

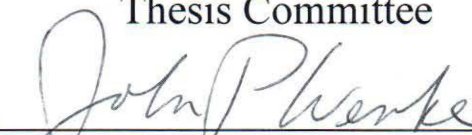
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The Duality of Women in Hawthorne's Romances

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## **The Duality of Women in Hawthorne's Romances**

### **Chapter 1: The Scarlet Letter**

During the years of 1850-1860, Hawthorne authored four novels he considered to be his romances: The Scarlet Letter, The House of the Seven Gables, The Blithedale Romance, and The Marble Faun. All of these novels suggest Hawthorne's interest in the role of women and their relationship with society. Within his novels he has created many memorable female characters through which he noticeably presents womanhood as a duality. He portrays this through two female archetypes; the woman who is strong and capable, yet burdened with deep flaws from her past and the seemingly frail and ethereal woman whose purity brings joy to those who encounter her. Hawthorne's Hester Prynne character sets up this duality in his first romance, The Scarlet Letter, by prophesying that "a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on surer ground of mutual happiness" (235). Hester realizes she is not the woman to set up this new order because it cannot be a woman "bowed down with shame, or even burdened with life-long sorrow" but must rather be "lofty, pure, and beautiful; and wise, moreover, not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy" (The Scarlet Letter 235). Though the latter form of womanhood is not manifested in The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne uses Hester to anticipate the second half of this duality. This will be his exploration of a woman who embodies purity, often through an effusion of joy and an almost ethereal presence. When examining both types of women, he seems to favor the woman of purity, yet never truly manages

to create a character that embodies these ideas and who is also able to establish anything resembling a new order of womanhood. In fact, it is Hester Prynne's character, one who is hardly in the category of pure, who comes closest to creating this new truth and establishing the new aesthetic manifestation that could improve relations between men and women.

Critical to the analysis of Hawthorne's work is an understanding of how women were perceived at the time of his writing. Hawthorne wrote his four romances at an important time in the history of women when, much like in his writing, there were conflicting ideas of womanhood. The 1780s to the 1830s were especially important, as this was the time when the cult of domesticity formed. The cult of domesticity, also known as the cult of true womanhood, was constructed around the essential importance of a woman's place within the family (Cott 1-2). The domestic setting was vital and created the marked contrast between the home and the world. Nancy F. Cott discusses in her book The Bonds of Womanhood how the cult of domesticity set women up as the caretakers of the home, which men would retreat to in order to escape from the material-obsessed world. The woman of the house was expected to be uninterested in material issues and focus solely on the well-being of the family, making the home into a sanctuary. Books instructing women in motherhood were extremely popular during this time. Though there were slight differences in advice, Cott describes how these books nonetheless "revealed a single canon - of domesticity" (Cott 64).

By the 1830s, there was a paradox in the women's social "progress". This developed from the "seemingly contradictory visions of women's relation to society" (Cott 5). These ideas are embodied in "the ideology of domesticity, which gave women a limited and sex-specific role to play, primarily in the home" and "feminism, which attempted to remove sex-specific limits on women's opportunities and capacities" (Cott 5). The cult of domesticity, which brought about a

sense of sisterhood between women, was actually vital in bringing about the feminist movement. Rather than being seen as inferior versions of men as was common in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, women were viewed as inherently different from their male counterparts, possessing positive qualities of their own.

Also during this time, there was a wider range of rights granted to men, such as the removal of property rights as requirements for suffrage. This brought the continued political inequality of women even more to light. Yet the cult of domesticity did in fact give women a solid social and political role (that is, their role within the family), and many women accepted this as their duty, and thus it could be seen as a step forward in some ways (Cott 99). It was believed that women were fundamentally more nurturing and thus better suited to this role. Nonetheless, the cult of domesticity clearly relegated women to one particular sphere, limiting advancement towards a true equality with men. The differences in these two ideas of women are clearly reflected in Hawthorne's writing as he explores women from both ends of this spectrum.

Hester Prynne, considering her sin of adultery, does not uphold the idea of the cult of domesticity. Of course, Hester's story takes place in colonial New England before the idea of the cult of domesticity existed, yet Hawthorne would have known of the concept. In many ways, while Hester starts off as a woman persecuted, she eventually comes to represent what feminists' desire: a female who is able to surpass the restrictions placed on her sex. But whether she ever fully embraces this idea is one highly debated by critics. The three novels following The Scarlet Letter present a form of womanhood far different than Hester in that these women are neither burdened with perpetual sorrow nor bowed down with past sins. They are beautiful and joyous characters, seemingly exactly what Hester envisions. Yet rather than presenting them as the "angels and apostles of a coming revelation", "bringing about a new and happier coexistence of

man and woman”, Hawthorne resolves these women’s storylines by placing them in situations that support the patriarchal system.

Phoebe Pyncheon, in The House of the Seven Gables, is the first of Hawthorne’s women to embrace the idea of the cult of domesticity. She is the sensible and cheerful member of the Pyncheon family, which starts off as a matriarchal family unit under the control of Hepzibah Pyncheon. Yet at the end of the novel, Phoebe marries Holgrave. While this union resolves the destructive feud between Phoebe and Holgrave’s families, the marriage also reestablishes the patriarchal order by making Holgrave head of the household (Weldon 61-65). In The Blithedale Romance, the ethereal Priscilla is the bride of choice for Hollingsworth, a man who openly supports the subjugation of women. He rejects the proud and worldly Zenobia, who is even willing to give up her feminist quest for equality to be with him. Hawthorne’s final completed romance, The Marble Faun, presents the independent and virginal character of Hilda, whose purity protects her from corruption. Though she suffers temporary sorrows and learns more about the way of the world, she is not ruined for the position of angel/apostle. Miriam (another strong a passionate woman like Hester and Zenobia) on the other hand, must be made to pay for her sins. It seems as though this contrast sets up Hilda to be the angel/apostle. Yet rather than have Hilda rise above traditional female roles, Hawthorne has her marry her longtime admirer, Kenyon, and so she descends from being angelically pure to being the angel of the house for him.

Although Hawthorne sets up the potential for a new type of woman who can change the way males and females coexist, he never seems to truly deliver with a character than can achieve this. He certainly portrays characters such as Miriam, Zenobia and Hester with sympathy, where he could have painted them as the dark side of womanhood that is to be condemned. Though Hawthorne does not demonize them, he still never fails to show society punishing them for their

transgressions. With Hester Prynne, he problematizes Puritan ideologies, yet this is not as clearly seen when representing his own contemporary society. Even if he is vague about his stance on women such as Zenobia and Miriam, he is clear about how society feels. The characters of Phoebe, Priscilla and Hilda all have the requisite purity and achieve the joyful aspect required to become the angel/apostle, but none of them transcend their stereotypical female role to bring about the revelation Hester envisions. In fact, out of all of the women, Hester herself seems to come closest to reaching this ideal by the mere act of being able to envision this revelation at all.

As Hawthorne's first romance, The Scarlet Letter sets the foundation for his portrayal of women. Hester Prynne is clearly in line with the characters of Zenobia and Miriam, and many of their qualities take root in Hester's form. Critic Nina Baym accurately describes how "In Hester he [Hawthorne] developed the first of a group of female representatives of the human creative and passionate forces" ("The Major Phase I, 1850: The Scarlet Letter" 133). In fact, it is Hester's passionate nature that leads her to committing adultery, an extreme violation of Puritan law. Because Hawthorne makes her sin of adultery quite obvious from the beginning of the narrative, Hester's initial offense to societal expectations is left much less mysterious than that of Zenobia and Miriam. Nonetheless, Hawthorne's narrator clearly portrays her as a character readers can respect, and even shows sympathy for her plight. The narrator does this by demonstrating, on multiple occasions, bias against the puritanical judgment of the townsfolk, such as in the chapter "The Market-Place" when he questions the validity of moral judgments coming from the various community leaders.

Hawthorne also presents positive aspects of Hester's personality, especially in how she manages to earn the respect of her town to the point where she, to a degree, rises above

traditional morality in the eyes of the townsfolk. In a sense, she transcends the rules that define her gender, while she is being punished for transgressing them. Her strict adherence to her punishment gives her the freedom society would allow for a woman who was truly pure.

At the end of the novel it is revealed that “Earlier in life, Hester had vainly imagined that she herself might be the destined prophetess” that would herald in a new and more prosperous era for men and women (The Scarlet Letter 235). But by this time she realizes she is prevented from being this angel/apostle figure due to her sin and her burden of lifelong sorrow.

It is always risky to assume the narrator and the author share a common mind, but if one considers the similarities between Hawthorne and his narrator (they shared the Custom House job in the first chapter), it seems as though Hawthorne does use his narrator to pass judgment on Hester. Yet this judgment is sympathetic in that he looks beyond merely the Puritanical laws and examines her emotions and reasons for her decisions, giving her a selfhood beyond what society allows her. Though Hawthorne makes Hester a sympathetic character, his use of her as a prophetess for something beyond herself shows his hope to go further in exploring women who move beyond the typical stereotypes. In a sense, she is the beginning of Hawthorne’s attempt to aesthetically call into being the type of woman he envisions.

In order to explore Hester’s role in society, Hawthorne must first allow readers to see how she compares to the generic colonial New England woman. Hawthorne clearly presents a contrast between these colonial women and women of later generations, suggesting those in The Scarlet Letter are closer to their English ancestors and that they are of a “coarser fibre” (48). Though it is never explicitly stated what this coarser fibre entails, there is a suggestion of strength and resilience. Yet these traits will be diluted with later generations, as mothers transmit to their children “a fainter bloom, a more delicate and briefer beauty, and a slighter physical

frame, if not a character of less force and solidity, than her own,” (The Scarlet Letter 48).

Though there is a sense of physical fragility, Hawthorne does not take this to mean that the later generations lack in internal strength. This is an early hint of what the narrator will later propose as the angel/apostle through Hester’s character. This form of woman does not exist yet in The Scarlet Letter’s New England, and Hawthorne leaves it to Hester’s character to herald it. For now readers are given Hester Prynne as their main female protagonist. It is her strong and proud nature that Hawthorne first examines, especially in the face of society’s condemnation.

Hawthorne’s heroine must, ostensibly, choose whether to submit to society’s judgment or refuse to adhere to expectations of her as a woman. In putting her through this journey, Hawthorne enables her to conceive of a type of woman who can move beyond the stigmas she suffers under.

In terms of his portrayal of Hester, Hawthorne frequently references how Puritan society (in this case a New England town) judges her and attempts to bend her to its will. The punishment of wearing the scarlet A is laid out in the first scaffold scene. The magistrate makes it clear that that Hester will be a “living sermon against sin” (The Scarlet Letter 59), proof of what happens to those who transgress the law. Though the men and women of the town vary in what degree of punishment they expect, all seem to agree that she has clearly breached her moral obligation as a wife through committing adultery. The older women of the town seem to judge her most harshly, one particular “hard-featured dame” (The Scarlet Letter 48) suggesting Hester’s forehead be branded with the letter. A younger woman takes a more sympathetic approach, possibly already showing the more delicate aspect of newer generations as opposed to the coarser fibres of old ones suggested only a few paragraphs before. Nonetheless, even this woman feels confident that such an act must weigh heavily on Hester, and therefore must be terrible to commit. Though less harsh than a physical branding, the very visual punishment for



Hester's act suggests an attitude of distrust towards women's virtues and the idea that insubordination such as hers must be used to make an example. One man goes so far to say "is there no virtue in woman, save what springs from a wholesome fear of the gallows?" (The Scarlet Letter 49), suggesting the 17<sup>th</sup> century view of women as the more sinful sex. This man's statement implies that the threat of the law is what keeps women moral rather than any inherent virtue, which is manifested in multiple women Hawthorne portrays in his romances that are set in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Yet Hawthorne's narrator clearly questions the right of society to judge Hester. At her trial, he notes the men judging her are all wise and virtuous. Nonetheless, it would be hard to find anyone "less capable of sitting in judgment on an erring woman's heart, and disentangling its mesh of good and evil" (The Scarlet Letter 60), showing a woman's sins and digressions cannot easily be understood by men. Years later, these same men try to separate Hester from her young daughter with the idea that either Pearl is of demonic origin and would be an obstacle in Hester's repentance, or else that she is innocent and deserves better care than a sinful woman like Hester could provide. Once again, Hawthorne's narrative voice makes derisive comments about this decision. At the beginning of the chapter entitled "The Governor's Hall" he mocks the grandiose measures of powerful men, such as Governor Bellingham, who go out of their way to address a small scale issue such as one woman's affair as though it was a huge moral dilemma effecting many (The Scarlet Letter 92). By being sure to comment on the pretensions of the town's leaders in making moral judgment calls, Hawthorne creates sympathy for his strong-willed female protagonist. He also suggests there are flaws in this rigidly structured society in terms of how it would judge women, paving the way for a need for the angel/apostle.

After such a breach of conduct, it is remarkable how Hester alters the opinions of the

townspeople and is able to gain their respect; she is even given more social freedom than she initially possessed, being able to interact with a wider range of society than is available to most women. The chapter “Another View of Hester” addresses the transformation she undergoes, both personally and in the eyes of others. This chapter highlights how the townspeople come to respect the pure life Hester has led since her adultery. They take notice of what they perceive as Hester’s newfound modesty, as should befit a woman who committed such a crime. It is this very quality that makes the townspeople able to accept her. The narrator describes how, unless provoked, mankind is more inclined to love than hate. So long as the figure in question does not provoke those judging her, time will often transform their hatred into love. By submitting to their judgment, Hester ensures the waning of their negative emotional response against her.

Not only is Hester careful not to further incite their anger, she also manifests a generous spirit, most especially through helping the poor, which they come to respect. By being willing to do charitable acts with no expectation of reward, Hester demonstrates the level of modesty the townspeople expect her to maintain. Her past crime even seems to give her a right to be in places of despair, because she is “a rightful inmate, into the household that was darkened by trouble; as if its gloomy twilight were a medium in which she was entitled to hold intercourse with her fellow-creatures” (The Scarlet Letter 146). That she has experienced her own darkness makes her all the more capable of venturing into the darkness of others. The idea of “darkness” in one’s life can represent a variety of unfortunate circumstances, not necessarily related to Hester’s own. But there is still a sense that her faults and her suffering is much more universal than the town might originally believe. Whatever the crimes or tragedies, her peers suffer in ways she can commiserate with, making her much less removed from society than her punishment intends her to be.

Hester's scarlet A comes to symbolize "Able" rather than "Adulteress" (The Scarlet Letter 146), transforming the once negative stigma into a positive one that represents her good deeds throughout the community. Even more important is the statement that follows: "so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength" (The Scarlet Letter 146). It is significant that Hester can embody a strength that is considered fundamentally that of a woman when earlier in the novel her sin is shown to be her ultimate failing at being a proper woman by betraying her duties as a wife. This idea that sin has not fully destroyed her as a woman is interesting in light of other passages describing Hester, where her new respect within the town seems to have come as result of sacrificing many of the aspects that identified her as sexualized female character. This positive reputation she gains actually gives Hester freedom beyond the usual means of women at the time. It is as though she has created her own morality, where she is not impeded by the usual restraints placed on women. Because the letter comes to be like a nun's cross, Hester can "walk securely amid all peril" (The Scarlet Letter 147), often even into situations where, if another woman wandered, it would be seen as a breach of conduct. An example of this is when Hester meets with the seaman to discuss gaining passage on his boat. Such a shifty fellow would normally reflect poorly as a woman's conversational partner, but the town sees Hester as above any kind of chicanery. Like a nun, her purity of motive is seen as a given. But by perceiving her as a nun-like figure, the townspeople also remove any kind of sexuality from her femaleness. Also, the town's acceptance of her cannot come about until they perceive her as submitting to their judgment and showing humility. So while Hester dwells in this new realm of her own morality, it must be asked whether she had to sacrifice her own pride and sense of womanhood to do it.

Besides merely acting out her penance, Hester also changes in appearance. Her rich and

luxurious hair, a symbol of her sexuality, is now hidden beneath a cap. She has also lost a certain intangible quality. While she remains an elegant and statuesque figure, she lacks the passion that once defined her. Hawthorne describes how “Some attribute had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman” (The Scarlet Letter 148), which he claims is a common occurrence to women who have lived through a severe experience. These women, if too tender in temperament, will die. Hester, however, is stronger than this, and therefore “the tenderness will either be crushed out of her” or “crushed so deeply into her heart that it can never show itself more” (The Scarlet Letter 148). But there is a small ray of hope in that a “magic touch” can restore Hester (The Scarlet Letter 148). Nonetheless, this portrayal seems to show that Hester has been negatively altered by her experience of wearing the scarlet letter, even to the point of losing something important to womanhood.

Hester’s appearance is that of one who has been sexually neutralized, yet there is the suggestion that she is still free in thought. She might be forced to adhere to the Puritan punishment of her crime but “the world’s law was no law for her mind” because she “assumed a freedom of speculation” (The Scarlet Letter 149). Hester’s freedom of thought is what sets her above other female characters in Hawthorne’s novels because it allows her to clearly see the issues women currently face in her society and envision a way to move beyond this. She questions whether existence as it currently stands for women is even worthwhile. For her, she decides, it is not. Yet she recognizes that to truly change women’s lot in life, men themselves must be fundamentally changed, either in their “nature” or in their “hereditary habit” (The Scarlet Letter 150). But to achieve this higher role in society, a woman must give up their “ethereal essence”, which is considered to be her “truest life” (The Scarlet Letter 150). Therefore, to be on equal terms with men, women must give up what truly makes them women.

Yet has not Hester done this? If read as a sexually neutralized figure, Hester should already be able to find a new and more equal place in society since she has shown she transcends the moral spectrum usually allotted to women. At this point, Hester's theory differs from the angel/apostle prophecy at the end of the novel, in which a true essence of womanhood is absolutely necessary to change the relations between men and women.

Hester's revolutionary thought is a vital indicator that "the scarlet letter had not done its office" in repressing her free spirit (The Scarlet Letter 150). In fact, it is not altogether clear whether Hester is even truly sacrificing her nature out of earnest repentance. It often seems as though she has fully retained her proud nature and sees her bearing of the scarlet letter as her own personal choice. Critic Edward Wagenknecht points out in Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Man, His Tales and Romances that Hester accepts guilt on her own terms. She even creates the A she has to wear and connects it to her passionate nature through her luxurious embroidery (Wagenknecht 87). If people greet her on the street, she does not return the greeting but rather lays her finger on the scarlet letter. This gesture, though it is perceived as humility, could also be her pride in upholding the image she has created for herself (The Scarlet Letter 147). Hawthorne describes how "The public is despotic in its temper; it is capable of denying common justice, when too strenuously demanded as a right; but quite as frequently it awards more than justice, when the appeal is made, as despots love to have it made, entirely to its generosity" (The Scarlet Letter 147). This shows that the only way Hester could gain their sympathy is through acting complicit so they can bestow it upon her. Because Hester seems to retain her pride and dignity of character, her subjugation to the Puritan moral standard is a personal choice, one she makes for her own reasons as opposed to true repentance.

In considering Hester's potential role as the angel/apostle, one must look at her

relationships with the male characters to see whether she is in fact capable of enacting change. Chillingworth admits it was a mistake for him to marry a much younger woman who was clearly not in love with him. Nonetheless, Hester commits the first socially condemnable sin against him when she has an affair with Dimmesdale. Despite this, Hester's character grows in nobility after her sin, as seen in her chaste life and her charity throughout the town. She also achieves a freedom of thought beyond her stereotypical gender role. Chillingworth, on the other hand, devolves into a man bent on revenge and nothing else. In this sense, Hester comes across positively by being able to carry herself with dignity. The male is unable to accept the situation and brings about suffering to those around him.

Some critics such as Roberta Weldon have argued, however, that Hester's relationship with Dimmesdale reinforces the usual stereotypical role of women found in other works of Hawthorne (Hawthorne, Gender, and Death: Christianity and its Discontents 28-29); that is, to serve the whims of the man. Weldon argues that Hester's choice to remain in New England with her daughter is rooted in a hope that she and Pearl will someday be able to be with Dimmesdale (26-27). Though the middle portion of the book often bypasses any strong feelings of Hester's towards Dimmesdale, the latter chapters support this idea. Hester approaches Dimmesdale upon learning that Chillingworth has been slowly poisoning him with guilt. She hopes taking Dimmesdale out of New England will relieve him of his guilty conscience. Her plan is not one she has long considered, but rather one that comes about because she thinks it will save Dimmesdale. When he dies, Hester decides to continue with her plan and leave the town. Her willingness to leave with no one but Pearl as a companion shows that she was not tied to New England out of an inability to support herself and her daughter elsewhere, nor that she had any attachment beyond Dimmesdale that made her unwilling to leave. If Hester could have left New

England at any time, readers must question the wisdom of her staying if it meant her and her daughter living ostracized from their community.

Hester's reunion with Dimmesdale in the forest also indicates that while she pleased the town with her repentance, she is also quite willing to cast off these changes she has made. The "magic touch" that Hawthorne mentions appears to be her reconnection with Dimmesdale, because once she is speaking with him again and discussing leaving the town together she is able to let down her luxurious hair and cast off the scarlet letter. Once again Hester becomes a sexualized being. Hester has revealed that she can return to her original passionate state, yet she does not resume this road after Dimmesdale dies. She does take Pearl to Europe, where her daughter can escape the stigma of being a child of adultery. Yet when Pearl is grown, Hester returns to New England of her own accord and once again takes up the scarlet letter.

When discussing Hester's return to New England, the narrator describes a split second hesitation as she prepares to return to her old home. Yet the hesitation is brief and Hester once again takes up her "long forsaken shame" (The Scarlet Letter 233). Though no one would expect Hester to continue to wear her scarlet letter and live as she had before, she chooses to do it nonetheless. Although she has already transformed the town's perceptions of her through her humbleness and good deeds, it is upon her return that "the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma" and transforms into "something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence" (The Scarlet Letter 234). Besides just being known for her acts of charity, she also becomes a confidant to people, especially women, who are going through troubling times. Hester offers them both advice and comfort in her assurance that one day relations between men and woman will improve.

Many critics have found Hawthorne's portrayal of Hester at the end of the novel to be

problematic, especially those who see Hester as a positive feminist figure through much of the novel. In Frederic I. Carpenter's essay "Scarlet A Minus" he states that Hawthorne does a disservice to his character by making her repent at the end of the novel when throughout she wore the scarlet A with what might almost be called pride (68). Yet Nina Baym, on the other hand, points out that in some sense, Hester does bring about social change because society must expand to accept the adulteress as a member of the community, and it does ("The Major Phase I, 1850" 136).

This choice of ending is hard to reconcile with the rest of the novel, so it is unsurprising that contradictory readings of it exist. If Hester is willing to cast off her image of the sexually neutralized woman, then why would she retake it? It is significant that her choice comes after Dimmesdale's death and after she has done all she can to free her daughter from a society where she is stigmatized. Perhaps once she knows she cannot be truly happy but that Pearl now has a chance, Hester is finally prepared to repent, as Carpenter suggests? The narrator does not clarify this point. But it is clear from the final chapter that Hester has transcended morality more than ever, perhaps becoming an even greater figure in the town's eyes because she chooses to bear the scarlet letter. Though Baym makes an excellent point in saying society has, ultimately, accepted her, it remains clear that Hester is unable to fulfill what she expects the angel/apostle to achieve. She has created a new space for herself within society, but there is no indication it has been expanded for other women as well.

It seems that only when she has settled back down in New England to live out the rest of her life that Hester gets a "true" vision of the angel/apostle. She realizes it cannot be a woman bowed down with sin or lifelong sorrow, both of which encompass her life. Instead, it must be a woman that is "lofty, pure and beautiful" yet also wise (The Scarlet Letter 235). But this wisdom



cannot come from grief, as it did with Hester, but instead from joy. Yet can such a person exist and remain free of sin? The Scarlet Letter seems to suggest that none can escape it, yet Hester believes that is what is required. Hester's prophecy seems to be suggesting that the angel/apostle should be a woman who can achieve what she did in her freedom of thought, but in order to truly rise above traditional society this freedom must be achieved through her core womanhood, her joy.

Nina Baym describes how "Cautiously, Hawthorne advances the notion that if society it to be changed for the better, such change will be initiated by a woman" (Hawthorne and Women: Engendering and Expanding the Hawthorne Tradition 10), and this passage at the end of The Scarlet Letter is Hawthorne's promise to aesthetically pursue this character in his later works. Hester-like characters contrasted with those who sound like Hester's description of the angel/apostle show this struggle as Hawthorne endeavors to create a new form of womanhood. Yet, while there is a possibility present in The Scarlet Letter, "in his later works Hawthorne was to answer this question negatively" and never truly achieves this notion (Hawthorne and Women: Engendering and Expanding the Hawthorne Tradition 10). As it stands Hester, who does to a degree overcome traditional morality, is the closest Hawthorne comes to his angel/apostle.

## **Chapter 2: The House of the Seven Gables**

One year after the appearance of The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne published his second romance, The House of the Seven Gables. Here Hawthorne continues to explore the roles of women in society, this time set in his own present rather than colonial New England. Clearly, by this point, the more delicate form of womanhood that Hawthorne predicted in The Scarlet Letter has come into existence. This is manifested in the character of Phoebe Pyncheon, whose introduction into the narrative is indicative of her persona, so unlike that of most Pyncheons.

When Hepzibah first lays eyes on her, she describes Phoebe, a simple country girl, as “so fresh, so unconventional, and yet so orderly and obedient to common rules” (The House of the Seven Gables 66). Phoebe is an immediate contrast to the surroundings, wholly unlike the “sordid and ugly luxuriance” of the Pyncheon house; this vision of decayed opulence is wholly out of her “sphere” (The House of the Seven Gables 66). Nonetheless, there is something appropriate about her appearance there, like sunlight falling onto a dismal place. Phoebe’s arrival sets up the influence she will have within the Pyncheon household. Like sunlight, she will bring an aspect of warmth to the dark and oppressive house. By being able to make the Pyncheon house into a home, Phoebe comes to embody the ideal figure of the cult of domesticity. The strength of Phoebe’s innate goodness suggests she may be a successful creation of Hawthorne’s angel/apostle figure, yet Hawthorne’s decision to place her in a stereotypical marriage situation undermines this potential.

In terms of the dual female archetypes, The House of the Seven Gables, like The Scarlet Letter, presents only one of these women. This character, Phoebe Pyncheon, is much unlike Hester Prynne and is the first portrayal of the type of woman Hester predicts. She possesses the joyful and sinless nature that Hester deems essential for the angel/apostle. Nonetheless, she is not the only important female character within the text. Hepzibah Pyncheon also plays a vital role in the narrative, though she matches neither the Hester-type nor Phoebe-type of character. Rather, her portrayal reflects the pride of a declining American aristocracy. Yet Hepzibah’s role is intricately tied into the portrayal of women, and it would be unwise to leave her out of such an examination entirely. As Weldon correctly points out in Hawthorne, Gender, and Death: Christianity and Its Discontents, Hepzibah plays an important role as head of a matriarchal family unit (61-65). It is she that stoops to become the breadwinner when having to care for her

brother, Clifford, and she who tries to defend him against the machinations of the wicked Judge Pyncheon. If Hawthorne wanted to develop a character such as Phoebe into the angel/apostle, it seems highly appropriate to place her within a matriarchal household where she can grow into the new form of womanhood the author envisions.

Phoebe Pyncheon embodies the 19th century idea of the cult of domesticity. Her arrival at the Pyncheon house immediately brings about great change to a place that was dismal and uninviting. Hawthorne describes her as sunlight, which “fall into what dismal place it may, instantaneously creates for itself a propriety in being there” (The House of the Seven Gables 66). Though the house is described as “sordid” and “ugly,” and is not her typical “sphere,” Phoebe makes herself fit and improves her surroundings merely by being present. She also has the ability to turn any place she resides in into a home by making it comfortable and habitable. This can be achieved through practical means, such as creating a beautiful flower arrangement, or even through her mere presence. Hawthorne’s description is not simply describing Phoebe, but a type of woman, shown through his reference to Phoebe as a “one of those persons” (The House of the Seven Gables 68) in which he proceeds to ascribe many positive aspects to her. Hawthorne clearly sets her up to represent a type of womanhood far different from that displayed in The Scarlet Letter.

Hepzibah is very much a character out of the American Gothic novel tradition, leading a lonely existence in the foreboding Pyncheon house. Phoebe is much outside this realm; though she is part of the Pyncheon family, she has grown up in the countryside and has not been touched by the gloom of the house of the seven gables. Hepzibah worries that the house will have a negative influence on Phoebe’s cheerful nature and dislikes the idea that Phoebe’s rosy cheeks will lose their color, like her own have. Phoebe assures her that no such thing will happen and is

eager to be of benefit to her weary relatives. And Phoebe certainly is beneficial; she brings joy to Hepzibah's brother, Clifford, a man who had been unjustly imprisoned for years and is of very delicate constitution. Although Hepzibah is a dedicated caretaker, Clifford has a keen appreciation for the Beautiful, which Hepzibah sadly lacks but Phoebe possesses in her bright personality. Phoebe's presence is invaluable to Clifford's wellbeing, and even having her in the house rejuvenates him.

Although Hepzibah and Clifford could probably survive on their own, Hawthorne makes it clear that Phoebe "grew to be absolutely essential to the daily comfort if not the daily life, of her two forlorn companions" (The House of the Seven Gables 123). Phoebe, the ultimate anti-Gothic character, possesses a cheerfulness that chases away the shadows from the morbid Pyncheon house. Hawthorne explains that she cannot be corrupted in the same way many would be by spending too much time in the house because "There was no morbidity in Phoebe; if there had been, the old Pyncheon House was the very locality to ripen it into incurable disease" (The House of the Seven Gables 123). Phoebe's immunity can be related back to her place in the cult of true womanhood, wherein the woman plays the role of the homemaker who creates an inviting and welcoming place to live. In this way, she is idealized because she manages to purify her surroundings despite the house's notoriety for being a place of corruption. As she is being presented as an ideal form of this type of womanhood that was revered during the 19th century, it is important to observe Hawthorne's use of Phoebe's character in positively influencing Hepzibah and Clifford's lives. In terms of Phoebe's influence on her relatives, Hawthorne is obviously portraying her as a positive character.

In describing Phoebe's ability to care for the house and family, Hawthorne shows Hepzibah noting that Phoebe's skill seems to be used "without conscious effort," showing her

innate abilities are part of her nature (The House of the Seven Gables 72). Though Phoebe is clearly a contrast to a character like Hester, Hawthorne remains firm in his belief that women like Phoebe developed from their ancestors, the Puritan women. He claims that Phoebe, and women like her “betokened the cheeriness of an active temperament, finding joy in its activity, and, therefore, rendering it beautiful; it was a New England trait - the stern old stuff of Puritanism with a gold thread in the web” (The House of the Seven Gables 73). Phoebe retains some of the Puritan strength of character, but brings an added element of joy to her work which creates a woman perfectly suited to the role of housewife. Shortly after this description, Hawthorne claims, “Angels do not toil, but let their good works grow out of them; and so did Phoebe” (The House of the Seven Gables 78) connecting the idea of Phoebe as a pure and angelic being to a woman who ideally serves her role in the house. These traits are seen as innate to Phoebe, not something she needs to learn. From this, readers may gather that Hawthorne sees the development of women from Colonial New England to New England of the mid-19th century as moving ever closer to an ideal.

Hawthorne also states the importance of women like Phoebe and the positive force they bring to the home. He claims that “A nature like Phoebe’s has invariably its due influence, but is seldom regarded with due honor” (The House of the Seven Gables 124) implying that Phoebe is not the only woman with these qualities, but rather these types of women bless multiple households. Yet despite this, these women do not get the honor they deserve for their important role in everyday life. Hawthorne goes on to describe how Clifford’s life is utterly changed for the better once he meets Phoebe. She does not even need to speak, but her presence brings him joy. This woman, who is innately of the home, finally provides what Hepzibah cannot. Though Hepzibah acts as head of the household, Phoebe quickly becomes the heart of it. The importance

Hawthorne places on her role is obvious, and in this particular character he seems to be promoting the view that women such as Phoebe are vital to maintaining a comfortable home. By encouraging a view of women traditional in his time, this certainly does not mean Hawthorne is unable to envision a female character than can go beyond stereotype. Indeed, Hester's description of the angel/apostle indicates that this type of woman, who ostensibly fits the idea of the cult of domesticity, is the basis from which a new form of womanhood will develop. Therefore, by creating a character that so utterly embodies this idea, Hawthorne seems to be setting Phoebe up to take this role.

Phoebe's personality is further enhanced by her contrast with Hepzibah. Not long after Phoebe is introduced in the text, Hawthorne describes how, though Phoebe is related to the high-brow Pyncheon family, she is not exactly what one would consider a "lady". Her image, with her tan skin and freckles, is too bucolic to appear aristocratic. Nonetheless, Hawthorne does not begrudge her these qualities. When defining Phoebe's worth in comparison to other ladies, one must look beyond social rank and rather "regard Phoebe as the example of feminine grace and availability combined, in a state of society, there were any such, where ladies did not exist" (The House of the Seven Gables 76). If not for preconceived notions of rank being intertwined with wealth and some abstract idea of good breeding, Hawthorne believes a woman's office would "move in the midst of practical affairs, and to gild them all, the very homeliest - were it even the scouring of pots and kettles - with an atmosphere of loveliness and joy" (The House of the Seven Gables 76). Directly following this statement is a description of the "born and educated lady" (The House of the Seven Gables 76), Hepzibah. Though Hepzibah has the conceit of a long and pure line, she is stuck in the shadowy past. Through Phoebe, Hawthorne presents an office that would give all women a chance to be exalted, rather than merely those with pure bloodlines.

Even the woman stuck scouring pots and kettles could be considered worthy if she brings a sense of loveliness and joy to her house.

Phoebe's position in the Pyncheon household does not leave her unchanged. During a conversation with Holgrave, Phoebe points out that she is not the same as she was when she first arrived at the house. She tells Holgrave that "I shall never be so merry as before I knew Cousin Hepzibah and poor Cousin Clifford. I have grown a great deal older, in this little time. Older, and, I hope, wiser, and - not exactly sadder, but, certainly, with not half so much lightness in my spirits!" (The House of the Seven Gables 189). Though Phoebe is changed, she is not bowed down with sorrow, which would prevent her from being the angel/apostle. Rather, Hawthorne suggests that this transformation is necessary. She realizes she has, to a degree, sacrificed some of her sunny disposition to Clifford and Hepzibah, who are so direly in need of something to brighten their lives. It comes across as the duty of the one playing the feminine role of the household to make this sacrifice to those she is caring for, and Phoebe does not regret doing so. Upon her telling him this, Holgrave responds by telling Phoebe that she is leaving behind her youth, which is necessary for her maturity. He claims it is "necessary for the soul's development," and that one can achieve a "second youth" through some profound event in life (The House of the Seven Gables 190). And this second youth is richer than the original, even if there is a feeling of loss in the passing of the original. Through Holgrave, Hawthorne shows how even though Phoebe is portrayed as a very positive character, there is still room for her to mature and develop into a truly admirable woman. Hester, too, develops, but the changes wrought in her because of the scarlet letter cannot but result in a life of sorrow. Though Phoebe has faced the challenge of caring for her relatives, her joyful nature allows her to get through it not necessarily unscathed, but resulting in change for the better.

Though Phoebe's character in regards to her relationship with Hepzibah and Clifford is important, her relationship with Holgrave is vital in interpreting whether or not she achieves angel/apostle status. In order to fulfill the promise of a new womanhood, Hawthorne must show how this woman's relationship with men overcomes contemporary stereotypes and expectations. Hawthorne gives Phoebe strength of character in that her interactions with Holgrave do not immediately suggest a female's submission to the male. Rather, when conversing with him she is cautious, if consistently polite and good-natured. By the end of the novel, she admits that she loves him. Yet even by this point, she fears their personalities are too different for them to be happy. In terms of individuality, she does herself credit by not assuming she can shape herself to his whim. In fact, Holgrave believes it is he who will have to change for her. Though the eventual marriage seems promising and they are certainly better suited than Hester and Chillingworth were, Hawthorne does not actually follow through with any proof that their marriage takes steps towards equality. Instead it shifts focus to monetary matters, immediately linked to the male side of the relationship.

One of the key scenes in the relationship between Phoebe and Holgrave is when Holgrave comes perilously close to putting Phoebe under a mesmeric influence. Early on, when Phoebe is first getting to know Holgrave, she notices a sense of authority he carries even when just convincing her to remain in the garden a while longer and agree to be the caretaker of the plants and chickens. Like Hepzibah, Holgrave retains artifacts from his hereditary past. In this case, it is the mesmeric power he has inherited from the Maule line. Being a simple country girl, and one who dwells in the practical and tangible realm of the Actual, his strange depth is something she is unused to. Though he affects gaiety, there is a seriousness underlying his tone. Hawthorne describes that Phoebe "rebelled, as it were, against a certain magnetic element in the artist's



nature” (The House of the Seven Gables 87), showing she does at least offer resistance to the sway he could hold over her, suggesting a strength in Phoebe’s nature.

Nonetheless, she is almost overtaken by Holgrave’s mesmeric skills. This happens when he tells her the story of Alice Pyncheon, one of Phoebe’s ancestors whose mind was made slave to one of the Maules, a rival family of the Pyncheons. The purpose of Matthew Maule in enslaving Alice’s mind was clearly with wicked intent, whereas Holgrave exerts his power more naturally without prior planning. As is revealed in the end of the book, he himself is a Maule and seems to have inherited this skill. When his story about Alice is concluded, he notices that Phoebe looks as though there is a veil thrown over her, and she is clearly under the spell of his story. Holgrave feels what is an almost involuntary sense of power when he sees the control he has over her. He is aware that he “could complete his mastery over Phoebe’s yet free and virgin spirit: he could establish an influence over this good, pure, and simple child” (The House of the Seven Gables 187). It is very tempting for Holgrave to exert his power over her because there is no idea “more seductive to a young man than to become the arbiter of a young girl’s destiny” (The House of the Seven Gables 187). But while Holgrave retains these artifacts from his hereditary past, he also possesses the self-control to deny them and, out of respect for Phoebe’s individuality, is able to resist temptation.

But Holgrave’s power brings up a question of whether readers, or even Hawthorne himself, can adequately examine a new relationship between men and women if the male character being used in the example has this power that is not innate to all men (even if there is a suggestion such a power is desired by them). Can Phoebe’s potential ability to change the idea of womanhood be accurately assessed when she is paired with an unusual specimen of male? It is difficult to determine whether to see her brief submission to him as a flaw in the angel/apostle

ideal. Roberta Weldon argues that Phoebe's character is portrayed as especially insightful enough to resist attempts to dominate her mind, yet Holgrave possesses and has perfected this method which most men would not be able to exert over her (Hawthorne, Gender, and Death: Christianity and Its Discontents 72), bringing to question how well Holgrave serves as a representative of males in general. One must also wonder whether Holgrave's subsequent choice to not overpower her mind reflects on his respect for her as a person. If so, it would suggest that Phoebe's good character carries enough weight that it has influenced a male character in a positive way.

Phoebe's influence on Holgrave is most obviously apparent when the two share the secret of Judge Pyncheon's death, as it is at this point that he can overcome the dark mental state the death has placed him in. He feels the weight of the Maule family curse, which has once again been enacted on a member of the Pyncheon family to avenge a long ago wrong. Though Holgrave himself did not kill the Judge, his lineage as a Maule connects him to the crime. Yet when Phoebe arrives and must, therefore, share in the terror of the Judge's death, Holgrave feels hope once again. He describes to her how when "you crossed the threshold; and hope, warmth, and joy came in with you! The black moment became at once a blissful one" (The House of the Seven Gables 266). It is here that he admits his love for Phoebe. Yet Phoebe is not prepared to immediately return his affections for fear that the two of them would not go well together because she is a simple girl and he has "many, many thoughts, with which I should try in vain to sympathize" (The House of the Seven Gables 266). She is also afraid that Holgrave will make her stray from her "own quiet path," and follow him "where it is pathless" instead, presumably leading her away from dwelling in the Actual, where she lives a simple homely life (The House of the Seven Gables 267). This, she claims, would be against her very nature. Phoebe's fears

present the concern of women who must inevitably force themselves to change their nature to better fit that of their husband. An example of this can be seen in The Scarlet Letter, where the young and vibrant Hester marries Chillingworth, an older man wholly unsuited to her temperament. The disastrous results of her loveless marriage make clear the dangers of a woman being forced to marry someone against her nature. Of course, Phoebe does admit she loves Holgrave. But the danger of her unhappiness remains if she is expected to change for him.

Holgrave, however, has no such concerns. He is sure that the exact opposite will happen and that Phoebe will draw him into a life of homeliness and simplicity. Holgrave explains to Phoebe that “The world owes all its onward impulses to men ill at ease. The happy man inevitably confines himself within ancient limits. I have a presentiment that, hereafter, it will be my lot to set out trees, to make fences - perhaps, even, in due time, to build a house for another generation - in a word, to conform myself to laws, and the peaceful practice of society. Your poise will be more powerful than any oscillating tendency of mine” (The House of the Seven Gables 267). By marrying Phoebe, Holgrave will become one of the happy men he describes, and in order to be truly happy he must conform to the societal ideals of marriage and settle down rather than live his wandering lifestyle. He even goes so far to say that Phoebe is his only chance at happiness. This scenario gives Phoebe a great deal of power for a woman. Indeed, it confirms her influence as a woman of the household in that she is able to tame the wild and dissatisfied young man merely by the goodness of her nature. In this sense, Hawthorne shows Phoebe to be a strong character whose nature does not have to submit to her male lover. Yet it is not clear whether their union truly serves to revolutionize anything in terms of how men and women interact.

At the end of the novel, Holgrave reveals not only that he is a Maule but also that he

knows where to find the Pyncheon deed that gives the family a large tract of land. With their renewed wealth, the family abandons the house of the seven gables forever. Hawthorne promised his wife a happy ending to the novel, and also realized these types of resolutions were popular during the time (Buitenhuis 57). He certainly delivers with The House of the Seven Gables, with Phoebe, Hepzibah, Holgrave and Clifford all riding off to enjoy a life of luxury. Though much of the novel focuses on Phoebe's ability to make the Pyncheon house livable, it is Holgrave who holds the secret that truly gives the family a chance to escape. It seems to minimize the importance of Phoebe's womanly role when Holgrave uses his stereotypically masculine connection to monetary issues to resolve matters. Also, this ending would not be possible without the union of Phoebe and Holgrave, finally dissolving the generations of bad blood between the families. Though the ending is picture-perfect, it is not clear whether Phoebe achieves angel/apostle status.

It seems more as though the ending simply supports the status quo of gender relations. In fact, Nina Baym points out in The Shape of Hawthorne's Career her belief that Holgrave's change of character is due to the Judge's death rather than Phoebe's influence (165), which is tied in with Holgrave's attempt throughout the text to distance himself from the family rivalry he desires no part in. By the death of the final Pyncheon male reflective of Colonel Pyncheon, Holgrave is now freed of his identity as a Maule, an enemy to the family. Yet it still seems quite apparent that it is Phoebe herself and her influence that change Holgrave. Now that he no longer has to run from the past, he can go from a wandering lifestyle of many careers to one who that allows him to settle down with a wife.

But his marriage to Phoebe does not seem particularly revolutionary in terms of gender relations. Rather, by marrying into the Pyncheon family he becomes the nominal head of

household and the primary breadwinner, instead of Hepzibah. Though much of the novel focuses on Phoebe and how her character develops the idea of the cult of true womanhood into an idealized state, Hawthorne does not supply the resolution necessary to prove Phoebe successful in revolutionizing the relations between men and women. The potential is present through her angelic influence on Clifford and Hepzibah and the respect accorded to her by her romantic interest, Holgrave. Yet rather than go through with the final step of showing how Phoebe's life ultimately resolves as Holgrave's wife, Hawthorne instead turns the marriage into a plot device to allow a final mending of the feud between the Pyncheons and the Maules. Hawthorne has, perhaps, gone a step further than he did in The Scarlet Letter by presenting a potential candidate for the angel/apostle role. But ultimately, he does not choose to follow through with his idea and instead ends The House of the Seven Gables with plotline dependent on the Holgrave's masculine influence rather than Phoebe's feminine one.

### **Chapter 3: The Blithedale Romance**

In The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne presents the flawed heroine Hester Prynne as a woman worthy of admiration but, while she creates a new place in society for herself, she is unable to exact lasting change for her gender as a whole. Hawthorne shifts focus with Phoebe Pyncheon's character in The House of the Seven Gables. Her joyous personality makes her capable of turning any place into a home and even gives her family the strength to resist the harmful influence of the Pyncheon house. Both of these women are, in different ways, representative of perceptions of womanhood: Though Hester is constrained by society, her mind is free to imagine new possibilities, and Phoebe is not merely an example of the cult of true womanhood but is, rather, an idealized presentation of it. Nonetheless, neither manages to break down barriers in regards to traditional female roles in society as a whole.

The Blithedale Romance, completed a year after The House of the Seven Gables, looks at women with similar characteristics to Hester and Phoebe, yet in this novel Hawthorne sets them up as direct parallels to one another. He does this through his portrayals of two sisters, Zenobia and Priscilla, who are on opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of female archetypes. Zenobia represents the beautiful and sexualized woman who, while admirable in many ways, ultimately cannot overcome society and her own desires to be part of its system. Priscilla, on the other hand, is completely submissive to the male hierarchy from the start. Though she is a figure of purity and even, when freed from the grasp of Westervelt, one of joy, she is far too frail a character to carry the burden of angel/apostle. Despite her ethereal nature, which seems almost outside and beyond the realm of womanhood, Priscilla offers no chance of disrupting the patriarchy. In The Blithedale Romance, Hawthorne clearly stratifies the sexualized versus asexualized woman. But considering that Zenobia's life ends in despair and Priscilla's is one of servitude, Hawthorne hardly offers his readers a satisfying conclusion in terms of women's roles if they hope to see a woman overcome the limits of Hester and Phoebe.

Zenobia's character is reminiscent of Hester Prynne before Hester must recreate herself in a chaste image for the approval of her town. She is a beautiful woman with obviously sexualized qualities, and so too is Zenobia. When Coverdale, the narrator, first meets Zenobia he describes her hair as rich and glossy. Even though her hair is styled in a prim fashion, Coverdale still notices its luxurious quality. Despite its modest style, she wears a very ostentatious ornament: an exotic flower, which she likely got from a hothouse. This flower serves no other purpose than to be a luxury that enhances her beauty. And the fact that it is an actual flower rather than jewelry means its beauty is only temporary, making it an even more extravagant commodity. Clearly she is a woman unafraid to flaunt her beauty. She also adopts the queenly

name of Zenobia, a name for her well-known public persona that quickly catches on in the town of Blithedale. She is proud enough to also embrace this title in a small town setting, effectively perpetuating her own mysterious identity.

At their first meeting, Coverdale and Zenobia discuss Blithedale as being an attempt at finding a new Eden, to which Zenobia jokes that she will not be adopting her Edenic garb until after May-day, clearly bringing to mind thoughts of the nude figure of Eve. Coverdale recognizes this use of language as rare in women, commenting that it came from “Zenobia’s noble courage, conscious of no harm, and scorning the petty restraints which take the life and color out of other women’s conversation” (The Blithedale Romance 17). Following this, Coverdale considers how many contemporary women do not leave an impression of womanliness at all, that “their sex fades away and goes for nothing, in ordinary intercourse” (The Blithedale Romance 17), but this is not the case with Zenobia, who rather reminds him of what Eve might have looked like when first introduced to Adam. Edward Wagenknecht claims Zenobia is the most sexualized of Hawthorne’s women, and Coverdale’s multiple sensual descriptions of her show the accuracy of this assessment (Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Man, His Tales and Romances 112). Zenobia’s womanliness does not have the distinct qualities of “especial gentleness, grace, modesty, and shyness” but rather “a certain warm and rich characteristic” (The Blithedale Romance 17). This warmth is different, albeit not wholly unlike, the sunny qualities of Phoebe exhibited in The House of the Seven Gables. The difference lies in the overt sexuality of Zenobia, which has been refined away from other women during this time. Unlike Hester, she has not, at least during this time, been unsexualized by a disapproving society.

When examining Zenobia’s (or, indeed, Priscilla’s) character, it is important to keep in mind that the information readers get is being filtered through the perceptions of a narrator who

himself is playing a role in the story he describes. Hawthorne's other three romances are written in third person, making this shift to first person in The Blithedale Romance highly noticeable. It is often suggested within the text that Hawthorne's other narrators are relating a story they themselves have heard; The Scarlet Letter's narrator finds evidence about Hester's past while working at a Custom House, and The Marble Faun's narrator suggests he has spoken with the characters. Though there is certainly a degree of opinion assumed with these narrators, none is so invested in the story they related as Miles Coverdale is. The extremely voyeuristic Coverdale is quite often personally involved in the dramatic proceedings surrounding his three friends, and the reader must keep in mind the natural bias this will cause, especially when some crucial events take place without Coverdale witnessing them. Since it is through Coverdale's eyes that readers see Hawthorne's women, it is important to consider Coverdale's position in terms of women. He certainly seems to sympathize with Zenobia on subjects of women's rights in chapters such as "Eliot's Pulpit" rather than side with Hollingsworth's patriarchal views. Therefore, Coverdale seems extremely open to women such as Zenobia, who do not fit with idea of the cult of true womanhood. Yet at the end of the novel Coverdale reveals that he had all along been in love with Priscilla, the figure of utter submission to the patriarchy. Despite his support for Zenobia, his final statement in the novel implies he too is drawn to Priscilla's type of womanhood.

Coverdale's perceptions of Zenobia expand when he takes ill, and in his feverish state he examines her and tries to discover her mysteries. He recognizes her intellect, realizing she could have pursued many careers, a surprising comment to make about a woman during this time. He claims she could have been an excellent stump-oratress, able to sway crowds with her powerful words. Many critics believe Hawthorne modeled Zenobia off of the real life feminist figure,



Margaret Fuller (Wagenknecht 113-114). Fuller wrote and spoke about the idea of a new and more just social order, much like Zenobia (Weldon 109-110). Hawthorne's relationship with Fuller was often contradictory; though he would criticize her in his text, he and his wife were nonetheless on speaking terms with her (Idol, Ponder 65-72). Though he was not, perhaps, especially fond of her, Hawthorne may have had a grudging respect for Fuller that was translated into the character of Zenobia.

Interestingly, right after Coverdale recognizes Zenobia's potential to achieve impressive feats in society, he describes her mind as "full of weeds" (The Blithedale Romance 44) which would seem to have negative connotations. He follows up this statement by saying "she made no scruple of overthrowing all human institutions" and that she is "A female reformer, in her attacks upon society, has an instinctive sense of where the life lies, and is inclined to aim directly at that spot. Especially, the relation between the sexes is naturally among the earliest to attract her notice" (The Blithedale Romance 44). The reader might be inclined distrust Coverdale's observations in his feverish state, but there is a suggestion that he is able to perceive things more clearly than ever. An example of this would be when he alludes to the idea that Zenobia and the Veiled Lady (Priscilla) are sisters, which he does not find out is actually true until much later. Though it is not initially clear that Coverdale's observations might be especially insightful at this point, the fact that such large portions of the chapter are devoted to his observations of Zenobia implies a certain importance. Interestingly, he not only sees Zenobia as a reformer, but as one who would take especial notice of the state of relations between men and women. Zenobia seems like someone who could actually make a difference, considering her intellect and passion, and the suggestion that she is a well-respected figure that people will listen to. Despite this, when one considers Hester's description of the angel/apostle, it is all too clear that Zenobia does not fit

the description.

One way that Zenobia differs from the Hester's idea of the angel/apostle is that Hester believes this woman must be "pure". Hester envisions a virginal character, and Zenobia's highly sexualized portrayal is anything but. Coverdale recognizes the sexuality she exudes, and even has suspicions that she has been married before. He suspects this in spite of the fact that Zenobia is young enough to be unmarried and is "the freshest and rosiest woman of a thousand" (The Blithedale Romance 46). He hesitates to say that "the great event of woman's existence" (The Blithedale Romance 46) had already happened for her. This, of course, implies that marriage is the primary event in a woman's life and highlights the importance of purity before wedlock. Coverdale also describes why Zenobia's personality would lead him to think she had already been married. Specifically it is the "freedom of her deportment" (The Blithedale Romance 47). Therefore, he must see in Zenobia a freedom which virginal women often lack, perhaps and ability to play a larger and more independent role in the outside world, as she clearly does. Yet despite the vivacity of her nature, the code of womanhood decrees that Zenobia is still no longer pure.

Coverdale clearly manifests a great respect for Zenobia and even seems to sympathize with her. Nonetheless, readers must remember that Zenobia is being portrayed through his male, albeit possibly progressive, perspective. Coverdale shows he can see beyond what is expected of a woman as part of the cult of true womanhood through his respect for Zenobia's strength and highly sexualized beauty. Yet he also points out her flaws on multiple occasions. Shortly after he is introduced to her and directly after he spends an entire paragraph describing her beauty, Coverdale points out that as beautiful as her features are, she is "a little deficient in softness and delicacy" (The Blithedale Romance 15). He then follows this statement by pointing out that this

softness is a quality commonly seen in women, so Zenobia is in some ways beautiful for her contrast. Later, in the chapter titled “Hollingsworth, Zenobia, Priscilla”, Coverdale alludes to far greater flaws in Zenobia’s character. Yet she is a complex figure because even though he thinks he knows many of her flaws, he also believes “she possessed noble traits, and a heart which must at least have been valuable when new” (The Blithedale Romance 79). This alludes to his belief that she has been married before, and also that suggests the experience fundamentally changed her and how she exists within the scope of womanhood. Coverdale points out the qualities Zenobia lacks when compared to the idealized woman of the time, but he is also capable of respecting her feministic quality of independence. Coverdale’s subjectivity makes him, in many ways, an unreliable narrator. Yet it is to the readers’ advantage that he is at least capable of perceiving such a complex woman from multiple angles.

Towards the end of the novel, when Hollingsworth has rejected Zenobia in favor of Priscilla, Zenobia herself examines what she believes to be her flaws. She describes herself as possessing “every fault, it may be, that a woman ever had”: weakness, vanity, lack of principle, and using her cunning to pursue that which she is overly passionate about (The Blithedale Romance 217). But, if she found someone true of heart, she believes she could be “all that a woman can be” (The Blithedale Romance 218), which seems much against the feminist ideas Zenobia previously preached, as it suggests a woman’s worth is equated with her relationship to a man. All of her flaws, she suggests, could have been cured by the right male presence. This makes her similar to Priscilla, who flowers when she finds a stronger personality to which she can cling.

It is also important to consider how much influence Hollingsworth has over Zenobia. The fact that Zenobia and Priscilla are in love with Hollingsworth clearly plays an important role

in both of their actions. Hester Prynne stands up to Chillingworth, even fighting against his attempt to destroy Dimmesdale. Zenobia, on the other hand, in her love for Hollingsworth, eventually sacrifices all that makes her a strong and independent female. For a character that is presented as a feminist, this is quite a dramatic shift. It starts early in the novel, when Hollingsworth chastises her for not being kinder to Priscilla, whom she is meeting for the first time. After his sharp rebuke, she quickly backpedals and welcomes Priscilla to Blithedale. This can be seen as the beginning of his influence over her. The fact that Zenobia is willing to go against her beliefs and change her actions to please someone she loves suggests a power of emotionality in women. If it can affect Zenobia, the very image of feminism, what woman is not susceptible to the power of her love for a man?

As an attempt to reclaim a pre-lapsarian world, Blithedale seems like an ideal place to reexamine gender roles outside of the influence of society. Yet it is clear that many residing there have not left behind the prejudices of society. Hollingsworth, especially, has strong views of woman's place. He admires women, so long as they stay in their "sphere," which he sees as being the support system for men (The Blithedale Romance 122-123). Coverdale fully expects Zenobia to react strongly and protest these views. Instead she looks humbled, saying "I, at least, have deep cause to think you right. Let man be but manly and godlike and woman is only too ready to become to him what you say" (The Blithedale Romance 124). Zenobia's reaction is puzzling, causing the reader to wonder whether she truly believes this of all womankind, whether she is referring to herself in particular, or a combination of both.

Towards the end of the novel, Hollingsworth makes it clear that he has chosen Priscilla over Zenobia. He has lured his chosen woman into supporting him in his philanthropic dreams. As she will inherit their father's money, Priscilla has monetary incentive to Hollingsworth that

Zenobia once hoped to offer. In Zenobia's tirade against Hollingsworth, she points out that Hollingsworth's philanthropic devotion to reforming prisoners is the truly selfish act of this entire tragic love triangle. Hollingsworth hopes to use the land of Blithedale, which is currently devoted to attempting to create a new Utopia, to achieve his own dreams of creating a place to reform prisoners. Hollingsworth's retaliation to this comment is that Zenobia cannot possibly understand him, as a woman's "whole sphere of action is in the heart" and she "can conceive of no higher nor wider one!" (The Blithedale Romance 218). With this accusation, Hollingsworth denies the possibility of the angel/apostle figure, for if he considers women to be only inward looking and unable to conceive of higher ideals, then surely he cannot imagine a woman who could affect the two sexes as a whole. Of course, Hollingsworth's opinion is only important if it is valid. Zenobia could easily negate his view of women, yet instead she consistently does things out of her own self-interest and love for him rather than promote her original feminist ideals.

The reader can assume that Hollingsworth's opinion matters to Zenobia for the obvious reason that she is in love with him. Yet Zenobia, the once feminist figure, makes it clear that his effect on her goes beyond merely that of an individual loved by another individual. Zenobia tells Coverdale about how men, in their secret tribunals, will gather to condemn her. And even if they do not give her a technical "sentence", it does not matter because "this same secret tribunal chances to be the only judgment-seat that a true woman stands in awe of, and that any verdict short of acquittal is equivalent to a death-sentence!" (The Blithedale Romance 215). A few paragraphs previously, the scene is described as a witch-trial from Puritan times, with Zenobia as the beautiful sorceress and Hollingsworth as the Puritan magistrate condemning her. This comparison shows that society has not changed all that much since the times of colonial New England. Even in Blithedale, where the residents struggle to create an ideal society, America's

patriarchal history remains evident. Even such strong women as Zenobia wind up bowing down to male authority.

Though Zenobia never makes an impact on the relation of men and women as a whole, she does at least leave a lasting impact on Hollingsworth. Zenobia's harsh words do not impact him as much when spoken as they do after she commits suicide. Coverdale reveals that when he encounters Hollingsworth years later, the man is haunted by her death. Thus his dream of reforming criminals never takes place. Priscilla's own type of womanly strength supports him in his misery. Yet while he is affected by Zenobia's death, he is not changed by it. He feels guilt, but there is no indication his view of women has shifted even slightly.

Critic Robert Weldon discusses how, while The Blithedale Romance cannot be considered a feminist tract, it does not portray the patriarchy positively either (Hawthorne, Gender, and Death: Christianity and its Discontents 107). Perhaps this can be seen in how Zenobia's death shines a harsh light on both the effects of the patriarchy and one woman's failure to be a feminist figure. The surprising end to Zenobia's part in the story is not one easily explainable. Maybe her death, like Phoebe's marriage, functions as a plot device, in this case to show Hollingsworth's selfish errors. Whatever Hawthorne's reasoning, he does not allow his character to uphold the feminist ideas she puts forth earlier in the text.

Westervelt, a character who has been portrayed as villainous throughout, actually has the most progressive view of Zenobia, which he discusses at her funeral. He believes she should not have considered her life over, and that she had potential to offer many things to the world. Whatever happened in the past between the two of them (it is strongly hinted they were once married), it is clear that Westervelt considers Zenobia extraordinary, saying that "Every prize that could be worth a woman's having - and many prizes which other women are too timid to

desire - lay within Zenobia's reach" (The Blithedale Romance 240). Though Coverdale believes Westervelt has been the evil fate of Zenobia's life, it remains clear that Westervelt at least sees an opportunity for Zenobia to move beyond a role which confines her to obeying her heart and nothing else. Despite his dislike of Westervelt, Coverdale actually expresses similar sentiments shortly later. He blames male egotism for forcing women to build their existence around their affections, most especially the affections of a specific man. Without these restraints, a woman like Zenobia could flourish.

Though Zenobia's character and Hester Prynne's share different fates, the experiences of these two women bear many similarities. They both suffer from the oppression of society, which attempts to force them into specific roles. For Hester, one might say she overcame societal oppression to a degree by using the image it forced upon her to create a persona that is above traditional rules for women. Zenobia starts out as a female character that speaks out for women's rights and is a truly feminist figure, yet in the end chooses to give up everything she stands for to be with Hollingsworth. It is unclear why Hawthorne chooses to have Zenobia fail in representing a feminist figure, but if she is to be Hawthorne's representative of feminine culture in general, it is a damning portrayal indeed.

Priscilla's character makes for quite a contrast from Zenobia in terms of how she represents womanhood. Where Zenobia's strong personality struggles with her desire to be a submissive partner to Hollingsworth, Priscilla is practically made for the part. Priscilla seems to want nothing more in life than someone to care for her and guide her. Priscilla is also a vision of purity and, once released from the grasp of Westervelt, she is even a joyful character. Yet to suggest that she brings about any of the changes Hester Prynne envisions in The Scarlet Letter would be preposterous. Priscilla's character does share a similar joyful aspect with Phoebe in

The House of the Seven Gables, yet Priscilla supports the patriarchal order throughout the novel rather than merely at the end of it. In the case of Priscilla, it seems as though Hawthorne attempted to create the ethereal and angelic woman he envisioned, but the ultimate result was merely a woman who valorizes the ideal of patriarchal authority.

The way Coverdale describes Priscilla when she is introduced is much different than his description of Zenobia, creating an immediate contrasting parallel between the two women. Priscilla looks sickly and is shaking, either from the weather or from nerves. Coverdale sees her as “a flower-shrub that had done its best to blossom in too scanty light” (The Blithedale Romance 27), which contrasts directly with Zenobia, who wears a luxurious flower in her hair. Priscilla has the potential to be beautiful, but has not been in an environment which allows her to flourish. This also creates a contradiction between her and Phoebe Pyncheon, because while Phoebe brings sunlight with her wherever she goes, Priscilla needs it brought to her if she is to become anything close to beautiful.

Once in Blithedale, Priscilla undergoes a transformation. She is finally in a place where she can bloom, as Coverdale predicted. Coverdale cites the playful aspect of young girls, noticing that while Priscilla plays and frolics with the rest of them, her bodily weakness makes her prone to clumsiness and frequent mishaps. Yet all of Blithedale loves her, and this aspect of her even adds to her charm. She overflows with boundless joy, and it is as though the otherworldly and sickly creature she was can now embrace the joyful aspects of life. Priscilla is ineffective in any work besides sewing, unable to cook or even milk a cow, making her much unlike Phoebe, whose skill as a housewife made her the embodiment of the cult of domesticity.

Priscilla is more a part of Blithedale’s joyful atmosphere than the practical realm which serves to maintain it. She is still “unformed, vague, and without substance” (The Blithedale



Romance 72), and seems to embody the idea of purity and joy in a girl that is being shaped by Nature into a woman. Priscilla's ethereal aspect makes her seem like the angel/apostle who, while possessing the fundamental qualities of being female, is enough removed from the realm of traditional society that she can become something more. As she is moving towards womanhood, now would be the time for her to prove she can become the angel/apostle, but instead she only becomes more and more submissive to Hollingsworth, the main male influence in her life.

It is clear throughout the novel that Priscilla is submissive to anyone with the will to command her. This is shown when Coverdale, who has temporarily left Blithedale, discovers his three friends have gone also. When he asks Priscilla if she came freely, she responds that she has no free will, she has come only because Hollingsworth bade her to (The Blithedale Romance 171). Though a woman who submits to her husband would likely be seen as a positive by many during the time, Hawthorne takes Priscilla's character to an extreme. In the past, Westervelt uses her passive nature to make her act as the Veiled Lady in his mesmeric performances. Zenobia uses her influence with Priscilla to try to make her return to being the Veiled Lady. It is only when Hollingsworth commands Priscilla to leave Westervelt and her role as the Veiled Lady that she is actually able to walk away from the performance. By being the active male who saves her, Hollingsworth sets himself in Priscilla's eyes as someone even more worthy of veneration than before.

In the "Eliot's Pulpit" chapter, Hawthorne clearly lays out the characters' various opinions of womankind. Zenobia's observation about Priscilla is especially important in the presentation of the younger woman's character. She says that Priscilla "is the type of womanhood, such as man has spent centuries in making it. He is never content, unless he can

degrade himself by stooping towards what he loves” (The Blithedale Romance 122). Following this, Hollingsworth states his opinion that the embodiment of true womanhood is to lend one’s strength to her male counterpart. Hollingsworth’s comment does seem to agree with the idea that men prefer women to be in a place of inferiority, but he believes it is woman’s natural state where Zenobia argues it is a patriarchal construct. The fact that Priscilla asks Hollingsworth whether Zenobia’s comment is true implies she is very much under the control of men, but it is unclear whether it is her natural or unnatural state, as she is already fully submissive by the time she is introduced in the story.

When examining Zenobia and Priscilla as women, it is important to look at how they are perceived by the males they interact with. Coverdale often takes the more feminist approach, sympathizing with Zenobia’s defense of women and sounds uncomfortable with Zenobia and Priscilla’s devotion to Hollingsworth. Yet the end of the novel reveals that Coverdale has all along been in love with Priscilla. Whether or not the reader considers Coverdale’s claim to be truthful or not makes it difficult to decipher how this confession should change one’s perception of the narrator. Also, though Coverdale is never explicably stated to be Hawthorne’s persona in the novel, one must still question whether Coverdale’s conflicting emotions towards the female characters in some ways represents Hawthorne’s own struggle to identify what he sees as the proper path for womanhood. This is especially relevant when considering that Zenobia, a character treated with so much respect, kills herself at the end of the novel, whereas Priscilla is right where she wants to be, beside Hollingsworth.

Hollingsworth, on the contrary, is very obviously in favor of the patriarchal order. While he does not despise women, he is convinced that their place is supporting a man in his endeavors. When a woman’s heart is devoted to a man’s cause, he sees it as a beautiful thing, but anything

else he finds only foolish and destructive. Though Zenobia's passionate personality could perhaps offer him great assistance in his dream of reforming criminals it is likely, as Coverdale observes early on, that Hollingsworth would prefer the silent sympathy and support of Priscilla than someone with such a forceful personality. Working by his side, Zenobia might appear more an equal than the one supporting him. Coverdale cannot imagine that Hollingsworth could give his affections to "a person capable of taking an independent stand, but only to one whom he might absorb into himself" (The Blithedale Romance 167). In this way, Priscilla, once removed from Westervelt's grasp, goes from being the Veiled Lady, an ethereal being, directly to the male ideal. Although her ethereal aspect and joyful characteristics make it seem as though she could develop into a new kind of woman, Priscilla's submissive personality, especially in her relationship with Hollingsworth, shows she has merely been molded to fit into the patriarchal order.

Blithedale, as a social experiment in the creation of an "ideal" community, offers its residents the perfect opportunity to reform gender roles by being outside of general society. Zenobia, who seems to immediately take a leadership role, predicts that at first the Blithedale residents will stick to the stereotypical roles assigned to men and women. The men will do the hard labor, while women do the typical cooking and cleaning activities. But she suggests that during their stay individual skill levels may develop and blur the lines between male and female jobs. Considering Blithedale is supposed to help people get away from society and return as much as possible to a pre-lapsarian ideal, Coverdale makes an interesting point that the roles typically assigned to women (i.e. housework) are the ones most artificial and most removed from an Edenic atmosphere. Blithedale, therefore, offers women a chance to escape from artificial roles. If it is possible to cast off roles in a practical sense, it seems possible to do so from a

psychological perspective as well. Yet Coverdale's examination of the Zenobia/Hollingsworth/Priscilla microcosm within the Blithedale community suggests these ideas are far too ingrained to be easily forgotten.

Critical interpretation of Priscilla and Zenobia is full of many contradicting ideas in terms of how to perceive Priscilla and Zenobia in relation to female gender roles in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The two women are so different in both their actions and thoughts that critics often portray them in a light of polarity. In The Angel and the Machine: The Rational Psychology of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Jones astutely points out that this often makes it only too easy for critics to divide the women into categories of good and bad (176). He accuses Fogle of ascribing Zenobia to a role representing materialism, which she fails to overcome, whereas the pure Priscilla exists beyond the material realm (Jones 177). Nina Baym, however, argues that Zenobia is the true heroine because, rather than being portrayed as a flawed and damaged woman, she actually develops into the reality that Coverdale seeks (Jones 177). Therefore it is all too easy to make it seem as though Hawthorne's intentions are to make Priscilla the heroine. Jones argues that even if one divides the two women into binary opposites, it does not necessarily make either of them ideal (Jones 184-185). Whether looking at Priscilla as idealism or Zenobia as materialism, the true tragedy of the book is, to Jones, that the four main characters are ultimately incompatible and cannot properly mesh their natures in a way that leads to mutual satisfaction (Jones 178). This reflects Hawthorne's own pessimism that the two opposing natures of women like Zenobia and Priscilla must remain in separate realms and cannot be combined. Jones's comment about incompatibility is especially striking in terms of Hawthorne's exploration of women. Part of the lure of the angel/apostle is that she will be able to create relationships between the sexes that are more beneficial than they were previously. The women in The Blithedale Romance clearly fail to

do this.

Whether or not the characters are seen as binary opposites, the fact remains that both ultimately fail to become the angel/apostle and achieve a new sense of equality between men and women that Hester expects to be manifested in the future. Hawthorne presents Zenobia as strong and smart woman, but one that is also prey to following her heart. Even so, her suicide is a very extreme portrayal of her dependence on Hollingsworth's love, making it a problematic section. Yet if readers accept this as part of the story's canon then it creates an interesting contrast between Zenobia and Hester. Zenobia starts out freer, a woman who truly stands up for her sex, but her affection for Hollingsworth ultimately degrades her, making her abandon her role as reformer. Hester, however, is able to eventually achieve a freedom of thought. As strong and intelligent as Zenobia is, she is a step back from Hester Prynne. And while Hawthorne seemed to make progress towards the angel/apostle with the character of Phoebe in The House of the Seven Gables, he promptly takes another step back with Priscilla. Though her ethereal nature can seem almost angelic in its description, she hardly offers the potential for reform that Phoebe does. Priscilla's joyful nature is weak and inconstant, all too easy to crush. To be the angel/apostle she must carry this joy with her and bring it to the world, not have conditions set so that it is brought to her. She also utterly reinforces the patriarchy by supporting Hollingsworth, the ultimate representative of male power. The Blithedale Romance, even more so than the romances that precede it, seems to be Hawthorne's artistic search to create the angel/apostle. But now so more than ever, he finds himself unable to create a tale and characters in which women can overcome societal oppression.

#### **Chapter 4: The Marble Faun**

Hawthorne's final romance was completed in 1860, eight years after The Blithedale

Romance. The Marble Faun, like The Blithedale Romance, directly sets up the duality of women with its two main female characters. Miriam, like Zenobia and Hester before her, is a strong and sexualized woman whose mysterious past leaves a burden upon her character. Hilda, a virginal young woman, has qualities similar to both Phoebe and Priscilla. Her joyful personality and gentle purity is much like both of her predecessors. The setting of The Marble Faun, unlike Hawthorne's other three romances, takes place outside of America. By placing his characters in Rome, Hawthorne creates the possibility of removing them from the typical societal pressures and familial structures that surrounded the men and women in his past romances (Weldon 115). Despite this opportunity, both Hilda and Miriam wind up subjecting themselves to the patriarchy. Miriam, who is burdened anew with complicity in a murder, chooses to wholly give herself to the suffering Donatello, who has murdered on her behalf. Much like Phoebe Pyncheon, Hilda is a woman who presents the possibility of being the angel/apostle, but ultimately winds up in a marriage typical of the time. Even while taking his characters out of New England, Hawthorne fails to use this opportunity to give the women outcomes they may not have achieved in America.

As with Zenobia and Priscilla, Miriam and Hilda are presented as contrasts to one another both in appearance and personality. When first introducing the characters, Miriam is described as "a dark-eyed young woman" and Hilda as "a slender, brown-haired, New England girl" (The Marble Faun 7). It is significant to note that where Miriam is a young woman, Hilda is a girl, though Miriam is only a year or two older (The Marble Faun 63). The choice of terms implies something about each character, hinting towards a degree of experience and maturity on Miriam's part and innocence and youth on Hilda's. Both women are artists residing in Rome, but Miriam is clearly the worldlier of the two. She is more experienced with Italian life and "better

fitted to deal with its crafty and selfish inhabitants” (The Marble Faun 63). Unlike Hilda, Miriam has clearly seen the darker side of human nature. Her experience is not without value, however, as Miriam is able to help Hilda adjust to her new situation.

The nature of Miriam and Hilda’s artwork is very indicative of their characters. This is especially shown in how they relate to the painting of Beatrice Cenci. Carton says that the actual story behind the Beatrice painting can be interpreted multiple ways. She can be seen as fundamentally pure, a woman cruelly sacrificed as result of a criminal act. She can also be seen as having a certain dangerous aspect to her, perhaps connected to revenge. In this way, the painting can stand for either Hilda or Miriam. Beatrice wears an expression that can be interpreted in many ways. When Miriam is connected to the Beatrice painting, it suggests that Beatrice has a dark past connected to trying to escape the oppression of a strong male figure, resulting in a deadly crime. Yet Hilda also sees herself as Beatrice, even though she has committed no crime, only witnessed it. (Carton 90-92)

Much like her interpretation of the Beatrice painting, Miriam’s style is indicative that she is haunted by her past. Miriam does a variety of original paintings, including famous heroines such as Jael and Judith. While these pictures start with expressions of “perfect womanhood” (The Marble Faun 43), it seems Miriam cannot help but add something to distort the expressions. Miriam’s pictures continually represent “the idea of woman, acting the part of a revengeful mischief towards men” (The Marble Faun 44). At the same time, Miriam also captures the fact that in order for a woman to have her revenge, she must strike through her own heart to get to her victim. These pictures are extremely disturbing to the free-spirited and innocent Donatello, whom Miriam did not intend to see these particular works. She tells him they are “not things that I created, but things that haunt me” (The Marble Faun 45). Like Zenobia, Miriam’s past is

mysterious and there is an aspect of darkness to it, clearly showing a lack of purity and innocence women such as Phoebe, Priscilla and Hilda possess. It is also interesting that the narrator refers to terms of womanhood as universal. Though Miriam is not a New Englander, she is still tied into Hawthorne's ideas of womanhood, which have previously been applied only to women residing in America.

Yet not all of Miriam's paintings are like the ones of the heroines. She has also created many beautiful domestic scenes consisting of pure maidens, married couples, and even an infant's shoe. Considering she is still rather young, it is clear Miriam relies on her imagination to produce these works rather than experience. The narrator seems to take comfort in the fact that "they were the productions of a beautiful imagination of a woman's heart, and thus idealizing a truer and lovelier picture of the life that belongs to woman, than an actual acquaintance with some of its hard and dusty facts could have inspired" (The Marble Faun 46). Though Miriam's darker paintings hint at strife in her life, these paintings at least seem to suggest that through her imagination she can achieve a feminine ideal.

After this comforting idea, however, it is revealed that a shadowy figure lurks in the background of all of these calm, domestic scenes. If looked at closely, the figure resembles Miriam herself. This description creates a problem with the earlier suggestion that Miriam's power of imagination will allow her to create artistic renderings of perfect womanhood. Even if she is able to imagine it, she herself is always apart from it. Though her past remains vague, readers know that whatever happened was enough to fully cut her off from the potential to achieve any kind of pure womanhood.

Miriam's mysterious past seems to be tied to a man known as the "Model." It is never explained what he has to do with her past, but he consistently follows her around Rome, causing



Miriam distress. At first, she reveals her past to no one, not even her closest friends. Miriam believes that she, unlike Hilda, can carry the burden of both sin and sorrow. Hilda, though she could bear sorrow, should die from being touched by sin. Yet Miriam also assures Kenyon that “my conscience is still as white as Hilda’s” (The Marble Faun 128), and much later when she does finally confide in him he agrees she was indeed innocent, if unlucky. Wagenknecht feels it is as though Hawthorne wants to release his character from explicit blame at the onset of the past crime, yet wants to maintain a mystery about her character (Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Man, His Tales, And Romances 144). Miriam is, at least at the time, more “innocent” than a woman such as Hester, who without question broke Puritan law. And even after Donatello murders the Model with her consent, she does not shy away from her part of the crime (Wagenknecht 130). Hawthorne presents her not only as a sympathetic figure but one who can be respected as well. Whatever happened in Miriam’s past, the Model was clearly involved. Though she is otherwise portrayed as an intelligent and independent woman, she is tied to the power of this man. Miriam describes how she is “naturally of so courageous a spirit” yet has “resigned herself to the thralldom in which he held her” (The Marble Faun 93). She is both proud but submissive to his power, knowing he has ties to her that she cannot avoid. It almost seems as though he is not really there at all, but rather a constant reminder of a past she would rather forget.

Through Miriam is reluctant to let anyone in on her secrets, she is able to escape her pain when with her friends. This is especially true when she is with the free-spirited Donatello. She finally puts her trust in him, and because of his love for her, he kills the Model with her consenting glance. Once this action takes place, Miriam knows Donatello’s joyous and cheerful nature is permanently stained. Miriam can clearly see the profound negative effect she has had on Donatello by making him lose his innocence through this crime. Miriam manifests strength of

character shortly after the murder. She sees Donatello's distress and offers to be his support. She, who has already suffered trials, knows that she is strong enough to bear the weight of his sorrow too. In this sense, their personal qualities are not divided by gender so much as by personality and personal experience.

Yet the relationship between Miriam and Donatello does shift dramatically after the murder. Whereas before it was Donatello who was hopelessly in love with Miriam, Miriam gives her heart to him after he has committed murder for her. It is as though she knows she is the only one with the power to save him and is willing to submit herself to him to make up for what she made him do. When Donatello abandons Miriam because the sight of her reminds him of his crime, she is devastated. She tells Kenyon that without "The object, which I am bound to consider my only one of earth" (The Marble Faun 280) she has no resource for her energy. The "object" that is her main focus is, of course, Donatello. Where Miriam once was devoted to her art, she now places all of her concerns in relation to him. What she wants more than anything is to make a sacrifice of herself to Donatello's happiness, but he will not allow this. Miriam's newfound determination to live to please Donatello is reminiscent of The Blithedale Romance, when Hollingsworth says women are at their best when they serve at man's side. Yet Miriam is not attracted out of a sense of purpose and duty that Donatello manifests, but rather by guilt in what they have done together. In this way, she is almost like Hester, who feels an obligation out of her love for Dimmesdale to try to protect him. Whatever her motivation, it nonetheless Miriam has made Donatello her sole reason for existence.

Miriam was once a strong and admirable woman that Donatello could only follow about with adoration. This is changed after the crime, and changes even more so when Kenyon reveals that Donatello loves her. Kenyon watches as a "womanly softness" appears, where once she had

been cold and lifeless in her misery (The Marble Faun 282). She also insists to Kenyon that it must be she that helps Donatello through this difficult time. Unlike before, when it seemed primarily her strength of character that would allow her to support Donatello, she now specifically mentions the fact that she is a woman in this conversation. She suggests that by sharing in their crime they can be “on such terms of intimate equality” (The Marble Faun 282), yet the fact that she is living to, in essence, sacrifice herself to saving him, does not come across as equal at all.

It is interesting that, in some ways, it is actually Donatello who gets objectified. He is literally the object of Miriam’s love and devotion. She refers to him as “my only prospect of happiness” (The Marble Faun 283), oddly reminiscent of Holgrave’s declaration of love to the innocent and lovely Phoebe in The House of the Seven Gables. Yet clearly the roles are not so reversed as they at first seem. Miriam tells Kenyon that “you little know what a weak, or what a strong creature, a woman is!” and goes on to say that she does not fear the wrath of Heaven but does fear Donatello’s opinion of her. The implication is that she can be strong for the sake of the man she loves, but against his power she is weak. Kenyon is shocked by this change in personality and cannot “but marvel at the subjection into which this proud and self-dependent woman had willfully flung herself” (The Marble Faun 283) when Donatello had once been but a plaything to her.

Even Miriam herself recognizes this change in temperament. She asks Kenyon if she has shocked him “by my betrayal of woman’s cause, my lack of feminine modesty, my reckless, passionate, most indecorous avowal that I live only in the life of one who perhaps scorns and shudders me?” (The Marble Faun 286). Interestingly, Miriam seems to be betraying womanhood from two angles. She is betraying the feminist cause by creating her life’s meaning solely

through Donatello, yet she is also going against the view of the modest and demure woman by declaring her intentions so openly and passionately. Her passionate personality is not gone, but her independence is. She feels further severed from the ties of womanhood because she has lost Hilda, who witnessed Miriam's part in the crime. To her, Hilda is a representative of Womanhood, and by losing her she has lost all connection.

Robert Weldon believes that Hawthorne first invokes and then revokes the matriarchal order through Miriam and Donatello's relationship (Hawthorne, Gender, and Death: Christianity and It's Discontents 116-117). In the beginning of the novel, Donatello is determined to serve Miriam. Miriam, on the other hand, only deigns to notice him only when she chooses. The hierarchy switches after the crime, however, and Miriam becomes subservient to Donatello. Why Hawthorne chose to portray this shift is unclear, but perhaps it is related to the fact that before the crime Miriam and Donatello were not fit to fulfill a stereotypical heterosexual relationship. Once Miriam became indebted to Donatello for his actions against the Model, she had reason to be subservient to him.

Out of all of Hawthorne's strong female characters, Miriam is the one with the vaguest past. Nonetheless, her personality is clearly portrayed: she is intelligent, talented and strong-willed. Yet, like Hester and Zenobia before her, she is burdened with lifelong sorrow. And this sorrow follows her from her past into her present, her part in the Model's murder driving both her and Donatello down a dark path. And it is this crime that changes her character even further, going from a beautiful woman who strung along Donatello to a woman desperate for his affection. Although Miriam is neither a New Englander nor even residing in America, Hawthorne nonetheless places her in the role of supporting the man she loves, as he has done with so many of his other female characters.

Hilda is a much different presentation of womanhood than Miriam, coming across as much more pure and innocent. Although she resides in Rome, she is very the image of an innocent New England girl. The chapter “The Virgin’s Shrine” describes Hilda as a very pure character, all in white and “like a dove” (The Marble Faun 52). She resides in her tower, above and away from the stains of humanity. It is her duty to keep lit the light of the Virgin Mary’s shrine in the tower. Hilda’s physical description is clearly reminiscent of Phoebe’s. She is described as “pretty, at all times, in our native New England style” (The Marble Faun 63) with brown ringlets and a healthy glow. Yet at times her prettiness transforms into beauty as some feeling or thought rises to the surface. She is a naturally pleasant person who is never overly passionate with her emotions but also never long despondent. Even in temperament, she is much like Phoebe, a cheerful person that everyone benefits from being around. Yet Hilda does not possess the innate skills of a housewife that Phoebe does. Rather, Hilda is an artist. Her virginal devotion to the grand masters of art and her seclusion in her tower suggest that though she is not necessarily more pure than Phoebe, she does perhaps inhabit an angelic and ethereal realm like Priscilla.

As an artist, Hilda is what is known as a copyist: rather than create original pictures, she copies those of the great masters. By applying her very skillful work to recreate the works of others, she does reverence to these male artists. Her artistic perspective is described as “looking at humanity with angel’s eyes” (The Marble Faun 55), suggesting that she exists on a loftier plane than most humans, just as she resides in her tower high above Rome. She will be able to add darker and more forceful elements into her paintings once she has become more experienced with life. The narrator also claims that with her talent, Hilda could be well-known in her native country for original work. Yet when she traveled to Rome, she became devoted to doing homage

to the works of others. She “had ceased to consider herself as an original artist. No wonder that this change should have befallen her. She was endowed with a deep and sensitive faculty of appreciation” (The Marble Faun 56). Though her work is no longer original, Hilda does bring something special to her art. Hilda is able to bestow “all the warmth and richness of a woman’s sympathy; not by any intellectual effort, but by this strength of heart, and this guiding light of sympathy” (The Marble Faun 56-57). This description is highly reminiscent of what Hollingsworth in The Blithedale Romance says in regards to the ideal woman. Although Hilda is devoted to long dead artists rather than a living male companion, she nonetheless serves them and enhances their work with her innate feminine perspective.

The fact that Hilda has left her native New England for Rome suggests a possibility for her to reach new levels of intellectual and artistic freedom for a woman. She certainly gains a level of independence, as she lives alone in her tower, “free to descend into the corrupted atmosphere of the city beneath” (The Marble Faun 54) when she so chooses. Rome also offers her a chance to be outside of a land where the cult of true womanhood is the basis of judging all women. Yet it seems as though Hilda does not require such societal pressures to maintain the purity that will allow her to achieve this ideal. In fact, there is a sense of trust that her purity will be maintained against all corruption, and therefore she is safe in Rome. This is shown multiple times throughout the text. When Hilda does not meet her friends at an art gallery as planned, they are not overly concerned because they believe that, like a dove, she will be untouched by the corruption of the city and thus is in no danger.

The first major threat to Hilda’s innocence actually comes from the crime committed by Miriam and Donatello. Though she herself took no part in the murder, she has now seen the harsher and corrupt aspect of the world simply by witnessing the crime. It is especially hard for

Hilda to learn this from observing a woman she admired condoning murder. More than this, Hilda must keep her knowledge of the crime to herself because she does not wish for Miriam and Donatello to be harmed. The keeping of this secret is harmful to her, and it seems as though the character that comes so close to fitting the angel/apostle image is now burdened with lifelong sorrow.

Hilda eventually turns to the Catholic Church to release her of her burden. She retains her Protestantism, however, knowing she can only receive absolution from God, not from a priest. Upon making her confession, Hilda is immediately relieved. She claims she finally understands what it is like to be a Saint who, while being touched by another's sorrow, is not ruined by it. This, perhaps more than anything else, is indicative of the angel/apostle. Hilda has now experienced the darker and more violent aspect of the world, but she has not been stained by it.

The fact that Hilda is able to remain pure even after witnessing the depravities humans are capable of is certainly a positive aspect of her character, and perhaps a hint that Hawthorne feels he has finally created a woman capable of upholding the angel/apostle idea. Yet some critics have found Hilda problematic in her reaction to the crime. Wagenknecht points out that while spotless characters such as Hilda were popular in 19th century fiction, more recent criticism questions her characterization, especially in how she treats Miriam after the crime (Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Man, His Tales, and Romances 139-140). Hilda has certainly been profoundly affected by Miriam's crime; she has lost a degree of innocence and thus can no longer exist to devote herself to art and the copying of the great masters. Yet she is not brought to a point where she can fully discredit her beloved artists and think them unworthy. The narrator claims she "had a faculty (which, fortunately for themselves, pure women often have) of ignoring all moral blotches in a character that won her admiration" (The Marble Faun 338). If

this is so, one must wonder why she was never able to regain her friendship with Miriam, since she clearly respected the other woman. Though Hilda is portrayed as representative of all that is innocent and pure, there is a surprising harshness in her dismissal of Miriam as a friend.

Though Hilda is relatively independent throughout much of the book, she is still very close to her small group of friends. Kenyon, in fact, desires more than friendship. He is clearly in love with her, yet believes her to be too lofty to be attainable. Kenyon is reluctant to ask such an angelic woman to lower herself by being with him. At the same time, Hilda is not ready to grasp the more passionate side of love. The friendship she has now is enough for her. In this sense, their relationship is a very pure one of mutual affection and respect. Kenyon is also willing to shape himself to her beliefs rather than the other way around. When he suggests that mistakes such as Miriam's and Donatello's can actually teach a lesson, Hilda is horrified by the very idea. He immediately rescinds his comment and bows to what he considers to be her superior wisdom. Whether or not readers agree with Hilda's black and white view of the world, it is significant that Hawthorne chooses to give her such power and sway over her male romantic interest.

Once Hilda realizes the amount of faith Kenyon is putting into her, she is very distressed. It seems that she does not want to be in a position of such power, telling Kenyon that "I am a poor, weak girl, and have no such wisdom as you fancy in me" (*The Marble Faun* 461). What came further of this conversation is not shared, but it is soon revealed that Hilda has agreed to marry Kenyon. This signals a change in Hilda's character. There must be another hand to "trim the lamp before the Virgin's shrine" because Hilda is lowering herself from her tower. She is no longer the virgin figure but will soon be "herself enshrined and worshipped as a household Saint, in the light of her husband's fireside" (*The Marble Faun* 461). Kenyon, similar to Holgrave, seems to see in his future bride a quality that is essential to his own improvement and happiness.



Hilda, like Phoebe, has survived the influence of dark forces and, while she has not necessarily escaped unscathed, she is still unquestionably pure. In fact, her joy in life is now tempered by wisdom about the world. The symbolic description of her descending from the tower to become a household saint is clearly indicative of her new role within the cult of domesticity. Even if she does return to New England with Kenyon to become part of this societal structure, it is never outright stated that their relationship will reflect the stereotypical relationship of husband and wife. Yet neither does Hawthorne give readers a clear indication that she is the angel/apostle figure by suggesting the marriage will defy typical heterosexual relationships of the 19th century. As it stands, her last words are ones in which she attempts to avoid any lasting influence.

It is interesting to note that Hawthorne himself was in Rome when writing The Marble Faun. Critics have noted that there may be a connection between this novel and his daughter, Una, who became sick while in Rome. Critic Evan Carton suggests that the novel portrays Hawthorne's struggle to reconcile their father/daughter dynamic (The Marble Faun: Hawthorne's Transformations 85-90). With Hilda, Hawthorne creates a devout daughter of the Puritans, a contrast to the more sexualized and rebellious Miriam. Carton also notes that, despite her rebelliousness, Miriam is still constrained by male forces (The Marble Faun: Hawthorne's Transformations 85-90).

In interpreting the characters, M. T. Gale attempts to divide them into the different elements of human nature, claiming Miriam represents the soul/will, Hilda the conscience/intuitive, Kenyon reason/intellect, and Donatello animal nature/body (The Marble Faun: A Key To Its Interpretation 1-9). As Jones said in regards to The Blithedale Romance, it is highly risky to pigeonhole Hawthorne's complex characters into such specific representations,

especially without a great deal of proof that Hawthorne would have purposely presented them this way (The Angel and the Machine: The Rational Psychology of Nathaniel Hawthorne 176). Nonetheless, Gale's idea leads her to the interesting point that both of the women rebuff their male suitors until the murder takes place. Miriam, as the soul, is debased in her act, and is thus willing to devote herself to the more animalistic nature of Donatello (Gale 1-9). Hilda, as conscience, is weakened by her encounter with guilt, and thus leans on Kenyon, who represents reason (Gale 1-9). Again, to make such direct distinctions is a stretch. The idea of Hilda accepting "reason" into her life in the form of the practical-minded Kenyon, however, is appropriate. And unlike what Gale says, Hilda actually seems to get stronger for her encounter with guilt. She has at least gained the experience that allows her to leave the lofty realm of virginity into the more practical world, where she is ready to be a wife to Kenyon.

Once again, Hawthorne effectively punishes his strong female character and, ostensibly, gives the pure woman a happy ending. Even when taken out of the context of American society, Miriam must still suffer for her sins. Wagenknecht suggests that Hawthorne starts to bring forth the idea of the "fortunate fall" in The Marble Faun, showing how Miriam and Donatello's sin can actually serve to make one wiser (Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Man, His Tales and Romances 148-149). Yet Hilda and, subsequently, Kenyon's rejection of this idea never allow it to be fully explored. Instead, according to Weldon, it seems as though the guilty couple of Miriam and Donatello are sacrificed for the idealized heterosexual couple of Hilda and Kenyon (Hawthorne, Gender and Death: Christianity and its Discontents 124). In the end, Hilda's union with Kenyon does not reveal any innovative new relationship between a man and woman. What instead results from all the suffering and strife throughout the book is merely a couple that upholds the status quo.

What, then, is the reader to make of Hawthorne's attempt to artistically bring the angel/apostle into existence? Though Hawthorne creates sympathetic portrayals of women such as Hester, Zenobia, and Miriam, he never fails to show that either they will be punished by society or that some force inside of them will make them submit to the patriarchy, even while they know they betray woman's cause. Hawthorne also takes diverse approaches to women who support the cult of domesticity, yet never quite manages to raise them to a level above that of how a pure and gentle woman would normally be valued during the 19th century. Phoebe, Priscilla, and Hilda are, perhaps, the closest Hawthorne comes to aesthetically rendering the joyful and pure aspect of the angel/apostle into existence. But as all of their stories end with no indication of the "revelation" that necessarily comes with the angel/apostle, they can hardly be seen as successful attempts.

It would be easy to label Hawthorne's quest as a failure, since no one character he creates manages to fully encompass what he hopes to aesthetically achieve. Yet while Hawthorne may not have achieved his ultimate goal, he did successfully render all aspects of the angel/apostle, albeit in different characters. Hester remains the closest Hawthorne comes, in a psychological sense, to a woman who can change relations between men and women. Despite, or perhaps even because of her sin, she is able to transcend traditional morality and escape the restrictions typically placed on women. Even though it is Hawthorne who called Hester Prynne into artistic existence he is, perhaps, hesitant to give the angel/apostle role to a woman who is stained with sin. Instead he continues to show the inevitable punishment for women like her through Zenobia and Miriam. With women such as Phoebe, Priscilla and Hilda, Hawthorne creates women who would be ideal vessels for his rendering of the angel/apostle, yet cannot seem to break them away from their roles as constructs of the patriarchy. Though Hawthorne is able to perceive all

that is necessary to create the angel/apostle, he struggles to bring all of the elements together. Perhaps readers should not be surprised that the angel/apostle is ultimately unattainable in Hawthorne's work, especially when viewing his work as a reflection of a time in history when concepts of feminism and the cult of domesticity were both drastically different yet inextricably intertwined. Readers may be able to see a measure of success in Hawthorne's venture in that he is able to examine the struggles of both sides of womanhood's spectrum. Maybe Hawthorne's failure to render the angel/apostle in an artistic sense is connected to the fact that this aesthetic creation is not a plausible solution in reality. Though he could not, in the end, bring about the angel/apostle figure he hoped to create after The Scarlet Letter, readers perhaps can take solace in the fact that all the elements for the existence of this woman are present in his subsequent novel. Though he cannot seem to escape writing women as a duality, Hawthorne's romances are nonetheless complex explorations of women's roles within society which suggest, through striving towards the angel/apostle ideal, that there is a possibility for better relations between the genders.

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