore, because these men each choose an allegiance to one another over a relationship with Hester, she is freed of an obligation to either one of them, and allowed to live alone in a “no-man’s land” (250), complete with solitude, property, and ultimate autonomy. Finally, Elbert concludes that “in the end, Hawthorne exonerates Hester from the charge of adultery in the same way the community tends to forget her sin and is blinded to the ‘A’ on her bosom” (251). While Hester’s final ending and role in the community will be discussed in further detail, Elbert’s analysis of marriage in the text renders it clear that Hawthorne vindicates Hester’s actions, and her independence.

Hawthorne’s irony and one of Hester’s many victories lie in the fact that, amidst these desertions, Hester does her best work – mothering her daughter and the community most effectively when she is allowed to be on her own. Clearly, on many levels, Hester is redeemed, not only through Hawthorne’s focus on male desertion, but also through both her nurturing of Pearl, and her community contributions. What, then, is Hawthorne proposing about the matriarchy, as a whole, and specifically, in terms of motherhood, marriage, charity, and the future for gender equality? First, it is obvious that Hawthorne did not subscribe to the “Cult of True Womanhood” theories of his day, at least not fully, for he shows that marriage and effective motherhood are not only unlinked, but in

Hester's case, are mutually exclusive; in this, Hawthorne promotes a Woman of the Nineteenth Century model over a Domesticity model – this will be detailed in closing. In terms of charity, Hawthorne certainly privileges the act of giving – both through motherhood and charitable work; from the opening scene featuring the autumnal women being “interposed” upon by the “young wife, holding a child by the hand” (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 56), the reader sees that Hawthorne finds motherhood to be aligned with beauty, youth, grace, kindness, and, generally speaking, a magnanimous outlook, but not necessarily marriage or a man. This echoes Fuller's notions about the ideality embodied in the figure of the Virgin Mary, as the perfect female archetype embodies motherhood without the patriarchy. As the young mother reminds the presumably barren and certainly aging autumnal women that Hester's punishment may, in fact, be felt more deeply by the sinner, herself, than most may think, she is evincing that there is a nurturing that comes with motherhood that cannot be duplicated elsewhere, certainly not within the heart of the other gender. As Baym notes in “Revisiting”, part of Hawthorne's proposal in gender equality is that the genders must be acknowledged as *different*, for they cannot be considered to be exactly the same, and true equality does not require exact similarity. She states, in response to Hawthorne's final notion of sacred love:

If only a love of this sort can guarantee mutual happiness between men and women, only a love like this could underpin a society of equals that might supersede present-day exploitation. As long as there are two sexes in the world, a just and humane polity must perceive each as equal to the other. But the very differences between the sexes that demands better forms of human intimacy also impeded their realization. (Baym, “Revisiting” 556)

Baym also notes that just because “Hawthorne’s women have more heart than his men does not imply that they have less brain” (553), and Hester is proof of this, for she is as socially savvy as she is nurturing.

However, while Hester may be somewhat victorious due to her savvy, what redeems her is her motherhood and nurturing, for it is motherhood that continually renders “the sinful mother happier than the sinful father” (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 99), in more ways than one. In Chapter VIII, entitled “The Elf-Child and the Minister,” Dimmesdale pleads on Hester’s behalf, announcing that allowing her to keep Pearl, to function as the mother that she is, has saved Hester, and “preserved her from blacker depths of sin into which Satan might else have sought to plunge her!” (99). For all of her trying behaviors, Pearl does, in fact, represent truth in that children are both innocent and untainted by society; the child is constantly voicing her thoughts, and demanding that Dimmesdale acknowledge both her and her mother in public. In her representation of truth and in the notion that she is keeping Hester from sin, Pearl functions as a consistent opportunity for Hester’s redemption. While Pearl is often referred to as impish, evil, and fiend-like, and while she often both frightens Hester and drives her mad, she is, ultimately, Hester’s “sole treasure, whom she had bought so dear, and who was all her world” (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 84). Lesley Ginsberg, in her article “The ABC’s of *The Scarlet Letter*”, discusses Hester’s mothering of Pearl throughout the text as a constant rhetoric of repression, at least when the two are in public; from telling Pearl, “we must not always talk in the marketplace of what happens to us in the forest” (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 185), and by hushing her each time Pearl questions the minister’s strange behavior, and whether or not he will walk with them in public, Hester

is forced by the patriarchy to silence her daughter on several occasions. Ginsberg notes that, in this, “Hawthorne critiques and exposes antebellum pedagogies of repression in *The Scarlet Letter*” (17), and, in another perceptive link between the Puritan time and his own time period two hundred years in the future, Hawthorne critiques the patriarchy, both past and present. However, Hester is forced by the larger political structure to silence Pearl, and it is likely in fear of losing her altogether that she does so; keeping her daughter with her is a top priority to Hester, and she manages to do so without giving up her true self or publicly apologizing for the sin that created Pearl.

Elbert also analyzes Hester’s motherhood “on her own terms” (Elbert, “Hester’s Maternity” 179), stating that “by making her maternity emotional as well as physical, by not being someone’s wife, she can determine her maternal attitude” (179). Elbert makes the distinction between “reproductive” and “emotional” mothering, stating that Hester manages to do both in her own way. As early as the initial scaffold scene, the reader can see Hester asserting her autonomy over the patriarchy by demonstrating individual ownership of the very thing that the patriarchy tries to dominate: motherhood itself. Elbert explains the important notion of motherhood as commodity in the patriarchal public sphere: “woman counts in society only insofar as she contributes to the marketplace, by perpetuating the race” (179). By both mothering in her own way – “on her own terms”, as Elbert says – and by refusing to name the father of the child in this initial scene, Hester “bears and raises a child on her own, and by denying the need for a husband, certainly when she refuses to reveal the identity of the father, in the ‘Market-Place’ scene, she shows her feelings that men are not indispensable” (179). Elbert continues to connect Hester’s early silence with her overall statement, which renders

triumphant her stance against the patriarchy: “The worst sin against patriarchy is to bear a child and not disclose the identity of the father. Hester’s single motherhood is one of those peculiar feminine mysteries that men have made taboo because it robs them of their power” (179). Elbert further argues that “Hester’s silence resounds with victory; it is more an act of defiance than deference or diffidence”, that her “refusal to participate in male discourse” is a sign of “triumph over the male reality” (185). Furthermore, Hester rescues Pearl from the holds of the patriarchy by mothering her alone, and by modeling behaviors of self-reliance and independence; Elbert asserts that “Pearl is saved because she never knows a father” (197) – when the spell is broken in the final scaffold scene, Pearl is finally delivered from the clutches of the patriarchy once and for all.

Elbert further analyzes the “magic circle” of Hester’s maternity, which separates both mother and child from the throng, and allows them to further nurture the special kind of bond that exists between them; the relationship of Hester and Pearl is clearly profound, as Hester will not part with Pearl for anything, cares for her in spite of all of her mischievous actions, and teaches her how to thrive within the patriarchy without giving *in* to the patriarchy. When forced to choose between her love, Dimmesdale, and her daughter in the forest, Hester chooses Pearl, for, as Pearl demands her mother resume her letter and her hair-restricting cap, she is simultaneously reminding her mother of the truths of the situation – that she and the minister cannot skulk off so easily at this point in the text. In choosing her daughter, Pearl, Hester chooses truth – owning the sin and demanding that Dimmesdale do the same – and shows that she is already far beyond needing or even wanting a man. In this, Hawthorne further redeems her as a figure who, unlike the rest of her contemporaries, nurtures children, however difficult they may

behave, and, faces facts, however difficult they may be. Her bravery and her maternity are aligned as virtues, and it is through her maternal bond that Hester shows her grace, her benevolence, and her resilience. Ultimately, then, Pearl is a success, at least by traditional societal standards in that she adapts to both marriage and motherhood. After “the spell is broken” and the truth has come out, Pearl and Hester disappear together, presumably to Europe, where Pearl makes her own life, complete with riches – both inherited money from Chillingworth and the newer money of a presumably prosperous matrimony – and possibly even a baby of her own, a sure sign of matriarchal success on Hester’s part. She and Pearl keep in touch, and, although Hester must fulfill another duty – that of charity – back home in Boston, the narrator is clear about the fact that Pearl would “most joyfully have entertained that sad and lonely mother at her fireside” (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 200). As maternity comes full circle, Hester has effectively turned the “imp” into a woman “alive, but married, and happy, and mindful of her mother” (200). It is partially through the unique bond of motherhood – a bond, Hawthorne tells the reader, which no man could fulfill, physically or emotionally – that Hester is redeemed; once again, she is vindicated not in spite of her womanhood, but *because* of it.

Another redeeming aspect of Hester’s womanhood is charity, from her work with the poor mid-text, to her final function as counselor to the emotionally distraught. From early on, Hester is described as innately charitable; there is “none so ready as she to give of her little substance to every demand of poverty.” She acts as a “self-ordained Sister of Mercy” and “such helpfulness was found in her – so much power to do, and power to sympathize – that many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original

signification. They said it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength" (131). She is redeemed by this giving spirit just seven years after her sin is initially discovered, to the point at which the decorated and controversial emblem no longer stands for Adulteress. Through this remarkable change in the public opinion, Hawthorne assigns value to both acts of charity and to womanhood in general, for he is clear in labeling this a *woman's* strength. In the end, the "more real life" Hester chooses to live in Boston is based on penitence through counseling, and "as Hester Prynne had no selfish ends, nor lived in any measure for her own profit and enjoyment, people brought all their sorrows and perplexities, and besought her counsel" (200). Hester's role in society becomes defined by her knowledge, her sin, and her willingness to commiserate and volunteer her wisdom; through this, she earns reverence, and a place in the world for herself.

At the close of the novel is it neither Dimmesdale nor Chillingworth who are of consequence, but Hester, who functions as counselor, prophetess, and paragon. Both Baym and Sacvan Bercovitch, among other critics, view "Hester's return to Boston and resumption of the letter as the novel's most important event" (Baym, "Revisiting" 547). In this final act, Hawthorne renders Hester's ultimate meaning as strong female and progressive visionary complete, her ultimate function as one who both points out and seeks to amend societal flaws, most profoundly through the wisdom from – and at the location of – her own sins. Unlike Zenobia, she is not silenced, she is empowered, first by her acts of motherhood, and more importantly, by her acts of charity and counseling. Hester is a beacon of hope and wisdom for the local women, those with "recurring trials of wounded, wasted, wronged, misplaced, or erring and sinful passion" (Hawthorne,



*Scarlet Letter* 201), who seek Hester for counsel and remedy. These women, caught between the oppressive patriarchy of their time and the inevitably progressive emotions of the female heart, which cry for and deserve social acceptance, have only Hester to serve as the liaison between these two contradictory spaces. She, of course, assures them “of her firm belief, that, at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven’s own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on surer ground of mutual happiness” (201), and her prophecy is born: she dreams of the woman’s ideal, a time in which she can have both love and domesticity *and* societal acceptance and fulfillment, and she notes that it is not woman, but *society* who is not yet “ripe for it”. This is part of Hawthorne’s intended social reform through Hester and her enlightenment, which has come only from her trials, and her triumph over the most painful of societally inflicted torments.

Hester does admit that, in her own eyes, she is not the true prophetic, for the “angel and apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman, indeed, but lofty, pure, and beautiful; and wise, moreover, not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy; and showing how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest test of a life successful to such an end!” (201) As Bercovitch also notes, Hawthorne leaves, in this statement, as well as in Hester’s resumption of the letter itself, room for ambiguity, or, more accurately, irony: Hester’s particular wisdom comes not from purity and joy, but from tribulation and subsequent triumph. While she may not fully realize the gift that her sin has been, the reader can see no better visionary than she, for a “pure” apostle is an unfit one; it is Hawthorne’s statement as a true Romantic writer that one’s wisdom comes from one’s experience, and especially one’s trials, not from the sheltered and idyllic, as is

described above. This is, possibly, Hawthorne's way of pointing out, at the last moment, that it is not Hester's fault that happily-ever-after did not become hers; it is, instead, Dimmesdale's actions that cause Hester to be robbed of this sacred love that would allow her to be the true "Angel and Apostle." As noted by Baym in "Revisiting", one of the many consequences of romantic love, true fulfillment may lie in the notion that man and woman must share the same space, priorities, decisions, and outlook – Dimmesdale, of course, chooses social reputation, whereas Hester chooses romantic fulfillment, and the union between the two is ultimately broken. While Hester is beneficial to the community and fulfilled by society in the end, she is stripped of romantic love due to what can only be recognized as Dimmesdale's cowardice. To the last, Hawthorne asks if, and when, woman can have both romantic love and societal fulfillment; Baym notes, "Why this is so, and what to do about it, are questions his plots repeatedly ask" as he interrogates the romantic *and* societal "obstacles that make of a supposedly fulfilling social reform something so fraught with misery" (Baym, "Revisiting" 549). While it would minimize these obstacles to feature an idyllic, into-the-sunset conclusion, Baym also states that while "his plots do not – and cannot – lead to happy outcomes in a conventional romantic sense, neither do they end in social futility. They offer limited, incremental change, although often at a great cost to the agent of such change" (549). Through this, Hester is the nineteenth-century reader's hero in many ways, from her triumph, to her charity, to her predictions about the future for female and male relations. Hawthorne does not condemn her through her tragic ending, but vindicates her plight through her tragic circumstances and, more importantly, her endurance through them.

But Hester is, in reality, triumphant, for the patriarchy, embodied in the magistrates, Dimmesdale, Chillingworth, and the Puritan society in general, does not keep her down; as noted by Baym, feminist women, including Hester, “even when defeated, make things happen” (549). Baym is addressing the fact that, even though she is culturally powerless as a woman, Hester affects both change for herself and for her daughter, and therefore, for the entire female gender, and, in this, Hester is, of course, a success story in spite of the odds, which renders her more powerful than the males, who, once again, even with the odds in their favor, do not win. Hester is a paragon simply because “she does not die; she succeeds as a single mother, supporting herself and her child, and when her child is grown, becomes a valued and valuable member of the community” (550-551), even after the males of the text are long defeated and forgotten. Hester triumphs without patriarchal support, and even in spite of patriarchal obstacles, proving that the patriarchy is only as powerful as it is allowed to be.

A similar commentary on both Hester’s endurance through ostracization and her subsequent social contribution is made by Brook Thomas in an astute article entitled, “Citizen Hester: ‘The Scarlet Letter’ as Civic Myth.” Thomas notes that Hawthorne’s intention in *The Scarlet Letter* is partially to showcase a model of democracy through Hester’s independence, ultimately positing that Hawthorne’s critique of the Puritan society is based on his assertion that Hester’s lack of obedience is her true strength. Thomas states, “*The Scarlet Letter* as civic myth does not advocate obedience to the state or even primary loyalty to the nation. Instead, it illustrates how important it is for liberal democracies to maintain the space of independent civil society in which alternative obediences and loyalties are allowed a chance to flourish” (185). Thomas further notes

that submission to civil authority is part of the evil Hawthorne seeks to amend, and, by demonstrating this lesson through a female character, Hawthorne is aligning civil oppression with the patriarchy, as much as he is aligning progressive democratic action with the female viewpoint. To further this, Thomas notes, as did Elbert, that the maternal instinct is what infuses children with the “moral quality of sympathy” (194) that is portrayed as so rare and yet so crucial in the tale. Hester as mother, to both Pearl and to the community, demonstrates Thomas’s final point, that “the power of *The Scarlet Letter* as civic myth has to do with its dramatization of the difference that a preference for freedom of choice can make and how important the existence of an independent civil society is for its cultivation” (196). Central to this independent society is gender equality, and a privileging of the uniquely important traits maternity has to offer.

Regarding Hawthorne’s proposals for future gender equality, it is arguable that, while Hawthorne identifies with many of his female protagonists, he identifies the most with Hester; his narrator is aligned with her from “The Custom House” onward, and, as stated earlier in this paper, their similarities are significant. In his article entitled, “Nathaniel Hawthorne, Una Hawthorne, and *The Scarlet Letter*,” T. Walter Herbert comments that Hawthorne considered his writing, and therefore, himself, to be somewhat feminized, in its sentimentality and emotional appeal. Additionally, Hawthorne was said to be shy, painfully so, and “was profoundly disconcerted by women who displayed the forthright public assertiveness that he himself lacked” (285). As seen through the lens of the accepted gender roles of the nineteenth century – that women are to be self-sacrificing, maternal, and relegated to the domestic sphere – an interesting analysis is further revealed through Herbert’s examination of Hawthorne’s comments on the

behaviors of his daughter, Una. One of the many reasons Hawthorne frequently interrogated gender roles in his own writing was due to some of the wild, and oftentimes odd, tendencies of his daughter, on whom Herbert claims the author based his most famous child character, Pearl. Herbert discusses the accepted nineteenth-century notion of “naturalization” assumed to be inevitable for girls – that they will grow more tender with age, simply because they are female. The flip side of this naturalization is, of course, the assumption that the combative and independent nature that “should be” natural to males will emerge inevitably as well. Because Hawthorne saw in himself an exception to this rule, and he saw the same in his daughter, his examination of gender roles is not only societal, but personal. Through this, then, Hawthorne is posing questions as to whether gender is constructed by society, or by one’s inherent nature. By interrogating these gender roles, and clearly identifying with Hester, herself, Hawthorne aligns himself, and therefore Hester, as both a maternal figure and an artist figure. If Hester is redeemed through her maternal and charitable character traits, which Hawthorne also saw as potentially present in males, like himself, she is lastly redeemed by her artistic tendencies; Hester’s struggles are those of a nineteenth-century woman born into a seventeenth-century world, and they mirror that of an artist, born into a world in which one must be much more than a mere “writer of story-books” (Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* 47).

Tomc takes the preceding analysis of Hawthorne’s self-consciousness regarding his own craft and his “scribbling women” comment as signifying more emotional pain than competitive sneer, and furthers these notions by identifying Hawthorne in Hester. As both are the “outcast/artist” figures, as both are possibly disappointing to the Puritan

culture/ancestors. As both are rejected by patriarchal institutions, Hawthorne is not only linked to the narrator of *The Scarlet Letter*, but to the protagonist as well. Tomc claims that “confronted with a crisis in the literary value of the artist, Hawthorne embraced a mass-circulated narrative of women’s desire in an attempt to establish his own significance as a writer of novels” (469). In Hester’s plight of sin, denial, and “bodily and social” (474) ruin, is Hawthorne’s plight as an artist in a world that has rendered him illegitimate. This is both commentary on “the modern artist’s dilemma in recognizable form as a bitter cross to bear” (471) and a potential opportunity for Hawthorne to redeem the artist’s plight. However, according to Tomc, in Hawthorne’s ultimate redemption of the artist, Hester’s does not exist, for she finishes the tale as outcast, as “ghost,” forever haunted, and haunting. While Tomc’s analysis seems to be both insightful and very much rooted in what is Hawthorne’s alignment of his narrator/self with his protagonist, she errs in her conclusion that Hester ends the text as a rejected outcast. While Hester is separated from society, it is ultimately things positive – her wisdom, progressive attitude, and important role in the community – that set Hester apart, not haunting sin and a ghostlike nature. While described as “shadow-like” as she returns to her cottage in Boston, once there, nothing ghost-like appears concerning Hester. She is quite involved in society, and while her needlework has been juxtaposed with public therapy, she is, more than ever, accessible, present, and helpful; her charity allows her to reach the people, while her artist’s nature and years of sin-born wisdom allow her to keep something of a respectful distance, away and above the common who so desperately seek her expertise.

In the end, she is the true and self-satisfied artist, in that she lives in the world, but not of it. This is a state upon which Millicent Bell comments in her essay “Hawthorne

and the Real”, analyzing Hawthorne as realist or romantic – or a combination of both; she also examines Hester’s place within her social context, stating, “In the fullness of character Hawthorne awards her, Hester is, after all, incongruous in colonial Boston. She is a nineteenth-century woman imagined as inhabiting a seventeenth-century world” (Bell 14). The meaning, for Hawthorne, is clear: Hester is not only a visionary of the future, but she is a woman with enough courage to live out a progressive and advanced lifestyle in her present time. As seen by Bell, ultimately, it is certain that Hawthorne aligns Hester with figures of his own time, and he does so for a reason: in the end, she embodies his message regarding the gender debates of the nineteenth-century. With the emergence of the Cult of Domesticity in the mid-1820’s, women all across America and Great Britain were urged to possess the following virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, and with these, women were “promised happiness and power” (Welter 152). Clearly, Hawthorne did not create Hester in alignment with these virtues: she is not overtly religious in the text, and professes, as stated earlier, that her relations with Dimmesdale “had a consecration of its own”; she is far from aligned with purity, and is viewed as a sinner throughout the text; there is no submissiveness in Hester, as she is more rebellious and independent than ruled by any man; finally, she is not relegated to the home, but earns a living in the public sphere for herself and her daughter.

Hawthorne much more overtly aligns Hester’s character with the philosophies of two of his most intellectual friends, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who defined the self-reliant individual, and Margaret Fuller, who, of course, defined the ideal Transcendentalist woman in her text *Woman in the Nineteenth-Century*, which is considered the quintessential work of feminism. These nineteenth-century gender tensions are

epitomized in the struggle between the ideals surrounding domesticity, and that of philosophers like Emerson and Fuller, who attempted to help society transcend its current social boundaries for women. In his renowned essay entitled "Self-Reliance", Emerson advocates that "imitation is suicide" (Emerson 23), that one must "trust thyself" (24) in order to achieve that status of a "nonconformist" (26) and an ultimate "a triumph of principles" (48). These traits closely describe Hester and her actions throughout *The Scarlet Letter*, as does Fuller's alignment of a fulfilled woman in her text; she states, in closure, that there will come a "woman who shall vindicate the birthright for all women" (Fuller 104), which is similar to the prophetess Hawthorne envisions at the end of the novel. While Hester feels she is not the prophetess, due to her struggles, she fits Fuller's definition perfectly – she embodies Fuller's required "self-subsistence," "self-reliance," "self-impulse," and "independence of man" (103) in every way. Through Hester's actions, Hawthorne promotes the type of woman advocated by Fuller, and through her ultimate victory, he supports subversive and autonomous female behavior as the only satisfaction for woman and for society as a whole.



Chapter Three: *The Blithedale Romance*

While the legendary and beautiful Zenobia, of *The Blithedale Romance*, experiences quite a different outcome than Hester, distinct similarities exist between Hawthorne's two strongest heroines: like Hester, Zenobia is striking in both looks and intelligence, wealthy in both sexuality and spirit, and progressive in both her ideas for women and her own personal autonomy. Also, like Hester, Zenobia falls for a man who rejects her in favor of his own ends, and this perpetuates her downfall. However, in addition to many other palpable differences – most notably Zenobia as sister instead of mother and as classed instead of outcast – the most striking is that Zenobia dies, committing suicide in a river, whereas Hester is redeemed both spiritually and communally. What comment is made on the discrepancy between the fates of these two very strong women, and on their different roles as women throughout the texts? Furthermore, in focusing on Zenobia, how do both class and authorship come into Hawthorne's ultimate message? What role does sisterhood itself play, and what is the responsibility of one female to another? Finally, what comment is Hawthorne making on society's preference for weak Priscilla over strong Zenobia?

Nick-named after the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Syrian queen who was famous for royalty, philosophy and revolution, *Blithedale's* Zenobia is something of an enigma: the reader never knows her true name or identity, and while her behaviors at Blithedale showcase her namesake's queenly status, innate wisdom and subversive action, she dies penniless, degraded, and heartbroken. The reader's first introduction to her, through the eyes of Miles Coverdale, the misogynistic and presumably unreliable narrator of the tale, highlights her "native pride" calling her "remarkably beautiful" and noting her "hair,

which was dark, glossy, and of singular abundance” and ornamented only by a singular flower of “rare and exotic beauty” (46-48). She is also described, like Hester, as tall and robust, and radiating the sexuality that has faded away in most women of Hawthorne’s day: in reference to most modern women, Coverdale notes, “their sex fades away and goes for nothing in ordinary intercourse. Not so with Zenobia”, which leads him to declare, “Behold, here is a woman!” (49). Joel Pfister, in his article, “Feminine Evolution and Narrative Feminization,” notes the overt link between the robust physiques of both Hester and Zenobia, citing that Hawthorne, himself, regretted that the women of his day had grown to look “thin, worn, and care-begone” (318). On the contrary, Zenobia is luxuriant, radiant, and full of health and vigor. Characterized early on as an ideal feminine model by Coverdale, Zenobia, like the narrator, is a writer and creator by trade. She appears also, to possess great wealth and holds herself with the grace and poise that should come with societal status. She muses regarding the utopian experiment, “By-and-by, perhaps, when our individual adaptations begin to develop themselves, it may be that some of us, who wear the petticoat, will go afield, and leave the weaker brethren to take our places in the kitchen!” (48). Clearly, Zenobia is willing to accept the female role temporarily, but has hopes for a more progressive female future. Here is yet another similarity to Hester is Zenobia’s vision for the future, in which gender roles are switched, and with them, gender biases; however, for Zenobia, this future, is not theoretical, as it is for Hester, but immediate, as she hopes it will take place within the realm of Blithedale itself.

In addition, Zenobia is characterized as a visionary in terms of her own perceptive gaze: “She is a woman who sees and sees through others and who refuses to be a mere

‘object of sight’ or a mere face” (Pfister 324). She does not allow Coverdale’s misogynistic and romanticized rendering to define her, and the reader should not do so either. Making the distinction between “Coverdale’s Zenobia” and “Hawthorne’s Zenobia,” Pfister points out that Coverdale wants to reduce Zenobia’s suicide to a consequence of a school-girl crush gone wrong – ultimately, a mere affront to her looks, stating, “Six hours before, how beautiful! At midnight, what a horror!” He callously continues, “Being the woman that she was, could Zenobia have foreseen all these ugly circumstances of death, how ill it would become her... she would no more have committed this dreadful act, than have exhibited herself to a public assembly in a badly-fitting garment!” (Hawthorne, *Blithedale* 210). As Coverdale attempts to reduce Zenobia to a vain woman whose only priority is her appearance, he further exposes his own unreliable storytelling, for he inadvertently reveals that Zenobia actually looks quite bold in death – according to Pfister, she is “a rather rebellious horror” (325). Her hands are clenched in defiance, and, she is in a position which “offers nothing to the voyeur” (325), and it is ultimately through Coverdale’s folly and faulty analysis that Hawthorne truly showcases Zenobia’s strength over the patriarchy. While Pfister notes that many nineteenth-century readers suggested that Zenobia’s tale should have ended in a more didactic way by marrying her off, he also states in response to this that “Hawthorne would not have been entirely comfortable emplotting his feminist in this conventional way. He prefers instead to draw attention to the way, the literary way, that Coverdale tries to stereotype her.” Finally, and most insightfully, Pfister asserts that Zenobia’s “botched Ophelia-death is not simply a lovesick suicide but a parody of the way her culture stereotyped women” (326); just as he did in *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne uses the

circumstances surrounding the downfall of his heroine to simultaneously complicate the female plight and render the patriarchy reprehensible.

While Coverdale is not the focus of this discussion, his character embodies Hawthorne's overt critique of the patriarchy, which cannot be ignored, for it is in light of this critique that Zenobia's status as a heroine can be examined. Laura E. Tanner also reads Zenobia through an analysis of Coverdale, specifically highlighting the fact that these two characters are the artists of the text. She notes that Coverdale first associates Zenobia with literacy, citing his storytelling as directed by "a narrator's need to suppress the artistic vision that threatens his own production" (Tanner 1). Embodying the patriarchal fear of both feminine sexuality and feminine performance and creativity, Coverdale is admittedly a narrator who has trouble distinguishing the realities of the women in the text from the "fancy-work with which I have idly decked her out!" (Hawthorne, *Blithedale* 112). This quote references, specifically, his abstract musings on Priscilla, the second woman on whom Coverdale fixates, and the one he ultimately succors and claims to love. Tanner states that "Coverdale recognizes that his concern for her stems primarily from her value as virgin clay which he can mold to suit his own artistic ends," and that, "while Coverdale is defined by the 'self-deception' that Hawthorne associates in the romance with male blindness, Zenobia is characterized by the probing vision that defines the woman as artist" (Tanner 2-3). While Coverdale is the reader's storyteller and narrative voice, it is Zenobia who embodies truth, as seen when, with her self-chosen name and carefully picked exotic flower, Zenobia is who she wants to be, while Priscilla is, through the patriarchy as embodied by Coverdale, "the type of womanhood, such as man has spent centuries in making it." Zenobia also insightfully

notes that the patriarchy's preference of the weaker, blank-slate woman is detrimental to its own welfare – "he is never content, unless he can degrade himself by stooping toward what he loves. In denying us our rights, he betrays even more blindness to his own interests" (Hawthorne, *Blithedale* 127) – and this is evident in the final and degraded state of Hollingsworth at the end of the text.

After clearly establishing Coverdale's questionability as a narrator, Tanner insightfully notes that "when examined carefully, the crucial scenes in which Zenobia apparently sacrifices her feminist ideals are in fact highly ambiguous situations which Coverdale deliberately manipulates to indict Zenobia" (Tanner 9). Most notably evident in the scene at Eliot's Pulpit in Chapter XIV, in Coverdale's analysis of Zenobia's feminist diatribe, he clearly attempts to discredit her stance, just as he does by reducing her death to a publicity stunt based on looks and vanity. Zenobia argues that "when my sex shall receive its rights, there will be ten eloquent women, where there is now one eloquent man. Thus far, no woman in the world has ever once spoken out her whole heart and her whole mind. The mistrust and disapproval of the vast bulk of society throttles us, as with two gigantic hands at our throats!" (Hawthorne, *Blithedale* 126) The ultimate irony is that the biggest perpetrator of this silencing is the man relaying the tale, Coverdale himself, who narrates, moments after Zenobia's speech:

What amused and puzzled me was the fact that women, however intellectually superior, so seldom disquiet themselves about the rights or wrongs of their sex, unless their own individual affections chance to lie in idleness, or to be ill at ease. They are not natural reformers, but become such by the pressure of exceptional misfortune. (Hawthorne, *Blithedale* 126)

Again, Coverdale misogynistically reduces Zenobia to a woman on a rant merely because she is dissatisfied with her own personal circumstances; although there is no evidence of Zenobia's discontent with her own life at this point in the text, Coverdale needs to reduce her to this state because it is consistent with his portrait of her as a victim rather than an autonomous agent. He reports on her reaction to Hollingsworth's subsequent retaliation, which supports true womanhood in the domestic sphere; Coverdale notes that Zenobia "looked humbled" and that tears of "grief not anger" sparkled in her eyes (127). Tanner notes that "upon closer consideration, however, it is apparent that Zenobia's response is anything but the 'humble' reaction that Coverdale uses as ammunition in his charge of female degradation," further noting that "Zenobia's tears are more likely the sign of frustration and grief than of humility, as her words are more likely a bitter affirmation of the painful effect of patriarchal brainwashing than a sign of her assent to that brainwashing" (Tanner 12). Although Coverdale attempts to reduce Zenobia to a disgruntled woman who backs down quite easily, assessing ultimately that women are "'too ready' to accept male definitions of their position in society" (Tanner 13), a careful reading shows Coverdale's own biases, which reveal that the patriarchy has a need to turn outspoken feminists like Zenobia into victims of male possession in order to allow them to exist at all.

Tanner further discusses Coverdale's misappropriation of Zenobia in the final chapters in which he details her suicide, citing that this is his "penultimate strategic maneuver" and that "whether or not Coverdale murders Zenobia in the plot, he clearly uses his narrative authority to silence her voice once and for all by killing her into art" (Tanner 16). This patriarchal need to objectify and own women is a scheme that

ultimately backfires in the text; in this, Hawthorne sides with the female endeavor to speak in the face of the male attempt to silence. Tanner states that “Zenobia’s defiant posture in death marks the ultimate futility of Coverdale’s attempt to appropriate her” (Tanner 17); in her disobedient death posture, Zenobia further takes a stance, possesses a voice, even from beyond. From this analysis, the reader can look to her ultimate haunting of Hollingsworth, for, while the self-interested philanthropist chooses money – embodied in a woman he can dominate – over the passionate and brilliant Zenobia, he is forever plagued by this choice, for Zenobia’s ghost will not let him rest. As Zenobia’s “vindictive shadow dogged the side where Priscilla was not,” Hollingsworth ends the tale “depressed,” “melancholy” and “weak”; as Priscilla clings to his side with a “deep, submissive, unquestioning reverence” (Hawthorne, *Blithedale* 214-5), Hollingsworth is haunted by the voice of Zenobia, and the subversive woman has the final say.

To properly analyze Zenobia’s final voice in death, the gender and class issues that are relevant long before this scene must be more carefully examined, for these function in the financial and political shifts that cause Hollingsworth to choose the weak over the strong. This choice is the final message to Zenobia that the female plight is far from triumphant over the patriarchy, at least during the nineteenth century; Nina Baym addresses these issues of female sexuality and class in her article, “Passion and Oppression in *The Blithedale Romance*,” noting that Hawthorne has a recurring point about gender in both *The Scarlet Letter* and *Blithedale*, which is “the idea that a man’s liberation and fulfillment require his accepting a more fully sexual image of woman than culture allows. The woman’s sexuality (she is a secondary being in a patriarchal system) is suppressed in society as a means of inhibiting the male; both sexes suffer” (Baym,

“Passion” 289). Certainly the reader sees both Dimmesdale and Hollingsworth suffer – the former because he cannot own his attraction to and love for Hester publicly, and the latter because he follows money instead of the passionate Zenobia with whom he has a true connection; in the ghost that plagues Hollingsworth, the reader can see the male suffering that comes with oppressing a strong female and rejecting her sexuality. The male fear of female sexuality is one of the gender boundaries Hawthorne seeks to amend, and this is apparent in the misery of Hawthorne’s men; his goal is not just freedom for women, but a more joyous and fervent outcome for men, as well.

Baym also discusses class in regards to gender in terms of Zenobia’s loss of money and status close to the end of the novel. Although this “rerouting of class,” as Baym calls it, exposes Hollingsworth once and for all as a selfish egotist, Baym also notes that there is more to this narrative choice – it is about Zenobia as functioning above and beyond class constraints, something the men of the novel seem unable to accomplish. She states, “Although throughout most of the romance Zenobia is wealthy, she operates in a frame dependent of money. Her wealth is in the abundance of her natural gifts” (Baym, “Passion” 292). Zenobia is described as possessing a wealth of virtues, and, even after the loss of status, is no less enchanting. Contrarily, the bland Priscilla, when identified as anything at all, is labeled seamstress or Veiled Lady, images that pose class questions. Baym “finds her characterization intimately bound up with economic questions” for, as seamstress, she makes silk purses, an object that “appeals to a jaded taste” in terms of luxury, and as the Veiled Lady, she, herself, becomes the object/commodity (Baym, “Passion” 292). It is only when she is given Zenobia’s money that Priscilla truly gets noticed, whereas Zenobia, on the other hand, as noted ironically



enough by Westervelt – the ultimate wielder of commodity – describes her even after her fall in social status: “Her mind was active, and various in its powers... her heart had a manifold adaptation; her constitution an infinite buoyancy... her beauty would not have waned... She had life’s summer all before her, and a hundred varieties of brilliant success... Every prize that could be worth a woman’s having... lay within Zenobia’s reach” (Hawthorne, *Blithedale* 212). The discrepancy between these two women speaks loudly about female autonomy, for in their mutual class shifts, as well as their status as sisters, Hawthorne provides astute commentary on subversive versus subservient women, and how the patriarchy receives each.

Baym brings up an interesting point regarding feminism and sisterhood, ultimately praising Zenobia for all of her actions but one – her lack of caretaking and concern for Priscilla, citing that, in general, she is feminist, but, at least toward her younger sister, is “not feminist enough” (Baym, “Passion” 295). Baym posits that Zenobia chooses her love for Hollingsworth over her allegiance to a fellow woman, which is not very sisterly. The refutation for this argument comes in Baym’s own assessment of Priscilla: Baym points out that Priscilla, “in all her frailty and vulnerability” (294) is, in the end, the sister who is chosen by the patriarchal world. While Baym asks, “Who will rescue Priscilla?” (294), it is ultimately Zenobia who needs rescue from a patriarchal world which does not appreciate her genius or her passion, and cannot handle her strength. One cannot fault Zenobia for not being “sisterly,” for Priscilla is an enemy to herself – she chooses repeatedly to be weak, insubstantial, and needy – hardly admirable qualities in a character nor aspects that are deserving of rescue; in addition to that, Priscilla gets exactly what she wants, to be claimed and owned by

Hollingsworth – the patriarchy rewards her blameworthy behavior. Consequently, Zenobia, for her strength, intellect, passion and idealism, is rejected; this lesson does not render Zenobia less feminist, but in fact, renders Priscilla *unworthy*. In a world that rewards weakness in women, Zenobia has no place, and it is for this reason that she takes her own life, for what good is it when the weak consistently triumph over the strong?

Perhaps Baym's interpretation of Zenobia's lack of sisterhood relates to what Angela Mills calls "a popular epithet of reformism" in Hawthorne's time (97). In commenting on contemporary sisterhood as "both personal and political relationship", Mills defines one of the primary goals of nineteenth-century feminism as educating women to "act, collectively, in their own interests" (Mills 97). While Zenobia is clearly capable of this, Priscilla is not, and so, it falls to Zenobia to "rescue" her figurative and literal little sister; problematically, however, in featuring Zenobia as ultimately turning her back on Priscilla, Hawthorne insightfully poses the following question: To what extent is true feminism about female self-reliance? Just as Hester saves herself in the end, and defines Margaret Fuller's nineteenth-century woman in her "self-subsistence," "self-reliance," "self-impulse," and "independence of man," Priscilla is unable to save herself and does not possess any of these virtues; it is not for Zenobia to save Priscilla if the latter cannot rely on herself.

Mills highlights two major victories of the patriarchy in this text as instrumental to Zenobia's final realization that the plight of woman is far from victorious. The first occurs when Moodie shifts his brother's fortune from Zenobia to Priscilla; this is not because money and class are of issue, for what Baym states is true: Zenobia is so virtuous as to be above class definitions. What is an affront about this shift is Moodie's

supremacy, representative of the unfair and absolute power of the patriarchy. Although Zenobia was raised by his brother, and was presumably far closer to him than Moodie himself, it is ultimately the male heir who decides upon the placement of the riches. While Hawthorne clearly aligns the audience with Zenobia, the reader watches in horror as even a lowly and degraded man is ultimately more powerful than an accomplished woman. This is one of the tragedies of the patriarchal system: however undeserving, the male is heir and therefore all-powerful. In pointing out that society has not come much further than the world of Greek tragedy, Hawthorne leaves the reader with a kingdom usurped by an unworthy male beneficiary, and a heroine floating tragically in a river of her own realizations: that the world is clearly not yet the gender-balanced place that Hester, Fuller, and Zenobia envision.

The second event that brings about Zenobia's realization, according to Mills, is not specifically Hollingsworth's choice of Priscilla as much as it is Priscilla's choice of Hollingsworth. She states, "Priscilla's obedience to Hollingsworth signals the defeat of Zenobia, the feminist and the woman" (Mills 109). In assenting to Hollingsworth's "protection," Priscilla allows herself to be controlled, and Hollingsworth is showing a preference of authority and mastery over sharing a life with a true and equal companion. In recognizing this, Zenobia realizes once and for all that her most prized gifts will forever be unvalued by the patriarchy. Furthermore, she knows that Hollingsworth is choosing Priscilla against his true desires: "What can Priscilla do for him? Put passionate warmth into his heart, when it shall be chilled with frozen hopes? Strengthen his hands, when they are weary with much doing and no performance? No; but only tend towards him with a blind, instinctive love, and hang her little, puny weakness for a clog upon his

arm” (Hawthorne, *Blithedale* 202). Zenobia knows that Priscilla will pale in comparison to the partner she has been to Hollingsworth, and it is over this injustice, and not the loss of the man, himself, that Zenobia despairs. In addition, Zenobia realizes that this moment is representative of her lot for all time, for the weak women of the world are the true roadblocks for the strong; Hollingsworth, like the patriarchy itself, does not want to be challenged by a woman like Zenobia when he can choose a subservient devotee. It is not, in the end, the fault of Priscilla, but the fault of the patriarchy for choosing the proverbial easy-way-out; Zenobia forgives Priscilla, while noting that the weakness she represents has always halted the progress of feminism: “You have been my evil fate; but there was never a babe with less strength or will to do an injury” (199). Priscilla does not have enough strength or will to possess an opinion, and therefore, she cannot be directly blamed. Mills notes, however, that “Priscilla finds no communion with other women. She retires to a secluded cottage with Hollingsworth to become, exclusively, a companion and crutch for him.” This “bolsters a sense that she thrives through parasitism, getting what she needs the only way she knows how” (Mills 114). Priscilla supports the male agenda unflinchingly, and in this, she is for the men, and always will be.

As Zenobia is left to accept humankind’s bitterest evils on her own, she chooses suicide over joining a convent – this Mills sees as Zenobia’s final rejection of what the patriarchy would urge her is “acceptable.” Mary Suzanne Schriber agrees that Zenobia’s end is defiant, not subservient, in her article “Justice to Zenobia.” She defines Coverdale as overtly misogynist, and refutes critics who fall for his tale as true, accusing them of “all too readily accepting another character’s interpretation of Zenobia and of her death... not been able to recognize the artistry of Hawthorne’s creation” (61-62). Defining

Zenobia's ultimate decision as "suicide over despair of woman's lot and future prospects," Schriber notes that "suicide over unrequited love is out of character for Zenobia" (74). In a sense, given the way the "romance" plays out, especially in light of how both Hollingsworth and Coverdale embody of the patriarchy, Zenobia has no true choice about ending her life; Schriber further comments on this, stating that "a woman judged guilty of ambitions beyond her proper domestic sphere", certainly such an intelligent woman as Zenobia, "simply understands that, whatever her own views on the matter, power is vested in the male," and, for her ambitions, is "sentenced to a metaphorical death" ultimately anyway (Schriber 72). What else is a "Zenobia" to do, when the "Hollingsworths" of the world ignore who they love in favor of the insubstantial "Priscillas", and the "Coverdales" of the world are the ones not only telling the story, but also, quite expectedly, themselves choose the weak women in the end.

It is indisputable that in *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne is critiquing the patriarchy, as embodied in his condemnation of both Hollingsworth and Coverdale, in both their choices of weak over strong women, and in their rendering of the story of woman, in general. The circumstances do not appear promising for the strong women, and at the end of this utopian romance, Hester's prediction for women never seems further away from fruition. Perhaps one must return to the redeemed adulteress of *The Scarlet Letter*, for if Zenobia's character is modeled after the great feminist Margaret Fuller, as she is rumored to be, Hester ironically succeeds in delivering Fuller's message in a much more poignant and promising way, and in this, Fuller is ultimately embodied in both Zenobia and Hester. Thomas Mitchell further illustrates the heavy role Fuller played in Hawthorne's fiction and the writing of his women: "[Fuller] was to an important extent

the origin of their very conception, the problem at their heart” (10). He further states that the riddle of Hawthorne’s existence is embodied in Fuller, and therefore, ultimately, the fashioning of both Hester and Zenobia after Fuller is Hawthorne’s best way to “confront and attempt to resolve this riddle through the privacy and the control provided by the veiled allegories of narrative representation” (10). The ultimate message on women housed in the dilemmas of his characters stems from the teachings of Fuller: if woman caves under the crushing patriarchal pressure, if she lets it overwhelm her with despair, she will do little lasting good in the world. This lesson is partially embodied in Zenobia, whose tale is a cautionary one for feminists: concede, and the Hollingsworths, Coverdales, and Priscillas will continue as always, and the world will be minimally improved. Conversely, Hester, in her perseverance and attempts to contribute to society, however unfair it may be, serves as a role model and stands to effect real change in the end. On the whole, women, like Zenobia, as ultimately similar to Fuller, can either haunt from beyond the grave, pursuing the patriarchy with their legacy of what could have and *should* have been, or, like Hester, can stand, fight, hope, and *help*, redeeming the female plight and in that, gaining victory – either way, Hawthorne ultimately shows that strong women cannot be silenced, and that the patriarchal world, however challenging, is a better place for this feminine subversion.

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