

THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE

NATHANIEL
HAWTHORNE



EDITED BY SEYMOUR GROSS
AND ROSALIE MURPHY

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION



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NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

THE BLITHEDALE
ROMANCE

AN AUTHORITATIVE TEXT
BACKGROUNDS AND SOURCES
CRITICISM

SEYMOUR GROSS

THE UNIVERSITY OF DETROIT

and

ROSALIE MURPHY BAUM

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA, TAMPA

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Introduction

No shift in the concerns of society at large or in the emphases of literary criticism will ever dislodge *The Scarlet Letter* from its pre-eminent place among Hawthorne's novels. It will remain what it has been almost from its publication in 1850—the Hawthorne novel of most interest to both general reader and specialist. Second place, however, is less certain. There is growing evidence that *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), after a long period of neglect, is gradually coming to occupy that position. After an initial flurry of interest in the novel, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics—with the notable exceptions of Henry James and William Dean Howells—tended to brush the work aside. Typical is Paul Elmer More's comment at the turn of the century that a study of Hawthorne need not include a discussion of *The Blithedale Romance*, “the slightest and most colourless of the novels.”

Beginning in the 1950s, however, interest in *The Blithedale Romance* gathered such momentum that analyses of the novel have numerically outstripped those of any of Hawthorne's other longer works, with (of course) the exception of *The Scarlet Letter*. The reasons for this shift are clear: the subject matter of the novel and the form in which the story is told coincided with certain cultural and critical concerns. *The Blithedale Romance* is about “a knot of dreamers” who withdraw from society in search of a better American way of life. That the 1950s and 60s should have been drawn to such a novel (as they were drawn to *Walden*) was inevitable, for not since the 1840s—which saw the formation of more than fifty communities, at least twenty-five of which were Fourierist phalanxes—had a period in American history displayed such a passionate interest in radically idealistic communitarian movements and ideas. It is possible to see now that an early signal of this change in the critical fortunes of the novel was Irving Howe's serious treatment of *Blithedale* in *Politics and the Novel* (1957)—alongside such monuments of social fiction as Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, Malraux's *Man's Fate*, Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, and Orwell's 1984. An interest in first-person point of view narratives made it equally inevitable that a problematic narrator like Coverdale would compel substantial critical response. Coverdale's mind, the ambiguous perspective from which the story is told, determines the meaning of the novel as surely as does the mind of Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*, Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, or Jack Burden in *All the King's Men*.

The choice and organization of the materials in the Modern

Essays in Criticism section of this book reflect the cultural and critical concerns of recent scholarship. The essays are presented chronologically within, roughly, three thematic categories. The first five (Howe, Male, Kaul, Levy, and Lang) focus primarily on *The Blithedale Romance* as a cultural document, either as a revelation of Hawthorne's America or as an exploration of certain ongoing American cultural concerns. The following three essays (Rahv, the Lefcowitzes, Baym) are concerned with the nature of woman, either as a psychological problem for the author and/or in American society, their critical strategies mediating between the issue of feminism and formalistic matters. The final six essays (Waggoner, Crews, Griffith, Auchincloss, Justus, and Bales) treat such artistic matters as imagery, structure, and point of view, most especially the last.

The choice and organization of the materials in the Contemporary Reviews section reflect the cultural and critical concerns of the early criticism. One of the pieties frequently encountered in Hawthorne criticism is that it all began with James. It is our view, however, that the criticism of *The Blithedale Romance*, whatever the truth may be about Hawthorne's other novels, began at the beginning, with the contemporary reviews. We have therefore not followed the usual practice of including a few of these for their antiquarian interest. We have, instead, selected and arranged numerous excerpts to display how the contemporary reviewers, in our view rather extraordinarily, located the problems of the novel which later criticism pursues in more detailed and sophisticated fashion. The selections in the Modern Essay section support this thesis. The Contemporary Reviews section does, however, include material on the work as a "romance" (the place of fact in fiction as an artistic and historical problem) and on the possible real-life models for the characters of the work. Given the limitations of space, we did not feel that modern criticism in these areas (the biographical interest being most characteristic of the 1930s) warranted inclusion. The substantial Backgrounds and Sources section does, however, offer a clear indication of Hawthorne's use of primary materials. And the annotations of the text offer many of the speculations and insights of biographical criticism.

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SEYMOUR GROSS
ROSALIE MURPHY

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PREFACE

IN THE 'BLITHEDALE' of this volume, many readers will probably suspect a faint and not very faithful shadowing of BROOK FARM, in Roxbury, which (now a little more than ten years ago) was occupied and cultivated by a company of socialists.¹ The Author does not wish to deny, that he had this Community in his mind, and that (having had the good fortune, for a time, to be personally connected with it) he has occasionally availed himself of his actual reminiscences, in the hope of giving a more lifelike tint to the fancy-sketch in the following pages. He begs it to be understood, however, that he has considered the Institution itself as not less fairly the subject of fictitious handling, than the imaginary personages whom he has introduced there. His whole treatment of the affair is altogether incidental to the main purpose of the Romance; nor does he put forward the slightest pretensions to illustrate a theory, or elicit a conclusion, favorable or otherwise, in respect to Socialism.

In short, his present concern with the Socialist Community is merely to establish a theatre, a little removed from the

1. Brook Farm (1841-47), situated about nine miles from Boston, was the most famous cooperative community of the nineteenth century. It began as an attempt to put into practice some of the idealistic social ideas of Transcendentalism, a romantic New England movement which intended the regeneration of the entire

quality of American life. Hawthorne, although not a Transcendentalist, lived at Brook Farm (in which he owned stock) from April to November of 1841. For the uses he made of that experience in *Blithedale*, see the section entitled "Hawthorne and Brook Farm," below.

highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives. In the old countries, with which Fiction has long been conversant, a certain conventional privilege seems to be awarded to the romancer; his work is not put exactly side by side with nature; and he is allowed a license with regard to every-day Probability, in view of the improved effects which he is bound to produce thereby. Among ourselves, on the contrary, there is as yet no such Faery Land, so like the real world, that, in a suitable remoteness, one cannot well tell the difference, but with an atmosphere of strange enchantment, beheld through which the inhabitants have a propriety of their own. This atmosphere is what the American romancer needs. In its absence, the beings of imagination are compelled to show themselves in the same category as actually living mortals; a necessity that generally renders the paint and pasteboard of their composition but too painfully discernible. With the idea of partially obviating this difficulty, (the sense of which has always pressed very heavily upon him,) the Author has ventured to make free with his old, and affectionately remembered home, at BROOK FARM, as being, certainly, the most romantic episode of his own life—essentially a day-dream, and yet a fact—and thus offering an available foothold between fiction and reality. Furthermore, the scene was in good keeping with the personages whom he desired to introduce.

These characters, he feels it right to say, are entirely fictitious. It would, indeed, (considering how few amiable qualities he distributes among his imaginary progeny,) be a most grievous wrong to his former excellent associates, were the Author to allow it to be supposed that he has been sketching any of their likenesses. Had he attempted it, they would at least have recognized the touches of a friendly pencil. But he has done nothing of the kind. The self-concentrated Philanthropist; the high-spirited Woman, bruis-

ing herself against the narrow limitations of her sex; the weakly Maiden, whose tremulous nerves endow her with Sibylline² attributes; the Minor Poet, beginning life with strenuous aspirations, which die out with his youthful fervor—all these might have been looked for, at BROOK FARM, but, by some accident, never made their appearance there.

The Author cannot close his reference to this subject, without expressing a most earnest wish that some one of the many cultivated and philosophic minds, which took an interest in that enterprise, might now give the world its history. Ripley, with whom rests the honorable paternity of the Institution, Dana, Dwight, Channing, Burton, Parker,³ for instance—with others, whom he dares not name, because they veil themselves from the public eye—among these is the ability to convey both the outward narrative and the inner truth and spirit of the whole affair, together with the lessons which those years of thought and toil must have elaborated, for the behoof of future experimentalists. Even the brilliant Howadji⁴ might find as rich a theme in his youthful reminiscences of BROOK FARM, and a more novel one—close at hand as it lies—than those which he has since made so distant a pilgrimage to seek, in Syria, and along the current of the Nile.

CONCORD (Mass.), May, 1852.

2. Characteristic of sibyls, women regarded as prophetesses by the ancient Greeks and Romans.

3. George Ripley (1802–80), Unitarian minister (resigned), literary critic and social reformer, was organizer and head of Brook Farm. Charles Anderson Dana (1819–97), newspaper editor, lived there from 1841–46; John Sullivan Dwight (1813–93), music critic, from 1841–47; Warren Burton (1800–1866), Unitarian minister and educator, from 1841–44. William Henry Channing (1810–84), Unitarian minister and social reformer, and Theodore Parker (1810–60), Unitarian minister whose parish in West Roxbury included many Brook Farmers, were fre-

quent visitors to the Farm. None of these men wrote a history of Brook Farm, although Ripley died while writing a short account for Justin Winsor's *The Memorial History of Boston* (1881) and Dana gave a lecture-tribute to Brook Farm at the University of Michigan in 1895.

4. George William Curtis (1824–92), a student at Brook Farm from 1842 to 1843, wrote two *Impressions de voyage* entitled "Nile Notes of a Howadji" (1851), that is, of a "traveller," and "Howadji in Syria" (1852). Late in life he wrote a short essay, "Hawthorne and Brook Farm," for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*.

I

OLD MOODIE

THE EVENING before my departure for Blithedale,⁵ I was returning to my bachelor-apartments, after attending the wonderful exhibition of the Veiled Lady, when an elderly-man of rather shabby appearance met me in an obscure part of the street.

"Mr. Coverdale,"⁶ said he, softly, "can I speak with you a moment?"

As I have casually alluded to the Veiled Lady, it may not be amiss to mention, for the benefit of such of my readers as are unacquainted with her now forgotten celebrity, that she was a phenomenon in the mesmeric line;⁷ one of the earliest that had indicated the birth of a new science, or the revival of an old humbug. Since those times, her sisterhood have grown too numerous to attract much individual notice; nor, in fact, has any one of them ever come before the public under such skilfully contrived circumstances of stage-effect, as those which at once mystified and illuminated the remarkable performances of the lady in question. Now-a-days, in the management of his 'subject,' 'clairvoyant,' or 'medium,' the exhibitor affects the simplicity and openness of scientific

5. Happy Valley.

6. Miles Coverdale (1488–1569) did the first translation into English of the whole Bible with Apocrypha (1535). For a discussion of the novel and the Bible, see Joan Magretta, "The Coverdale Translation: *Blithedale* and the Bible," *Nathaniel Hawthorne Journal* (1974), 250–56.

7. By 1789 any contribution which Franz Mesmer (1734–1815) made to Vitalistic philosophy or to curative medicine, with

his theory of an invisible universal fluid which penetrated and surrounded all bodies, had been obscured by an eclectic, spiritualist form of mesmerism which entertained the public with magic, seances, hypnotism, somnambulism, and exhibitions similar to that described by Coverdale in Chapter XXIII. For Hawthorne's attitude toward mesmerism, see his letters, below.

experiment; and even if he profess to tread a step or two across the boundaries of the spiritual world, yet carries with him the laws of our actual life, and extends them over his preternatural conquests. Twelve or fifteen years ago, on the contrary, all the arts of mysterious arrangement, of picturesque disposition, and artistically contrasted light and shade, were made available in order to set the apparent miracle in the strongest attitude of opposition to ordinary facts. In the case of the Veiled Lady, moreover, the interest of the spectator was further wrought up by the enigma of her identity, and an absurd rumor (probably set afloat by the exhibitor, and at one time very prevalent) that a beautiful young lady, of family and fortune, was enshrouded within the misty drapery of the veil. It was white, with somewhat of a subdued silver sheen, like the sunny side of a cloud; and falling over the wearer, from head to foot, was supposed to insulate her from the material world, from time and space, and to endow her with many of the privileges of a disembodied spirit.

Her pretensions, however, whether miraculous or otherwise, have little to do with the present narrative; except, indeed, that I had propounded, for the Veiled Lady's prophetic solution, a query as to the success of our Blithedale enterprise. The response, by-the-by, was of the true Sibylline stamp, nonsensical in its first aspect, yet, on closer study, unfolding a variety of interpretations, one of which has certainly accorded with the event. I was turning over this riddle in my mind, and trying to catch its slippery purport by the tail, when the old man, above-mentioned, interrupted me.

"Mr. Coverdale!—Mr. Coverdale!" said he, repeating my name twice, in order to make up for the hesitating and ineffectual way in which he uttered it—"I ask your pardon, sir—but I hear you are going to Blithedale tomorrow?"

I knew the pale, elderly face, with the red-tipt nose, and the patch over one eye, and likewise saw something characteristic in the old fellow's way of standing under the arch of a gate, only revealing enough of himself to make me

recognize him as an acquaintance. He was a very shy personage, this Mr. Moodie; and the trait was the more singular, as his mode of getting his bread necessarily brought him into the stir and hubbub of the world, more than the generality of men.

"Yes, Mr. Moodie," I answered, wondering what interest he could take in the fact, "it is my intention to go to Blithedale tomorrow. Can I be of any service to you, before my departure?"

"If you pleased, Mr. Coverdale," said he, "you might do me a very great favor."

"A very great one!" repeated I, in a tone that must have expressed but little alacrity of beneficence, although I was ready to do the old man any amount of kindness involving no special trouble to myself. "A very great favor, do you say? My time is brief, Mr. Moodie, and I have a good many preparations to make. But be good enough to tell me what you wish."

"Ah, sir," replied old Moodie, "I don't quite like to do that; and, on further thoughts, Mr. Coverdale, perhaps I had better apply to some older gentleman, or to some lady, if you would have the kindness to make me known to one, who may happen to be going to Blithedale. You are a young man, sir!"

"Does that fact lessen my availability for your purpose?" asked I. "However, if an older man will suit you better, there is Mr. Hollingsworth,⁸ who has three or four years the advantage of me in age, and is a much more solid character, and a philanthropist to boot. I am only a poet, and, so the critics tell me, no great affair at that! But what can this business be, Mr. Moodie? It begins to interest me; especially since your hint that a lady's influence might be found desirable. Come; I am really anxious to be of service to you."

8. In "*The Blithedale Romance: A History of Ideas Approach*" (reprinted below), Hans-Joachim Lang speculates on

Hawthorne's choice of the name *Hollingsworth*, with its suggestion of "the arch radical of that time," Thomas Holcroft.

But the old fellow, in his civil and demure manner, was both freakish and obstinate; and he had now taken some notion or other into his head that made him hesitate in his former design.

"I wonder, sir," said he, "whether you know a lady whom they call Zenobia?"

"Not personally," I answered, "although I expect that pleasure tomorrow, as she has got the start of the rest of us, and is already a resident at Blithedale. But have you a literary turn, Mr. Moodie?—or have you taken up the advocacy of women's rights?—or what else can have interested you in this lady? Zenobia, by-the-by, as I suppose you know, is merely her public name;⁹ a sort of mask in which she comes before the world, retaining all the privileges of privacy—a contrivance, in short, like the white drapery of the Veiled Lady, only a little more transparent. But it is late! Will you tell me what I can do for you?"

"Please to excuse me to-night, Mr. Coverdale," said Moodie. "You are very kind; but I am afraid I have troubled you, when, after all, there may be no need. Perhaps, with your good leave, I will come to your lodgings tomorrow-morning, before you set out for Blithedale. I wish you a good-night, sir, and beg pardon for stopping you."

And so he slipt away; and, as he did not show himself, the next morning, it was only through subsequent events that I ever arrived at a plausible conjecture as to what his business could have been. Arriving at my room, I threw a lump of cannel coal upon the grate, lighted a cigar, and spent an hour in musings of every hue, from the brightest to the most sombre; being, in truth, not so very confident as at some former periods, that this final step, which would mix me up irrevocably with the Blithedale affair, was the wisest that could possibly be taken. It was nothing short of midnight

9. The historical Zenobia was the third-century Queen of Palmyra who defied the Roman empire and was defeated by the emperor Aurelian. For the possible influence of William Ware's *Zenobia, or The Fall of Palmyra* (1837), see John

C. Hirsh, "Zenobia as Queen: The Background Sources to Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*," *Nathaniel Hawthorne Journal* (1971), 182–90.

1. A brightly burning but exceedingly smoky fuel.

when I went to bed, after drinking a glass of particularly fine Sherry, on which I used to pride myself, in those days. It was the very last bottle; and I finished it, with a friend, the next forenoon, before setting out for Blithedale.

II

BLITHEDALE

THERE can hardly remain for me, (who am really getting to be a frosty bachelor, with another white hair, every week or so, in my moustache,) there can hardly flicker up again so cheery a blaze upon the hearth, as that which I remember, the next day, at Blithedale. It was a wood-fire, in the parlor of an old farm-house, on an April afternoon,² but with the fitful gusts of a wintry snow-storm roaring in the chimney. Vividly does that fireside re-create itself, as I rake away the ashes from the embers in my memory, and blow them up with a sigh, for lack of more inspiring breath. Vividly, for an instant, but, anon, with the dimmest gleam, and with just as little fervency for my heart as for my finger-ends! The staunch oaken-logs were long ago burnt out. Their genial glow must be represented, if at all, by the merest phosphoric glimmer, like that which exudes, rather than shines, from damp fragments of decayed trees, deluding the benighted wanderer through a forest. Around such chill mockery of a fire, some few of us might sit on the withered leaves, spreading out each a palm towards the imaginary warmth, and talk over our exploded scheme for beginning the life of Paradise anew.

2. John W. Shroeder parallels the seasonal structure of *Blithedale* with that of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*; he further argues that four episodes in the novel are based on eclogues in Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar*: pp. 58–

59 on "April"; pp. 75–78 on "May"; pp. 232–37 on "November"; and Chapter XXIX on "December." ("Miles Coverdale's Calendar," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 103 [1967], 353–64.)