Chapter 6

The Blithedale Romance: Counterfeit Arcadia

Hawthorne himself had doubts about the "happy" ending of The House of the Seven Gables. Arlin Turner, in his authoritative biography, tells us that Hawthorne actually rewrote the end between January 16 to January 26, 1852 in an effort to bring the tale to a more "prosperous close" and that when the new version was read out to Sophia she "recognized that the revised ending broke the "spherical harmony" she had found in the earlier chapters, but she was pleased to have the earlier gloom lighted.¹ E.P. Whipple's review of the novel, which according to Hawthorne helped him to see his own work better, also pointed out, that "the integrity of conception and execution in the early chapters is weakened as the movement of the author's mind betrays a fitfulness towards the conclusion."² In The Blithedale Romance, Hawthorne once again focuses on American culture but this time gives free reign to the dark logic of his imagination. So much so that Millington reads The Blithedale Romance as a "counter novel" to The House of the Seven Gables. "The forms of feeling and behaviour that had seemed the resources of middle-class culture in the earlier book - sympathetic attachment, one person's capacity to influence another, the vision of reform, the shared stories that hold the community together - all become in The Blithedale Romance either masks for acts of
self-aggrandizement and predation or defences against awareness. It is as though Hawthorne has seen the undercurrent of anxiety beneath the surface of the middle-class culture that he seeks to celebrate and renovate in The House and sets out to administer, in The Blithedale Romance, the shock treatment that might cure it. "3

I

In The Blithedale Romance, like in the other two romances, there are four major characters trying to cope with the reality of sin, even as they dream their utopian dreams.4 Hollingsworth is egocentric and is totally absorbed in himself and in his scheme, Zenobia is proud and rebellious; Priscilla is innocent and ignorant and Coverdale, as an active participant, is the superfluous man frittering away his energies because he seemingly lacks "purpose." The setting too is in many ways familiar. The farm where the idealists conduct their experiment of community living5 is given an Edenic dimension, while the idealists themselves are repeatedly identified with Puritan forefathers. In this romance, Hawthorne once again exploits the similarity between the Edenic myth and the myth of America that inspired its settlement to give his fiction a universal as well as an immediately relevant social dimension. The eventual failure of the nineteenth century idealists at Blithedale becomes emblematic of the
failure of mankind in general and that of the American experiment in particular.

The idealists fail because in their transcendent and democratic enthusiasm they ignore the reality of universal sin. "Altogether, by projecting our mind outwards, we had imparted a show of novelty to existence, and contemplated it as hopefully as if the soil beneath our feet had not been fathom deep with the dust of deluded generations..." In the Hawthornian scheme of things, unless man recognizes and accepts his own limits he will merely re-enact past mistakes. Renewal is possible only in terms of the recognition of the universal brotherhood of man.

Ironically, the idealists believe in the brotherhood of man above all things. At the Blithedale they were trying to evolve a social system which would be governed by this belief. But their belief is suspect because it is not grounded in a realistic awareness of the limits of man. In the absence of this awareness, despite their sincerity, their idealism and their good intentions become merely a pose and their experiment becomes playacting, a masquerade, a counterfeit Arcadia. On the Edenic farm, the past mistakes are once again repeated. In nineteenth century America, the fall of Adam and the Puritan lapses are re-enacted and what ought to have been the truth is once again lost.
Significantly, the collapse of the Blithedale experiment is signalled by the symbol which Hawthorne habitually uses to signify the sinful condition of man - the cemetery. Once Coverdale jokingly tells Hollingsworth: “And I shall never feel as if this were real, practical, as well as poetical system of human life, until somebody has sanctified it by death... would it not be well, even before we have the absolute need of it, to fix upon a spot for a cemetery.” The hidden truth in his remark is borne out later when the need to choose a spot for burial ground delivers a mortal blow to the experiment itself. Zenobia's suicide tolls the knell of the Blithedale experiment for the reasons that led to her death are the underlying causes of the failure of the Blithedale experiment.

The single most important reason for the death of Zenobia was the fact that she along with the Blithedale idealists had not really outgrown her past habits of thought. Surprising himself with his own orphic wisdom, Coverdale once tells Priscilla, “No summer ever came back, and no two summers were ever alike... Times change, and people change; and if our hearts do not change as readily, so much the worse for us.” In The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne had shown the present as a prisoner of the past in terms of guilt for social and economic crimes. In The Blithedale
Romance he shows the tragic consequences of the persistence of the past modes of thought and behaviour in terms of emotional responses of men and women. Thus, at the climactic moment when Hollingsworth chooses Priscilla and Zenobia is left stricken, Coverdale cannot help but see the present in light of the past. "But, in truth, as my eyes wandered from one group to another, I saw Hollingsworth all that an artist could desire for the grim portrait of a Puritan magistrate, holding inquest of life and death in a case of witchcraft; - in Zenobia, the sorceress herself, not aged, wrinkled, and decrepit, but fair enough to tempt Satan with a force reciprocal to his own: - and in Priscilla, the pale victim, whose soul and body had been wasted by her spells. Had a pile of faggots been heaped against the rock, this hint of impending doom would have completed the suggestive picture." 

The Blithedale farm is characterized as a place where the "tender passion" rules. "While inclining us to the soft affections of the golden age, it seemed to authorize any individual of either sex to fall in love with any other, regardless of what would elsewhere be judged suitable and prudent. Accordingly, the tender passion was very rife among us, in various degrees of mildness and virulence..." The persistence of past, outmoded patterns of behaviour is shown through the contradictory emotional responses of the various characters. Zenobia projects herself as someone
who would raise her voice "in behalf of woman's liberty" but she falls helplessly in love with the man who would not hesitate to call upon men to use their superior physical force "that unmistakable evidence of sovereignty" to scourge women back within their proper bounds. Coverdale would have women run the government and the church but falls in love, not with the "new" women Zenobia but with the clinging Priscilla "the type of womanhood, such as man has spent centuries in making." Hollingsworth projects himself as the man of iron who is completely devoted to the single-minded pursuit of an exalted purpose. But he prefers the blind, uncritical veneration of Priscilla to Zenobia's combination of beauty and brains, when the latter obviously would have been of much greater help to him.

Thus, even in the free and liberated Blithedale farm, where the idealists are trying to lay the foundations of a new society, old emotional patterns continue. Both the men cannot help falling in love with Priscilla who fits the traditional stereotype of the clinging woman and both the women cannot help falling in love with Hollingsworth who fits the traditional stereotype of the assertive, aggressive and chauvinistic male. The chauvinistic male and the clinging woman come together, while Zenobia and Coverdale are left in the cold. Zenobia commits suicide and Coverdale goes on to lead a desolate, lonely life and ends up becoming the romancer.
who pens *The Blithedale Romance*. As Herbert puts it, "The indices of Hawthorne's problems form a pattern in which male and female serve as defining opposites, and the axis of gender, so established, crosses an axis of power. Considered as a system of co-ordinates, the four figures define a world of sexual politics in which Hawthorne's imagination recurrently seeks its way. The question that now emerges is ideological..." Critics have often complained that Zenobia's suicide is being incompatible with the force and power she exercises in the novel. "Hawthorne" says Person, "could not tolerate such a powerful character even though he had created her." These critics however, tend to overlook the tint of Arcadian affectation that has characterized life at Blithedale.

When Zenobia, horribly petrified, is flushed out of the stream in which she had drowned herself, the narrator tells us, "Zenobia... was not quite simple in her death. She had seen pictures, I suppose, of drowned persons in lithe and graceful attitudes. And she deemed it well and decorous to die as so many village maidens have, wronged in their first love, and seeking peace in the bosom of the old, familiar stream... But in Zenobia's case there was some tint of the Arcadian affectation that had been visible enough in all our lives for a few months past." Later, Westervelt makes the same point more forcefully.
The tint of Arcadian affectation in Zenobia and in Blithedale community once again has to be seen in terms of the persistence of the past in the present. Since the past is merely re-enacting itself in different ways - the present loses its authenticity and becomes mere playacting, a masquerade. The past in Hawthorne, however, includes not just the immediate past of the characters, not just the Puritanical past of America but also the Adamic past of all of mankind. Human history, if one goes back far enough, surely begins with the fall and for Hawthorne any real renewal in the present is possible only if man has faced and countered the consequences - that is, the real existence of evil within man himself. Both the Blithedale idealists and Zenobia fail to do so. Thus the Blithedale experiment degenerates into a game for the adults and eventually fails. Despite being a feminist of sorts, when the crunch comes, Zenobia betrays Priscilla to Westervelt, and finally acting the part of tragic queen, kills herself. This, as the author points out, takes nothing away from the tragedy. "For has not the world come to an awfully sophisticated past, when, after a certain degree of acquaintance with it, we cannot even put ourselves to death in a whole hearted way."16

II

In The Blithedale Romance, the burden of self-consciousness is carried by actor, spectator, narrator - Coverdale. In the action that he describes,
Coverdale is an active participant, the spectator, as well as, the writer. To demonstrate how Hawthorne uses the artist figure to give his text the self-conscious dimension, we will examine how Hawthorne portrays Coverdale's character in the three roles mentioned above. But before zeroing in on Coverdale, we need to focus on the two tales within the tale, "The Silvery Veil" and "Fauntleroy". Coming to terms with the significance of these two free-standing, interlinked stories told within the narrative of The Blithedale Romance, will help us frame some of the issues which shape Hawthorne's complex portrayal of Coverdale.

The two tales capture the inevitable and necessary vulnerability of the self in relationships as well as its vulnerability within the larger social and economic structure. The story of the veiled lady, told by Zenobia, describes the fate of the doomed Theodore, who is left to "to pine, forever and forever" because he refuses the self-risking interchange offered by the veiled lady - an exchange that Hawthorne inevitably holds out both for lovers as well as authors and readers. The other tale features Fauntleroy, who too is a man who has been robbed of his self-hood. He is described as someone "who would have gladly have faded out of view" and "have crept about invisibly". The story links his inner emptiness, his loss of self hood to the loss of his financial fortune. A creation of the developing marketing economy to begin with, Fauntleroy was rich and wealthy but his
glittering self was described as a mere reflection of his prosperity. "His whole being seemed to have crystallized itself into an external splendour... and had no innate worth to fall back on." Thus when he loses his money, he loses himself. The vulnerability of the self, as Millington points out, generates both defensiveness and aggression. "In the legend of the Veiled Lady the etiology proposed is psychological: an inner lack - an inherent or characteristic fragility in the constitution of the human self - generates a private defensiveness that unfolds in this culture's predatory fantasies and forms of behaviour. In "Fauntleroy" an inexplicable, unstable, market world infects the self, making it feel continually at risk and putting it constantly on guard."

Coverdale's marginal role as an active participant in the action of the novel serves to highlight the problematic situation of the artist in the American society as he confronts the psychological and economic vulnerability described above. The Blithedale farm is presented as a miniature version of America and parallels are constantly drawn between the little community and the larger nation. Like the pilgrim forefathers who helped to settle America, the idealists too are seen as people who had broken away from a corrupt social system; they are also seen as people who were trying to set up a social system inspired by the ideal of the democratic
brotherhood of man which, like America itself, would serve as an example for the rest of mankind.

We had left the rusty framework of society behind us; we had broken through many hindrances that are powerful enough to keep most people on the weary treadmill of the established system, even while they feel its irksomeness almost as intolerable as we did.. It was our purpose to give up whatever we had hereto-fore attained, for the sake of showing mankind the example of a life governed by other than false and cruel principles on which human society has all along been based...And, first of all, we had divorced ourselves from pride, and were striving to supply its place with brotherly love. We meant to lessen the labouring man's great burden of toil, by performing our due share of it at the cost of our own thieves and sinews. We sought our profit by mutual aid...20

The artist, however, finds himself increasingly isolated and alienated even in the midst of so much familiar love. When Coverdale first arrives at Blithedale, his reputation as a poet precedes him. While welcoming him, Zenobia tells him that she has learnt some of his poetry by heart, and she shall most certainly sing his verses on summer evenings. However, once life settles down into a routine at Blithedale, it becomes increasingly
apparent that Coverdale is not taken seriously by his friends precisely because he is a poet. Zenobia far from singing his verses, actually makes fun of him; “I am afraid you did not make a song today while loading the cart, as Burns did when he was reaping barley.. Ah, I see, in my minds eye, what sort of an individual you are to be, two three years hence. Grim Silas Foster is your prototype... I do not know what his brain is made of, unless it be savoy cabbage; but yours may be cauliflower, as a rather more delicate variety.” Hollingsworth, Coverdale's other friend, is glad that the life of toil has knocked off “nonsense and fancy work” out of Coverdale. Although Coverdale has worked as hard as him in the fields, he goes on to state categorically, “Miles Coverdale is not in earnest, either as poet or a labourer.” Even at this early stage Coverdale is hurt by the remarks of his friends.

In the course of the action, we see that Coverdale is slowly isolated. Zenobia, Hollingsworth and Priscilla, Coverdale's closest associates at Blithedale, form a circle of their own, with Coverdale on the periphery. In the chapter “Eliot's Pulpit”, we are shown the equations established between the four friends and also Coverdale’s frustration and bitterness at being left out in the cold. In the discussion regarding the position of women, both Priscilla and Zenobia succumb to what Coverdale rightly calls Hollingsworth’s “intensity of masculine egotism” while Coverdale is
left contemplating his own bad luck. "I smiled - somewhat bitterly, it is true--in contemplation of my own ill luck. How little these two women care for me, who had freely conceded all their claims, and a great deal more, out of the fullness of my heart; while Hollingsworth, by some necromancy of his horrible injustice, seemed to have brought them both to his feet."\(^{23}\)

Matters, however, come to a head when Hollingsworth asks Coverdale to join him in his great enterprise. He tells Coverdale, "Be with me or be against me! There is no third choice for you."\(^{24}\). Hollingsworth's great contempt for Coverdale's vocation as an artist comes through even as he asks the latter to join him. The underlying assumption behind the offer is that left to his own, Coverdale will waste his life in pursuit of idle beauty, but if he were to join forces with Hollingsworth, he would be able to do something useful and substantial. "Your peculiar faculties, as I shall direct them, are capable of being so wrought into this enterprise that not one of them need lie idle... There may be no more aimless beauty in your life; but, in its stead, there shall be strength, courage, inimitable will- -everything that a manly and generous nature should desire."\(^{25}\) Hollingsworth dismisses Coverdale's commitment to the Blithedale experiment by saying that it has given him theme for poetry and what more could he possibly ask
from it? In other words, Hollingsworth suspects Coverdale's commitment to both life and to Blithedale just because the latter is an artist.

Coverdale refuses Hollingsworth's offer and it immediately affects his relationship with both Priscilla and Zenobia. “I stood on other terms than before, not only with Hollingsworth but with Zenobia and Priscilla.”

His loneliness begins to eat into him, so much so that he decides to leave Blithedale farm for a short while and go to town: “But your heart will not so easily rest satisfied. It incessantly remonstrates, though, most of the time, in bass note, which you do not separately distinguish; but, now and then, with a sharp cry, importunate to be heard, and resolute to claim belief. ‘Things are not as they were!’ It keeps saying. ‘You shall not impose on me! I will never be quiet! I will throb painfully! I will be heavy, and desolate, and shiver with cold! For I, your deep heart, know when to be miserable, as once I knew when to be happy. All is changed for us. You are beloved no more.’ ”

Even in the town, Coverdale is as isolated as he was in the countryside. He sits alone in his room reading his book and his loneliness is contrasted to the love and affection that the family man receives when he returns from work. It was while he was in his hotel room that he looks across into Zenobia's room and the latter delivers the “pitiless rebuke” by dropping the
curtain. Coverdale's isolation which began at the Blithedale farm is now complete, and as he sits meditating in his rocking chair, it becomes clear to him that he has ended up where he was only because his friends had failed to understand his temperament and behaviour as determined by his vocation:

For, was mine a mere vulgar curiosity? Zenobia should have known me better than to suppose it. She should have been able to appreciate that quality of the intellect and the heart which impelled me (often against my own will, and to the detriment of my own comfort) to live in other lives, and to endeavour--by generous sympathies, by delicate intuitions, by taking note of things too slight for record, and by bringing my human spirit into manifold accordance with companions whom God assigned me to learn the secret which was hidden even for themselves.28

Later, Coverdale visits Zenobia and tries to explain his position but Zenobia thinks of him merely as a "transcendental Yankee". She had earlier made fun of him as an artist, and now that he had broken away from Hollingsworth, she becomes hostile and gives the worst possible interpretation to his motives. She states clearly what she thinks his vocation as an artist is all about:
Bigotry; self-conceit; an insolent curiosity; a meddlesome temper; a cold blooded criticism, founded on shallow interpretation of half-perceptions; a monstrous scepticism in regard to any conscience or any wisdom, except one's own; a most irreverent propensity to thrust providence aside, and substitute one's self in its awful place - and out of these and other motives as miserable as these comes your idea of duty.29

Zenobia's suspicions and hostility represent the hostility and suspicions of the larger American community towards the artist. This is brought out later at the farm when the masqueraders chase him in the name of queen Zenobia. Deliberately, the masqueraders are made to represent the entire American community. Among them, there is an Indian chief, a Negro, a Kentucky woodsman, a shaker elder and also Puritans, Cavalier, revolutionary officers. With mock hostility, the entire group chases Coverdale. "The whole fantastic rabble forthwith streamed off in pursuit of me so that I was like a mad poet hunted by chimeras."30 The chase is a striking metaphoric rendering of the situation of the artist in America. It also highlights the isolation and alienation imposed upon Coverdale by his own friends just because he is a poet.
Coverdale's isolation forces him into the role of a mere observer. Throughout the text, we find him watching, prying, analyzing and teasing the sensibilities of his friends trying to make them give up their secrets. Zenobia takes him to task for his voyeurism and readers too have found this to be the most displeasing aspect of his personality. David Leverenz speaks for many when he writes, "Coverdale's self-consciousness is a book long double bind. He continually demands that his readers both mock and sympathize with him. Floating among postures of malice, narcissism, and voyeuristic detachment, he weaves a complicated knot of emotional evasiveness. His narrative is much more fun to analyze than to read."31

However, what is often not realized is that this spectorial role is, in a way, forced upon him. The suspicions regarding the artist isolate him so completely that there is little that he can do except sit and watch. As an artist, he necessarily possesses faculties for close observation, but the tendency to pry grows in direct proportion to the extent he is isolated. Coverdale himself is aware of the dangers inherent in his role as a mere observer. "... That cold tendency between instinct and intellect which made me pry with speculative interest into people's passions and impulses, appeared to have gone far towards unhumanizing my heart."32 Despite his awareness, given the fact of his alienation, there is little that he can do except retreat into himself, and observe the action as if it were a play. And
his role as a spectator is supplemented by the fact that the Blithedale idealists were actually putting up a show.

At one point in the play Coverdale retreats into his "hermitage" which becomes a memorable symbol of his own depleted self-hood.

...A hollow chamber, of rare seclusion, had been formed by the decay of some of the pine branches, which the vine had lovingly strangled with its embrace, burying them from the light of day in an arial sepulchre of its own leaves. It cost me but little ingenuity to enlarge the interior, and open loop-holes through the verdant walls. Had it ever been my fortune to spend a honey-moon, I should he thought seriously of inviting my bride up thither, where our next neighbours would have been two orioles in another part of the clump ...This hermitage was my one exclusive possession, while I counted myself a brother of the socialists. It symbolized my individuality, and aided me in keeping it inviolate.33

This parasitic identity, where emptiness pervades, where love strangles, where only a few deliberately opened loopholes let in the light of the day, has to a large extent been forced upon Coverdale by forces beyond his control. As Keith Carabine points out, he retreats to it only "after
recognizing 'the presence of Zenobia caused our heroic enterprise to show like an illusion, a masquerade, a posture, a counterfeit Arcadia'; after he discerns that Hollingsworth, 'had come among us actuated by no real sympathy with our feelings and our hopes'; after he grimly divines that 'for a girl like Priscilla and woman like Zenobia to jostle one another in their love of a man like Hollingsworth, was likely to be no child's play'; and still more importantly after he recognizes 'my own part in these transactions was singularly subordinate. It resembled that of a Chorus in a play.' 

In his *Culture and Society*, Raymond William's has argued that during the romantic era, ideas of art, of artist and of their place in society changed radically. Although his perceptive discussion is specifically related to the situation of the romantic artist in England, many of the points that he makes are applicable to the situation of the American artist as well. Williams argues that because the third and the fourth decade of the eighteenth century saw the emergence of a new middle class reading public, the system of patronage was replaced by general commercial printing, and the artist became a professional who earned his livelihood through writing. In other words, a writer's actual relations with the society and his audience came to be governed by the institution of the market. As a result of mass printing, the market in turn got divided into the educated
cultured, minority readers who were interested in "serious" literature and the vast majority who wanted escapist, pulp literature.

The division, according to Williams, had obvious implications for both literary theory and practice. The serious writers sought to compensate for their rejection by the majority by emphasizing the superiority of art and the special attributes of the artist. Both were seen as opposed to the commercial, mechanical civilization that was being inaugurated and both were, therefore, also seen to be partly incomprehensible to the average man. "Implicit in all organic, romantic thinking is a criticism of the mechanical and the rationalist principle underlying industrial revolution and the market." 35. Williams goes on to point out that the emphasis on the superior reality of art was, therefore, in many ways a mode of defence. "The height of artists claim is also the height of his despair." 36 As the huge changes inexorably manifested themselves not only did the condemnation of society become specialized, self-conscious and partly unreal, but also the idealization of the art and the artist became a form of escape from an unpleasant reality about which the writer could do nothing.

Under pressure art became a symbolic abstraction for a whole range of general human experience: a valuable abstraction because indeed great art has thus an ultimate power - yet, an abstraction nevertheless, because a general social activity was
forced into a status of department or province and actual works of art were, in part, converted into a self-pleading ideology. There is high courage and actual utility, if also simplification, in romantic claims of imagination... In practice, there were deep insights and great works of art, but in continuous pressure of living, the freeplay of genius found it increasingly difficult to consort with the freeplay of the market, and the difficulty was not solved, but cushioned by an idealization.37

Raymond Williams' remarks obviously apply to the American situation as well. As already mentioned, nineteenth century America not only witnessed the rise of the commercial publishing but also the division of reading public into what Melville called the "people" and the "public". Also the major writers of the romantic age inevitably idealized both art and the artist. Hawthorne too is fully conscious of the conflict between the artist and the majority, and in stories like "The Artist of the Beautiful" and the "Devil in the Manuscript" he not only dramatizes this conflict but also idealizes the artist. By the time he came to write his major romances, however, Hawthorne seems to have started questioning the idealization, finding many a chink in the grand front that the romantics had built up for the artist. Thus in both The Scarlet Letter and in The House of the seven Gables, he recognizes the harmful effects of enforced social isolation. He
also pinpoints negative aspects of the artist's personality. Pearl, despite her commitment to truth, is seen to be partly diabolic while Holgrave for all his democratic commitments, almost violates the sanctity of a human heart.

However, in both the books, the artist still manages to preserve some of their halo. In *The Blithedale Romance* the portrait of the artist is completely non-idealized. It is clinical and objective and no special favours are granted to Coverdale. The question of the artist's relation to society is faced squarely, and the difficulty is not sought to be cushioned by an idealization. Coverdale is determined by (and, therefore, enmeshed in) social processes as much as anyone else, and his special artistic attributes are unable to lift him above these processes. In "The Artist of the Beautiful" Warland negates the effects of alienation by transferring his humanity to the art object and by winning, through the intensity of his artistic endeavour, a spiritual repose that seems to negate the need for other human beings. For Coverdale, no such triumphant release is possible, and he suffers fully from the consequences of the isolation imposed upon him.

Yet Coverdale is not totally lost for despite his isolation, his dehumanization, and his prying, he manages to write *The Blithedale Romance*. The failure of the Blithedale experiment, the death Zenobia, his own loneliness and his growing awareness of the problematic situation of the writer ultimately transforms him into a Hawthornian romancer. His
progressive disclosure makes sense only if we see him as someone who, to begin with, wanted to write essays for The Dial or poetry "that would have the notes of wild birds twittering through it or a strain like the wind anthems in the wood" but who eventually penned the romance embodying the dark moral that there is a byway to the pit from the very gates of heaven.

There is no comfortable and easy idealization of the artist in The Blithedale Romance but the portrait is not entirely negative. Coverdale's last remarks about himself should be taken with a pinch of salt for there are obvious discrepancies. He tells us that lack of purpose, has led him to waste his life, that he has given up writing poetry and that he lacks any serious social commitment. In the year that follows Blithedale experiment, Coverdale might not have written any poetry but he does manage to write a romance, and though he is not willing to take up a sociological cause he has been true to his artistic cause brooding over his story for years and years. There are, in fact, two Coverdales in the book, the romantic poet who sets off in the storm with high hopes for man and his destiny and the romancer who broods over the exploded scheme of paradise for thirteen long years and who ultimately writes the romance. In the final analysis, Coverdale's self-presentation shows us how the book itself came to be written.
On arriving at Blithedale, Coverdale falls ill. When he is feverish, he suffers because his mind is fixed on the idea like “the nail in Sisera's brain” while “innumerable other ideas go and come, flutter to and fro, combining constant transition with intolerable sameness.” This feverish fixation anticipates what becomes his obsession with the three friends. While he is in this state, in his dream, he manages to perceive the future sequence of events. His position here is very much like that of a writer who in a moment of inspiration has conceived his plots, chief incidents and its catastrophe. “Had I made a record of that night's half waking dreams, it is my belief that I would have anticipated several of the chief incidents of the narrative, including a dim shadow of its catastrophe.”

Thus, in the very beginning, we are shown that the story being told is not a historical record in the ordinary sense. Coverdale's role as a creative writer is being emphasized and it is being made clear through displacement of time and Coverdale's peculiar imaginative faculties put him in the position of the chronicler free to re-imagine, even to reinvent his own history. Coverdale himself describes the process when he reports the conversation between Westervelt and Zenobia, “...other mysterious words, besides what are above written, they spoke together, but I understand no more, and indeed even question whether I fairly understand so much as this. By long brooding over our recollections we subtilize them
into something akin to imaginary stuff and hardly capable of being
distinguished from it."40

The process by which the stuff of life is made into the stuff of art by
Coverdale is described in the text and it self-consciously parallels
Hawthorne's own techniques as a romancer. First of all, there is
Coverdale's obsession with his three friends. In "The Custom House"
chapter, Hawthorne had said, "My eyes fastened themselves upon the old
scarlet letter and would not be turned aside."41 Coverdale too is unable to
turn his eyes away from his friends. Like the letter "A", the three characters
draw his whole mind and being, and just as Hawthorne felt obliged to work
out an interpretation of the symbol, so too Coverdale finds in the three "the
indices of a problem which it was my business to solve." Hawthorne's
efforts in the moonlit room to get to know his illusive guests by calling up
imaginary scenes also has its equivalent in Coverdale's experience. He
converts his friends into "characters of my private theatre."

Hawthorne's efforts lead to his isolation and alienation and so do
Coverdale's. Aurebach sees Hawthorne self-consciously expressing
through Coverdale his awareness that the self-alienating process of writing
is itself a larger problem of alienation.42 While Donohou feels, "If
Hawthorne's 'unpardonable sin might consist in a want of love and
reverence for the Human Soul...' was not Hawthorne himself guilty of violating the human heart to secure material for his art ... Hawthorne must have thought himself guilty of so horrible a sin, and his Notebooks and the letters reveal his ambivalence about writing ... In The Blithedale Romance, Hawthorne discovered some palliative for his own anguished and sorrowing voice by creating the impotent, meddling narrator-participant Coverdale, behind whose shallow sarcasm he could alternately conceal and reveal himself.” 43 Finally, as was the case with Hawthorne, the success and failure of Coverdale's enterprise depends on whether his imaginary transformation are informed by sympathy or not. As said earlier, the value of sympathy in Hawthorne is always directly connected with the awareness of sin, and the events at the Blithedale farm (as shown earlier in the chapter) foster precisely this awareness.44 In fact, the foremost difference between Coverdale the romantic poet and Coverdale the romancer is that the latter possesses this awareness. And that this awareness has led to sympathy is made clear through the contrast that is systematically developed between Coverdale and Westervelt.

Mesmerism in The Blithedale Romance is clearly equated with the romance. Like the romancer, the exhibitor also tries his very best through “all the arts of mysterious arrangement, of picturesque disposition and artistically contrasted light and shade ... to set the performance in the
strongest attitude of opposition to ordinary facts." Once again, like the romancer, the exhibitor casts a spell and claims to articulate spiritual truths that are unavailable to ordinary modes of perception. Westervelt practices this art without sympathy and he is, therefore, with his serpent like stick and his indecorous countenance, the very image of the devil. Coverdale remains, at worst, an erring human being.

The similarity as well as the difference between the two is brought out most clearly after the death of Zenobia. We find Coverdale sharing Westervelt's opinions but not his essential attitude. Westervelt is cold, objective, unmoved and utterly unsympathetic. Coverdale, though he recognizes the truth of Westervelt's remarks, is neither cold nor unsympathetic. Zenobia's death moves him profoundly and he is, in fact, outraged at Westervelt's lack of sympathy. That Coverdale does not lack sympathy is also made clear by the fact that there is no self-absorption or ego-centricity in his narrative. In fact, Coverdale cuts the sorriest figure in his own narrative. Hawthorne's distance from Coverdale is not a consistent one. As a participant and as a spectator, Coverdale cuts a sorry figure. However, as a narrator and story teller, he draws very close to Hawthorne for he lives up to the ideals that could easily be Hawthorne's own.
In the interdependent Hawthornian world, if Coverdale the artist needed his three friends for his narrative, they in turn often seem like characters in search of an author. It was while he was lost in reverie that he accidentally stumbled upon a dramatic scene - the moment when Zenobia, Hollingsworth and Priscilla triangle resolves itself, with Zenobia emerging as the loser. Awed by the raw emotions still on display Coverdale says:

"I will retire."

"This place is free to you," answered Hollingsworth.

"As free as to ourselves," added Zenobia. "This long while past, you have been following up your game, groping for human emotions in the dark corners of the heart. Had you been here a little sooner, you might have seen them dragged into the daylight. I could even wish to have my trial over again with you standing by, to see fair-play! Do you know, Mr. Coverdale, I have been on trial for my life.".46

In the final analysis the romance sets itself the task of ensuring precisely the kind of fair play that Zenobia is demanding here, while the Blithedale experiment and the Blithedale romancers are put on trial. But the question we can't get away from has to do with the reliability of our narrator. Was he fit for the office? In writing out the narrative was he cold heartedly
investigating human motives or was he genuinely sympathetic? Coverdale himself does not have any doubts on this score:

And now when the event has long been past I retain the same opinion of my fitness for the office. True I might have condemned them. Had I been judge as well as witness, my sentence might have been stern as that of destiny itself. But, still no trait of original nobility of character, no struggle against temptation, no iron necessity of will, on the one hand, nor extenuating circumstances to be rived from passion and despair, on the other, no remorse that might coexist-exist with error, even if powerless to prevent it, no proud repentance that should claim retribution as a need - would go unappreciated. True again, I might give my full assent to the punishment which was sure to follow. But it would be given mournfully, and with undiminished love. And, after all was finished. I would come, as if to gather up the white ashes of those who had perished at the stake, and to tell the world--the wrong being now atoned for--how much had perished there which it had ever yet known how to praise. 47

“Stake”, “redemption through suffering, “undiminished love” all toll us back to the Bible and to the underlying significance of the naming of our
narrator after the man who first translated the Book of books into English. The term “atone” for example is entirely rooted in Christ’s crucifixion, the responsibility of whose death in a sense is shared by the whole of mankind. Christ did not just preach enlightenment, but also sought to “atone” for man’s record of cruelty and folly and suffering through a descent into martyrdom and death. Frye points out that the radical meaning of “atone” is to make one, to unify, and the implications of atonement opens a channel of communication between the divine and the human allowing for the complete reversal of the whole metaphorical picture of man’s relationship with God.

In the Hawthornian framework however, the reversal in the man’s situation can be triggered only through sympathy, and that Coverdale did possess genuine sympathies becomes clear if we see his last confession in light of an earlier reference to it at a crucial moment. This is perhaps the only moment in the novel when Coverdale the spectator-who-would-be-the-author and Zenobia, the suffering woman-who-would-be-the-tragic queen, are in perfect sympathy because of their mutual loss. The trial over, Hollingsworth and Priscilla leave, while the two losers, Zenobia and Coverdale are left alone together. Lost in her great grief, Zenobia entirely forgets about Coverdale. But it never occurs to Coverdale to leave, and he presents this as a positive - as an indication of his complete and total involvement with the unfolding scenario. “But ... I never once dreamed of
questioning my right to be there, now, as I had questioned it just before, when I came so suddenly upon Hollingsworth and herself.” Coverdale then obliquely goes on to hint at what was at stake for him personally in the Zenobia-Priscilla-Hollingsworth drama. “It suits me not to explain what was the analogy that I saw, or imagined, between Zenobia’s situation or mine; nor I believe, will the reader detect this one secret, hidden beneath many a revelation which perhaps concerned me less. In simple truth, however, as Zenobia leaned her forehead against the rock... it seemed to me that the self-same pang, with hardly mitigated torment, leaped thrilling from her heart strings to my own. Was it wrong, therefore, if I felt myself consecrated to the priesthood by sympathy like this, and called upon to minister this woman’s affliction, so far as mortal could?” It was because Coverdale himself was in love with Priscilla that Zenobia’s loss seemed to him as his own and it was because of this empathy that he could understand that there was nothing he could do that would be adequate. “But, indeed, what could mortal do for her? Nothing! The attempt would be a mockery and anguish”. It is left to Zenobia to suggest the only course left open to him. “But, Mr. Coverdale, by all means write this ballad, and put your soul’s ache into it, and turn your sympathy to good account as other poets do, and as poets must, unless they choose to give us glittering icicles instead lines of fire. As for the moral, it shall be distilled into the final stanza, in a drop of bitter honey.”48
Coverdale’s final confession drops the ball - in this case the romance and the central romance question of the author-reader interdependence - in the reader’s court. It establishes that the tale that we have just read was not a result of disinterested cold blooded enquiry conducted by an egocentric artist attempting to establish literary authority over his readers, but the expression of an isolated, alienated, rather ordinary individual, entirely unredeemed by romantic heroic notions about the greatness of the solitary genius. A man who is seeking a cure for his condition by reaching out to the world at large, hoping that in telling the tale of his relationships as honestly as he can, he would be able to establish an honest relationship with his readers, and thereby end his isolation. Dimmesdale’s insight into the sacred hope that binds Hester and Pearl is true of Coverdale and his creation as well “… that if she bring the child to heaven, the child also will bring its parents thither.”
NOTES

1 Turner 227-228.


3 Millington, *Practicing Romance* 155.


5 From April to November 1841, Hawthorne lived at Brook Farm (in which he owned stock), situated about nine miles from Boston. Brook farm was an experiment in community living, an attempt to put into practice some of the idealistic social ideas of Transcendentalism. In the preface to the novel, Hawthorne, “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 present concern with the Socialist Community is merely to establish a theatre, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics...”

6 Hawthorne, *Novels* 745.

7 Hawthorne, *Novels* 746.

8 Hawthorne, *Novels* 757.

9 Hawthorne, *Novels* 819.

10 Hawthorne, *Novels* 694-95.

11 Hawthorne, *Novels* 739.


14 Leland Person, Aesthetic Headaches: Women and Masculine Poetics in Poe, Melville and Hawthorne (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1988) 159.

15 Hawthorne, Novels 838.

16 Hawthorne, Novels 838.

17 Millington, relying on the work of Charles Swan, suggests that the London banker, the real life Henry Fauntelroy, whose conviction and hanging for forgery was widely reported in the U.S., was the source for Fauntelroy.

18 Hawthorne, Novels 791.

19 Millington, Practicing Romance 171.

20 Hawthorne, Novels 648.

21 Hawthorne, Novels 689.

22 Hawthorne, Novels 690.

23 Hawthorne, Novels 741.

24 Hawthorne, Novels 751.

25 Hawthorne, Novels 749.

26 Hawthorne, Novels 752.

27 Hawthorne, Novels 753.

28 Hawthorne, Novels 772.

29 Hawthorne, Novels 766.

30 Hawthorne, Novels 816.


32 Hawthorne, Novels 767.
33 Hawthorne, *Novels* 718.


36 Williams 57.

37 Williams 63.

38 Hawthorne, *Novels* 644.

39 Hawthorne, *Novels* 664.

40 Hawthorne, *Novels* 723.

41 Hawthorne, *Novels* 145.


44 In their respective readings of the novel, Gordon Hunter, *Secrets and Sympathy*, and Millington, *Practicing Romance*, see Coverdale’s personal situation as symptomatic of the larger world he lives in. My understanding of Coverdale’s situation differs from theirs in the sense that they focus only on temporal, cultural realities while for me Coverdale, like the other Hawthornian artists, needs to come to terms not just with temporal, cultural dilemmas but with the atemporal dilemma of mankind, embodied in the concept of universal sin.

45 Hawthorne, *Novels* 631.

46 Hawthorne, *Novels* 819.

47 Hawthorne, *Novels* 772-773.

48 Hawthorne, *Novels* 826-827.