

# THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE

by Nathaniel Hawthorne



## THE AUTHOR

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) was the scion of an old New England family, the first of whom had arrived in Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630; his son (and the author's great-grandfather) William Hathorne was one of the judges at the Salem Witch Trials in 1692 - an embarrassment that haunted the author and significantly influenced the ideas expressed in his most famous novel. Hawthorne was born in Salem, and from age four was cared for by his uncle following his father's death. As a result of a childhood injury he became a voracious reader and began to dabble in writing. After graduating from Bowdoin College, he devoted his time to writing, mostly short stories. He had trouble publishing them until a collection called *Twice-Told Tales* came out in 1838, to great public acclaim. After working briefly in the Custom House in Boston and living for seven months at the Brook Farm utopian community, he married Sophia Peabody in 1842. He again had trouble selling his writings and took a job at the Salem Custom House from 1846-1849. When the Democratic Party lost the 1848 election he lost his patronage job and turned again to writing, this time completing *The Scarlet Letter* in about six months and publishing it in 1850. The work received immediate public recognition and was considered by many the greatest work of American fiction yet written. In the two years that followed he produced *The House of the Seven Gables* among other works. In 1852, his old friend and classmate Franklin Pierce was elected President, and Hawthorne was made U.S. consul in Liverpool, which ended his financial woes. He continued to write until his death in 1864.

*The Blithedale Romance* (1852) was inspired by Hawthorne's brief experience at Brook Farm, a short-lived communal experiment, from April through November in 1841. Brook Farm was one of many socialist communes founded in the first half of the nineteenth century. Though many were religious in character, Brook Farm was shaped more by the ideals of Romanticism, Transcendentalism, and the desire for social reform. Brook Farm was founded by Unitarian minister George Ripley and sought to promote the communitarian ideal of each one working for the benefit of all. As was the case with most such social experiments, it rejected the growing urbanization and industrialization of America in favor of a simpler agrarian form of life. Hawthorne's brief stay at the commune was motivated, not by any desire for social reform or commitment to communitarian ideology, but because he hoped to find a quiet place in which to concentrate on his writing. Brook Farm turned out to be anything but such a place, and he soon became disillusioned. Ten years later,

he decided to write a novel making use of his experiences. Though many have attempted to treat the work as a *roman a clef*, Hawthorne insisted that no characters in the book were taken from the Brook Farm experience, though a few incidents are somewhat similar, including the snowstorm with which the novel begins.

From a Christian perspective, the main thing to remember is that no utopian society created by man can hope to succeed because they are always based on a misapprehension of fundamental human nature. Sinful man simply is incapable of creating an ideal society. That is God's job, and in building His Church, He is working toward the eternal perfection that will be found only in heaven.

## **PLOT SUMMARY**

### PREFACE

The preface consists largely of a series of disclaimers in which the author, while acknowledging that he drew on his experiences at Brook Farm to provide a realistic atmosphere for his story, denies that what he is written is a thinly-veiled fictionalized version of that failed experiment or that any of the characters in the novel are based on actual persons. He also insists that he intends neither a critique nor an apologetic for socialism or communitarian living arrangements. Instead, the commune he calls Blithedale is nothing more than a suitable setting for his romance.

### Chapter 1 - Old Moodie

Miles Coverdale, the narrator, attends a performance by the Veiled Lady, a clairvoyant and practitioner of mesmerism. Since he is intending the next day to join the Blithedale commune, he asks her whether the venture will be successful. As he ponders her ambiguous answer, he is taken aside by an old man named Moodie. He asks if Coverdale would do him a great favor, but refuses to say what that favor is. He then inquires about a woman named Zenobia, who is known to Miles only by name and reputation, then leaves without saying anything further.

### Chapter 2 - Blithedale

The next morning Miles, doubting the wisdom of his decision, departs for Blithedale in the midst of an unseasonable mid-April snowstorm. He and three companions travel on horseback, finally arriving at the old farmhouse where the commune is to be established. While they are warming themselves by the fire, a woman bursts into the room - the aforementioned Zenobia, though that was not her real name.

### Chapter 3 - A Knot of Dreamers

Zenobia greets all the new arrivals and takes time to compliment Miles on the quality of his poetry. She is dressed simply, but in such a way as to accent her beauty, and no amount of simplicity can hide her flamboyant personality. She announces that the labor is to be divided by gender, with the men working in the fields and the women cooking, cleaning, and sewing. Miles wonders why work is necessary in Paradise, but Zenobia warns him that snow-covered fields do not produce fruit

of their own accord, then playfully suggests that she will not don the garb of Eden until May at least. When the women go to prepare dinner, Silas Foster enters from the fields. He is an old farmer who is to teach the men what they need to know in order to keep the farm running. The goal is to create a society based on cooperation rather than competition, to labor with their hands rather than taking by force from others, to put into practice the theory of the phalanstery developed by Charles Fourier. Their reveries are interrupted when Foster begins to talk about pigs and market gardens, and they soon realize that they will have to compete against the competitive world they had renounced in order to survive. Zenobia then calls the company for supper.

#### Chapter 4 - The Supper-Table

As they sit down to supper, the denizens of the city and the farm folk alike, both are conscious of class differences. The residents of Blithedale are proud of their condescension while the farmer and his family find it difficult to eat among those they consider their betters. Coverdale notes that he and his fellow travelers would not have been able happily to eat simple fare in such an environment had they not known that they did so as a matter of choice rather than necessity, and that they could at any time return to the lives they had voluntarily set aside. While they warm themselves by the fire, they hear a knock at the door. Miles opens it to find Hollingsworth, the philanthropist who founded the commune, standing at the door. He brings with him a frail young woman who introduces herself as Priscilla and asks Zenobia to take her into her care. An old man had brought her to Hollingsworth and asked him to take her to Blithedale, but he knows nothing of her, and for the time being decides not to probe her secrets.

#### Chapter 5 - Until Bedtime

After dinner, the members of the party adjourn to the sitting room, where Priscilla sits worshipfully at the feet of Zenobia. When Miles remarks about it, Zenobia challenges him to write a ballad about it, but guesses that in reality Priscilla is no more romantic a figure than a seamstress. She kindly reaches out to her, however, and thereafter Priscilla is accepted as a member of the company. They spend the rest of the evening trying to think of a name for the commune, but because they are unable to agree on anything, decide to stick with Blithedale. Soon Foster reminds them that the work day on a farm begins at daybreak, and they head to their respective room. Miles, however, feels a cold coming on and suspects that he will be thoroughly ill by morning.

#### Chapter 6 - Coverdale's Sick-Chamber

When the horn sounds at daybreak the next morning, Miles, now suffering from a fever, wonders what on earth he is doing in a community designed to reform society. All he wants is his comfortable bachelor pad and life of ease back in town. Hollingsworth appears to be the only member of the group who begins his day with prayer. When the philanthropist discovers Coverdale's condition, he arranges for a fire to be built in his room, where the invalid is to remain until he recovers, and nurses him personally. Zenobia also spends a lot of time in his room, preparing and bringing his food - sadly, she is a wretched cook - and talking, mostly about herself. Miles finds her enchanting, especially the fresh flower she wears in her hair each day, and ruminates about whether she has ever been married.

## Chapter 7 - The Convalescent

Priscilla had brought with her a letter of recommendation from a city mission, hinting that because of undesirable circumstances, she was in need of shelter in the Blithedale community. She proves to be a hard worker, but so quiet that she seems a mystery to those around her. She follows Zenobia around like a lost puppy, but confides only in Hollingsworth. One day Priscilla stops by Coverdale's room to present him with a nightcap she made for him. Miles spends most of the time during his convalescence reading. Among other authors, the works of Fourier, a French utopian socialist, attract him. He spends hours discussing Fourier's theories with Hollingsworth. The latter finds them repellant, largely because they are grounded in the concept of human self-interest. The avid philanthropist could countenance no other theory of human society other than his own. Miles realizes that Hollingsworth has come to Blithedale only to gather disciples for his scheme of criminal reform, and fears that his monomania will soon lead to madness.

## Chapter 8 - A Modern Arcadia

By early May, Miles is well enough to leave his bedchamber. He goes out to the barn and finds Zenobia and Priscilla gathering flowers to celebrate a belated May Day. He sees that the labors of the community, including several new recruits, have wrought wonders on the land surrounding the farmhouse and barn. Despite rumors spread by skeptical neighbors about the incompetence of the communitarians, the farm is flourishing and the men are growing strong and healthy from their labors in the fields. The problem is that their work leaves them time for little else; the promise of pleasant labor leaving room for leisurely thought is not close to being fulfilled. After a while Zenobia begins to tease Miles because he has produced no poems and warns him that he is becoming like old Silas Foster. Over time, Miles perceives that both Zenobia and Priscilla are becoming disciples of Hollingsworth.

## Chapter 9 - Hollingsworth, Zenobia, Priscilla

The love and respect Miles has for Hollingsworth leads him to examine his behavior closely, particularly concerning his relationships with Zenobia and Priscilla, and the more he observes, the more concerned he becomes. He fears that Hollingsworth's monomania will prove harmful to those drawn into his orbit, as both women increasingly are. When an obsessed man attracts followers, he does not hesitate to sacrifice them for the good of the cause, whatever it may be, or to destroy them utterly if they fail to follow his path to whatever extremes it may take him. What such men fail to realize is that "the cause" is nothing more than their own egotism projected upon the surrounding world. Miles thus feels a sense of responsibility to save Priscilla from the clutches of such a man. The girl grew more beautiful each day, and her weakness and ineffectiveness seemed charming rather than upsetting to the rest of the community. But the looming love triangle involving her, Hollingsworth, and Zenobia became increasingly apparent to Miles. He warns Priscilla not to be so effervescent, but she says she cannot help it. Zenobia sees what is going on as well and draws Priscilla aside, offering to be her duenna and educate her in the ways of the world. In the days that follow, Hollingsworth and Zenobia are often seen walking together in the woods, and rumors spread that they are planning to build their own cottage in a favorite spot on a hillside.

## Chapter 10 - A Visitor from Town

Blithedale receives many visitors, mostly those who sympathize with their philosophy and are considering joining if the experiment shows some hope of success. After a hard day's work in the fields, Miles inwardly laughs at their idealism. One day he and Hollingsworth are eating their lunch under a tree when an elderly man with an eyepatch approaches. Miles recognizes him from town; he is none other than Moodie, the old man who mysteriously asked him about Blithedale and Zenobia the night before he joined the community. Hollingsworth offers to share their lunch with him, and Moodie gratefully accepts. As they eat, Miles asks Moodie about the small silk purses he sells, inquiring about who made them. At this point Hollingsworth interrupts and identifies the maker as Priscilla, who had been entrusted to his care by Moodie on the very same night. Moodie asks if she is well and happy, and Hollingsworth assures him that she is. He then asks about Zenobia, whom he claims to have known when she was a child. He is pleased to hear that the great woman is treating Priscilla well. As they go to find the women, Miles wonders whether the old man might benefit from joining the community. When they approach the house, however, Moodie sees Priscilla and Zenobia through a window. The former playfully approaches the latter and is roughly rejected. At this point Moodie angrily shakes his stick and walks away.

## Chapter 11 - The Wood-Path

Soon after the encounter with Moodie, Miles decides to take a day off and spend it alone deep in the woods near the commune. As he walks toward the center of the wood, he is interrupted by a stranger asking of him a favor. Miles is offended by his rudeness, and when he asks where he might find Zenobia for a private conversation, the narrator answers him only reluctantly. The stranger then intimates that Hollingsworth is trying to cultivate Zenobia in order to obtain her fortune to purchase land on which to build an institution for the rehabilitation of criminals. When he goes on to ask about Priscilla, Miles demands to know his name, which he gives as Professor Westervelt, after which he leaves Miles to his solitary meditation. He decides to stay near the farmhouse to see if anything comes of the appearance of the dubious figure of the Professor.

## Chapter 12 - Coverdale's Hermitage

During his walks in the woods, Miles had discovered a stand of pine trees overgrown by a wild grape vine in such a fashion that one could climb up into the enclosure formed by the vine and the branches and be completely concealed from anyone on the ground. He tells no one of his discovery, goes there to write or think, and anticipates the day when the grape vine will yield a rich harvest. The perspective from aloft makes him a cynic; he doubts the worthiness of the community's commitment and knows with certainty that poor Priscilla will be betrayed by both Zenobia and Hollingsworth. Suddenly he hears the harsh laugh of Professor Westervelt and realizes that the man's skepticism has wormed its way into his own heart. Zenobia is with him, and she is clearly angry. Miles discerns that the two must have been lovers in the past, but now her love for him has turned to fury in the coldness of his heart. Miles catches only a few words of their conversation, but deduces that they are quarreling about Priscilla; Zenobia really cares nothing for the girl but hates to hurt her, since she has bestowed all her love upon her, and Westervelt scoffs at such sentimentality.

## Chapter 13 - Zenobia's Legend

While the members of the community worked hard, they occasionally found time for leisure, whether involving afternoon picnics or evenings of charades, music, or readings, with Zenobia usually the main entertainer. During one such evening, Zenobia proposes that she make up a story on the spot for their amusement. The tale she wove and narrated with great skill was called "The Silvery Veil." It was based on the recently-popular Veiled Lady who had suddenly disappeared, even as the crowds clamored to hear more from her. One afternoon a group of young men are discussing rumors about the identity of the Veiled Lady, speculating that she is from a prominent family. Considering that doubtful, they wonder at her appearance. Does she veil herself because she is astonishingly beautiful or horribly ugly? Some even thought that she was a demon, and that anyone who lifted the veil would see his own fate in the face behind it. One of the young men, named Theodore, offered a challenge to his friends, betting them a considerable sum of money that he would discover the identity of the Veiled Lady that very night. He goes to the theater and climbs into the woman's dressing room, concealing himself behind a screen. When she enters the room, she seems to float rather than walk. She seems restless, and eventually she makes her way toward the screen and calls him out by name. She asks what he wants, and he tells her that he seeks her identity. She tells him that the only way to do so is by lifting the veil; if he first kisses her through the veil, their destinies will be linked forever in felicity, but if he comes only out of idle curiosity, lifting the veil will ensure that he will never in his life again know happiness. He has no desire to commit himself for life to someone he cannot see, so he flings the veil aside and briefly glimpses a pale young lady, who promptly disappears, leaving only her silvery veil behind. For the rest of his life, poor Theodore longed miserably for one more glimpse of the face he had so callously cast aside. But what of the Veiled Lady? At the moment when she disappeared from her dressing room, she appeared among an earnest group of visionaries who took her in without questioning her origins. She attached herself to one woman in particular. One day this woman was walking in the woods and met the magician who had previously enslaved the mysterious lady. He warned her that the girl would be her doom if she did not take the magic veil, cast it over the young girl's head, and summon the magician to take her away. This she did, and the magician appeared and enslaved the girl forever. As Zenobia concludes her tale, she flings a piece of gauze over Priscilla's head, and the latter nearly faints, though no magician appears to spirit her away.

## Chapter 14 - Eliot's Pulpit

On Sundays the inhabitants of Blithedale did no work. Some went to church - some even preached - but most relaxed on or near the commune's property. Miles, Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla typically gathered at a large rock called Eliot's Pulpit, based on an old tradition that missionary John Eliot had preached there to an Indian audience centuries before. Often they encourage Hollingsworth to ascend the rock and deliver a lecture. On the Sunday after the appearance of the Professor, Zenobia cries out after Hollingsworth's lecture, bemoaning the injustice of women's voices being silenced by the world and insisting that she will do something about it before the year is out. When Miles smiles at her words, she accuses him of opposing her, but he insists that he would prefer women to men as heads of government and clergy. Priscilla cannot imagine such a situation, and Hollingsworth agrees with her. He insists that woman's rightful place is by man's side to help and encourage, and that when she departs from that stance she becomes a monster. Priscilla finds these words encouraging, though Miles is infuriated by them. Zenobia,

surprisingly, acquiesces humbly, admitting that Hollingsworth has described matters as they truly stand. As the four return from the rock, Zenobia and Hollingsworth walk together, and it becomes obvious to Miles that she loves him deeply. Miles soon catches up with Priscilla and speaks to her of her love for Zenobia, but later wonders what Hollingsworth will do with the two hearts so clearly entrusted to his care.

#### Chapter 15 - A Crisis

As the community becomes more stable, they discuss the possibility of forming a phalanstery after the pattern developed by Charles Fourier. Some in the company prefer living as a family unit rather than in a communal setting and begin choosing parcels of land and planning cottages for themselves. Hollingsworth, however, shows no interest in these future plans. Miles, meanwhile, dreams of the future of the colony a hundred years hence and believes that the bonds of the community will inevitably be strengthened by the first birth and the first death among them. Hollingsworth believes the community is doomed to failure and is simply waiting to snap up the land on which it rests to build his institution for the reformation of criminals. Miles urges him to make his plans known to the members of the community, but he not only refuses, but also seeks to recruit Miles for his scheme. He asks if Zenobia has enlisted in the plan and finds that she has, but Miles cannot commit himself to what he sees as ultimately disastrous.

#### Chapter 16 - Leave-Takings

Between his ongoing health problems and the encounter with Hollingsworth, Miles decides to take a seaside vacation for a few weeks. Foster accuses him of seeking an easy way of deserting the community, but Miles insists he will return and ultimately die in his support of the cause. In reality, however, his commitment to the great experiment is waning; even the closest of relationships are no longer what they were, and he intends to use his break to determine his future. Perhaps he will go abroad and return after some years, when the commune has had an opportunity to establish itself firmly or fail altogether. In any case, he feels the need to clear his head by holding conversations with people other than progressives with their heads in the clouds. As he prepares to leave, he says farewell to Zenobia, who tells him that she was once tempted to make him her confidante, and to Priscilla, who has no oracle to give him. To Hollingsworth he says nothing, but on his way out, he pauses to say goodbye to the pigs.

#### Chapter 17 - The Hotel

Upon returning to town, Miles takes a room in a local hotel for a few days. He deliberately avoids his old companions, knowing that they will make fun of his time as an amateur laboring man. As he meditates on his recent experience, he wonders where reality truly lies, in the pastoral atmosphere of the socialist commune or the dirty hubbub of the town. For the first two days he stays in his room, reading a boring novel and looking out the window at the backs of the buildings across the way. One is a boarding house, and he begins to pay attention to its occupants as they go about their daily tasks.

## Chapter 18 - The Boarding-House

Miles left Blithedale to put it out of his mind, but he finds that he dreams about his friends there incessantly. He suffers from a sort of homesickness and begins to feel guilty that he did not do all within his power to save his friends from the damage they were likely to do to one another. In order to clear his mind, he resumes his observation of the boarding house and its denizens. He is amazed to discover that among the people he sees through the windows of the boarding house are none other than Zenobia, Priscilla, and Professor Westervelt! He can't imagine what kind of coincidence would place him in a hotel room overlooking Zenobia's abode in town. He cannot tell what they are saying, but Zenobia is clearly upset about something. Eventually Westervelt spots Miles at the window and summons Zenobia, who gives him a scornful look and rapidly closes the curtains.

## Chapter 19 - Zenobia's Drawing-Room

Miles is insulted by Zenobia's reaction. Suddenly he realizes that, instead of speculating about what the three are up to, he should simply walk across the intervening space and call upon his friends and acquaintances. When he arrives, Zenobia greets him with a smile, but he senses a certain distance between them. She is no longer garbed in the simple clothing of the country farm, but wears an expensive dress and beautiful jewelry and is surrounded by fashionable furniture. He quickly perceives that Blithedale is merely one episode of many in her life rather than a wholehearted commitment to principle and wonders of what the real Zenobia consists, since she constantly seems to be an actress playing a variety of parts. She then proceeds to pity Hollingsworth's totally impractical single-mindedness, admitting that she is tempted to laugh at him as much as the rest of society does. Nevertheless, she considers him a great man and obviously loves him. Miles then asks about Priscilla, and Zenobia summons her.

## Chapter 20 - They Vanish

When Priscilla enters, she is dressed all in white and is lovely in a way that is totally different from the sparkling beauty of Zenobia. Miles tries to make sure she is there of her own will, but she claims to have no will of her own. He then washes his hands of the entire affair, after which Westervelt arrives to take the two women to some unknown destination.

## Chapter 21 - An Old Acquaintance

Feeling utterly cut off from his contacts at Blithedale, he is tempted to leave all of that behind and start a new life with a new set of relationships, but decides to contact Old Moodie first to try to resolve the enigma that surrounds his former friends. He therefore goes to a tavern the old man is known to frequent. As he waits, he contrasts the contentment of the customers as they imbibe their liquor with the coldness of temperance advocates who shun it. He finally spots Old Moodie behind a screen and approaches him. Miles offers to buy him lunch and a bottle of wine, and Moodie gratefully accepts. He then begins to reminisce about his early years, which is exactly the response for which Miles hopes.

## Chapter 22 - Fauntleroy

Moodie's story began twenty-five years earlier in one of the middle states, with a wealthy young man named Fauntleroy who had a beautiful and loving wife and a delightful daughter. Sadly, he prized them, not for their intrinsic value, but simply as possessions among the many in his collection. Soon, however, he lost his fortune and deserted his family, after which his wife died of shame and grief. His rich relatives covered over his perfidy, he fled to Boston, and his name was forgotten. There he rented a shabby apartment in a run-down building that had formerly been the governor's mansion. Eventually he married a poor seamstress who lived in the same apartment building; she, too, bore him a daughter. The mother soon died, but the painfully shy daughter continued to bestow love on her father. The second daughter was Priscilla, and her father often entertained her in the evenings by talking about his former life of wealth, and especially about her older sister. Priscilla was so taken by these tales that she was determined at all costs to find that sister, whom we know as Zenobia. The neighbors gossiped about her because she was such a strange and secluded child, and many thought she possessed mystical powers. As these rumors spread, a man, clearly interested in Priscilla, began to visit the apartment. The neighbors concluded that he was a wizard who wished to use her mystical powers for his own benefit. This man - we know him as Professor Westervelt - eventually took her under his wing and passed her off as the Veiled Lady.

Zenobia, meanwhile, had been adopted and raised by Fauntleroy's brother. She was raised in luxury, but with no mother to guide her, and when her uncle died, she inherited his wealth. After she became independently wealthy while still a youth, the course of her life became somewhat muddy. Some said she married a handsome but unprincipled young man, but such rumors died out quickly. After years of living in a manner that allowed her to fulfill her every whim, Old Moodie summoned her and, without identifying himself as her father, begged her to take care of Priscilla. She soon determined to contribute a substantial part of her fortune to the Blithedale experiment. There she was found by Priscilla, who hoped that her older sister could protect her from the domination of the unscrupulous Professor.

## Chapter 23 - A Village-Hall

During the weeks that follow, Miles speaks often with former acquaintances about his experience at Blithedale and typically is met with jesting responses. He cannot bring himself, however, to speak to anyone about the three people who made the biggest impression on him - Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla. One day he sees a handbill advertising a public interview with the Veiled Lady at a local town hall. The room is crowded, but Miles soon becomes aware that Hollingsworth is in the audience. Soon Westervelt, dressed in his mystical garb, appears on the platform, followed shortly thereafter by the Veiled Lady. The Professor announces that she is in communion with the spiritual world and has no cognizance of the audience before which she sits. Westervelt invites members of the audience to come forward and do whatever they pleased to elicit a response from the woman; several loudmouths shout in her ear, and two even lift her chair high in the air with no reaction. Hollingsworth then walks forward onto the platform and calmly tells the Veiled Lady to come to him. At that point Priscilla throws off the veil and rushes into the arms of the philanthropist, who assures her that she is safe.

## Chapter 24 - The Masqueraders

Two days after the incident at the town hall, Miles sets off on foot for Blithedale, uncertain of how he might be received. As he approaches the farmhouse, he encounters many animals, both wild and domesticated, but sees no signs of human life. Then, far off in the woods, he hears laughter. Concealing himself behind a tree, he sees below him the Blithedale company, all decked out in a bewildering variety of costumes. They engage in a wild dance, after which Miles bursts out laughing at their revels. Someone in the company recognizes his voice and he runs off. Thinking to escape their pursuit, he moves in the direction of Eliot's pulpit and finds that Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla are waiting for him there.

## Chapter 25 - The Three Together

The three had on their costumes from the revels. Hollingsworth wore his normal work clothes, but Priscilla had on a pretty dress, while Zenobia was dressed like an oriental princess. She looks very pale, and informs Miles that she has been on trial for her life. To Miles she appears as one accused of witchcraft, with Hollingsworth her judge and Priscilla the victim of her spells. She demands that Miles hear their case and pass judgment. Zenobia admits that she intended to give her fortune to support Hollingsworth's scheme, but accuses him of betraying the Blithedale experiment by seeking to use it for his own ends. She says she is now poor. Worst of all, Hollingsworth has rejected her in favor of Priscilla, who returns his love blindly. Priscilla kneels before her sister, but Zenobia bitterly consigns her to the arms of Hollingsworth, who she is sure will betray her innocent sister as well. The two walk off arm in arm while Zenobia collapses sobbing at the base of the rock.

## Chapter 26 - Zenobia and Coverdale

Miles wants to reach out to her but is unsure how to proceed. She finally acknowledges his presence and tells him that she intends to leave Blithedale, unable to stay when Hollingsworth has rejected her in favor of Priscilla. She takes off her jeweled flower and asks Miles to give it to Priscilla for her. She regrets not pursuing the love of Miles instead of the ruthless Hollingsworth and announces that she will convert to Catholicism and become a nun.

## Chapter 27 - Midnight

After Zenobia leaves, Miles begins to worry about her and goes to the house to awaken Hollingsworth and Foster, asking for their help in locating their distraught friend. Miles had found Zenobia's handkerchief on the bank of the river near a deep pool and fears that she has drowned herself. When they arrive at the scene, Foster finds one of her shoes in the mud. The three get into a small boat and begin to probe the bottom of the pool. Finally Hollingsworth's pole catches on something and he pulls the sodden corpse of Zenobia out of the depths. They carry the body back to the farmhouse and leave it in the care of the women there.

## Chapter 28 - Blithedale Pasture

Zenobia is buried in the pasture where earlier rumors had suggested that she and Hollingsworth were planning to build a cottage for themselves. The ceremony is a simple one and,

in addition to the inhabitants of the commune, is attended by both Old Moodie and Professor Westervelt. After the ceremony, Miles goes over to Westervelt, who calls Zenobia a fool for throwing her life away when she could have had all she desired had she managed to persevere through the loss of her relationship with Hollingsworth. Miles, furious at the Professor's shallow worldliness, never does discover what relationship the pseudo-magician had with Zenobia.

But what of Hollingsworth and Priscilla? They did indeed marry, and years later Miles, ought of curiosity as to their fate, sought them out. The two lived in a small cottage, and Hollingsworth was an empty and broken man. He never built his institution for reforming criminals. When Miles asked him how many criminals he had reformed, the former philanthropist replied that he had not reformed a single one, but had given all his time to reforming a single murderer, by which Miles understood him to mean himself.

## Chapter 29 - Miles Coverdale's Confession

Within a week of Zenobia's death, Miles leaves Blithedale, never to return. He never marries, becomes prosperous, visits Europe for several extended tours, but gives up writing poetry. He no longer believes in human progress and considers his own comfortable life to be an empty one. Why had he never married or made anything out of his life? He finally admits to himself and to the reader that he was in love with Priscilla.

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Miles Coverdale - The narrator is a young poet newly arrived at Blithedale who tells of his experiences from the perspective of a decade later.
- Old Moodie (Fauntleroy) - An elderly man from the town who makes his living selling silk purses, he is in reality the father of both Zenobia and Priscilla, who are half-sisters.
- Hollingsworth - A philanthropist who is obsessed with prison reform and seeks followers among the members of the commune, he falls in love with and marries Priscilla, but never gets over the guilt of being the cause of Zenobia's death.
- Zenobia - A wealthy heiress and an ardent feminist, she intends to leave her fortune to Hollingsworth to pursue his dream, but her love for him goes unrequited when he chooses Priscilla over her. She then commits suicide.
- Priscilla - A sweet and naive young girl who, before arriving at Blithedale, performed as the Veiled Lady under the spell of Westervelt. She comes to Blithedale to seek her sister, Zenobia, and falls in love with Hollingsworth.
- Silas Foster - An old farmer who teaches the men at Blithedale how to run the farm.
- Professor Westervelt - The magician who exploited Priscilla as the Veiled Lady in his shows and may in the past had enjoyed a relationship with Zenobia, he meets Miles in the woods one day and asks him many questions about his friends in the commune and later warns Zenobia that Priscilla will in the end harm her. He is a symbol of Satan in the story.

## NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Let it be reckoned neither among my sins nor follies, that I once had faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world’s destiny and to do what in me lay for their accomplishment.” (Miles, ch.2)

“By and by, perhaps, when our individual adaptations begin to develop themselves, it may be that some of us, who wear the petticoat, will go afield, and leave the weaker brethren to take our places in the kitchen!” (Zenobia, ch.3)

“It was our purpose - a generous one, certainly, and absurd, no doubt, in full proportion with its generosity - to give up whatever we had heretofore attained, for the sake of showing mankind the example of a life governed by other than the false and cruel principles, on which human society has all along been based.” (Miles, ch.3)

“I rejoice that I could once think better of the world’s improvability than it deserved.” (Miles, ch.3)

“[Hollingsworth’s] heart, I imagine, was never really interested in our socialist scheme, but was forever busy with his strange, and, as most people thought it, impracticable plan for the reformation of criminals, through an appeal to their higher instincts.” (Miles, ch.5)

“Had I made a record of that night’s half-waking dreams, it is my belief that it would have anticipated several of the chief incidents of this narrative, including a dim shadow of its catastrophe.” (Miles, ch.5)

“Mortal man has no right to be so inflexible, as it is my nature and necessity to be!” (Hollingsworth, ch.6)

“[Fourier] has committed the Unpardonable Sin! For what more monstrous iniquity could the Devil himself contrive, than to choose the selfish principle - the principle of all human wrong, the very blackness of man’s heart, the portion of ourselves which we shudder at, and which it is the whole aim of spiritual discipline to eradicate - to choose it as the master-workman of his system?” (Hollingsworth, ch.7)

“We were of all creeds and opinions, and generally tolerant of all, on every imaginable subject. Our bond, it seems to me, was not affirmative, but negative. We had individually found one thing or another to quarrel with, in our past life, and were pretty well agreed as to the inexpediency of lumbering along with the old system any farther.” (Miles, ch.8)

“When a young girl comes within the sphere of such a man, she is as perilously situated as the maiden whom, in the old classical myths, the people used to expose to a dragon.” (Miles, ch.9)

“For, little as we know of our life to come, we may be very sure, for one thing, that the good we aim at will not be attained. People never do get just the good they seek. If it come at all, it is something else, which they never dreamed of, and did not particularly want.” (Miles, ch.9)

“Oh, in the better order of things, Heaven grant that the ministry of souls may be left in charge of women! The gates of the Blessed City will be thronged with the multitude that enter in, when that day comes! The task belongs to women. God meant it for her. He has endowed her with the religious sentiment in its utmost depth and purity, refined from that gross, intellectual alloy, with which every masculine theologian - save only One, who merely veiled Himself in mortal and masculine shape, but was, in truth, divine - has been prone to mingle it.” (Miles, ch.14)

“Man is a wretch without woman; but woman is a monster - and, thank Heaven, an almost impossible and hitherto imaginary monster - without man, as her acknowledged principal!” (Hollingsworth, ch.14)

“It was incidental to the closeness of relationship, into which we had brought ourselves, that an unfriendly state of feeling could not occur between any two members, without the whole society being more or less commoted and made uncomfortable thereby.” (Miles, ch.16)

“Blind enthusiasm, absorption in one idea, I grant, is generally ridiculous, and must be fatal to the respectability of an ordinary man; it requires a very high and powerful character, to make it otherwise. But a great man - as, perhaps, you do not know - attains his normal condition only through the inspiration of one great idea.” (Zenobia, ch.19)

“I am weary of this place, and sick to death of playing at philanthropy and progress. Of all varieties of mock-life, we have surely blundered into the very emptiest mockery, in our effort to establish the one true system.” (Zenobia, ch.26)

“Ever since we parted, I have been busy with a single murderer!” (Hollingsworth, ch.28)

“I see in Hollingsworth an exemplification of the most awful truth in Bunyan’s book of such; - from the very gate of Heaven, there is a by-way to the pit!” (Miles, ch.28)

## ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*, the Blithedale experiment in applied socialism ultimately fails. The author, however, spends most of his time examining the lives of the four main characters and tells us relatively little about the community and how it operates. Using the information given in the novel, how would you explain the failure of Blithedale? Be sure to support your analysis with specifics from the novel.
2. Critic Michael Hollister argues that the utopian experiment in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* fails because the inhabitants of the commune “propose to reform society without reforming themselves.” How accurate is this assessment? Support your analysis using both details from the novel and appropriate passages of Scripture.

3. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, the Blithedale experiment in applied socialism ultimately fails, though the author provides little insight into why this happened. Why do you think the commune failed? Use biblical insights into human nature to explain why such utopian efforts have always failed and always are predestined to do so.
4. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, the four major characters engage in various forms of betrayal that ultimately destroy their closeness to one another. In what ways do the four principals betray each other? To what extent do these betrayals give insight into why the commune as a whole failed in the end?
5. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, to what extent does romantic love undermine and destroy the platonic love that was essential to bind the Blithedale community together? Would the outcome of the communal experiment have been different had not the four principal characters fallen in love with one another in various combinations and permutations?
6. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* was his first attempt at constructing a first-person narrative. As is the case with all such literary works, the reader must ask himself to what extent the narrator can be trusted. In the case of Miles Coverdale, he admits focusing on matters of greatest interest to himself and even remarks at one point that he made up a conversation to which he could not possibly have been a party. To what extent can the narrator of the novel be trusted? In what aspects of the story do you suspect that he may have slanted the truth to some degree?
7. Miles Coverdale, the narrator of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, comes across as passive, lacking commitment to or even very much involvement with the enterprise he decides to join. In what ways might this passivity be an advantage for a narrator? What are the consequences of it for Coverdale himself, especially as he looks back in retrospect at the end of the story?
8. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, the narrator portrays the philanthropist Hollingsworth as a supremely selfish individual. How is this selfishness manifested in his personal relationships and in his role in the community? Why does philanthropy, which on the surface is the epitome of unselfish behavior, so often prove to be self-centered rather than an act of true love for mankind?
9. One of the fundamental principles of writing narrative fiction is that the author must show the reader what the characters are like rather than simply telling him about them. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* contains accounts of romantic attachment between a number of the characters. To what extent does Hawthorne show rather than tell when he describes them? Evaluate the author's effectiveness in portraying these relationships convincingly, especially the love triangle involving Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla. Furthermore, do you believe, after reading the last chapter, that the narrator really loved Priscilla? Support your arguments with specific details and quotations from the novel.

10. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, the half-sisters Zenobia and Priscilla serve as foils for one another. How do the contrasting qualities of each of the women help to bring out the characteristics of the other? What similarities underlie their differences?
11. Some critics have suggested that the two sisters in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, Zenobia and Priscilla, represent the flesh and the spirit respectively. Do you agree? Support your analysis with specific incidents and quotations from the novel.
12. Theatricality plays a major role in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*. From costumes donned by the denizens of the commune for their masquerade to the veils worn by Priscilla and the woman in Zenobia's story to the frequent references to Zenobia's acting ability, characters are constantly concealing who they really are. What is Hawthorne trying to say by means of these references? Does he believe that people in general are afraid to reveal their true selves to one another, or does he intend a critique of the Blithedale experiment?
13. At the center of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* is a love triangle involving Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla. The philanthropist is loved by both women, but in the end he chooses Priscilla over Zenobia. Critics have suggested a variety of reasons why he does so. Why do you think he chooses the quiet younger sister over the flamboyant older one? Support your answer with specifics from the novel.
14. Critics have differed radically in their assessment of Nathaniel Hawthorne's treatment of gender in *The Blithedale Romance*. Some argue that he is a strong supporter of feminism, while others accuse him of being a misogynist. Evaluate his attitude toward and treatment of women in the novel, being sure to support your arguments with specific incidents and quotations.
15. In chapter two of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, Miles Coverdale says, "Let it be reckoned neither among my sins nor follies, that I once had faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world's destiny and to do what in me lay for their accomplishment." After reading the book, do you believe him? Was he ever the kind of idealist he describes? If not, why not? If so, what caused his eventual disillusionment?
16. In chapter three of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, the narrator describes the purpose of the commune in these words: "It was our purpose - a generous one, certainly, and absurd, no doubt, in full proportion with its generosity - to give up whatever we had heretofore attained, for the sake of showing mankind the example of a life governed by other than the false and cruel principles, on which human society has all along been based." What false and cruel principles did he have in mind that in his opinion had brought about the ruination of society? Why did the communal experiment at Blithedale fail to escape them?

17. Utopian schemes always suffer from an overestimation of the goodness of human nature. This was not only true of the commune at the heart of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, but also of Hollingsworth's "impracticable plan for the reformation of criminals, through an appeal to their higher instincts." What flaws did the two schemes share? Why was one as impracticable as the other?
18. In chapter seven of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, Hollingsworth scorns the collective scheme of Charles Fourier in the following words: "He has committed the Unpardonable Sin! For what more monstrous iniquity could the Devil himself contrive, than to choose the selfish principle - the principle of all human wrong, the very blackness of man's heart, the portion of ourselves which we shudder at, and which it is the whole aim of spiritual discipline to eradicate - to choose it as the master-workman of his system?" What dastardly principle did Hollingsworth have in mind? Why is he here essentially the pot calling the kettle black?
19. In chapter eight of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, the narrator describes the basis upon which the unity of the commune was built: "We were of all creeds and opinions, and generally tolerant of all, on every imaginable subject. Our bond, it seems to me, was not affirmative, but negative. We had individually found one thing or another to quarrel with, in our past life, and were pretty well agreed as to the inexpediency of lumbering along with the old system any farther." Why was such a system doomed to failure? Why can a negative bond such as Miles here describes never provide the basis for true and lasting unity?
20. In the fourth paragraph of chapter nine of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, the narrator analyzes the man who is obsessed with a single idea. To what extent does Hollingsworth fit this description? Can you think of men in history for whom this analysis is valid? Choose three examples and show how they fit the description of the monomaniac given by Miles Coverdale in the novel.
21. In chapter thirteen of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, Zenobia tells a story called "The Silvery Veil." Besides being a condensed version of the plot of the novel itself, what is the significance of the story? In what sense does it function as an allegory? What or whom do the characters in the story represent?
22. In chapter fourteen of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, Miles Coverdale makes the following statement: "Oh, in the better order of things, Heaven grant that the ministry of souls may be left in charge of women! The gates of the Blessed City will be thronged with the multitude that enter in, when that day comes! The task belongs to women. God meant it for her. He has endowed her with the religious sentiment in its utmost depth and purity, refined from that gross, intellectual alloy, with which every masculine theologian - save only One, who merely veiled Himself in mortal and masculine shape, but was, in truth, divine - has been prone to mingle it." The sentiment expressed here is a strange mixture of feminism and Romanticism. In what ways does it partake of the ideas of each movement? Evaluate both aspects of the narrator's ideas from Scripture.

23. The Bible has much to say about the importance of unity within the Body of Christ. In I Corinthians 12:26, the Apostle Paul says that, in order to avoid division in the Body, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” In chapter sixteen of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*, the narrator says, “It was incidental to the closeness of relationship, into which we had brought ourselves, that an unfriendly state of feeling could not occur between any two members, without the whole society being more or less commoted and made uncomfortable thereby.” Does Coverdale mean the same thing by this as Paul did by his comment to the Corinthians? Why or why not? How is his understanding of this principle illustrated by relationships among the four main characters?
24. In chapter twenty-six of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*, Zenobia expresses her disillusionment with the communal experiment by saying, “I am weary of this place, and sick to death of playing at philanthropy and progress. Of all varieties of mock-life, we have surely blundered into the very emptiest mockery, in our effort to establish the one true system.” What caused her disillusionment, her determination that the members of the commune were playing a meaningless game? Was the problem inherent in the system, or was it more related to her personal experience of it?
25. In chapter twenty-eight of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*, Hollingsworth, years after his experience at Blithedale, admits the total failure of his own utopian dream of reforming prisoners when he says, “Ever since we parted, I have been busy with a single murderer!” To what extent is his experience an illustration of Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:1-5 when he warns His listeners against seeking to correct the faults of others without being willing to address their own sins?
26. In chapter twenty-eight of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*, Miles Coverdale assesses the downfall of Hollingsworth in these words: “I see in Hollingsworth an exemplification of the most awful truth in Bunyan’s book of such; - from the very gate of Heaven, there is a by-way to the pit!” He is referring to *Pilgrim’s Progress* and the experience of Ignorance, who at the very end of Book One seeks to enter the Celestial City without trusting the saving work of Christ and is refused, then cast bound hand and foot into the pit. How valid is Hawthorne’s comparison between Hollingsworth and Ignorance? Do the two fail for the same reasons? Is the nature of their respective quests even comparable?
27. In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*, Hollingsworth is convinced that he can reform criminals by “appealing to their higher instincts.” Somewhat similarly, industrialist Andrew Undershaft in George Bernard Shaw’s *Major Barbara* is sure that he can eliminate crime by eliminating poverty. While Shaw portrays Undershaft’s idea as a rousing success, Hollingsworth never has the opportunity to implement his theory. To what extent are their schemes grounded in the same view of human nature? Which author better understands the implications of the utopian theory his character espouses?

28. In both Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* and T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, efforts to create an ideal society founder on the flaws of those seeking to create it. To what extent are the ambitions of the founders of Blithedale and Camelot comparable? In what major ways, besides the scales of the endeavors, are they different? Do the two authors see the essence of human nature at the root of the failures, or do they instead ascribe them to individual flaws?
29. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, Hollingsworth is obsessively dedicated to a scheme for the reformation of criminals and is willing to do anything to put it into practice. C.S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength* also pictures an approach for reforming criminals. Compare and contrast the two. To what extent would the flaws Lewis points out in the scheme propounded by the N.I.C.E. have also plagued Hollingsworth's institution had he ever been able to put it into practice?
30. Nathaniel Hawthorne was a descendant of one of the judges at the Salem Witch Trials and heartily loathed his Puritan forebears. This dislike appears in a number of his writings, including *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Blithedale Romance*. In the first, he openly attacks the Puritans by setting his story in the seventeenth century, while in the second the references are much more indirect. Compare and contrast the treatment of the Puritans in the two works. How does he show both the same attitudes and the same misunderstandings of Puritanism in both of them?
31. Miles Coverdale (1488-1569) was an early translator of the English Bible and an associate of William Tyndale. Why might Nathaniel Hawthorne have chosen this name for the narrator of his novel, *The Blithedale Romance*? Is there a sense in which Hawthorne's creation is a "translator" of the Blithedale experience to the readers in the outside world?