

Interpretation

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Women in the Novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne

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“ . . . It somewhat startled me to overhear a number of ladies, highly respectable in appearance, proposing to fling their gowns and petticoats into the flames, and assume the garb, together with the manners, duties, offices, and responsibilities, of the opposite sex.”

“Earth’s Holocaust”¹

Near the middle of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s first major and most successful novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, a tale ostensibly concerned primarily with the private and public consequences of adultery, guilt and revenge, the reader encounters this remarkable passage:

Indeed, the same dark question often rose into her [Hester Prynne’s] mind, with reference to the whole race of womanhood. Was existence worth accepting, even to the happiest among them? As concerned her own individual existence, she had long ago decided in the negative, and dismissed the point as settled. A tendency to speculation, though it may keep woman quiet, as it does man, yet makes her sad. She discerns, it may be, such a hopeless task before her. As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. Finally, all other difficulties being obviated, woman cannot take advantage of these preliminary reforms, until she herself shall have undergone a still mightier change; in which, perhaps, the ethereal essence, wherein she has her truest life, will be found to have evaporated. A woman never overcomes these problems by any exercise of thought. They are not to be solved, or only in one way. If her heart chance to come uppermost, they vanish.²

And, near the end of the novel, Hawthorne relates how Hester, many years after the tragic events that form the core of the narrative, would attempt to assuage the broken hearts of women coming to her for advice and solace:

. . . Hester comforted and counselled them as best she might. She assured them, too, of her firm belief, that, at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven’s own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness. (P. 240)

These passages suggest that Hawthorne's interest in laying before the public this sad story of sin and persecution transcended the exploration of the emotions of guilt and revenge, or even the exploration of the American polity's founding and transformations.³ The above glimpses into Hester Prynne's speculations provided by the sympathetic narrator Hawthorne point to his widest intention in revealing her suffering and thoughts: the promulgation of a new order between the sexes in the world. Moreover, the themes of the respective characters of the sexes, their proper relations, and the desirable political and legal context of their relations are the abiding concern of all his novels.⁴ Hawthorne's novels lay out a teaching: that teaching is a feminist one, in so far as he wishes a world which is vastly different from the traditional world around him, one which, with certain exaggerations, is also the world which produced Hester Prynne's suffering. In the world governed by the "new truth" with which Hester soothed the feminine wounds of her contemporaries, women would enter into the wider stream of human life beyond the domestic sphere, assuming a voice in their own political governance and even securing their economic independence, at least to some degree. Their domestic relations, too, would be founded in an equal friendship with their husbands. In sum, the general subordination of women to men as a political class and the specific subordination of wives to husbands would give way to an arrangement more firmly grounded in Nature. With Mary Wollstonecraft, Abigail Adams, Margaret Fuller and others, Hawthorne saw—and welcomed—the change in the status of women in the world as part of the ever-increasing awareness of natural rights and equality that was revolutionizing the human condition everywhere. Yet his embrace of feminist transformation, like his embrace of revolutionary changes born of a resort to Nature, was significantly tempered and accompanied by a warning.⁵ If the overcoming of subordination would free women from the tyranny of men, it could also destroy women's happiness in the world, let alone the proper foundations of social life. Although Hawthorne was a feminist, he was a cautious one. His teaching regarding the proper relations of the sexes was rooted in a vivid presentation of their differences, some of which stemmed from Nature itself and some from convention. In the quest for social and political equality, those differences (regardless of their provenance) could only be ignored at the psychic peril of women and men and the larger justice and stability of society. As we shall see, the relations between the sexes, more than any other issue in human life for Hawthorne, raised the question of the character, strength and pervertibility of the passions. Hawthorne's teachings about women's place in the world are an attempt to create a truly happier and juster place for them without destroying the possibility of happiness and justice. Without presenting an elaborate program for reform, Hawthorne's novels do provide clues for constructing the institutional and attitudinal changes he considered necessary to women's "fair and suitable position." We shall trace through his five major novels, beginning with his first novel, *Fanshawe*, and

concluding with *The Marble Faun*, his view of the sexes and their proper relations.⁶ We shall then be in a better position to consider whether or not Hawthorne has anything important to say to men and women in the present regarding the best direction for the ongoing revolution in “the whole system of society.”

FANSHAWE

Fanshawe, Hawthorne's first novel—and first, anonymous publication—is a clumsy blend of adventure story and character study. There is no comprehensive look at the place of women in society, but the novel does examine the relationship between men and women, presenting themes that recur through Hawthorne's later and more successful works. It is the story of Fanshawe, a reclusive and hardworking student at Harley College (a second-order New England college), who *almost* marries Ellen Langton, the beautiful ward of the president of Harley, Dr. Melmoth. Ellen, who has fallen in love with Fanshawe's spirited friend and fellow student, Edward Wolcott, is about to be deceived into marriage by a sinister stranger, Butler, born and raised in the locality but now away for many years in questionable pursuits. When his deceit fails, Butler abducts Ellen, but Fanshawe rescues her. From gratitude, Ellen offers to marry Fanshawe. Out of nobility or friendship or a simple recognition of Ellen's love for Edward Wolcott, he demurs, paving the way for Edward and Ellen to marry. Fanshawe eventually studies himself to death at the age of twenty, while Ellen and Edward spend the rest of their lives together in a marriage “uncommonly happy”: “Ellen's gentle, almost imperceptible, but powerful influence drew her husband away from the passions and pursuits that would have interfered with domestic felicity; and he never regretted the worldly distinction of which she thus deprived him” (p. 80).

The novel is really about successful and failed pairings between men and women, and what happens to men when they fail to marry. There are three couples contrasted in *Fanshawe*: Dr. and Mrs. Melmoth, Hugh and Dame Crombie (the former Widow Hutchins) and Ellen Langton and Edward Wolcott (and the two potential couples of Ellen-Fanshawe and Ellen-Butler). In each of these couples, the female offers stability, rootedness and connection with the real world. In the case of Dr. Melmoth, good-natured, spiritual and ineffectual, his wife is presented as something of a shrew at the beginning of the novel. As the story unfolds, however, and Dr. Melmoth is called upon to act to aid in Ellen's rescue, it is Mrs. Melmoth who directs him and initiates his movements; he is utterly at a loss as to how to proceed practically, and actually recognizes her “common sense” and “firmer mind” (p. 47).

Hugh Crombie is the innkeeper who often plays host to the students at Harley. He is remarkable in the story not only for the role that he plays in enabling

Butler to carry out certain aspects of his plan to marry Ellen, but also because the two were companions in their youth, often associated in pranks and delinquency. The two stand as contrasts: both started out down life's path into criminality, but only Butler ended up so. Crombie, on the other hand, married the Widow Sarah Hutchins and underwent a transformation. As Butler attempts to enlist him in his scheme, he finds that his former friend has become honest, law-abiding and even soft-hearted, so much so that he is forced to ask: "Why, Hugh, what has come over you since we last met? Have we not done twenty worse deeds of a morning, and laughed over them at night?" Crombie replies that his "conscience has grown unreasonably tender within the last two years" (p. 31). Butler, too, once had, and still has, occasional bursts of sadness, sympathy and longing to join the ranks of society, but these moods usually pass in bitter loneliness, outweighed by his opinion that his life already contains too much evil in it to repent. Nothing or no one has ever entered his life since he deserted his widowed mother in his youth. His plan to entrap Ellen Langton in marriage stems only from the desire for wealth and respectability, and the peculiar opportunity that her father's status as a seafaring merchant affords him.

Edward Wolcott, the man whom Ellen finally marries, is a handsome, spirited, but proud and hot-tempered young man. Because of his hurt vanity, for example, he becomes drunk and violent in Crombie's inn, and, to assuage his damaged pride, almost entangles himself in a pistol duel with Butler (from which Crombie rescues him). He eventually learns to govern his temper and restrain his easily-awakened jealousies, primarily in response to seeing the effect that his behavior has upon Ellen. And, as mentioned earlier, Ellen ties him down to domesticity by the end of the novel, which more than compensates for his incipient urge for worldly distinction.

Ellen Langton, the central female character of the novel, is the only daughter of a merchant father absorbed in the pursuit of wealth, who realizes, too late, that his wealth means nothing compared to the potential marital bliss that he has sacrificed in the pursuit of his career (p. 6). Before he can return to resume his paternal relationship with Ellen, though, he must finish his business dealings in another country and asks Dr. and Mrs. Melmoth to assume responsibility for her.⁷ Ellen is extraordinarily but accessibly beautiful, attractive without being intimidating. Most important, she infuses everything around her with sunny enthusiasm and a good-natured devotion and skill in the domestic arts, all wielded with attentive love. Moreover, her own education in the liberal arts is not inconsiderable, as the young men at Harley have discovered as they try to attract her attention with sweet verses in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. She is, however, attracted to Edward by virtue of his handsome features, which promised to be "manly and dignified" when fully adult, his "respectable" character as a scholar and his gentlemanly disposition.

But the novel is named for Fanshawe, so his dilemma is the one that Hawthorne wishes to focus his readers' attention upon. Fanshawe is introduced into

the story as a shy, retiring, young man, barely connected with the world except through his studies. Although his health is in decline from overwork, so much so that Dr. Melmoth has instructed him to take daily horse rides to improve it, he "was possessed of a face and form such as Nature bestows on none but her favorites" (p. 11). Fanshawe is, in other words, all potential. Although gifted by nature, he cannot actualize those gifts in adult human society. He is "unconnected with the world, unconcerned in its feelings, and uninfluenced by it in any of his pursuits" and led on, in fact, by the desire to attain immortality through his studies. Hawthorne reveals to the reader, disclosing the part of Fanshawe's "inmost heart" hidden even to himself, that this longing for immortality is actually a concealed "dream of undying fame" (p. 14). He deeply desires the goods of the world, but cannot attain them—perhaps because his imagination is uncontainable, therefore setting up an unbridgeable distance between what he desires and what he can attain. On meeting Ellen and Edward riding one day, he falls in love with her, although never entertains any hope of fulfilling his longings. Although galvanized into heroism by the threat to her, he relinquishes the possibility of marrying her and returns to his fatal studies. Fanshawe is an adolescent who never makes the transition into concrete adulthood.⁸ Longing for the world and its goods, but lost in unfocussed passion, abstraction and imagination, he passes from its precincts. Although he would seem to be the opposite of Butler, he is as unrooted—and just as lost and wandering in the realm of self and selfishness. And each of the other males, as like and unlike Fanshawe or Butler as they may be, would have suffered the same fate as these two had he not married.

In *Fanshawe* Hawthorne lays out most of the major themes that will dominate his subsequent important fiction.⁹ The relations between men and women are central to understanding our happiness, our psychology and our fates in society. Because of both natural potential and conventional shaping, men and women are different from each other and need each other. The major psychological traits of men and women fall along these lines: men are more "abstract," given to living in the world of, and under the sway of, society's external opinion and the unfocussed passions attached to it.¹⁰ Women are more tied with the internal and the domestic, with sympathy and concrete reality. True, the social world that forms the background of the novel is the traditional and conventional world of male worldliness and female domesticity and goes uncriticized in Hawthorne's treatment. Yet the outward dependence of females upon males is subtly and ironically reversed. Although the women live in their roles shaped by male expectations, and are therefore ostensibly dependent upon them, it is the males who are truly dependent upon the females. Women give actuality to men's capacity to live fully in the world, and a man who fails to connect his life with a woman's either falls into a deformed masculinity, untouched by reality or sympathy, or a deficient masculinity, incapable of playing a man's role in the world. Without the specific, concrete tie to a particular female, men

become ineffectual, ethereal, superficial, wandering, boyishly selfish adolescents, unable fully to enter into the world, or, if doing so, fail to develop those traits that are necessary for entering into it with honesty, respect for others or even for society's conventions.

THE SCARLET LETTER

The Scarlet Letter was the first major work in which Hawthorne *did* scrutinize the social environment of men's and women's relationship as much as the relationships themselves.¹¹ The Puritan community, both as the environment of Hester Prynne's story and as the forerunner of subsequent American communities (see note 3), is vividly portrayed, not only as the community in which the public realm practically chases out the private, but where men rule completely and visibly.¹² It is a community that provides neither voice nor refuge to women. The abolition of public and private is tantamount to the eradication of gender distinction, the attempt to conventionalize the heart.

There are four major female characters or sets of characters, representing different degrees of the "conventionalized heart": Hester Prynne, Pearl Prynne, Mistress Hibbins and the Puritan Women, primarily portrayed in the beginning of the novel, but also briefly at its end. There is a spectrum among them, moving from those women who stand firmly within the circle of society—of the male society of the Puritan fathers—to those who stand most firmly outside of it, nay, actively seek to destroy it. The Puritan women in the crowd of spectators watching Hester's humiliation at the beginning of the novel are distinguished from the men on the platform meting out the punishment only in the severity with which they would punish Hester. Devoid of pity or compassion, they fault the men for being too merciful; they would inflict either branding or death. Save for the young woman clutching her child who senses Hester's pain (and who subsequently dies), there is no tenderness among them, no identification with the movements of the heart.¹³ They are women who have been fully "socialized," as we would say, fully integrated into the male community around them; Hawthorne's implication is that they are fully "masculinized." At the other end of the spectrum is Mistress Hibbins, the unmarried sister of Governor Bellingham, who frolics in the forest as a self-proclaimed witch, expressly devoted to the worship of the Devil. Under the protection of her sororal relationship to the community's leader, she (almost) openly rebels against its law and denies its beliefs. Close to the Puritan women at the beginning of the novel are the women at the end, still firmly within the law and power of the community, yet forced to seek out Hester's consolation and advice (resituated in her cottage at the edge of the Puritan settlement for the remaining years of her life), "demanding why they were so wretched, and what the remedy!" (p. 240). There is no institution, no person, clearly within the fabric of Puritan life that

can satisfy the ache of their feminine hearts. Hester, ironically, has almost become a part of the Puritan community, performing a function which perhaps prevents more women from joining Mistress Hibbins in the forest. In the middle of the spectrum are Hester and Pearl. Hester, at the beginning of the novel, is inside the community but is pushed outside of it, and eventually chooses to remain on its periphery. Pearl is born out of it (actually born within its prison, then raised at the edge of the forest), then through the novel moves into it. Hester, Dimmesdale and she stand as a complete family in the middle of town, first at night in the middle of the narrative, then eventually in daylight at its end. Although she eventually finds her life in Europe, she lives out her life conventionally and happily as a wife—presumably the happy balance between living within the law and outside of it.

The two most critical “marriages” are between Hester and Roger Chillingworth and Hester and Arthur Dimmesdale. The marriage between Hester and Chillingworth is the “unnatural” marriage sanctioned by law and convention; the “marriage” between Hester and Dimmesdale is the “natural” marriage unsanctioned by law and convention. The presence of passion is what determines the “naturalness” of the relationship. Rather, one should say that the proper balance of friendship and passion is the most important factor in a marriage’s naturalness, at least as Hawthorne suggests in *The Scarlet Letter*. What existed between Hester and Chillingworth was an unnatural mixture of convenience, admiration and friendship (pp. 119, 127–28, 186–88). Chillingworth, though, had expended most of his passion on his studies all his life, and only in his old age had he finally desired an insulation against his own loneliness; perhaps, too, a bit of envy at the happiness had by other men had overcome him. He had evidently been attracted to Hester because of her youth, her beauty and her intellectual gifts and character.¹⁴

But why did Hester marry Chillingworth? Perhaps with her speculative bent (intensified, but not generated by the experience with the scarlet letter) and her talents, she saw the possibility of enlarging her world beyond the small English village where she was raised, or perhaps she saw the possibility of marital friendship with Chillingworth, whom she viewed as scholarly, kind and just. At any rate, both of them seem to admit that the marriage was without love, without passion—perhaps even without consummation. Chillingworth admits to having wronged Hester in marrying her. Moreover, he intensifies the unnaturalness by sending her on to America from the European city where they had been living. Without financial pressure, without religious zeal, without any of the contemporary reasons why people wanted to begin their lives anew in America, Chillingworth in effect annulled their marriage. Hawthorne does not specify his motives; one can only speculate as to his reasons: Did he fear the temptation to Hester of living in an open city with too many opportunities to obtain the objects of passion that he was unwilling to satisfy, and therefore hope to place her in the relative (and ostensible) austerity of the American

Puritan community? Did he weary of the necessity of providing her marital companionship, her very youth and passionate character serving as a constant reminder of his inability or unwillingness to be her husband? At any rate, although Hester does consider her relationship with Dimmesdale to have wronged Chillingworth, she does not consider it to be a sin.¹⁵ Perhaps she does not consider her adultery a sin because she does not consider her prior marriage to Chillingworth to have been a genuine marriage.

Leading a celibate life, immersed in a science intended to expand his own reputation and power in the world, even if initially undertaken partially for the benefit of humanity (p. 186), has misshapen Chillingworth's soul as much as his body was misshapen. On discovering Hester's ignominy, he desires neither to pardon nor to step forward to claim his rightful participation in her shame. To acknowledge his marriage might embarrass him as much as it would deprive him of the opportunity of revenge; he is as dependent upon public opinion and approbation as Dimmesdale. And, after seven years of living for the sole purpose of avenging himself, he has completely fallen out of the human sphere; he has become a "fiend," a devil. His former life set him up for the deformity of his latter life. Chillingworth essentially sets himself up as G—d, as the Avenger/Searcher of hearts which the Puritans hold G—d to be and as their community tries to be. Like them, he recognizes no sanctity to the heart, no rightful sphere of privacy, and therefore, no limit to his power. But, ironically, believing himself to be beyond the tyranny of passion, he turns out to be no god but a devil, and ends up the misshapen victim of his own passions.

Dimmesdale's progressive madness and loss of vitality also stem from his inability to find rootedness in feminine domesticity or sympathy, driving him tragically and unsuccessfully to exhaust his identity solely in his public role as preacher. Ironically, his "marriage" to Hester derives from the same source as Chillingworth's avoiding of natural marriage: leading one's life as if the private and the feminine were negligible. Like Chillingworth, he had devoted his life to his studies and to his public mission, even coming to the Puritan community unwed. When he met Hester, the potential joy of experiencing natural love and passion—possessing its own "consecration"—snapped the restraints of his attachment to the law and the faith that grounded his public identity. Because he has no real private identity to rely upon, unlike Hester, to whom nature had granted the natural effects of their passionate union, Dimmesdale can never publicly confess his sin. In Hester's punishment he sees that the Puritan community around him has no tolerance for lapses in the private realm (seeing it only as the realm of sin), and therefore no forgiveness. The only way that he can remain a Puritan in the Puritan community, by confessing, would destroy his status as a Puritan. As a result, the acclamation of the public—once a source of sweetness and strength—becomes increasingly poisonous as it forces him to face his hypocrisy. Only in the forest with Hester, outside the eyes of his community, and in death on the public scaffold, is he capable of experiencing peace.

Persecuted for claiming the rights of womanhood in the face of a convention which has no opening for womanhood, Hester is subordinate without being subordinated, resistant without being rebellious. As opposed to Mistress Hibbins, who reduces her nonconventional womanhood to willful passion by expressing it in acts of animality in the forest, Hester transforms an act of passion into devotional love through motherhood, and still does so within the law; she does, after all, raise Pearl to be a pious Christian. In doing so, she lays the foundation for Pearl's resumption of normal life within a marriage that combines natural passion, affection and conventional legitimacy, as Hawthorne's reported rumors about her subsequent life testify at the end of the novel. It is true that Pearl's redemption cannot occur until her father demonstrates his private love for her by acknowledging their natural relationship in public, but even this could not happen without Hester's willingness to live partially within the law that condemned her, on the fringes of the community that scorned her.

But what enables Hester to survive, to transform the opprobrium of the community into admiration, and even to effect the internal change from Adulteress to Able to Angel is not only her defiant proclamation of her motherhood to the Puritan community, but primarily her art. First, her art generates her economic self-sufficiency. Without a husband to support her, Hester, burdened with a child, would have to fall upon public charity—an unlikelihood given her public stigma.¹⁶ Second, her art does create a public identity that carries her beyond her definition as “woman” as the being who only fills out the private life of a man. Although the male leaders in the Puritan community attempt to foster her public identity solely on the basis of their stigmatizing her adultery as a sin, her art eventually gives her mastery over the meaning of the symbol. Originally this is evident in her embroidering the letter with a trim of gold, but over the years, the gold trim proves to be prophetic. Even the final transformation of the letter that Hester achieves, from Adulteress to Angel, is effected primarily through her art, from her employment of it for charitable purposes.¹⁷ Without her assumption of at least some of the public dimensions of identity that would normally be reserved for a man, in the Puritan community and in Hawthorne's own world, the essential drama of the novel could not have occurred.

What places the above passages regarding Hester's hopes for the creation of a world in which women have a “fair and suitable position” at the center of *The Scarlet Letter* as opposed to the periphery is the scarlet letter itself. As already mentioned, the “A” comes to have multiple meanings in Hester's lifetime and through her actions. But there is one final meaning to the letter beyond what Hester can attribute to it, for the world in which she lives is not ready for it, and the sorrow of her own life rendered her unable to perform it in her time: Apostle. Only Hawthorne can invest the letter with its final and most important mission, one that begins as he first places the faded “A” that he has discovered in the Custom House against his own breast and feels its searing, mystical power. In revealing through his writer's art the surviving “history” of the Puri-

tans' persecution of this woman, woven together with the private sufferings of her heart *and* the private speculations of her mind, Hawthorne is not only reporting her sorrows, but completing her triumph.

THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne presents the story of two ancient families whose fates have been intertwined by an injustice and a curse. The aristocratic Colonel Pyncheon in colonial times had desired the land of the insignificant plebeian Matthew Maule. Arranging by deceit and manipulation of the law to have the latter executed as a witch, Colonel Pyncheon managed to acquire his land. But as the hapless Maule was dying on the scaffold he uttered the prophecy: "G—d will give him blood to drink!" After seizing Maule's property, Pyncheon built his spacious seven-gabled mansion on the spot, ironically designed by Maule's architect son, Thomas. Throughout the centuries, both families nursed their respective animosities. In Hawthorne's time, the Pyncheon family has all but dwindled into nonexistence. The last inhabitant of the ancient mansion is Hepzibah Pyncheon, an elderly spinster finally forced because of poverty to support herself by opening a penny-shop in the mansion. Although the major theme in the novel is the decay of an aristocratic family against the background of the growth of America's commercial democracy, the place of women and their relationship with men are also examined.

The major contrast in the novel with respect to women is between Hepzibah and Phoebe Pyncheon, the young cousin from the country who comes to live with Hepzibah and her enfeebled brother, Clifford. In Hepzibah, Hawthorne has conflated his criticism of aristocracy and of an exaggerated version of the traditional woman's role. Hepzibah has barely gone out of her house for most of her life. Finally, after "sixty years of idleness," she must do what all natural beings must do: make her way in the world—"earn her own bread or starve"—but out of shame and imbecility can hardly bring herself to do it. "It was the final throe of what called itself old gentility. A lady—who had fed herself from childhood with the shadowy food of aristocratic reminiscences, and whose religion it was that a lady's hand soils itself doing aught for bread—this born lady, after sixty years of narrowing means, is fain to step down from her pedestal of imaginary rank" (pp. 265–67). As narrator, Hawthorne's voice is that of the third-person observer. He is speaking as an American to an American audience ("In this republican country, amid the fluctuating waves of our social life . . ." [ibid.]). Unlike *The Blithedale Romance*, where his distance from the narrator is expressed through palpable irony, here it is plausible to conclude that the contemporary American stance of the narrator is Hawthorne's, and that the mixture of sympathetic pity and contemptuous laughter is his own judgment. Hepzibah's plight is not just the result of an elderly person caught in a way of

life superseded by changing times. It rests upon illusory premises; it is a *false* way of life. The American environment that has enveloped her and compelled her to change is better, truer, more *natural*. The falseness is not only the aristocratic assumption of unequal ranks and congenital privilege, it is also a femininity defined as passive dependence.

Phoebe, on the other hand, is an example of “the true New England woman,” possessing a “genial activity”—“which impelled her forth, as might be said, to seek her fortune, but with a self-respecting purpose to confer as much benefit as she could anywise receive” (p. 287). Her character is not so much the result of being overly shaped by a set of conventions as being raised in a society where natural femininity grows relatively unobstructed. In response to Hepzibah’s comment that Phoebe is not a lady in the aristocratic sense, Hawthorne the narrator responds that the question “could hardly have come up for judgment at all in any fair and healthy mind.” She not only possesses the natural prettiness and grace of a bird, but the sweet energy of sunshine. Hawthorne adds:

Instead of discussing her claim to rank among ladies, it would be preferable to regard Phoebe as the example of feminine grace and availability combined, in a state of society, if there were any such, where ladies did not exist. There it should be woman’s office to 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. (P. 291)

The energetic practicality at the core of Phoebe’s character comprises domesticity, but is not limited to it. She has been saleswoman and schoolmistress and has acquired the knack of dealing with others in the wider world of human affairs, as shown by her easy infusion of profitability into Hepzibah’s pennyshop. Yet, she still retains an intimate connection with nature and natural beauty. Her ability to bring the mansion’s garden and its creatures into harmonious fruitfulness culminates in her gift with flowers, which Hawthorne identifies as a feminine trait:

This affection and sympathy for flowers is almost exclusively a woman’s trait. Men, if endowed with it by nature, soon lose, forget and learn to despise it, in their contact with coarser things than flowers. (P. 331)

Both Phoebe and Hepzibah, representing “a fair parallel between new Plebeianism and old Gentility” (p. 291), are the two possible contemporary versions in Hawthorne’s America of an earlier Pyncheon woman, Alice Pyncheon, who had died tragically and unjustly in her youth, and whose ghost is believed yet to haunt the mansion. Hawthorne employs Alice Pyncheon’s story to link several critical themes in the story, in particular aristocracy and gender, and to tie the breach between the previous Pyncheons and Maules with the contemporary

reconciliation between the two families in Phoebe and Holgrave's relationship. Alice Pyncheon had been brought under the fatal spell of an earlier Maule's mesmeric ability, who, in collusion with the woman's father, was attempting to use her as a medium to discover the secret of the Pyncheon family's lost claim to vast wealth in property. Maule had completely subverted her will and was capable of ordering her to do anything, causing her the loss of her dignity. On his wedding night, he forced Alice to attend his bride. Because of the storm in which she was forced to walk, she became ill and died.

In the novel, this tale is written by Holgrave, the descendant of the Maule family who now resides as a boarder in the house. It is a story of revenge wreaked by a resentful commoner upon a "haughty" aristocrat, but also of a man wielding total power over a woman.¹⁸ Not only is the tension between the social classes expressed in the story overcome by Holgrave's eventual marriage to Phoebe, but a new understanding of men's and women's relationship emerges from the occasion of the story's recital in the novel. As Holgrave is reading the story to Phoebe, he notices that she begins to nod as in a trance. The events parallel the story; once again, a male Maule is about to bring a female Pyncheon under his power. But, at the last minute, he holds back:

To a disposition like Holgrave's, at once speculative and active, there is no temptation so great as the opportunity of acquiring empire over the human spirit; nor any idea more seductive to a young man than to become the arbiter of a young girl's destiny. Let us allow him integrity, also, forever after to be confided in; since he forbade himself to twine that one link more which might have rendered his spell over Phoebe indissoluble.¹⁹

The same kind of democratic culture which has allowed Phoebe's father to marry a "commoner," that will allow Phoebe to marry Holgrave and end the centuries of injustice and recrimination born of the falseness of aristocracy, will also allow the "new truth" in the relations between men and women wished for by the women in Hester Prynne's day to emerge. Holgrave, the frank and open experimenter with different kinds of lives and the product of that democratic culture, is literally the new man, who does not desire to dominate or own women, but to share a life in friendship with them. His love for Phoebe emerges out of his respect for her individuality—i.e., the same thing that he prizes in himself.²⁰

The other two male characters in the book are examples of deformed and deficient masculinity. Clifford, Hepzibah's brother who had been imprisoned falsely—by the manipulation of their cousin Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon—for the murder of his uncle, has recently been freed by the same manipulation.²¹ Clifford's congenital "love of beauty" borders on effeminacy and renders him almost incapable of moving in the world. After decades of imprisonment he has become feeble and infantile. Phoebe's influence, however, gradually begins to restore him to health. After the crisis of Judge Pyncheon's attempted further

exploitation of Clifford, with the hereditary apoplectic death ("Maule's Curse") preventing the Judge from fulfilling his plans, Clifford achieves an almost complete recovery.

Jaffrey Pyncheon, the grasping and insensitive judge who would be governor is the man who is contemptuous of women and knows nothing of the sympathies of the heart nor, therefore, any limits on his own ambitions. Not only does Hawthorne employ him to demonstrate the distortion of an exaggerated masculine character, but also the potential falseness of the public world of politics, business and reputation in general. Judge Pyncheon is at the zenith of his public career, the object of wide admiration and respect. Yet, Hawthorne adds these reservations:

So also, as regards the Judge Pyncheon of to-day, neither clergyman, nor legal critic, nor inscriber of tombstones, nor historian of general or local politics, would venture a word against this eminent person's sincerity as a Christian, or respectability as a man, or integrity as a judge, or courage and faithfulness as the often-tried representative of his political party. But besides these cold, formal, and empty words of the chisel that inscribes, the voice that speaks, and the pen that writes, for the public eye and for the distant time,—and which inevitably lose much of their truth and freedom by the fatal consciousness of so doing,—there were traditions about the ancestor, and private diurnal gossip about the Judge, remarkably accordant in their testimony. It is often instructive to take the woman's, the private and domestic, view of a public man.... (P. 316)

That the outer man and inner man can diverge is a lesson that Arthur Dimmesdale's suffering has already taught, but Hawthorne has another insight in mind here. Dimmesdale's wretchedness was caused by an unnaturally stern public realm that caused him to despise what was naturally good in himself, the attempt to cultivate a rich inner life of private connectedness with a woman. The Judge, in contrast, has allowed his passionate life to wrap itself solely around the pursuit of public goods in neglect of his inner life; he is the quintessentially public man. He suffers no inner torment, only moral deformation and the loss of a sympathetic conscience. Hawthorne's warning is not directed against the pursuit of the external goods of the wider world per se, but that those goods pose a danger. The affairs of the public world—in any society—will enlarge and expand the abilities, but they possess an inherent and unavoidable tendency to shape the character toward the pursuit of honor. Wrapped up in the pursuit of externalities, a man—or woman—can allow the gulf between the public image and private self to overwhelm his or her integrity. In Hawthorne's understanding, this is a particularly feminine insight, but not only because women in his day found their completion particularly in the private realm and would therefore see what the wider world does not. Women, because of their natural involvement with nurturing and the physical and emotional realities of motherhood, live first in the internal emotional life and move outward into the world. They

are the first to see—and to suffer—from the deformation of heart. An individual without a rich, inner, private life can be neither truly happy nor just; a society which discounts or devalues that realm can also be neither happy nor just.²²

Nevertheless, *The House of the Seven Gables* is an optimistic book, even more than *Fanshawe*, whose hero, after all, dies prematurely. As opposed to the grimness and suffering of *The Scarlet Letter*, the personal failures and bitter irony of *The Blithedale Romance*, and the dark undercurrents of *The Marble Faun*, in the story of the Pyncheons and the Maules Hawthorne suggests that the past can be overcome, even if not completely erased. Moreover, as a picture of America, it portrays a society far from perfect but one pervaded by genuine improvement. And, as an image of the place of women in the world, the novel implies that the question that Hester had asked—whether life was worthwhile for even the happiest of women—can be answered at least leaning to the affirmative. While the world portrayed in the narrative may not yet be ripe fully for the “new truth” that Hester and her contemporaries longed for, the mutual happiness of men and women does appear a little surer.

THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE

In *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne places the private affairs of his main characters against the most explicit attempt to create the new world dreamed by Hester (regardless of whether it would actually be the world as she would dream it). Here, Hawthorne shows men and women who really take seriously Hester’s desperate speculation: “the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew.”²³ Blithedale is the pure community purged of all the tensions in traditional society, even in Hawthorne’s America (Zuckert, pp. 71–75). The competition in commercial society is replaced by common ownership and harmony, rank is abolished, and finally, the erotic war between the sexes laced with male domination and exploitation of the female by the male is replaced with a new friendship based on equality and mutual respect.²⁴ The Community, however, does not endure; neither does it provide the vehicle for the novel’s main characters to find their happiness.

The novel poses two female characters against each other: Zenobia, the proud and dramatic feminist, known only in the novel by her public pseudonym; and Priscilla, Zenobia’s half-sister, submissive, passive and meek. Although both women present strikingly attractive aspects of femininity, Hawthorne draws both of them as too flawed to be emulated. The most striking aspect of Zenobia’s presentation of self—in addition to her abundant natural beauty and force of character—is her “flower.” No matter what the weather or season, Zenobia always has a ravishingly beautiful flower in her hair, the result of greenhouse cultivation (adding to its inordinate expense).²⁵ Zenobia’s *rhetor-*

ric of self-presentation, the foundation of her public persona, exalts the full emancipation of women into society, the breaking down of "artificial" distinctions between the sexes. But as she moves through the world, she belies an unwillingness to abandon the peculiar hallmarks of femininity. She is tragically torn because she is psychologically unprepared to do what her intellectual program of emancipation calls for. Because she is such a vital example of natural femininity, she stands in contrast to the tepid social life of the Blithedale Community and, in fact, to the image of the masculinized female which she advocates. Yet, as the novel unfolds, her course in the world increasingly comes to embody the principles of the deformed masculinity portrayed by Butler, Chillingworth, Jaffrey Pyncheon and, in *The Blithedale Romance*, Hollingsworth. She eventually becomes a coconspirator with Westervelt to exploit Priscilla in order to remove her from Blithedale so that she can have Hollingsworth for herself. When Hollingsworth abandons her for Priscilla, Zenobia has nothing to live for. Having abandoned her capacity for moral sympathy, she receives none either (although the potential extender of the sympathy that may have saved her life is the problematic narrator, Coverdale), and destroys herself—in reality, the physical consummation of her precedent spiritual self-destruction.

Priscilla, the passive feminine pawn in the novel, has a public persona, too: the "Veiled Lady" who becomes a profitable commodity under Professor Westervelt's professional mesmerism. So distant from the active currents of the world is she, as a result of the truncated upbringing of her failed father, that she "blooms" in the fairyland environment of Blithedale. It is her lack of a substantial character that renders her perfect for Westervelt's hypnotism; she has neither a genuine "inner life" nor an "outer life." Although it would appear that she is a successful character by the end of *The Blithedale Romance* (Of the four major characters, she is the only one who could be considered "happy"; Zenobia is dead, Hollingsworth is shattered, and Coverdale wallows in self-contemned mediocrity.), she is in reality a failure, too. She spends her life drifting like a ghost with the psychologically emasculated Hollingsworth—in effect, his nurse for life.

Coverdale and Hollingsworth are both examples of deficient and deformed masculinity. Coverdale, the poet-narrator whom Hawthorne mocks as well as sympathizes with, is a self-described unhappy bachelor. Weary of the gentle and self-indulgent sterility of his life that no longer inspires poetry, he goes to Blithedale hoping to reconnect with the natural springs of inspiration. But perhaps the Community appeals to him for other reasons. His bachelorhood is the direct result of his preference for "observing" life rather than living it, of watching others thrash out their loves rather than loving. He appears incapable of loving any particular human being, of extending himself beyond himself and bonding externally to a woman. Blithedale is the secular monastery where traditional pairing will either be superseded by brotherly friendship or lighter and more transient versions of marriage. Perhaps he was attracted to a human com-

munity where pairing would no longer be necessary, where the private revelations of the heart would not have to occur, and where he would not have to support a family. Like Zenobia, he is an advocate of the feminism of the day, which provides the basis of the relations between the sexes at Blithedale (pp. 509–11).

Hollingsworth, the passionate reformer who longs to replace conventional prisons with rehabilitation centers, appears to possess great qualities of compassion and heart, but these eventually reveal themselves to be false. He is fanatically devoted to his public program, and extends friendship only to those capable of agreeing with his ideas or participating in his scheme. Moreover, he is willing to resort to deception (his intention is to subvert the Blithedale Community by turning the farm into a penal experiment) and raw exploitation. Interested in Zenobia only for the wealth that she could potentially devote to his plans, he abandons her for Priscilla when their father Moodie transfers Zenobia's inherited wealth to the latter. His "philanthropy" is all "self," as Zenobia accuses him.²⁶ For a man who seeks to reform the deformed heart of the criminal, he shows himself to possess a criminal heart, revealed in Zenobia's suicide. Like Dimmesdale, he cannot forgive himself for the discrepancy between his public mission and his private hypocrisy. He spends the rest of his life in broken-down self-pity, supported financially by Priscilla's money and emotionally by her ministrations.

The Blithedale Romance presents a failed community that seeks to reform the relations between the sexes by ignoring their differences and the passions that bind them (Zuckert, pp. 73–75, 81–83). Like the Puritan community that preceded it, but without the spiritual discipline and abstemiousness of the former, there is no private realm or independent sanctity of the heart. Love is replaced with dalliance, and, as a result, the main characters possess no moral integrity. Unlike Holgrave in *The House of the Seven Gables*, who does possess such integrity, they cannot summon the respect for each other to refrain from exploiting each other. In place of moral integrity the Community encourages or demands only "niceness."

Moreover, the main characters are all failures as men and women. Zenobia and Priscilla, especially, present themselves as two extremes of potential feminine response to the modern world, neither of which Hawthorne advocates. Zenobia completely embraces the public world of masculine values; Priscilla retreats into an unworldly and otherworldly femininity serving only the purposes of men. Of course, both of these possibilities are cast against the example of the man in *The Blithedale Romance* whom Hawthorne uses to characterize the spirit of the Blithedale Community and the probable character of the emerging modern world: Professor Westervelt. Although the Professor espouses the amiable blend of spiritualism/materialism of the Community, and speaks of "a new era that was dawning upon the world; an era that would link soul to soul, and the present life to what we call futurity, with a closeness that should finally

convert both worlds into one great, mutually conscious brotherhood" (p. 557), he is willing to exercise that complete mesmeric domination of a woman's spirit that Holgrave is not.

THE MARBLE FAUN

" . . . The world is sadder now!" exclaims the expatriate American sculptor Kenyon in Hawthorne's last and sprawling novel, *The Marble Faun*. Touched by the greater materialism and sobriety of the world, he fears that the aggregate capacity of humans to enjoy themselves may be diminishing.²⁷ *The Marble Faun* is Hawthorne's attempt to lay a rather full menu of issues before his American public: the nature of guilt and redemption, the power of religion and the relative merits of Catholicism and Protestantism, the emergence of humanity up from original nature with the attendant liabilities and benefits of that transformation, and, not least, the necessity of art to help preserve the spontaneity and sanctity of the heart in an age rendered increasingly barren by material and social progress. Laced with all of these concerns is the issue of women and men. *The Marble Faun* is the story of two couples, beginning as friends. Three of them (Kenyon, Hilda, Miriam) are artists; one is a young, innocent, handsome Italian count attracted to Miriam, Donatello. Kenyon and Hilda eventually marry; Miriam and Donatello spend their lives in penitence for a murder which they jointly commit.

The drama of these intertwined lives is set in a setting within a setting. The action of *The Marble Faun* takes place in mid-nineteenth-century Rome, a bizarre mixture of contemporary liveliness and poverty and ancient ruins and art, corrupt, vibrant, traditional, autocratic and dominated by the Church. Yet, in the midst of this most un-American of environments is an international community of predominantly American artists, floating in and around the city. The theme of this community is the friendly professionalism of the artists. It is a community to which men and women are equally welcome and in which both sexes participate. It is, in other words, a form of the Blithedale Community, but without the latter's urgent reformist impulses. Yet the genial friendship of this community also proves insufficient to satisfy the longings or spiritual needs of the main characters.

The two main female characters, Hilda and Miriam, represent two different versions of womanhood in the world, and, indeed, two different versions of the confrontation of good and evil in all of us. Hilda is a virgin, both actually and spiritually. She is a true New England Protestant Puritan, who believes that we can (and must) control our contact with evil in the world, or else become sullied and lose our purity—our human goodness. She is the greatest "copyist" in the artistic community; because of her ability to enter totally into the imagination and emotional world of the master painters of the great art, she can

imitate them perfectly. Able to summon great friendship, she is incapable of love (pp. 659–60). Yet, when faced with her own spiritual crisis, her witnessing of Miriam and Donatello's murder of Miriam's persecutor, she discovers that her Protestant upbringing, her self-contained relationship with G——d, can give her no peace or consolation. Only after availing herself of one of the most reviled (from the standpoint of Protestantism) institutions of Catholicism—the confessional—is she capable of resuming her artistic and emotional life in the world. The reliance on another human being's sympathetic hearing, and sharing of the burden of human guilt, proves to be the only way to experience love, which, it turns out, is what she needed more than anything (pp. 794–800).

Miriam Schaefer is a painter of vague and unspecified international origin, part Jewish, Catholic, English, Italian, aristocratic, plebeian. Tormented by the unresolved guilt of a past crime, threatened by a shadowy figure who could expose her and ruin her, she craves the sympathy of her friends, but can never overcome the barrier of friendship to confess her crime to them and win their understanding. On the one hand, because of her friendship with them, she wishes to unburden herself of her guilt with them; on the other hand, because she fears that the degree and kind of the guilt would destroy the same friendship, she refrains. Only when she implicates Donatello, with whom she had only previously dallied on the basis of his infatuation with her, in an even worse crime, does their shared guilt and penitence build a bridge between her and another human. Hawthorne has her say to Kenyon prior to the occurrence of the murder:

“It is a mistaken idea, which men generally entertain, that nature has made women especially prone to throw their whole being into what is technically called love. We have, to say the least, no more necessity for it than yourselves; only we have nothing else to do with our hearts. When women have other objects in life, they are not apt to fall in love. I can think of many women distinguished in art, literature, and science,—and multitudes whose hearts and minds find good employment in less ostentatious ways,—who lead high, lonely lives and are conscious of no sacrifice so far as your sex is concerned.” (P. 659)

What Miriam comes to discover is that her sex desperately needs the support and understanding of men. The true love that eventually grows between Donatello and her, even though by the end of the novel unfulfilled in marriage, releases her from her dreadful insularity, which her art never truly can. The virginal self-containment of Hilda and Miriam's attempt to solve the struggles of the burdened heart give way to a more complex but deepened involvement in the stream of human life through sharing their lives in serious love with a man. Although Hawthorne uses two female characters to bring this lesson forward, the men in the novel demonstrate the need for sexual love as a form of redemption, too. Once Donatello loses his boyish innocence in the commission of the

crime, which opens up the darker but more adult world of guilt and moral responsibility, he can only escape from self-pitying torture by sharing his guilt with Miriam. Kenyon, the sculptor, begins to lose his ability to create art until united in marriage with Hilda.

In *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne presents both men and women who follow a profession that comes as close, perhaps, as a profession can to a spiritual calling. He implies that art has two critical functions, personal and social. For the artist, art gives vent to passions, both joys and agonies, of the heart, and therefore generates both relief and redemptive awareness. And, in the coming "sadder" ages of technological, masculinized, sterility, art may play the crucial function of expressing and preserving the experience of the sentimental, the feminine and the private. In the story, both genders express themselves successfully in this realm, but they discover that art finally cannot completely fulfill the passionate and emotional needs of the heart. Both men and women, Hawthorne suggests, must find a balance between worldly identity and familial love. The pleasures of worldly achievement (even if graced with high social purpose), reputation and friendship are as real to women as to men, just as the need for love and connectedness are as real to men as to women, although Hawthorne implies that there are differences of emphasis in either realm for both genders. Even the artist, however, must finally experience reality in the private realm in order to express it convincingly to the public. The implied conclusion of the novel would seem to embrace this idea: Kenyon and Hilda will return to their native America and resume their lives as married artists, contributing to the unfolding of the common life of the republic of the future.

CONCLUSION

Hawthorne's teaching about the proper ordering of the relations between men and women, like his teaching about the proper character of the political world of which sexual relations are a part, is complex and sketchy. He does not lay a political program before us. His direct concern is not, strictly speaking, the institutional order that governs society, nor even the proper laws that might shape the realm of sexual relations more justly, although he does speak to these. With respect to the "political" and "institutional" question, Hawthorne seems to have settled on the imperfect institutions of the commercial republic. Close enough to nature to secure that measure of equality freed from conventional aberrations, yet freed from the reformists' desire to overcome *all* tensions in society, the commercial republic is at least amenable initially to the reform of the private realm through a reformed attitude of the heart. Moreover, its institutions are flexible enough to accommodate the entry of women into them as actors. Hawthorne would temper and moderate the reformist urge, rather than snuff it out. That urge has its dangers, as portrayed in his tale of the first

American community and parodied in his sketch of an attempted contemporary American community, one in which he himself had participated.²⁸ In this respect, Hawthorne was particularly keen-eyed to see that the reforming urge would have a peculiarly emphatic impact upon the relations between the sexes, in fact, that this issue would be the entry point for many of the reformist urges into American life.

His stance is essentially Tocquevillian. Not only is his concern with “mores” properly speaking, but with respect to the overall construction of society and the particular question of women, his teaching approximates that of Tocqueville’s.²⁹ In perceiving that the coming centuries might produce a masculinized world combining Roger Chillingworth’s proud and relentlessly inquisitive science with Hollingsworth’s ambitious and monomaniacally moral reformism, all governed by Professor Westervelts—and Zenobias?—spouting spirituality to justify their tender domination, he, too, hoped to preserve the integrity of the private, the sentimental, the feminine.

If Hawthorne were to be located on a spectrum of thought today, he would probably fall into the camp of feminists loosely designated as “difference” feminists, as opposed to “sameness” feminists. Contemporary feminism, at least the dominant strain from the early sixties, tends to resolve all questions of gender relations into ones of power and individual freedom: i.e. what kind of social arrangements can guarantee that no one man has more power than any particular woman, or that men have collectively no greater power over women than women have over men. Hence, the primary theme of “reform” of feminism has been the levelling of power in the name of equal individual liberty. Hawthorne’s art presents a picture of Nature which is sympathetic to this aim, as, indeed, it is the founding image of Nature undergirding the American regime. Yet his picture of Nature suggests that Nature lays a far more complicated set of issues in front of us than just the maximization of our individual liberty. The terrifyingly complex passions for love, sympathy and connectedness are as much a part of us as our longing to be free. And it is the female as natural creature, in addition to whatever focus that nonperverted convention gives to her character, that particularly bears these concerns of Nature into human life.

Hawthorne could view with approbation whatever reformation of politics and economy is necessary for women to become actors in the wider currents of human life beyond the domestic realm. He would consider this both good for society and also naturally just, for they would assist in the developing of women’s powers of intellect and reserves of independence and action. But because Hawthorne would not agree with Mary Wollstonecraft or Betty Friedan that the domestic realm is in itself “the more specious slavery which chains the very soul of women”³⁰ or “the comfortable concentration camp” that compels women to forfeit their selves,³¹ he could not advocate women losing their stronger connection to that realm and to the sanctity of the private heart. As we have

seen, he is too suspicious of the public realm of career and statesmanship as exhaustive foundations for human identity and happiness. So, the outlines of the "new truth" suggest a society in which women are more involved in the public realm and more independent in the private without the loss of the private or the evaporation of women's "ethereal natures." That is the task; Can it be done? And what must be done politically and juristically to achieve it? We ourselves are still struggling with this question after a century of suffrage and a generation of the attempted androgynizing of the workplace. Hawthorne himself does not answer these questions, other than hinting at potential resolutions in his characters as models. But what he does add is this: whatever political, legalistic or economic truth we attain or embody, it must first be grounded in the psychological truths of our natures.³²

If we were to transform this question into the question of which of Hawthorne's female characters he would wish to stand as an example to contemporary women, we would have to say that Zenobia, complex and intriguing as she is, and as modern and contemporary as she strikes us, is not Hawthorne's Apostle for the women of today. Zenobia's fate is truly tragic, brought on by a self-consuming and self-destroying wish to be included in the world on terms that deny her identity as a woman. That Apostle is, rather, Hester Prynne, even more than the indefatigable Phoebe or the reflective Hilda. Defeated as she is, she is never broken. Discovering indomitable wellsprings of strength in her heart's attachment to her child, she proudly resists and yet teaches the rulers and inhabitants of her sterile society. In redeeming the pledge which his art offers to the lonely woman who could not be the Apostle to the world around her, Hawthorne allows Hester to become the prophetess for the coming ages: the mother whose embrace of motherhood enabled her to endure everything with which a man's world could burden her.

NOTES

1. "Earth's Holocaust," from *Mosses from an Old Manse*, in *The Complete Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Garden City: Hanover House, 1959), p. 404.

2. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 182. All quotations from Hawthorne's novels are from *The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, edited by Norman Holmes Pearson (New York: The Modern Library, 1937).

3. *The Scarlet Letter* as a whole, including "The Custom House" introduction, contrasts three different "Americas" with one another: the Puritan origins, in which the public realm has all but eclipsed the private realm with the (attempted) triumph of the common and the spiritual over the individual and the bodily; the present Salem, in which the public realm has all but disappeared as the common has come to serve private interest as demonstrated by the spoils system and the animality of the occupants of the Custom House; and the description of the Salem of the Revolutionary period, a "mean" between public and private goods, alive with a balance of commercial energy and patriotic devotion.

4. Nina Baym, "Thwarted Nature: Nathaniel Hawthorne as Feminist," in *American Novelists Revisited: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982), p. 62. Baym also views "the

question of women" as central in Hawthorne's work, although primarily from his own attempts to work through his own confusion and guilt. Because Hawthorne had artistic sensitivities that elevated his awareness above men of his time, yet portrayed women as victimized according to the reality of the times (perhaps even pandering to the desires of his male readers), he, his characters and his readers are "obsessed by their fantasies of women, controlled by them (and, as controllers of women, they engulf women in their fantasies as well)." But see also her very fine, somewhat more sober and straightforward account of women in his whole literary career, which argues for his "feminist" sympathies: *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976). *Aesthetic Headaches: Women and a Masculine Poetics in Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne*, by Leland S. Person, Jr. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), likewise argues the centrality of the question of gender in Hawthorne's works. Person argues that, although Hawthorne's (and Poe's and Melville's) writing occasionally suffers from "phallogocentric" and "narcissistic" tendencies, Hawthorne genuinely tried to incorporate a feminine perspective into his "masculine poetics" (pp. 4–7). Yet Person suggests that Hawthorne's interest is primarily psychological or aesthetic, whereby women in his fiction are employed to work out his own internal struggles or to embody the artistic tensions between objectification and subjective experience: "None of these three [including Hawthorne] writers was very interested in examining the social and political status of women." I would argue that Hawthorne is more self-aware—of his own internal reality, of the psychology of his readers and certainly aware of the profound political and social issues which contain and shape the problem of gender—than these accounts give him credit for. Moreover, as Catherine Zuckert has demonstrated, the foundations and configuration of politics are central for Hawthorne (see n. 5 below), a conclusion that more satisfyingly explains his preoccupation with gender. Freed from the conceptual and jargonistic excesses of "feminist" criticism, however, the above accounts often provide valuable insight into Hawthorne's overall intentions and many aspects of the particular works.

5. See Catherine H. Zuckert, *Natural Right and the American Imagination: Political Philosophy in Novel Form* (Savage, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990), for an elaboration of Hawthorne's complex use of Nature as a standard for social life, especially pp. 90–92. Zuckert argues that Hawthorne's overall teaching regarding nature and convention is that human happiness, given the complexity of the passions, requires a delicate balance of natural ends and conventional restraints. At the core of Hawthorne's moderate feminism is the same balance.

6. By confining myself to Hawthorne's novels, I do not mean to imply that his tales and short stories are devoid of guidance as to women's identities and the problem of gender; indeed, there are often remarkable passages bearing on this issue contained in them. But the "novel" is a more substantial attempt to recreate and imagine the world, with far more character development. I suggest that it is in his novels that Hawthorne primarily elaborated his major themes, including the place of women.

7. Although Dr. Melmoth consents unhesitatingly, having always desired children, Mrs. Melmoth resists: "for women cannot, so readily as men, bestow upon the offspring of others those affections that nature intended for their own . . ." (p. 8).

8. Although, as Nina Baym points out, it is an unusually passive heroism. Butler meets his death accidentally when he falls from the cliff where Fanshawe has been standing and staring at him (*The Shape of Hawthorne's Career*, p. 29).

9. Moreover, the characters in *Fanshawe* prefigure the great characters in the subsequent novels. Aspects of Fanshawe can be seen in Arthur Dimmesdale and Miles Coverdale. Even Roger Chillingworth, buried in his studies until his vital juices nearly evaporate, save for the love of domination and revenge, could be what Fanshawe might have become had he lived. Phoebe Pyncheon is a more mature and reflective Ellen Langton. Judge Pyncheon is an older and more successful Butler, rapacious for wealth and position, and willing to reduce women to instrumentalities of his ambition. Hollingsworth himself is an odd combination of self-deceiving, self-centered otherness (*Fanshawe*) and ruthlessness (Butler).

10. This point is subsequently and clearly developed in Hawthorne's short story, "Egotism; Or, The Bosom Serpent," from his collection published in 1846. *Mosses from an Old Manse*. The main character, Roderick Elliston, is redeemed from the "serpent" of his self-absorption by the return

and forgiveness of his wife, Rosina. Elliston cries out: "Could I for one instant forget myself, the serpent might not abide within me. It is my diseased self-contemplation that has engendered and nourished him." "Then forget yourself, my husband," said a gentle voice [Rosina's] above him, "forget yourself in the idea of another." (*The Complete Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 347).

11. During the twenty-two years between the publication of *Fanshawe* and *The Scarlet Letter*, when Hawthorne published his short stories, both individually and in collections, he began to turn increasingly to social criticism and especially to the issues of social reform. During this period he also lived briefly in the socialistic experiment at Brook Farm, then subsequently married. See Baym, *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career*, especially chapters 2 and 3.

12. *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 122. Describing Hester's judges on the platform of her disgrace, Hawthorne says of Governor Bellingham and the others: "He was not ill fitted to be the head and representative of a community, which owed its origin and progress, and its present state of development, not to the impulses of youth, but to the stern and tempered energies of manhood, and the sombre sagacity of age; accomplishing so much, precisely because it imagined and hoped so little. The other eminent characters, by whom the chief ruler was surrounded were, doubtless, good men, just, and sage. But, out of the whole human family, it would not have been easy to select the same number of wise and virtuous persons, who should be less capable of sitting in judgment on an erring woman's heart, and disentangling its mesh of good and evil, than the sages of rigid aspect towards whom Hester Prynne now turned her face." See also Baym, *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career*, pp. 126-28, 141-42.

13. They must even be hushed into silence by a man standing by who is shamed by their harshness (*The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 114-15).

14. *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 128. Chillingworth to Hester: "But, up to that epoch of my life, I had lived in vain. The world had been so cheerless! My heart was a habitation large enough for many guests, but lonely and chill, and without a household fire. I longed to kindle one! It seemed not so wild a dream,—old as I was, and sombre as I was, and misshapen as I was,—that the simple bliss, which is scattered far and wide, for all mankind to gather up, might yet be mine." *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 187. Chillingworth to Hester: "Thou hadst great elements. Peradventure, hadst thou met earlier with a better love than mine, this evil had not been. I pity thee, for the good that has been wasted in thy nature."

15. *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 128, Hester to Chillingworth: "I have greatly wronged thee"; p. 200, Hester to Dimmesdale: "What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so! We said so to each other! Hast thou forgotten it?"

16. Contrast Hester to Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance*; Zenobia's self-sufficiency is not the result of her art, even though her art does give her a public identity, but of her inheritance. It is an illusory independence, for it is finally taken away from her by Moodie's shifting of it to Priscilla, and her independence (and her desirability in the eyes of Hollingsworth) evaporates. Like the original Zenobia, her power vanishes, subject to male whim.

17. True, the deepest meaning of Angel that she achieves is as confessor and consoler to the men and women who bring their private heartaches to her.

18. Nina Baym gives an interesting, and probably misguided, interpretation of this incident. She sees Maule's anger at Alice primarily as the result of her unabashed expression of admiration for his masculinity, for which he feels compelled to arouse her sexual desires, then frustrate them, therefore "desexualizing" her ("Thwarted Nature," pp. 68-69; see above, note 4). Baym's account completely abstracts from the aristocratic component of this story. The most plausible reason that Maule takes offense at Alice's admiration of his handsomeness is that this is part of her "haughtiness." She has the freedom to express her admiration of his sexuality because she is his social superior; he cannot reciprocate. He understands her "natural" reaction, which, under other social circumstances, would be a token of equality, to be a confirmation of his inferiority.

19. *The House of the Seven Gables*, p. 370. This is the temptation that may have seized Fanshawe, had he lived, and certainly seized Roger Chillingworth, Matthew Maule, Professor Westervelt and even, to a certain extent, Hollingsworth.

20. Hawthorne uses the comparison of Jaffrey Pyncheon with his ancestor, the original Puritan

Colonel Pyncheon, to bring forward a glimpse of the likely private lives of the men standing in judgment over Hester in *The Scarlet Letter*: "The Puritan, again, an autocrat in his own household, had worn out three wives, and, merely by the remorseless weight and hardness of his character in the conjugal relation, had sent them, one after another, broken-hearted, to their graves. Here the parallel, in some sort, fails. The Judge had wedded but a single wife, and lost her in the third or fourth year of their marriage. There was a fable, however,—for such we choose to consider it, though, not impossibly, typical of Judge Pyncheon's marital deportment,—that the lady got her death-blow in the honeymoon, and never smiled again, because her husband compelled her to serve him with coffee every morning at his bedside, in token of fealty to her liege-lord and master" (*The House of the Seven Gables*, pp. 316–17). Although Jaffrey Pyncheon has learned to wield power over his fellows through democratic means (see below), his relationship to his wife is the same as his ancestor's.

21. Among other purposes, the character of Jaffrey Pyncheon serves to remind that even the reasonably democratic society of Hawthorne's period is not free from corruption born of inequality of power. Because of his wealth—but more because of his ability to manipulate the people—Judge Pyncheon can commit the same kinds of injustices that his ancestor the Colonel could in aristocratic times. It is less likely that this is Hawthorne's jeremiad against the class oppression inherent in capitalism as it is his sober reminder that no form of society is free of injustice.

22. See Gordon Hutner's study, *Secrets and Sympathy: Forms of Disclosure in Hawthorne's Novels* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), for a persuasive discussion of how Hawthorne employs the Romantic technique of withholding secrets in order to generate the capacity for affective sympathy in readers. Hawthorne, in other words, quite deliberately creates "private selves" in his characters which the reader only gradually—and sometimes never—unravels. Although Hutner's analysis occasionally grows tedious, overwrought and wrong-headed, he has, I think, successfully linked Hawthorne's teaching with his writing strategy. The reader learns experientially the many levels of privacy and the necessity of developing sympathy. Hawthorne also thereby demonstrates the questionable nature of the public face of an individual or event.

23. Hawthorne seems anxious to draw the two novels together not only with a continuity of theme, but in many details, too: e.g., the resonance of names (Dimmesdale, Coverdale; Chillingworth, Hollingsworth), the overlap of scenery and events (Eliot's Pulpit, Dimmesdale's meeting with Elliot). The participants in *Bliethedale* even feel themselves to be re-enacting the original settlers' intentions in remaking society.

24. There is a vestige of division of labor between men and women in the founding of the Community, though. Zenobia does, however, promise that eventually labor will be assigned only by individual talent (*The Bliethedale Romance*, pp. 447–48).

25. Catherine Zuckert suggests that Zenobia's flower is a self-conscious recognition on her part that her desires are "indecent" and therefore require beautiful concealment (p. 96, note 31). I believe, rather, that her self-adornment is the result of a tragic lack of self-consciousness.

26. *The Bliethedale Romance*, p. 567–68. Hollingsworth replies to her: "This is a woman's view a woman's, whose whole sphere of action is in the heart, and who can conceive of no higher nor wider one!"

27. *The Marble Faun*, p. 727. Hawthorne the narrator continues: "It is the iron rule in our day to require an object and a purpose in life. It makes us all parts of a complicated scheme of progress, which can only result in our arrival at a colder and drearier region than we were born in. It insists on everybody's adding somewhat . . . to an accumulated pile of usefulness. We all go wrong, by too strenuous a resolution to go all right."

28. "And in spite of all the to-do to the contrary, he [Hawthorne] possessed a strong predilection for the kind of reform which was based on the broadest human experience. He hung back quizzically in all matters of 'theoretical nonsense.' But he was ready enough to subjoin himself to a reform that was 'natural and sensible,' reform that took into account in its program of improvement the motley and contradictory realities of men's existence. Such reform was not likely to cause with its cure effects which might prove more deleterious to the general happiness of mankind than the original disease" (Lawrence Sargent Hall, *Hawthorne: Critic of Society* [Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1966], p. 30).

29. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated by George Lawrence and edited by J.P. Mayer (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), Volume 2, part 3, chapters 9, 10, 12.

30. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. 2d edition, edited by Carol H. Poston (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988), p. 144.

31. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1983), chapters 11 ("Progressive Dehumanization: The Comfortable Concentration Camp") and 12 ("The Forfeited Self"), especially p. 333: "One sees the human significance of work—not merely as the means of biological survival, but as the giver of self and the transcender of self, as the creator of human identity and human evolution." Hawthorne would find Friedan's understanding of "self" to be deficient of interiority, sympathy and heart. Or, more accurately, he would see it as a statement lifted from one of Zenobia's published tracts.

32. Even assuming that I have correctly drawn Hawthorne's understanding of women (and men) and successfully located it in his view of Nature, one can certainly quarrel with that understanding. Many of our contemporaries, standing in the same "State of Nature" tradition as Hawthorne (or at least the Rousseauian branch of it) and which many would ostensibly reject, would claim that Hawthorne has sought Nature and only found Society; more accurately, only so much of Society as makes Hawthorne feel comfortable with what he is seeing in Nature. In other words, his novels are a form of ideology, steeped more or less in patriarchy or bourgeois self-satisfaction. Or some might claim that his complex view of sexuality represents a consciousness wallowing in rectitude doused with shame, as his partially heightened sensitivities have enabled him to see the exploitation of women but his phallogocentric masculinity hangs like a seductive web of distortion over his eyes. His art would be the objectification of his internal (partially unconscious) wrangling with his confusion (see note 4 above). Maybe. But Hawthorne himself is certainly aware of the Nature/Society distinction and the necessity/difficulty of sorting the two, especially on the question of women. Hawthorne does believe that Nature is the necessary, if not sufficient, source of standards for society, and he was neither the first nor last thinker to wrestle with the issue of how we may reliably know Nature. In his works, this concern usually surfaces as an attempt to distinguish between the natural and conventional passions. See, for example, his short story, "The New Adam and Eve": "We who are born into the world's artificial system can never adequately know how little in our present state and circumstances is natural, and how much is merely the interpolation of the perverted mind and heart of man. Art has become a second and stronger nature; she is a stepmother, whose crafty tenderness has taught us to despise the bountiful and wholesome ministrations of our true parent" (*The Complete Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 327ff.). The value in reading Hawthorne's works is that the questions he raises are still the ones that twenty-first-century human beings need to think about.