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# Emerson's Influence on Women in Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne

# Emersonův vliv na ženy v pracích Nathaniela Hawthorna

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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**ABSTRACT**

Due to its emphasis on the concepts of self-reliance, inner guidance and the aboriginal Self, Ralph Waldo Emerson's philosophy elaborates theses that favor the individual over community, such as the superiority and sanctity of self-definition, as opposed to definitions constructed by society and imposed on the individual. It is possible, then, to perceive his philosophy as important for the formation of the Women's Rights Movement and for the emerging feminism. In his four romances, Nathaniel Hawthorne creates female protagonists who advocate for women's right to self-reliance as Emerson describes it. Hawthorne's heroines can be understood and interpreted as contemplating the Emersonian principles, thus illustrating the connection between Emerson's philosophy, and themes and motifs present in Hawthorne's romances. Related to Hawthorne's portrayal of the heroines' reflections on the concepts of inner guidance, the aboriginal Self, moral dereliction and self-reliance is Hawthorne's attitude toward the relationship between "womanhood" and "femininity" on one side, and "manhood" and "masculinity" on the other side. The ambivalence of woman, as depicted by Hawthorne, consists in the discrepancy between attributes traditionally associated with "femininity", such as devotion, affection and humility, and the will to self-reliance, self-assertion and independence.

**ABSTRAKT**

Vzhledem k důrazu na pojmy jako sebedůvěra či spoléhání na sebe samého ("self-reliance"), vnitřní vedení ("inner guidance") a původní Já ("the aboriginal Self") rozvíjí filozofie Ralpha Walda Emersona teze, které upřednostňují jednotlivce před společenstvím, například tezi o nadřazenosti a posvátnosti sebe-definice vzdorující definicím, které sestavuje a jednotlivcům přiřazuje společnost. Proto je možné vnímat jeho filozofii jako důležitou pro obhájce hnutí za ženská práva a pro formující se feminismus. Ve svých čtyřech románech vytvořil Nathaniel Hawthorne protagonistky, které obhajují právo žen na sebedůvěru či spoléhání na sebe samou ("self-reliance"), tak jak jej definuje Emerson. Hawthornovy hrdinky mohou být chápány a interpretovány jako hrdinky zvažující Emersonovské principy, čímž dokládají souvislost mezi Emersonovou filozofií, a tématy a motivy přítomnými v Hawthornových románech.

S Hawthornovým vyobrazením úvah hrdinek o pojmech jako vnitřní vedení ("inner guidance"), původní Já ("the aboriginal Self"), morální či tvůrčí zanedbání ("moral dereliction") a sebedůvěra či spoléhaní na sebe samou ("self-reliance") souvisí Hawthornův postoj ke vztahu mezi "ženstvím" a "ženskostí" na straně jedné, a "mužstvím" a "mužností" na straně druhé. Rozpolcenost ženy, tak jak ji vyobrazuje Hawthorne, spočívá v rozporu mezi vlastnostmi tradičně pojenými s "ženskostí", například oddanost, náklonnost a pokora, a vůlí k spoléhání na sebe samou ("self-reliance"), k soběstačnosti, průbojnosti a nezávislosti.

**CONTENTS**

# 1. INTRODUCTION

In an essay commemorating the anniversary of the birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harold Bloom states quite aptly that there is no single sage in English literature as inescapable as Emerson goes on being for American poets and storytellers.[1] Emphasizing "the infinitude of the private man", connected closely to the concepts of self-reliance, inner guidance, nature, the aboriginal Self and moral dereliction, Emerson's lectures and essays challenge the established social order by calling into question the authority of social conventions and traditions. Representing a turning point not only in our perception of our own selves, but also in our perception of the world around us – two perspectives that coincide in many of his essays – Emerson promoted changes so radical and voiced them so loudly that it turned out to be a necessity and a natural course of action for his contemporaries to include his theses in their work and to incorporate them into their own reflections. Whether praising it or refusing it, it was unavoidable for Emerson's fellow thinkers, writers and intellectuals to create their own attitude toward Emerson's philosophy, which empowers the authority of every individual's uniqueness, and emphasizes theses that favor individuals over community, such as the superiority and sanctity of self-definition, as opposed to definitions constructed by community and imposed on individuals. For this thesis, there are two starting points: the belief that Emerson's empowering philosophy played an important role for individuals disempowered by society, and thus for the formation of the Women's Rights Movement, and the often wrongly disregarded, yet close connection between Emerson's theses and the works and characters of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Let us begin with the first one.

[1] Harold Bloom, *The Sage of Concord*, 10 October 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/may/24/philosophy>

Considering its emphasis on self-reliance, to which every person has a right and which ought to be achieved by every individual, Emerson's philosophy continues to inspire those who feel limited or oppressed in their endeavor to empower their innermost desires, to get in touch with their inner guidance and to live their lives accordingly. As I perceive it, Emerson's concept of self-reliance opposes social conventions and traditions, which build up the limits within which individual personalities ought to develop. Social constructions, such as gender roles, are inherently blind to each person's individual visions and needs, and strive to determine them in advance. Thus, people are born into a world that is already functioning and that does not hesitate to place them into one of its categories, outlining and predetermining the life they are about to live. Emerson questions these constructions and subordinates them uncompromisingly to "the infinitude of the private man" - the only legitimate confines of a man's life.[2]

Because his philosophy promotes and encourages the undeniable right of every person to self-definition, as opposed to internalization of definitions imposed on us by society and settling for a role society assigns to us, Emerson's philosophy can especially be enticing to those most disempowered by social conventions and constructions. In the setting of 19th century America, there were two disempowered groups in the center of attention: African Americans and women. As some of the representatives of these two groups pointed out, parallels can be drawn between the question of African Americans and women because both of the groups, ethnic and gender respectively, were by different circumstances denied the right to liberty and pursuit of happiness, both in relation to the Declaration of Independence and in the Emersonian sense. These similarities are best reflected in the speeches of Frederick Douglass. Known mostly as an eloquent, convincing abolitionist, he was also one of the few male defenders of women's rights in the second half of the 19th century:

[2] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004) 113.

> "When the true history of the antislavery cause shall be written, women will occupy a large space in its pages, for the cause of the slave has been peculiarly woman's cause."[3]

By implicitly comparing women to slaves, he makes it quite clear that women too remain excluded from the group of those "created equal, endowed with certain unalienable Rights"[4]. The common goal of African Americans and women is perhaps best evidenced in Douglass's statement that "Right is of no sex, truth is of no color."[5] I am aware of the fact that Douglass often voiced reservations about absolute endorsement of women's rights, and that his position of a defender of women's rights can thus be called into question. However, I consider these limitations to result from his perception of the African-American question as the most urgent one. After the Civil War, Douglass prioritized votes for African Americans in general, rather than for women in general:

> When women, because they are women, are dragged from their homes and hung upon lampposts…then they will have the urgency to obtain the ballot.[6]

This attitude resulted in Douglass's support for the Fifteenth Amendment, which enabled African Americans to vote but failed to give the vote to women. Thus, Douglass withdrew from the Women's Rights Movement. On the one hand, he views women as allies in war: "Woman, like the colored man, will never be taken by her brother and lifted to a position. What she desires, she must fight for.[7]" This attitude seems to result from the similarities between the subordinate position of African Americans and women. It also explains Douglass's support for Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Declaration of Rights and Sentiments, which he helped submitting in 1848. On the other hand, Douglass considered the question of women

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[3] Frederick Douglass, *Quotes on Women's Rights*, 10 October 2011 <http://womenshistory.about.com/od/quotes/a/douglass.htm>
[4] *The Declaration of Independence.* 10 October 2011 < http://www.ushistory.org/Declaration/document/index.htm >
[5] Frederick Douglass, *Quotes on Women's Rights*, 10 October 2011 <http://womenshistory.about.com/od/quotes/a/douglass.htm>
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

secondary to the question of African Americans, and he began to view men's disapproval of the Women's Rights Movement as yet another obstacle on the journey of African Americans toward the status of first class citizens, if the two movements were to be considered as closely connected. However, the theoretic basis of his arguments concerns both African Americans and women, thus supporting the connection between the two disempowered groups in question.

Let us now move on to the relevance of Emerson's philosophy to writers who advocate for the rights of either of the two groups, which I believe to be significant. His concept of self-reliance provides disempowered individuals with arguments that function as a stepping stone for the development of the African-American rights movement and American feminism. Not only non-fiction writers, such as Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Elizabeth Cady Stanton or Margaret Fuller, but also – and for the purpose of this thesis more importantly – writers of fiction, many of whom belong to the canon of American literature, react to Emerson's theses favoring self-reliance over submission and inner guidance over social constructs, and use them to comment on the problems that African Americans and women face on their spiritual, as well as political and economical, journey toward self-reliance.

Among those works in which Emerson's principles play a key role in the main protagonists' self-recognition and journey toward self-reliance, let me mention Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, as a representative of African-American literature, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, as a representative of feminist prose. Throughout *Invisible Man* and *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrators find themselves in the process of self-recognition – however painful and potentially fatal this process might be – trying to redefine their selves according to their conscience and nature, and thus defy the definition of their selves that they now recognize as internalized, that is to say imposed on them by society.

Thus, they acknowledge the moral dereliction they have so far been guilty of and manage to view themselves through their own eyes, as opposed to through the eyes of their surroundings. At the core of both of the characters is Emerson's belief in the assertion that "What I must do, is all that concerns me, not what the people think"[8]. The needs and commands of nature inside of us are the only authoritative voice we ought to listen to – not social constructions or expectations to be found in our surroundings.

Leaving the question of African Americans aside and focusing exclusively on the question of women, we can assert that one of the most vocal messages in *The Yellow Wallpaper* is that women are the ones particularly exploited and oppressed in a society based on social constructs established by men. Gilman argues that the main reason for the firm, traditionally accepted belief in women as naturally inferior and subordinate to men is a notion of natural female weakness, instability and need of protection connected to motherhood and maternal duties. In *Women and Economics* published six years after *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Gilman states that women's limitation to a mere domestic sphere makes it impossible for them to advance, to make the best account of their potential and express their individual creative powers. Being thus limited by the gender role society places on them, they are provoked by being forbidden to participate in the public sphere, or, as Emerson puts it, they "grudge every opportunity of action past by, as a loss of power."[9]

For Emerson, "the preamble of thought, the transition through which it passes from the unconscious to the conscious, is action." In "The American Scholar" he says: "Only so much do I know, as I have lived"[10]. Because there can be no thoughts without taking actions, and therefore no process of recognizing and acknowledging one's nature and inner guidance, it is the process of encountering the world around us that offers the keys which unlock our

[8] Lawrence Buell, *The American Transcendentalists* (New York: The Modern Library, 2006) 214.
[9] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004) 50.
[10] Ibid.

thoughts and make us acquainted with ourselves. Inspired by Emerson's emphasis on "the active soul", the female narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* recognizes that she is unjustly forbidden to work until she is well again by the men of her life, upon which she remarks: "Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good. But what is one to do?"[11] Here, she raises a question that feminist writers, whether through essays and lectures or by means of fictional female characters, strive to answer.

In "The Solitude of Self", Stanton chooses different Emersonian premises to vindicate the right of women to self-reliance: the natural solitude of soul. In *Experience*, Emerson repeats several times that we do not know any such thing as "external, objective reality", since we only see through our own eyes and anything we experience can be experienced through ourselves only. His "Fall of Man" evokes the Biblical experience in the Garden of Eden, where a descent into forbidden knowledge takes place, that is to say a descent into the knowledge of our existence. For Emerson, people truly exist only if they are aware of the fact that it is their consciousness that constructs everything they are acquainted with. In this sense, every entity must inevitably cease being objective, deconstruct itself and become a subject. The eyeballs through which we see and construct are not transparent but reflective, meaning that we never look outside but only see what can be seen inside of us, that is to say on our side of the eyeball. Projecting our inner visions into the outside, everything we see is a creation of our consciousness, of our sensibility:

> Thus inevitably does the universe wear our color, and every object fall successively into the subject itself.[12]

Because all we know is what our consciousness knows, we "do not see directly, but mediately". There is nothing we know by other means than through our own consciousness.

[11] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Writings* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989) 2.
[12] Emerson 251.

Therefore, no notion of what exists outside of our consciousness, independently of human minds and on the other side of our eyeballs, can ever be verified:

> We have learned that we do not see directly, but mediately, and that we have no means of correcting these colored and distorting lenses which we are, or of computing the amount of errors.[13]

Since we cannot escape our consciousness, we are responsible for everything we see. The transparent eyeball is an illusion, because at the moment we look out, we are actually looking inside. In different sections of his essays, Emerson is ambiguous about whether "external reality" exists or not:

> Perhaps these subject-lenses have a creative power; perhaps there are no objects.[14]

The bottom line, however, is that we are the only ones responsible for our lives. In "The Solitude of Self", Stanton provides us with what might be the most evident link between Emerson's theses and the feminist line of reasoning. According to her famous speech, all individuals – regardless of their sex – are entitled to self-sufficiency, independence and – as a result – social equality not because of their legal status as citizens, but precisely because of a natural solitude of soul:

> The isolation of every human soul and the necessity of self-dependence must give each individual the right to choose his own surroundings. The strongest reason for giving woman all the opportunities for….the full development of her faculties, forces of mind and body, for giving her the most enlarged freedom of thought and action; a complete emancipation from all forms of bondage….is the solitude and personal responsibility of her own individual life.[15]

While control over their own lives is what women seek, they cannot escape the responsibility connected to it. The one and only authority is our own self which means that we are the ones fully responsible for the way we order the world, the premise being that "world" is a relative term, since we only can perceive it through the mediation of our genius and our own

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[13] Emerson 249.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Solitude of Self,* 11 October 2011
< http://www.pbs.org/stantonanthony/resources/index.html?body=solitude_self.html >

consciousness. In other words, what we perceive differs from what others perceive, as it is not really "there" – it is not outside but inside, it exists within ourselves. Since nobody can see what we see and be who we are, the solitude in which each of us lives, regardless of his or her sex, is absolute. In order to cope with it, we need to be equipped with the right to self-development because in the end, there is our vision of the world only and nobody else's. As Stanton puts it, a woman is an individual as well as a man, and therefore must rely on herself because she has no other choice. The solitude of her "self" is what makes her equal to a man.

In agreement with this thesis, Stanton further states that "the great lesson nature seems to teach us at all ages is self-dependence, self-protection, self-support" and that "whatever the theories may be of woman's dependence on man, in the supreme moments of her life he can not bear her burdens"[16]. Thus, whoever denies a woman the right to depend wholly on herself and control her own life equals the "rude men" of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* who "seized the king's daughter, cut out her tongue, cut off her hands, and than bade her go call for water and wash her hands"[17], precisely because they deny her the right to become acquainted with her genius, express her own conscious self and thus be able to accept full responsibility for her life – an action nobody avoids, an action everyone must take alone, in the solitude of self. This action, as I perceive it, is exactly what Emerson's term "self-reliance" amounts to.

In Emerson's time and inside the circle of Transcendentalist writers – of which Emerson was the alpha and omega – was yet another famous American feminist who deserves to be mentioned in relation to Emerson's beneficial effect on the Women's Rights Movement: Margaret Fuller. At the beginning of *Nature*, Emerson asks: "Why should we not also enjoy

[16] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Solitude of Self,* 11 October 2011
< http://www.pbs.org/stantonanthony/resources/index.html?body=solitude_self.html >
[17] Ibid.

an original relation to the universe?"[18] In "The Great Lawsuit", Fuller narrows the "we" Emerson speaks of to the disempowered groups that existed in 19th century America and adds:

> Let us be wise and not impede the soul. Let her work as she will. Let us have one creative energy, one incessant revelation. Let it take what form it will, and let us not bind it by the past to man or woman, black or white.[19]

Referring to Emerson's credo that "the one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul", Fuller argues that the right to self-reliance is unquestionable and should be granted to every individual regardless of sex, ethnicity or any other arbitrary attribute on which unjustified social constructions can be based. As to Emerson's own attitude toward the two disempowered groups in question, it is my belief that Emerson himself confirms that his philosophy of self-reliance concerns all individuals, regardless of race and sex. His lectures advocating for the improvement of the situation of both African Americans and women support this assertion. There may, nevertheless, be objections against this perception of Emerson's essays and lectures, stating that he in fact argues against complete gender equality, as well as against the equality of African Americans. In "The Fugitive Slave Law", Emerson talks about a weakness inherent "in the black race"[20], while in "Woman", he mentions that "woman should find in man her guardian"[21]. However, such objections should not cast doubt upon the relevance of Emerson's philosophy to the African American and Women's Rights Movement, because its key principles, such as the concept of self-reliance and inner guidance, can still be used in works of those who advocate for the rights of disempowered groups.

Among American writers who created female protagonists advocating for gender equality and women's right to self-reliance as Emerson describes it, there is a man who stands out, not only because of the large number of heroines he turned into the main protagonists of

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[18] Emerson 7.
[19] Lawrence Buell, *The American Transcendentalists* (New York: The Modern Library, 2006) 319.
[20] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Address on The Fugitive Slave Law*, 28 November 2011 <http://www.rwe.org/vi-the-fugitive-slave-law-concord.html>
[21] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Woman*, 28 November 2011 <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/woman.html>

his works, but also because of the intensity with which he expresses his views on the question of women: Nathaniel Hawthorne.

As Emerson's contemporary, fellow intellectual and frequent neighbor, Hawthorne spent most of his life living and writing in close proximity to the circle of Transcendentalists. Nevertheless, the link between Hawthorne and the Transcendentalist circle that formed around Emerson is often wrongly disregarded, as a large number of literary essays document. In *Hawthorne's Labors in Concord*, for instance, Larry J. Reynolds comments on this problem by saying that Hawthorne could never sacrifice what he calls moral integrity to progress and by quoting from Hawthorne's defense of Franklin Pierce's administration against Emerson's sharp criticism of the president: "steadfastness and integrity are to me more sacred and valuable than the faculty of adapting one's self to new ideas, however true they may turn out to be"[22]. Because of his publicly manifested loyalty to high-ranking, conservative acquaintances, the connection between Hawthorne's fiction and Emerson's progressive philosophy is hardly ever considered a decisive factor in the process of interpreting his work. I do not consider such dismissal to be justified, especially in the case of Hawthorne's defense of Franklin Pierce, which ought to be interpreted as political propaganda and not as Hawthorne's marginalization of "the faculty of adapting one's self to new ideas", which is essential for Emerson's philosophy of growth and which Hawthorne elaborates in his second romance, *The House of the Seven Gables*.

Nevertheless, because of his personal connections to what Lawrence Buell calls "solid, middle-of-the road citizens"[23], Hawthorne's works are hardly ever discussed in relation to Emerson. Judging by his biography, the companions he seemed to have preferred throughout most of his career were decent, conservative, obedient citizens, rather than eccentric, progressive and – from the point of view of established authorities and state institutions –

[22] Larry J. Reynolds, *Hawthorne's Labours in Concord*, in: Richard H. Millington, *The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 29.
[23] Lawrence Buell, *The American Transcendentalists* (New York: The Modern Library, 2006) 524.

somewhat disobedient Transcendentalists. In his preface to *A Walk to Walden*, one of the journal-like records in *American Notebooks*, Buell further states that to think of Hawthorne "as a meditative diarist who roamed the precincts of Concord shows that he was not as detached from the Transcendentalist circle as he liked to make himself out to be"[24]. Perhaps it is partly because of his career as a consul in England and because of his association with high diplomacy in general – including a close relationship to Pierce, whose famous biography he wrote as part of the campaign preceding a presidential election – that critics and readers tend to underestimate Hawthorne's connection to Transcendentalists, and to Emerson's philosophy in particular.

As I perceive it, the link between Hawthorne's characters and Emerson's theses is evident. Like many of his colleagues, Hawthorne too was attracted to – or at least challenged and unsettled by – the groundbreaking thoughts and concepts brought up by Emerson's work. Before moving on to female characters, let us first consider this link in general, as it is the second starting point of this thesis. In order to illustrate the close connection between the protagonists of Hawthorne's works and the principles on which Emerson's philosophy is based, let us consider "The Minister's Black Veil". It is a short story published in 1836, shortly after Emerson's first book, *Nature*, was published. The story itself raises many questions that the author leaves unanswered. However, if viewed with regard to Emerson's influence on Hawthorne's characters, the short story offers answers that explain the minister's mysterious behavior as well as the process that brought about this sudden change.

The tale begins with the main protagonist making an unforeseen decision: he decides to put on a black veil that covers his face and does not allow the others to see his eyes. The veil also darkens his vision of the world, as it starts at his forehead and ends at his mouth. The reaction of his community is, unsurprisingly, strong. Nobody can relate to this eccentricity.

[24] Buell 429.

The minister and the community, including the minister's fiancée, gradually grow apart until his separation from the world, that is to say his solitude, which was first only symbolic, becomes real and complete. No attempts to remove the man's veil or to persuade him to do so are successful. The minister's determination can perhaps be seen as the most puzzling part of the tale. It did not bring him anything but solitude that resulted in sadness, and yet it is unthinkable and never an option for him to have it removed. He knows what he is doing and he insists on it.

Hawthorne thereby makes it very clear that this decision comes from deep within. The force that brought about this change must have been natural to the minister and so intrinsic that ignoring it was not an option. In fact, the final scene suggests that there was unusual strength and vehemence connected to the decision: when the minister is on his death bed, weak and dying, he astonishes the other characters with the vigor with which he prevents them from removing his veil. We sense that the veil in fact empowers him and that this power expresses itself whenever anyone approaches it. In the essay "Power", Emerson elaborates the theses he introduces in *Nature* and states that power is to be found inside of us and that it is "of one kind, a sharing of the nature of the world"[25]. Nature is inside of us and it can only be expressed through creative power, through our genius. Once we acknowledge our genius and begin to answer to it, the process itself gives us great strength, because it is natural and healthy for us to listen to our inner guidance, and to live and act according to it. In "Spiritual Laws", Emerson says that "There is guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening we shall hear the right word"[26]. Each individual should therefore look for guidance within himself.

This, however, is exactly what the minister is doing. The strange urge to wear a veil across his face is a result of the way he truly feels inside. It was his intrinsic right to act according to his inner guidance. Whatever his feelings about himself or his past deeds might

[25] Emerson 390.
[26] Emerson 154.

be, the immediate expression of them is a black veil across his face. The minister clearly does not stop himself because of the negative reaction of his community – such process would not make sense to him. As Emerson puts it: "What I must do, is all that concerns me, not what the people think." The needs and commands of nature inside of us are the only authoritative voice we ought to listen to – not social conventions or expectations of our surroundings. Thus, the minister hears out the inner urge, and there is nothing and nobody from the outside world that could prove him wrong. In this sense, this Hawthornian character takes Emerson's advice and becomes self-reliant.

Similarly, characters in Hawthorne's romances, such as Hester in *The Scarlet Letter* or Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance,* see no other option than to act and live in harmony with their inner guidance and nature. The strength, health and determination the narrators assign to the two women result from the empowering energy of self-reliance. Because they are women, their acknowledgement of their nature and inner guidance, the resulting self-reliance and the refusal of moral dereliction meet with a strong reaction in their surroundings. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's "solitude and personal responsibility of her own individual life" gains a new dimension in the case of Hawthorne's Hester who, had she been a man, would never have been forced to stand up for herself against the entire community, because there would be no child to take responsibility for. On the one hand, Hester's motherhood becomes part of her deconstructed definition of her self, and thus a part of her self-definition. As such, it empowers her. On the other hand, it is unauthorized by society which does not approve of it. However, Hawthorne makes it very clear that "the world's law was no law for her mind"[27], thus confirming Hester's self-reliance.

Not only the characters of Hester and Zenobia, but also Zenobia's half-sister Priscilla, Phoebe and Hepzibah in *The House of the Seven Gables*, and Miriam and Hilda in *The*

[27] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: Spectrum, 1968) 164.

*Marble Faun* can be perceived as Hawthorne's tools to comment on the issue of female self-reliance in the Emersonian sense, for which female emancipation and gender equality are the stepping stones. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to define and demonstrate a link that connects these female characters, and to trace out a pattern that describes and summarizes Hawthorne's representation of women. By means of analyzing the main female protagonists of his four romances, I wish to answer the question of whether or not – and if so, then in what sense – can Hawthorne's fiction be considered feminist. It is my belief that the key to understanding the complexity of Hawthorne's female characters can be found in Emerson's philosophy, mediated by the influence and editing of Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, especially in his concept of nature, inner guidance, self-reliance, the aboriginal Self and moral dereliction, which will therefore be paid attention to and used as a framework to analyze the situation, development and main characteristics of the female figures in question. In addition, Emerson's address on "Woman", delivered in 1855 to the Woman's Rights Convention, will also be taken into consideration, as it is a work through which Emerson himself provides us with a direct link between the key principles of his philosophy and the Woman's Rights Movement.

Finally, connected to the challenge of gender inequality was the challenge of conventional terms such as "manhood" and "womanhood", "masculinity" and "femininity". In Emerson's and Hawthorne's time, the rising capitalist and democratic system modified the reigning model of "manhood" by emphasizing self-making, self-reliance and competition. As a consequence, society's attention turned to the reigning model of "womanhood" too, perceived by feminist thinkers as subordinated to "manhood" by female gender role. It is my belief that Hawthorne's female characters, their relationship to themselves, to their respective male counterparts and to society in general, offer an opportunity to look into Hawthorne's attitude toward the relationship between "femininity" and "womanhood" on one side, and

“masculinity” and “manhood” on the other side. Thus, Hawthorne’s female characters express his, at times ambiguous, feelings about the emerging American feminism. Aware of the relevance of Emerson’s theses, and of their compelling power to elicit responses from Hawthorne, let us now immerse in the world of Hawthorne’s women.

## 2. THE SCARLET LETTER

### 2.1. Hester's Self-Reliance

The setting Hawthorne chooses for his first romance and its heroine is a Puritan community in seventeenth century Boston. Much like in "The Minister's Black Veil", any behavior deviating from the strict rules of Puritanism in the world of *The Scarlet Letter* meets with a backlash which takes the form of severe punishment. We learn at the beginning that Hester feels internally entitled to keep the name of her child's father, whom society reduces to an accomplice in crime, to herself. By that she publicly defies the authority of the community's officials and subordinates it to her own consideration and evaluation. Throughout the novel, Hester remains true to her own inner rules, the ones she has enacted by herself. An essential part of the inherently patriarchal Puritan community was the subordinate and subservient position of women, supported by the belief that women were by nature more prone to commit sin. Because of their natural weakness, as well as lustfulness, women were more likely to let the Devil lead them astray. Therefore, the rules and social constructs established by men ought to be especially binding on women, both for their own good and for the good of society.

It is, however, not acceptable to Hester to identify herself with the community's definition of good and bad, or right and wrong. She repeatedly questions the terms as defined by the "world's law" and compares them to her own visions of it. In Emerson's words, she takes it for granted that her task is to develop her "original relation to the universe". Similarly to the minister in "The Minister's Black Veil", Hester too is unyielding and very confident of her stance towards her decision, however rebellious, wrong or even deviant it seems in the eyes of her opponents. Her confidence results from the fact that she acts according to what her nature tells her to do. Hester's acknowledgement of her inner guidance is so empowering that

it makes her a much stronger person, both physically and mentally. It empowers her in a way nothing else could, turning the punishment into a rather insignificant by-product. If compared to shutting herself away from the empowering energy resulting from acknowledging her inner guidance, the loss of her image of a good wife and the consequent loss of her home seem quite bearable. As the narrator tells us, "the scarlet letter had not done its office"[1]. It might have made her process of self-recognition harder, but it did not manage to prevent her from achieving self-reliance. Hester's punishment resulted in limiting the interaction between her and the community, thus allowing her to interact more with her nature: "The tendency of her fate and fortunes had been to set her free. The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not tread"[2]. By forcing her to give up her husband and her household, the community themselves freed Hester from the limits established by female gender role. In addition, Hester was forced to earn her own living, accompanying spiritual self-reliance with economic self-sufficiency.

Generally speaking, the "regions where other women dared not tread" can be understood as regions where women acknowledge the authority of their conscience and thus question the traditional authority of men. At the beginning of "Experience", an essay published six years prior to *The Scarlet Letter*, Emerson asks: "Where do we find ourselves?" and warns us against blind belief in traditional conventions:

> We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight. But the Genius which, according to the old belief, stands at the door by which we enter, and gives us the lethe to drink, that we may tell no tales, mixed the cup too strongly, and we cannot shake of the lethargy now at noonday.[3]

What Emerson seems to suggest here is that we are born into a world that tells us who we are and that provides us with a framework within which our thoughts grow and our minds

[1] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: Spectrum, 1968) 166.
[2] *The Scarlet Letter* 199.
[3] Emerson 234-235.

develop. Nevertheless, this framework does not come from within ourselves. As it is not the product of our conscience, we should beware letting ourselves be tricked into accepting it as our own construction. Rather, we should approach it as something untrustworthy, something that threatens to oppress our own "original relation to the universe", and acknowledge the fact that this is not what we think, but what we were taught to think ever since we started thinking. Standing on the staircase, we ought to find our own relation to both of the directions and decide which way to go without the surrounding voices telling us that we ought to go upstairs, since we came from down below.

Contemplating this advice, Hawthorne turns Hester into a woman who questions the authority of Puritan beliefs and sees the world and herself in it through her own eyes. Hester, too, is standing on a staircase. Born into a world that is already functioning and running, she acknowledges that her own relationship towards her position in it is a highly personal matter and that no one has the right to construct it for her. By questioning and refusing the role Puritan society has assigned to her, she "assumed a freedom of speculation". Had the community's officials known about this freedom, the narrator later states, they "would have held it to be a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter."[4] To assume "freedom of speculation" means to question the validity of social constructs, which in turn endangers the authority of those who either invent or follow these constructs.

Before it was possible for Hester to "assume a freedom of speculation", she had to have recognized that social constructs are in fact based on other people's perspectives, opinions and intentions, rather than on any real, inherent qualities. In the case of gender roles, the assumption is that women are naturally weaker and therefore in need of protection. This weakness limits women's sphere of activity to households, protecting them from the public sphere which is assigned to men, who are stronger and therefore able to survive. By turning

[4] *The Scarlet Letter* 164.

Hester into a character who uncovers and knowingly defies moral dereliction, Hawthorne expresses his strong disagreement with the limits imposed on women by their respective gender role.

It should be noted here that the generally accepted vision of women as housewives that Hawthorne subjects to criticism in *The Scarlet Letter* can already be found in works of Greek philosophers, with Aristotle mentioning that "the Greek family – with its subordination of wife, children and slaves – is the natural, and therefore best, form of house-hold and family structure"[5], adding that women are naturally inferior to men, and therefore ruled by them. As a consequence of a change in the perception of "manhood", Emerson's and Hawthorne's time challenges this age-old gender role that women are expected to play. Once the capitalist and democratic system turns "true manhood" into self-reliant self-seeking, self-making and competing, the dependence of women on men becomes more noticeable. Charlotte Perkins Gilman phrases this concern of feminists when she comments on "economic dependence":

> "We are the only animal species in which the female depends on the male for food, the only species in which the sex-relation is also an economic relation. With us an entire sex lives in a relation of economic dependence upon the other sex, and the economic relation is combined with the sex-relation."[6]

As Gilman observes, the limitations society places on women are based on their sex only, regardless of their genius or creative agency, making it impossible for them to express themselves and become fully human in whatever potential for development they have. Generally speaking, men are the ones who produce and distribute wealth, while women are the ones who receive it. For men, self-reliance, self-making and the development of one's potential is a necessity perceived as the defining attributes of "manhood". Women, on the other hand, are supposed to rely on men as their "guards". Such forced passivity limits them in both their physical and psychological advancement and keeps them from achieving their full human potential.

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[5] Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992) 78.
[6] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Writings* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989) 134.

Thus, they are not allowed to develop the strength they naturally have – they are not naturally weak and incompetent, as traditional gender roles, reasserted by Puritanism, imply. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester draws our attention to the distinction between nature and nurture, that is to say between the potential, creative powers and strength women naturally possess, and the way their ascribed gender role makes them view themselves, that is to say as individuals lacking these qualities because of their sex. Foretelling a groundbreaking change concerning gender inequality, Hester comments on Emerson's concept of moral dereliction:

> As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position.[7]

The subordinate position of women in Hester's Puritan community does not result from their "very nature", but from a "hereditary habit" so ancient that it became synonymous to nature in people's minds. As it "has become like nature", Hester's community becomes guilty of exchanging nature for nurture, or, as Alison Easton puts it in her essay "Hawthorne And The Question of Women", they "blur the distinction between nature and culture"[8]. In Emerson's philosophy, whoever fails to distinguish between nature and nurture or, for that matter, culture, is guilty of moral dereliction.

In different sections of his essays, Emerson repeatedly deals with this notion, although he does not, as far as I am concerned, provide us with a clear-cut definition. The term itself seems to be related to the concept of self-reliance, as moral dereliction represents the main obstacle on the way towards achieving it. When Emerson speaks of every person's genius, he says: "Every soul is potentially a genius, if not arrested."[9] Hester's soul, unlike Dimmesdale's

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[7] *The Scarlet Letter* 165.
[8] Alison Easton, *Hawthorne And The Question of Women*, in: Richard H. Millington, *The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 91.
[9] Ronald A. Bosco, *The Topical Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume II.,* 20 October 2011 <http://books.google.cz/books?id=ZdQ__LGhRIUC&pg=PA352&lpg=PA352&dq=ralph+waldo+emerson+Consciousness+of+strength,+negligence+of+yesterday's+values.&source=bl&ots=-LdPnfLixk&sig=8ApVwEwswGomHLGWDUzGOac-

or Chillingworth's, is not arrested, because it manifests itself by pushing through its own perceptions, as opposed to yielding to perceptions sowed into her mind by the culture she was born into. She thus favors nature over nurture, realizing and acknowledging the discrepancy between the two. With regard to Emerson, we can say that favoring nurture over nature equals moral dereliction. Not working out the implications of our particular consciousness means to be morally derelict. In a world created by individual consciousnesses, this course of action is a great disappointment. It is unreasonable, absurd and dangerous at the same time.

For Emerson, "negligence of yesterday's values" is the only way to become conscious of one's strength.[10] It is our task and our undeniable right to create our own attitude, or, as Emerson puts it, our own "original relation" to ourselves, as well as to everything that concerns us. It is my belief that Hester represents a primary example of a person perfectly aware of this right. In his first romance, Hawthorne lets his female heroine create her own hierarchy of what is moral and what is immoral. He lets her deconstruct the social constructs, including gender roles, and live her life without the boundaries these unnatural constructs impose on women. By the end of the romance, the narrator concludes by expressing Hester's firm belief that:

> …at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness.[11]

The new truth that Hester hopes would be revealed is the fact that it is not nature but nurture that subordinates women to men. The reason that enables this misconception to survive is moral dereliction. In Hawthorne's time, women were already becoming aware of this fact, as Margaret Fuller's work documents. In the time Hawthorne chose as a setting for *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester was one of a kind and a pioneer of self-reliance.

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[10] Ibid.

[11] *The Scarlet Letter* 263.

## 2.2. Hester's Motherhood

So far, we have been discussing Hester's relationship towards the community and the limitations placed on her by social constructs represented by the community. In this regard, Hester has overcome the pitfalls of moral dereliction and managed to liberate herself. From this perspective, the heroine has achieved true self-reliance. However, the question of Hester's self-reliance becomes complicated once we consider her relationship to Pearl. In a text entitled "Mrs. Hawthorne's Headache", David Leverenz comments on Hester's ambivalence by saying that "as a solitary woman, Hester can rethink all social relations", including the deconstruction of gender roles, "but as a mother she has to nurture conventional womanhood, in herself as well as her daughter"[12]. This discrepancy can serve as an answer to the question raised by the narrator in Chapter 5: why is it that Hester does not leave? There seem to be at least two alternatives to Hester's staying in the Puritan community which condemned her: she could leave America for Europe and "hide her character and identity under a new exterior" or leave society with its social constructs behind to "assimilate with a people whose customs and life were alien from the law that had condemned her", that is to say to exchange civilization for wilderness.[13]

However, Hester does not choose to flee and decides to stay. Her affair with Dimmesdale belongs to her past, just as her child belongs to her present. They are now part of her identity, of her acknowledged self. Thus, Hester accepts the guilt society imposes on her, as it is part of the responsibility she wishes to take for her unauthorized motherhood and for her child. As Leverenz puts it, she "chooses to define her roots as her chain"[14]. On the one hand, Hester as a mother makes compromises with her acknowledged inner guidance and accepts the guilt, as well as the punishment imposed on her by the community. When forced

[12] David Leverenz, *Manhood And the American Renaissance* (London: Cornell University Press, 1989) 265.
[13] *The Scarlet Letter* 72.
[14] Leverenz 264.

to decide between nurture in the sense of motherhood, and nature in the Emersonian sense, Hester chooses motherhood. On the other hand, the portrayal of Hester as a protector, mother and nurturer is combined in the romance with the portrayal of Pearl, the product of Hester's motherhood and the cause of her conflict with the community. Instead of presenting Pearl as a submissive, obedient girl, she is depicted as independent, autonomous and instinctively aware of her inner guidance. Pearl is a very defiant child, unwilling to yield to the rules introduced to her by Hester. Depicted more as a creature of nature than as a creature of nurture, she represents a threat not only to female gender role, but to traditional roles and values in general. Even though Hester chooses motherhood over self-reliance, she nurtures a daughter who intuitively disdains the laws imposed on her by society.

What Hawthorne seems to be saying here is that women are inherently and naturally protectors, defenders of unconditioned love and nurture, and that it is this side of them that wins over self-reliance. In "Woman", Emerson says:

> The life of affections is primary to them [women]…they give entirely to their affections, set their whole fortune on the die, lose themselves eagerly in the glory of their husbands and children.[15]

There is a moment in *The Scarlet Letter* where Hester must decide, and the decision she makes is made on behalf of her daughter, not herself. In the chapter entitled aptly "A Flood of Sunshine", Hester experiences, though only for a brief moment, what her life would be like without the guilt she chose to accept for her disapproved motherhood. After she removes the scarlet letter, which is described here as "haunted by strange phantoms of guilt, sinkings of the heart and unaccountable misfortune", a flood of sunshine enters her life:

> The stigma gone, Hester heaved a long, deep sigh, in which the burden of shame and anguish departed from her spirit. Oh, exquisite relief! She had not known the weight until she felt the freedom![16]

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[15] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Woman*, 28 November 2011 <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/woman.html>

[16] *The Scarlet Letter* 202.

Her journey towards spiritual self-reliance in the Emersonian sense seems to become complete at this very moment. Accordingly, her "womanhood" is strengthened and accentuated:

> There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood.[17]

In keeping with Transcedentalists, Hawthorne makes use of Nature here, and has the narrator comment on Nature's sympathy towards this scene, in which a woman freed her nature from the smothering effects of laws enacted by civilization:

> The course of the little brook might be traced by its merry gleam afar into the wood's heart of mystery which had become a mystery of joy. Such was the sympathy of Nature – that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never subjugated by human law.[18]

This comment on Nature reacting to Hester's moment of relief expresses how close Hester got to freeing her nature, which "answers" to Nature "part by part", as Emerson says in *The American Scholar*.[19] Yet Hester's relief does not last long, as she is soon forced to reinstate the burden in order to preserve her relationship with Pearl. Having removed the scarlet letter, Hester has achieved self-reliance and freed herself from social constraints, including the gender role from which she has managed to withdraw: first by her affair with Dimmesdale, then by her disobedience during the trial that followed. As she has freed herself from the gender role though, she has also freed herself from her role of a mother:

> Hester felt herself, in some indistinct and tantalising manner, estranged from Pearl, as if her child, in her lonely ramble through the forest, had strayed out of the sphere in which she and her mother dwelt together, and was now vainly seeking to return to it.[20]

Thus, Hester's self-reliance seems to be set back by her motherhood. Emerson's line of reasoning in "Woman" is in accordance with the difficulty of Hester's situation:

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Emerson 50.
[20] *The Scarlet Letter* 208.

> Man is the will, and Woman the sentiment…In this ship of humanity, Will is the rudder, and Sentiment the sail: when Woman affects to steer, the rudder is only a masked sail.[21]

Hester obliges Pearl and thus chooses Pearl's wish over her own. As a woman, Hester is capable of a "magnanimity" men "stand astonished at". Hawthorne emphasizes this "magnanimity" and views it as problematic for women's journey towards self-reliance, as Hester puts her scarlet letter back on and sacrifices self-reliance to the relationship she has with her daughter:

> There was a sense of inevitable doom upon her as she thus received back this deadly symbol from the hand of fate….As if there were a withering spell in the sad letter, her beauty, the warmth and richness of her womanhood, departed like fading sunshine, and gray shadow seemed to fall across her.[22]

After she identifies herself once again, this time quite knowingly and by means of her own choice, with the letter A, and thus with the guilt imposed on her by the gender role she previously stood up against, Pearl agrees to recognize her:

> 'Dost thou know thy mother now, child?' '…now that she has her shame upon her – now that she is sad? '…Yes, now I will! Now thou art my mother indeed! And I am thy little Pearl!'[23]

Hawthorne clearly sympathizes with Hester's bravery, and in his portrayal of her defiance of authority other then the authority of her inner voice, he proves himself to be on the same side as Emerson, Fuller and others who praise "the infinitude of the private man". Hawthorne's objection to Emerson's principle stating that the only legitimate validator is "the infinitude of the private man" is that once we talk about the infinitude of the private woman, self-reliance becomes problematic because of motherly ties and the vision of "womanhood" as the embodiment of sympathy and sentiment.

Five years after the publication of *The Scarlet Letter*, Emerson's lecture on the Woman Question confirms the link between Hester's situation and Emerson's line of

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[21] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Woman*, 28 November 2011 <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/woman.html>
[22] *The Scarlet Letter* 212.
[23] Ibid.

reasoning. It shows that Emerson's attitude towards "womanhood" and the potential dispute that Hawthorne sees between Hester's self-reliance and Hester's motherhood in fact coincide. There seem to be two perspectives from which it is possible to view Hester: Hester as an individual member of a community, and Hester as Pearl's mother. From the first point of view, Hester rebels against moral dereliction and achieves self-reliance. In doing so, she seems to have the narrator's full support and sympathy. From the second point of view, Hester encounters an obstruction on her journey towards self-reliance that she does not wish to overcome. In "Woman", Emerson acknowledges the right of women to self-reliance, but indicates at the same time that they "are, in their nature, relative"[24]. Even if their relations to their surroundings are fractured, they still identify themselves in relation to their husbands, acquaintances or children, because "they give entirely to their affections". Therefore, the "best of women do not wish" gender equality manifested in such rights as the right to vote or to own property, because they prefer to find "in man her guardian…when he is her guardian, fulfilled with all nobleness…all goes well for both". While men "attain mental height by toil", women "attain the same mental height by sympathy" with men[25]. Similarly, Hawthorne seems to be saying in *The Scarlet Letter* that self-reliant women are still capable of warm relationships and unconditional love, while men are the ones who will always choose self-reliance over reliance on the loved ones. As David Leverenz puts it: "The men in Hester's life have maintained their intellectual or spiritual self-control by rejecting intimacy"[26]. He further states that not only in *The Scarlet Letter*, but in all of his four romances, Hawthorne favors "femininity" over "masculinity", the "feminine" being associated with relationships, intimacy and care for others, the "masculine" being associated with independence, self-assertion and

[24] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Woman*, 28 November 2011 <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/woman.html>
[25] Ibid.
[26] Leverenz 269.

competition with others.[27] While men favor combat over care and intellect over feelings, the women's domain prioritizes intimate, warm relationships. For this reason, "the coldness of Hester's radical speculations must be warmed by her mothering heart".[28]

On the one hand, the narrator allows Hester to feel entitled to the right Stanton promotes, and even to gain it, as she manages to take full responsibility for her life, which she strives to live according to what her inner voice and inner laws tell her to do. On the other hand, the right to express her own conscious self and to live according to it is taken away from her on behalf of her daughter, as it remains oppressed by the heaviness of the scarlet letter she never removes again. However, Hawthorne manages to combine the two seemingly opposite forces that determine Hester's life in his portrayal of Pearl. As a rather uncontrollable child, one who refuses to yield to the world that she was born into, the product of Hester's nurturing and mothering is, in fact, a daughter who shows signs of inner guidance and defiance of moral dereliction. In this sense, Emerson might have been thinking of Hawthorne's Hester when he stated that "so much sympathy as they [women] have; makes them inestimable as the mediators between those who have knowledge and those who want it."[29] If viewed from this perspective, Hester's mothering helps Pearl to get beyond moral dereliction. In this sense, it does not oppose female self-reliance, because it creates it.

As I perceive it, Hawthorne generally favors "femininity" over "masculinity", which is the main reason of his support of strong and conscious "womanhood", represented in his first romance by Hester. Female self-reliance empowers "womanhood", which is why Hawthorne sympathizes with Hester's self-reliance. In this respect, he adopts the key principles of Emerson's philosophy and sides with feminists of the type of Margaret Fuller. At the same time though, he seems to be afraid of what self-reliance might in fact do to "femininity" and

[27] Leverenz 270-271.
[28] Leverenz 271.
[29] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Woman*, 28 November 2011 <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/woman.html>

how it might change its association with the role of caregivers. When Hester achieves self-reliance, the narrator mentions that she has already lost much of her "femininity": "Some attribute had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman."[30] This loss of "feminine" attributes is the price Hester pays for the empowering effects of self-reliance, namely health and strength, traditionally associated with men rather than women. While Dimmesdale's health deteriorates and his moral dereliction becomes steadily more evident to him and to us, Hester grows stronger and becomes more resolute. Considering Hester's decision both to stay in Boston and to retain the scarlet letter, we can say that this potential consequence of female self-reliance turns out to contain something unsettling for Hawthorne, as for Emerson. In "Woman", Emerson also expresses his belief that "a masculine woman is not strong, but a lady is"[31].

With regard to Hester's case, Hawthorne clearly supports the idea of gender equality, criticizing "manhood" and "masculinity", and promoting "womanhood" and "femininity". Surprisingly, this attitude can be understood as both feminist and anti-feminist. It classifies *The Scarlet Letter* as a feminist novel, because it narrates a story of a female heroine's journey towards self-reliance. She defies moral dereliction, acknowledges her inner laws and puts them above traditional laws protected and promoted by a Puritan community. At the same time though, the romance undermines Hester's newly gained freedom by subordinating it to her devotion to Pearl. In this sense, Hawthorne implies that women cannot achieve self-reliance, because if they took the advice inherent in Emerson's works, they would simultaneously disclaim their roles of mothers, that is to say caregivers devoted to their closest. This seems to be a "feminine" trait that Hawthorne is not willing to give up in favor of Hester's emancipation. From this point of view, the romance can be classified as anti-feminist. After all, it advocates for gender inequality, since it promotes motherhood as

[30] *The Scarlet Letter* 163.
[31] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Woman*, 28 November 2011 <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/woman.html>

characterized by the female gender role of a devoted caregiver, and portrays it as a decisive factor in Hester's deliberation. However, if we consider Hester's self-reliance with regard to the nature of her mothering and the role she plays in Pearl's own journey towards self-reliance, the feminist perspective prevails.

Nevertheless, both perspectives, feminist and anti-feminist, are present in the romance. It seems that Hawthorne is referring to himself when he makes the narrator state the following words:

> No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true.[32]

Since he identifies himself with both the feminist and anti-feminist visions of his time, it is difficult to say which "face" might in fact be Hawthorne's "true" one: whether it is the one that accommodates to conventions of "manhood" and "womanhood", fearing the impact gender equality might have on "femininity", as well as on society itself, or the one that defies "womanhood's" inferior position framed by gender inequality. As a consequence, Hester's scarlet letter can rightfully be interpreted as standing for "ambiguity" or "ambivalence". In order to achieve a better understanding of this ambiguity, let us move on to Hawthorne's second romance: *The House of the Seven Gables*.

[32] Leverenz 278.

## 3. THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES

In the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne introduces two main motifs of his second romance: the relationship between the past and the present, and the transient, ever changing nature of all things. Simultaneously, he uses the introduction of these motifs to comment on his fondness for ambivalence: in the preface, he states that there is no such thing as objective morality. Rather, he asks his readers to create their own hierarchies of what is moral and what is immoral, and to bring their own perspective into the romance. Because "in nature, every moment is new"[1], as Emerson states in *Nature*, the process of evaluating and re-evaluating should never stop, because life never stops moving forward and developing into something different from what it was a moment ago – once it stops moving, it becomes dead:

> The author has considered it hardly worth his while, therefore, relentlessly to impale the story with its moral as with an iron rod – or, rather, as by sticking a pin through a butterfly – thus at once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude.[2]

Phoebe's and Hepzibah's life stories and the challenges they face in relation to democracy, capitalism and gender equality on the one hand, and class system and gender inequality on the other hand, are in turns viewed both from the progressive and the conventional perspective. This aspect of the novel is stressed by Hawthorne's appeal to the "gentle reader" to participate in constructing the story. In Emerson's words, "nature always wears the colors of the spirit"[3]. Thus, the preface explicitly asks the readers to make their own contribution to the romance.

Connected with this, and of special interest to feminist issues, is the question of the impact our past has on our present life. Hawthorne describes his second romance as:

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[1] Emerson 7.
[2] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (New York: Signet Classic, 2001) viii.
[3] Emerson 7.

> …an attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us. It is a legend prolonging itself, from an epoch now gray in the distance, down into our own broad daylight, and bringing along with it some of its legendary mist…[4]

Approaching the romance on the basis of the uniqueness of their consciousness, readers can either disregard this mist of times gone by, or "allow it to float almost imperceptibly about the characters and events"[5]. The motif of a changing world disrupting age-old traditions, such as sexual inequality, seems to correspond with Hawthorne's "present that is flitting away from us": he elaborates the theme of transience and perpetual movement, and contrasts it with conventions that do not yield to time. Following the life stories of his heroines and their male counterparts, Hawthorne in turn endorses and undermines Emerson's emphasis on newness and growth. Trying to free themselves from the "dark shadow" of their past, the characters strive to make peace with their respective inheritances, material and psychological. The connection between the past and the present, as well as the tension between tradition and progress are well summarized by Soren Kierkegaard, whose reflection on what Hawthorne expresses as "the very present flitting away" corresponds with the dilemmas of Phoebe and Hepzibah in *The House of the Seven Gables*:

> It is quite true what philosophy says; that life must be understood backwards. But then one forgets the other principle: that it must be lived forwards…Life can never properly be understood precisely because I can at no instant find complete rest in which to adopt a position: backwards.[6]

The present inevitably brings something new, something we have not had the chance to prepare ourselves for and to think over in advance. The present is unpredictable and always comes unexpected. It is natural, therefore, to feel intimidated by the changes these surprises inevitably bring, and to cling to that which has already been lived out and defined, thus providing us with a comfortable sense of security. As Emerson mentions in *Circles*:

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[4] *The House of the Seven Gables* vii.
[5] *The House of the Seven Gables* vii-viii.
[6] Soren Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals: A Selection* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1996) 63.

> Life is a series of surprises. We do not guess to-day the mood, the pleasure, the power of to-morrow.[7]

The "power of tomorrow" discussed in *The House of the Seven Gables* is represented by the process the characters engage in – it is a process of contemplation, deconstruction and re-evaluation of established social constructs, such as the traditional female gender role, that Hawthorne's mid-nineteenth century society tried to come to terms with. In my opinion, it is precisely in this context that Phoebe and Hepzibah should be analyzed.

## 3.1. Hepzibah Between Gentry and Democracy

Similarly to *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables* begins with a scene in which the female protagonist is being humiliated. In both cases, the women are challenged to gather their strength and face their inner fears. In the opening chapters, both of the romances associate female humiliation with a marketplace: after refusing to tell the name of Pearl's father, Hester decides to take shelter outside the town and to earn her own living, while her public humiliation literally takes place in a marketplace, and Hepzibah fights off her feelings of disgrace as she opens a shop in the house, becomes a shop assistant and enters the figurative marketplace. They both are pushed towards economic self-reliance and thus deviate from their gender role. Nevertheless, if we draw a line between the two heroines in question, we can see that the narrators seem to present their newly gained economic status as an unwelcomed necessity imposed on the women by the misfortunes that turned their lives upside down. In *The Scarlet Letter,* the narrator characterizes Hester's position by saying that needle-work, the work by means of which she makes her own living, is "almost the only one within a woman's grasp"[8]. As Leslie Fiedler mentions in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Hester's economic self-reliance cannot be understood as a proof of emancipation because the source of her economic self-sufficiency is one associated with traditional

[7] Emerson 211.
[8] *The Scarlet Letter* 81.

"womanhood".[9] Hester thus relies on an activity her gender role allows her to cultivate and practice. Similarly, Hepzibah is depicted as a woman who either does not possess or does not want to possess any other potential than the one that is in keeping with her position of a gentlewoman, a female gender role for which the rejection of tradition and hierarchy in favor of "self-reliance", economic or spiritual, is unsettling and uncomfortable. As such, Hepzibah partly meets Emerson's concept of a true woman. Since there is no man in whom Hepzibah could find her "guardian" - Clifford being weak and unfit for the male gender role of a "guardian", and Judge Pyncheon being perceived by her as a fiend – she "betakes her to her own defences, and does the best she can". According to the narrator, Hepzibah is too old to become a seamstress, leaving her with only one other option, a seller in a petty shop:

> This business of setting up a petty shop is almost the only resource of women in circumstances at all similar to those of our unfortunate recluse. With her nearsightedness, and those tremulous fingers of hers…she could not be a seamtress.[10]

The limited possibilities of women Hawthorne talks about do not suggest that the "feminine" works Hester and Hepzibah take up are the only ones they are naturally capable of. Rather, Hepzibah's situation reminds us of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, as referred to by Stanton, in which the king's daughter had been deprived of her arms by the "rude men" and then asked to take care of herself. In this sense, Hepzibah too had been deprived of the possibility to learn something that might help her make her own living more effectively than sewing and selling in a "petty shop".

If viewed from this perspective, the society she grew up in or - shall we say - the society's nurture, instilled the limits of female, as well as of class, gender role into her mind, depriving her of the right to get in touch with her nature and find a potential there worth developing and cultivating. As Emerson says in "Self-Reliance", the task of every individual

[9] Leslie Fidler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966) 63.
[10] *The House of the Seven Gables* 40.

is to look for a potential within her or his nature, a potential to become good at something.[11] Once we begin looking, finding it should not be a difficult task, since the mere approaching of it makes us feel fulfilled and good about ourselves. In other words, it makes us feel powerful. Then, we can achieve self-realization by means of developing this potential. Neither Hepzibah nor Hester was allowed to search for her talents and develop them freely, without the limits imposed on them by social constructs. Nurture prevented their nature from realizing its potentials. Thus, they are left with the activities their culture - or the "rude men" - allowed them to master, regardless of their talents and natural "arms".

Besides gender inequality, Hepzibah's situation as portrayed at the beginning of the romance is a result of yet another social construct – social hierarchy based on class system, albeit an admittedly very rudimentary one. The novel begins with Hepzibah's transformation from "the patrician lady" to "the plebeian woman"[12]. For the first time in her life, she is forced to take part in the working process and enter the marketplace. Not only her gender, but also her class is to blame for the lack of adaptabilities on the basis of which she might earn a living wage. As a "patrician lady", Hepzibah is twice handicapped. In order to survive, she must deconstruct the constructions instilled into her mind by the past, because the present brought new circumstances to which she must adapt. Throughout the romance, Hepzibah experiences what Emerson calls the "moment of transition". An advocate for progress, newness and growth, Emerson says in "Circles" that "everything good in nature and the world is in that moment of transition", because in the moment of change, our "intellectual power culminates".[13] In this essay, Emerson further expresses his belief that breaking our own patterns and re-organizing what we have previously organized or what somebody else has organized for us, is both empowering and extremely difficult.

[11] Emerson 113.
[12] *The House of the Seven Gables* 39.
[13] Emerson 202.

Knowing that she is about to break a pattern she thought was unbreakable until the present came and proved her wrong, Hepzibah wakes up in tears and begins to prepare for her first day as a working woman "nervously - in a sort of frenzy"[14]. Making use of Emerson's views on the difficulty connected to the moment of change, Hawthorne goes on portraying the distress, tension and fear that Hepzibah experiences in the process of breaking one circle and beginning a new one. Hepzibah feels that the world around her has moved forward, bringing republicanism, democracy and capitalism with it. It is now her lot and her turn to take a chance and move with the compelling current. After all, her pedigree alone can no longer provide security for her. "In this republican country", the narrator argues, "amid the fluctuating waves of our social life, somebody is always at the drowning point"[15]. Finding herself at the drowning point, Hepzibah realizes how pointless it is to "think backwards", as it means to live in an illusion. The reality of the present is so terrifying and fierce that she cannot afford to ignore it and pretend that no change has taken place. Thus, leaving the old circle and starting a new one becomes her only chance to survive.

At first, it might seem that the narrator points out Hepzibah's inner strength, which allows her to accept the new situation and to overcome her restraints, although she does so under pressure and because there is no other option at hand. She seems proud and self-reliant in that she refuses to accept money from Judge Pyncheon. She does not want to become an object of his charity and chooses to outgrow her beliefs, which she never before so much as thought about questioning, instead. By letting a man financially support her, Hepzibah would keep her subordinate position. The fact that she stood up for herself and refused Judge Pyncheon's support suggests that what she strives for is liberation from the dominance of men. However, the narrator soon raises questions concerning Hepzibah's potentially feminist

[14] *The House of the Seven Gables* 38.
[15] *The House of the Seven Gables* 39.

tendencies and provides us with an alternative explanation that seems to correspond with Hester's devotion to Pearl:

> …there was no other resource but either to accept assistance from a hand that I would push aside (and so would you!) were it to offer bread when we were dying for it – no help, save from him, or else to earn our subsistence with my own hands! Alone, I might have been content to starve. But you were to be given back to me![16]

Talking thus to Clifford, Hepzibah reveals that what might be understood as a proud, emancipated woman's act worthy of feminists' attention might also be characterized as an act of sacrifice. Hepzibah convinces herself to step out of her role as a supported gentlewoman for her brother's welfare. If it was not for him, the narrator implies, Hepzibah might have chosen poverty for life. The mainspring of her decision to "start a new circle" is to be found in "femininity" associated with "sentiment" and "affections" rather than in the Emersonian will to self-making and self-reliance. Likewise, her pride and her decision never to accept help from Judge Pyncheon, while partially productive of her emancipation, are to a significant degree produced by her devotion to a beloved brother, whose life was ruined by the Judge. Hepzibah does not find the energy to overcome the restraints in her inner guidance or nature. She finds it in her strong, loving feelings towards Clifford. If viewed from this perspective, Hepzibah and Hester share a common motivation for their spiritual emancipation: a devotion to the ones they love and care for. Having no strong man for a companion, Hepzibah finds unexpected reserves of strength within herself and uses them to protect herself and Clifford, who is portrayed as weak, exhausted and dependent on her care. In this sense, Clifford can be compared to Dimmesdale, who initially does not find the strength within himself to stand up for Hester and reveal his true relationship to her. These heroines are stronger then the respective male protagonists, but they also have the urge to use their strength for the benefit of others. Dimmesdale calls Hester his "better angel"[17], while Clifford murmurs: "You must

[16] *The Hous of the Seven Gables* 103.
[17] *The Scarlet Letter* 201.

take the lead now, Hepzibah! Do with me as you will!"[18] Both Hepzibah and Hester care deeply for their male counterparts in spite of their weakness and faults. At crucial points, the decisive factor in Hester's and Hepzibah's deliberations regarding self-liberation is devotion and care for a loved one. As such, they correspond with Emerson's belief that "the starry crown of woman is in the power of her affection and sentiment"[19] and thus provide a wider context for Emerson's advice regarding individuals in general, namely development of the self and its creative powers. Hepzibah is not fighting only for her survival, but for the good of her brother. To a significant extent, she justifies her new role as an attempt to foster Clifford's comfort and contentment, supplementing his decreasing powers with her increasing ones. Thus, the narrator helps map for us the subterranean, specifically "feminine" pathways of her hesitant transition toward self-reliance and emancipation.

## 3.2. Phoebe as a "Light-Bringer"

Hepzibah's female companion, Phoebe, remains true to her name throughout the romance and literally brings light to the house. Phoebe's presence refreshes the house as well as the romance itself, as her character changes the lives of her three companions: Hepzibah, Clifford and Holgrave. Enlivening their frames of mind, all of the characters associated closely with the dark shadow of the house and its past are being brought to the reality of the present by the curious and optimistic Phoebe. Three reasons for Phoebe's positive effect on the others can be detected in the narrator's portrayal of her character: two of them evincing direct influence of Emerson and Transcendentalist premises, one of them based on traditional views and conventions.

Let us begin with the first one, which reminds us of Transcendentalist writers, such as Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and their fondness for Nature/nature and its healing,

[18] *The House of the Seven Gables* 233.
[19] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Woman*, 28 November 2011 <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/woman.html>

empowering effects. It shows Phoebe as a product of Nature/nature. Described as a sweet, spontaneous, smiling country girl, Phoebe is related by the narrator to Nature/nature and its positive qualities. Phoebe is young and lives for the present. There is no burden from the past that would have power over her, no inheritance that would threaten to cast a shadow over her vitality. She can thus be contrasted to Hepzibah, who is portrayed as a product of nurture, rather than of Nature/nature – a product of what her culture brought her up to be. As opposed to Phoebe, Hepzibah has no sense of who she really is and only thinks of herself as of the vision instilled in her mind by society. Therefore, she is very unnatural – rigid, musty, frowning and unpleasant to look at. Even her own brother becomes repelled by her scowl, misunderstanding it as anger. In fact, Hepzibah finds it impossible to get rid of her scowl, since her vision of herself and others is imperfect, as she has deviated from Nature/nature to such an extent that her frown has become her only expression. By means of comparing the two women, the narrator expresses his belief in the good of Nature/nature and in the empowering and healthy effect it has on individuals. Nature/nature, associated with Phoebe, represents the present, liveliness, light and happiness, while nurture, associated with Hepzibah, represents the past, weariness, darkness and sorrow. As Thoreau, Emerson's disciple and Hawthorne's contemporary, said:

> There can be no really black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of nature, and has still his senses…While I enjoy the sweet friendship of the seasons I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me.[20]

Similarly, Phoebe is described as unburdened, as if shielded from melancholy and shadows by Nature/nature itself. At different places in the romance, Phoebe is described as a creature of Nature/nature, a person in close, personal touch with its enlivening forces:

> …the dawn kissed her brow. It was the caress which a dewy maiden – such as the Dawn is, immortaly – gives to her sleeping sister, partly from the impulse

[20] Henry David Thoreau, *First Days at Walden*, in: Lawrence Buell, *The American Transcendentalists* ((New York: The Modern Library, 2006) 437.

> of irresistible fondness, and partly as a pretty hint that it is time now to unclose her eyes.[21]

In works of Transcendentalists, there is an unwritten rule to be detected that says: the closer the relationship with Nature/nature, the healthier and more conscious the person. In the opening chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau explains that by settling for basic food and needs, and by taking everything one needs from Nature/nature, one can become economically self-reliant.[22] Once we achieve economic self-reliance, we can harmonize our daily rhythm with the rhythms of Nature/nature, and thus learn to live in harmony with Nature/nature. This is a healing process, since it is by getting to know Nature/nature that we get to know our inner selves, and vice versa. In *Nature*, Emerson mentions that "Nature always wears the colors of the spirit", that Nature is us and we are Nature.[23] In "The American Scholar", he speaks of a drop of a man's spirit and equates it to a small ocean of nature.[24] In this sense, the two are interchangeable, or rather, the two are one. The closer we get to physical Nature, the Nature that encloses us, the closer we get to our inner "nature" and the more authentic we become. It is therefore not surprising that Nature/nature is often contrasted to the city, a symbol of civilization. Civilization in turn represents life within society, the bearer of social constructs. In *Lectures on American Literature*, Martin Procházka states that Thoreau sees "physical nature as a counterpart of the state", having written *Walden, or Life in the Woods* as "a proof that man can live alone in natural environment…and achieve much greater freedom than anywhere in the society".[25] According to the Transcendentalists, the closer we are to Nature, the closer we are to our inner nature, and the more conscious of our own perceptions, as opposed to the adopted ones, we become. In the dark house, the witness of past acculturation,

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[21] *The House of the Seven Gables* 67.
[22] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods and „On the Duty of Civil Disobedience"*(New York: Signet Classics, 1999) 1.
[23] Emerson 11.
[24] Emerson 50.
[25] Martin Procházka: *American Literature: Beginnings to 1914*, in: Martin Procházka, Justin Quinn, Hana Ulmanová, Erik S. Roraback, *Lectures on American Literature* (Praha: Karolinum, 2002) 82.

socialization, unhappiness, misfortunes and acts of violence, the "bygone times" overshadow the potentially much happier future, preventing Hepzibah and Clifford from "living forwards", as Kierkegaard and Emerson might put it. Closed inside the house and surrounded by its old and dusty interior, Hepzibah and Clifford had withdrawn from Nature/nature, thus withering away behind the doors of the ancient house. Phoebe, on the other hand, is an outsider to the house, associated with the light of the outside, and the nature inside, rather than with the darkness of the inside, and the society outside. After Phoebe's arrival at the house, Hepzibah tries to discourage her from staying:

> "You see how pale I am! It is my idea that the dust and continual decay of these old houses are unwholesome for the lungs."

Phoebe does not let Hepzibah unsettle her and replies enthusiastically:

> "There is the garden, the flowers to be taken care of"…"I should keep myself healthy with exercise in the open air."[26]

Throughout the romance, she shows many signs of the enlivening, healthy effect of Nature/nature, thus representing a direct link to Emerson's essays and Thoreau's *Walden*. Especially if contrasted to Hepzibah, the creature of nurture, who prefers the unnatural, musty interior of the old House to the sunny garden, Phoebe illustrates Hawthorne's acknowledgement of Transcendentalist positive visions of Nature/nature.

My belief that Hawthorne's country-girl and "light-bringer" Phoebe is to a large extent inspired by Transcendentalist praise of Nature/nature can be supported by respective passages from *The American Notebooks*. In an entry from October 6, 1843, Hawthorne admires the natural beauties of Walden Pond. Two years before Thoreau went to live by Walden Pond, Hawthorne himself took what he called a "solitary walk" there and recorded the impression the place made on him in his journal. Acknowledging a special "magic" of the Pond, he wrote that it was in vain for him to "attempt to describe its autumnal brilliancies, or to convey the

[26] *The House of the Seven Gables* 71.

impression which they make on [him]".[27] He goes on to describe Nature as a force so powerful that it is not possible for a writer to capture the 'brilliancies' of its manifestation. Hawthorne thus takes part in the admiration and acknowledgement of the power of Nature/nature, a major topic phrased by Emerson and shared by Transcendentalist writers. In his foreword to Emerson's *Musketaquid,* a poem dealing with the natural beauties and spiritual powers of the countryside around Concord, Lawrence Buell comments on Emerson's and Thoreau's great interest in writing about the vital role Nature plays in our lives:

> He [Emerson] left it toThoreau to study nature intensively on its own terms and to bear out his Romantic assertions that the natural world is more indispensable to human well-being than a storehouse of raw material for manufacture and perception.[28]

Hawthorne too takes a walk from Concord to Walden Pond, contemplating and writing about the close association between a man - his experience, feelings and visions - and natural processes, such as Nature renewing the autumnal scene year after year, so that:

> …even when we shall have passed away from the world, we can spiritually create the scenes; so that we may dispense now and hereafter with all further efforts to put them into words.[29]

Thus, Hawthorne participates in the same activities and contemplations as Emerson and Thoreau, dealing with the topic of Nature/nature and the role it plays in each individual's life. Some people, as Hawthorne illustrates in Phoebe and Hepzibah, are more creatures of nature, while other people are more creatures of nurture. By associating Phoebe with the country and the garden, and by choosing youth, freshness and morning light as her defining attributes, Hawthorne picks up and accepts Emerson's positive, admiring attitude towards Nature/nature.

The second reason for Phoebe's positive effect on her fellow characters is related to the first one. Because she is closely associated with Nature/nature, Phoebe's character yields

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[27] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*, in: Lawrence Buell, *The American Transcendentalists* (New York: The Modern Library, 2006) 430.
[28] Lawrence Buell, *The American Transcendentalists* (New York: The Modern Library, 2006) 323.
[29] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*, in: Lawrence Buell, *The American Transcendentalists* (New York: The Modern Library, 2006) 430.

to Emerson's belief in the merit of growth and transition. She flourishes because there is no event in her past that she considers determinant in her life. She looks forward to new experience with anticipation and curiosity, not worrying about predestination, or prejudice, let alone a curse. When Phoebe arrives at the house, Hepzibah warns her against the dark and gloomy life she lives inside:

> "…this house of mine is but a melancholy place for a young person to be in. I lets in the wind, and the snow, too…but it never lets in the sunshine!"[30]

She then continues with an equally gloomy description of herself, an old woman living and thinking backwards, not expecting to experience anything happy in the future. She expects to continue to live a life of an old woman, whose past had turned her into an ill-tempered companion who does not acknowledge any potential changes the future might bring along in this respect:

> "And, as for myself, you see what I am – a dismal and lonesome old woman, whose temper, I am afraid, is none of the best, and whose spirits are as bad as can be. I cannot make your life pleasant, Cousin Phoebe…"[31]

Phoebe, however, views their common future differently. As a creature of Nature, she looks forward to newness and does not let Hepzibah break her spirit:

> "You will find me a cheerful little body", answered Phoebe, smiling, and yet with a kind of gentle dignity. [32]

In comparison to Hepzibah - her female counterpart in the novel - Phoebe, young and unburdened by the past, can be understood as Hawthorne's literary portrayal of Emerson's praise of newness and transition. In "Circles", Emerson contrasts the past to the present and says that the two in fact never meet, because there is a gap between them so wide that they cannot be connected. While Nature knows that "every moment in Nature is new", its artificial counterpart - culture - does not. The following extract from "Circles" relates to the step forward a younger generation of women had made in comparison to their older predecessors:

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[30] *The House of the Seven Gables* 70-71.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

> This old age ought not to creep on a human mind. In nature, every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred.[33]

When Hepzibah mentions that she cannot provide for Phoebe, the latter replies that she does not need anyone to provide for her: an answer that takes Hepzibah by surprise. As opposed to Hepzibah, Phoebe no longer considers female economic self-reliance, which requires female work, as an undesirable affair and something to be ashamed of. From Phoebe's point of view, this perception of women equals old age creeping on a woman's mind. In addition, she ascribes her progressive views to her life in the country, that is to say to a life in closer proximity to Nature:

> "I mean to earn my bread. You know I have not been brought up a Pyncheon. A girl learns many things in a New England village."[34]

For Hepzibah, it is not "the coming" but the "bygone" that seems sacred and relevant for her life. For Phoebe, the reason for happiness seems to be the mere newness of the place in which she has arrived and of her new companions. She greets everything she encounters in her new life in the house with a natural, sincere smile on her face, and in a relaxed manner. A good example of Phoebe's association with the future rather than with the past is Hepzibah's cent shop, which Phoebe happily takes over. It causes her no pain to communicate with the customers, while Hepzibah admits to being nervous and irritated by the mere fact that anyone can come to the shop without announcing themselves in advance. Phoebe enjoys greeting the customers and talking to them, as well as working in the shop and the process of working itself. In comparison to Hepzibah, the character of Phoebe functions as an embodiment of the present/future - a newcomer, spontaneous, unburdened, fresh and expectant. The fact that she is also "a light-bringer" and a cheerful and lively character implies positive connotations of the present and future, while Hepzibah's temper, appearance and weariness imply negative

[33] Emerson 211.
[34] *The House of the Seven Gables* 71.

connotations of the past. This, too, together with the characterization of Holgrave, might well be understood as Hawthorne's embodiment and portrayal of Emerson's philosophy of growth.

However sympathetic to newness, growth and progress Hawthorne turns out to be with regard to the first two aspects of Phoebe, the third one clearly undermines any potential feminist interpretations of this character. The third reason for Phoebe's functioning as the "light-bringer" and for enlivening the lives of Hepzibah, Clifford and Holgrave is her domesticity and home-loving care. In the course of the romance, Phoebe's presence in the house brightens up the previously gloomy, musty and unhappy place:

> The grime and sordidness of the House of the Seven Gables seemed to have vanished since her appearance there; the gnawing tooth of the dry rot was stayed among the old timbers of its skeleton frame; the dust has ceased to settle down so densely…or, at any rate, there was a little house-wife, as light-footed as the breeze that sweeps a garden walk...[35]

In this extract, Hawthorne's ambivalent attitude towards the character of Phoebe - and to some extent to the question of women in general - surfaces. Phoebe's youth, freshness and positive attitude towards anything life can bring suggests that she might put an end to prejudice and the frequently limiting power of traditions, such as the role of a housewife limited to the domestic sphere. After all, it is a very unhappy house in Phoebe's case, a gloomy old place that reminds us of the later *Yellow Wallpaper*, with its prison-like decorated walls that have a profound effect on its inhabitant and that penetrate her very soul. Yet Phoebe is in no way dispirited by the house. She keeps her positive attitude and happily glides "hither and thither to brush [the dust] away"[36]. By doing so, she "gives color" to the place, to use Emerson's phrasing, and enlightens the dark house with the touch of her nature, as well as with the touch of the physical Nature, with which she is so clearly associated. Thus, Hawthorne combines Phoebe's Transcendentalist-style, "natural" character with the image of "true womanhood", associated with traditionally thinking women who successfully master the

[35] *The House of the Seven Gables* 123.
[36] Ibid.

art of house work and domesticity. Phoebe draws her power and the "energizing spirit" that Emerson talks about in "Circles" from two seemingly contradictory sources: the power of the present that is "flitting away from us", connected to progressivism and "thinking forwards" rather than "backwards", and the traditional gender role of a woman as a happy housewife, completely fulfilled by her role of a caregiver and homemaker.

Hester in the *Scarlet Letter* felt that by choosing the role of a mother and caregiver, she was morphing and partially redirecting aspects of her nature that might otherwise have confined her to finding guidance within herself alone and turned her into a truly self-reliant person, in touch with her inner voice that drowns out the instructions of her Puritan community. Phoebe, on the other hand, seems happily to choose the role of a housewife and be naturally good at it precisely because she is in touch with her inner voice. In "Spiritual Laws", Emerson says that "there is guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening we shall hear the right word"[37]. Once we get in touch with our inner voice, this guidance reveals to us what the unique contribution is that each of us is to make to the universe. Phoebe's contribution and unique vocation is to be a housewife, since she not only masters the art of domesticity, but also feels happy, fulfilled and powerful within this role – she feels herself to be in the right place. Interestingly, in the character of Phoebe, Hawthorne manages to combine the social construct of female gender role with Emerson's concept of inner guidance, nature and self-reliance. Together, the three aspects, that is to say Phoebe's association with Nature/nature, her ability to live in the present as opposed to the past, and her domestic artistry associated with the traditional vision of "womanhood", yet presented in the romance as her unique vocation, create Phoebe's defining attribute of a "light-bringer".

[37] Emerson 154.

## 3.3. Phoebe's Shifting World

However, in order to analyze the complete picture of Phoebe with which the romance provides us, she ought to be viewed not only in relation to Hepzibah, her female counterpart, but also in relation to her male counterpart, Holgrave. It is a perspective that turns Phoebe into a rather inconsistent and ambiguous character, since her portrayal in relation to Holgrave differs immensely from her initial portrayal, based largely on the comparison to Hepzibah. If compared to Hepzibah, Phoebe emerges as an embodiment of the new generation of women, fond of changes and challenges to the old system established by the past. Thus, she happily takes over the cent shop and easily comes to terms with the interconnection of private and public sphere that the shop located in the house represents. If compared to Holgrave though, Phoebe assumes the role traditionally assigned to women if perceived alongside men: timid, settled and obedient. In this couple, the man and not the woman is the Emersonian character. By means of his profound criticism of moral dereliction and everything old that strives to predetermine his visions of the world, Holgrave shows clear signs of Emerson's influence. He decidedly defies moral dereliction, as his reflections advocate for the so called aboriginal Self, a term Emerson uses to describe a state of mind that is in the process of developing its own, "original relationship to the universe". Phoebe summarizes the difference between her and Holgrave in the following outcry:

> "How you hate everything old!" said Phoebe, in dismay. "It makes me dizzy to think of such a shifting world!"[38]

In comparison to Phoebe, Holgrave is depicted as a rather predatory character, one that feels entitled to rebel against deep-rooted orders and to dethrone them in order to establish new ones. Holgrave is described as possessing a strong force of will and a fighting spirit, which

[38] *The House of the Seven Gables* 163.

represents great danger to his prey: the traditional values and imposed definitions, which he wishes to overpower with values and definitions created by his own consciousness. His will to overpower moral dereliction is a sign of what Hawthorne calls Holgrave's "innermost man", whom the character obeys. Thus, Holgrave wants to disconnect himself from the legacy of the past. Phoebe, on the other hand, respects this legacy and wishes to retain it, as it is something she can rely on, something that cannot surprise her, something she had already come to terms with. Therefore, she can cherish it and cultivate it. In comparison to Holgrave's aboriginal Self, which Emerson describes as the opposite of moral dereliction, Phoebe falls prey to moral dereliction and she does so knowingly, because it makes her feel comfortable, while Holgrave's belief in constant movement and the need for new terms matching his "innermost man" and thus his present rather than his past, makes her feel dizzy.

To use a metaphor that Emerson introduces in "Compensation", we can say that Holgrave likens Hepzibah and Clifford to shellfish that has unknowingly outgrown its stone shell and has, by being thus confined, lost its capacity for growth and expansion. Emerson talks about shellfish, which "crawls out of its beautiful but stony case, because it no longer admits of its growth, and slowly forms a new house"[39]. However, neither Hepzibah nor Clifford take this step and remain inside their "stony case". For Holgrave, accepting the patterns established by previous generations, such as social constructs or state institutions, without approaching them ourselves and contemplating our own relation to them, equals living in "dead men's houses", such as, "for instance, in this of the Seven Gables!". Phoebe, on the other hand, does not approve of this attitude, as long as the already established patterns are still functioning: "And why not," said Phoebe, "so long as we can be comfortable in them?"[40] If viewed alongside Holgrave, Phoebe is the settled one, the one advocating for the certainty and comfort of that which had already been experienced and verified, even if

[39] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Compensation*, 28 November 2011 <http://www.rwe.org/?option=com_content&task=view&id=126&Itemid=42>
[40] *The House of the Seven Gables* 163.

somebody else had done that for us. Holgrave, as a man, is described as being one step ahead of Phoebe, the woman. Holgrave perceives her as a person that is not yet able to discern the pitfalls of not questioning the terms of the things she encounters, and to acknowledge the fact that before we name these things ourselves, the terms already assigned to them by somebody else are mere names that have no real meaning to us. Holgrave, by contrast, tries to reflect on everything in a different way than that in which it is presented to him. Thus, he acknowledges and promotes Emerson's "original relation to the universe". With regard to Holgrave's progressivism, Phoebe is depicted as one step behind: "I hardly think I understand you", says Phoebe, to which Holgrave replies, smiling:

> "No wonder, for I have told you a secret which I hardly began to know before I found myself giving it utterance. Remember it, however, and when the truth becomes clear to you, then think of this moonlight scene!"[41]

Not yet enlightened by the moonlight, Phoebe certainly does not function as a "light-bringer" in the Emersonian context of a new understanding of the self and the world, which empowers the individual. In the group of a woman and a man, the one who picks up Emerson's beliefs is the man, while the woman reacts mistrustfully and worriedly. In his portrayal of Holgrave and Phoebe, Hawthorne outlines for the first time what I consider his attitude towards the relationship between "femininity" and "masculinity": while the man strives to assert his power by creating his own, brand new visions and thus questions the ones created before his most recent visions emerged, the woman strives to come to terms with the already existing ones. While "manhood" indulges in the process of self-assertion and wishes to replace the terms defined by others with its own creations, "womanhood" relishes interconnectedness, rather then disconnection, and continuity.

With regard to the end of the romance, it is my belief that Hawthorne sides with the woman, prioritizing "femininity" over "masculinity", and favoring the choice to settle down

[41] *The House of the Seven Gables* 190.

over the choice to unsettle, praised and promoted by Emerson. In "Circles", Emerson says: "People wish to be settled, only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them"[42]. In the end of *The House of the Seven Gable*s, Hawthorne reverses this statement by deciding that all of his protagonists ought to settle down. He might as well have said: they wish to be unsettled, only as far as they are settled, is there any hope for them. Even Holgrave, who begins as an Emersonian nonconformist, changes his mind by the end of the novel and chooses to settle down, thus turning down Transcendentalist progressivism and choosing social constructions over self-reliance and the aboriginal Self:

> "…The happy man inevitably confines himself within ancient limits…it will be my lot to set out trees, to make fences – perhaps, even, in due time, to build a house for another generation – in a word, to conform myself to laws, and the peaceful practice of society…"[43]

The development that Holgrave and Phoebe go through is of course inherently Emersonian – they are neither consistent in their thoughts and attitudes nor fully determined. They change and evolve throughout the novel, so that it is impossible to "impale their story with a moral", as Hawthorne promises in the preface. Nevertheless, the fact that all of the protagonists, male and female, choose to settle down and focus on those points in their lives that seem most stable and firm, such as the House of the Seven Gables itself, hints at Hawthorne's struggle with the difficulty of accepting the inevitable fact of life that Phoebe calls "a shifting world". In the romance, Hawthorne recognizes Emerson's thesis that nature's law is growth. He acknowledges that it does not suit us well to "live backwards", as Clifford and Hepzibah do, because our nature is the nature of growth. At the same time, he says through the words of Holgrave that the order of life should be to construct, which inevitably means to deconstruct what others have constructed, and better yet, to deconstruct what we ourselves have constructed in the past. However, this process is depicted as very painful and it is not to the taste of Hawthorne's characters to go through it.

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[42] Emerson 211.
[43] *The House of the Seven Gables* 267.

Throughout his essays, Emerson develops a concept of two different kinds of tendencies that can be observed within the mind of each individual. While the first one seeks settlement and wants to anchor as tightly as possible, the second one seeks unsettlement and wants to head towards newness and repetitive deconstruction. As illustrated in this chapter, Hawthorne's characters obviously dispose of both of these tendencies. The two tendencies are traceable in the character of Hepzibah; they surface in the character of Phoebe – especially if compared to Hepzibah - and they manifest themselves very clearly in the character of Holgrave. In the end, however, all of the characters choose to settle down, allowing the first tendency to seize control over their souls. It is thus "femininity", portrayed in this work as the bearer of stability, and connection, rather than disconnection, to which the author draws our attention.

In my opinion, *The House of the Seven Gables* provides us with a specific view on "femininity" that Hawthorne cherishes and defends. The association of Phoebe and Hepzibah with "womanhood" and "femininity" as interpreted in this chapter is not yet present in *The Scarlet Letter*. Hester exceeds her male counterparts by the strength of her spirit. In comparison to *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Scarlet Letter* focuses primarily on its female heroine and marginalizes the men in her life. In a way, Chillingworth and Dimmesdale merely complement the final portrayal of Hester's development. If the struggle between "masculinity" and "femininity" as discussed in *The House of the Seven Gables* was already present in *The Scarlet Letter*, it only took place within Hester's mind: one part of her longs for freedom, self-reliance and self-assertion, while the other sees it as problematical for some aspects of her care for her child, and thus unsettling. In his second romance, Hawthorne puts women in pairs with men, conditions their complete portrayal by their comparison to the respective counterparts, and unfolds his vision of the age-old struggle between "masculinity" and "femininity". As I perceive it, the issue of preservation of the concept of "femininity" that

prevails in *The House of the Seven Gables* and concern for what Emerson's influence might do to it is the main preoccupation of much of Hawthorne's writing. This preoccupation, I believe, also provides the key to understanding Hawthorne's specific kind of feminism. His third romance, *The Blithedale Romance*, confirms this hypothesis. Let us therefore continue by a reflection on the following foursome: Zenobia, Hollingsworth, Coverdale and Priscilla. Focusing on the tension between "femininity" and "masculinity", special attention will be paid to Zenobia's relationship to Hollingsworth.

## 4. THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE

Among Hawthorne's fiction, *The Blithedale Romance* is the one most frequently discussed in relation to the writer's life and personal experience. Although the author explicitly discourages his readers from perceiving *The Blithedale Romance* as related to his experience at Brook Farm, critics cannot help but look for links and associations between the romance's characters and Hawthorne's contemporaries, even Hawthorne himself. To complicate this matter, Hawthorne makes Coverdale, the narrator of most of *The Blithedale Romance*, mention some of the names most frequently discussed in relation to the novel, such as Emerson and Fuller, the original editor of *The Dial*:

> Being much alone, during my recovery, I read interminably in Mr. Emerson's Essays, the Dial, Carlyle's works, George Sand's romances, and other books which one or other of the brethren or sisterhood had brought with them.[1]

Coverdale, a participant in the Blithedale experiment, is a writer who proves to be very sensitive to gender inequality. Throughout the romance, he either takes part in or later eagerly comments on a number of conversations about and manifestations of gender roles and the inequality between them. With regard to *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, the two romances he wrote prior to *The Blithedale Romance*, we can perceive Hawthorne as a writer interested in the feminist issue of gender inequality and thus reminiscent of the character of Coverdale. As some of his fellow residents at the farm later reported, Hawthorne, like Coverdale at Blithedale, often spent time alone during his stay there. Georgiana Bruce Kirby famously stated that:

> No-one could have been more out of place than he…He was morbidly shy and reserved, needing to be shielded from his fellows, and obtaining the fruits of observation at second-hand.[2]

[1] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001) 50.

Describing Hawthorne as an observer rather than an experiencer, Kirby indirectly likens the author to his narrator and one of the two male protagonists: Coverdale. Kirby thus provides us with an attractive clue that suggests a much more direct association between the author's own perceptions and attitudes, and the perceptions and attitudes expressed and alluded to in his fiction, than we can ever imagine while studying and analyzing the rest of his work. What is more, Hawthorne confirms this clue himself. In 1851, shortly after the publication of *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne wrote in a personal letter to a friend:

> When I write another romance, I shall take the Community for a subject, and shall give some of my experiences and observations at Brook Farm.[3]

However incorrect it seems to view this romance as Hawthorne's portrayal of Brook Farm only, it is equally incorrect to disregard the role it had to have played in Hawthorne's contemplations. As John Updike observes in his foreword to the novel, "Hawthorne's haunted, twilit imagination never admitted more local American daylight than in *The Blithedale Romance*"[4]. With regard to Hawthorne's views on the relationship between "manhood" and "womanhood", as well as between their respective roles, the potential links between Brook Farm and *The Blithedale Romance* represent a source of information that should not be omitted. Let us therefore begin with a comment on the phenomenon of Brook Farm and discuss its relevance to our knowledge of Hawthorne's feminist tendencies.

## 4.1. Brook Farm: Gender Equality as Part of Social Reform

The conventional perception of "true womanhood" as discussed in previous chapters and as approved, to some extent, by Emerson in "Woman", as well as the social construct of female gender role, were challenged by the Brook Farm community. Reminiscent of the limits imposed on Hester's self-awareness is the absence of religion that limits women's activities to

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[2] Georgiana Bruce Kirby, *Years of Experience: An Autobiographical Narrative* , 17 November 2011 <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/ideas/brkirby.html>
[3] James R. Mellow, *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980) 181.
[4] *The Blithedale Romance* xviii.

the ones assigned to them by patriarchal society. Historical memoirs which describe the Brook Farm experiment portray the place as one where "women had the opportunity to expand beyond their typical sphere of tasks". The female participants' activity is further depicted as "tasks that were typical of other women at the time such as simple food preparation, and shared housekeeping", although different sources emphasize that male and female gender roles often mingled, as "during the harvest time women were allowed to work in the fields and men even helped out with laundry during the cold weather".[5] Reminiscent of Phoebe's happy participation in Hepzibah's cent-shop business is the female economic self-reliance effective at Brook Farm:

> Because of the community's focus on individual freedom, women were autonomous from their husbands and were also allowed to become stockholders.[6]

Even though the enthusiasm with which Hawthorne, as opposed to Emerson, took part in this experimental community is described by his biographers as changeable and rather short-lived[7], the mere fact that he decided to participate in this communal way of living shows that he had to have consented to the principles on which it was based, or at least evinced curiosity about what the results might be of so striking a change in the relationship between traditionally conceived "manhood" and "womanhood". If viewed in relation to the four main protagonists of *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne's ambiguous, inconsistent attitude towards the Brook Farm experiment can be seen as reflecting his ambiguous, inconsistent attitude towards the question of women. Initially a keen supporter of Brook Farm's ideals and efforts to reform society, Hawthorne wrote in one of his letters to Sophia Peabody, his future wife: "I feel the original Adam reviving within me."[8] Only a few months later, he prioritizes

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[5] *Transcendental Ideas: Social Reform/History of Brook Farm* <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/ideas/brhistory.html>
[6] Ibid.
[7] Arlin Turner, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980)
[8] Edvin Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place, a Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991) 190.

the life of an "ordinary" member of society over the life of a reformist: "…it is my present belief that I can best attain the higher ends of my life by retaining the ordinary relation to society".[9] Having chosen the "ordinary relation to society", Hawthorne seems to be expressing here a certain kind of disillusion, which manifests itself in the romance's skepticism regarding social reforms of any kind, including female emancipation.

*The Blithedale Romance* introduces visions of a newly organized society only to undermine them as the individual stories of the four protagonists develop and intertwine. Shortly after the commune is introduced as one based on brotherhood and cooperation, as opposed to rivalry and competition, Silas Foster labels competition as something inevitable and completely natural: "I tell you, we should have to get up a little too early in the morning, to compete with the market-gardeners round Boston!"[10]. Upon his arrival, Coverdale finds out that "as regarded society at large, we [the Brook Farmers] stood in a position of new hostility, rather than new brotherhood"[11]. In reaction to Silas's down-to-earth statements, always ridded of lofty ideas and generous purposes, associated so frequently with Brook Farm, Coverdale recognizes that:

> …one of the first questions raised, after our separation from the greedy, struggling, self-seeking world, [relates] to the possibility of getting the advantage over the outside barbarians, in their own field of labor.[12]

As a newcomer, Coverdale immediately undermines the ideals on which the community is based, thus questioning the possibility of reform, be it reform of mutual relationships or reform of society as such. With regard to the change that took place in Hawthorne's comments on Brook Farm, it is tempting to view Coverdale as a fictional counterpart of Hawthorne, or, as John Updike puts it, as "Hawthorne's most extended self-portrait, an alter ego to whom he denies his own fruitful marriage and energetic authorship, leaving a detached

[9] Turner 138.
[10] *The Blithedale Romance* 21.
[11] *The Blithedale Romance* 22.
[12] Ibid.

introvert"[13]. In my opinion, what Coverdale and Hawthorne mainly have in common is a mistrustful attitude towards reforms, which leads us back to Hawthorne's fear of what Phoebe calls "the shifting world". At Brook Farm, as well as in the romance, social reforms such as the one concerning gender equality are put forward and examined. Neither in reality nor in Hawthorne's narrative do they succeed, though. Brook Farm fails to persuade society of the possibility to run an effective, economically self-reliant community based purely on peaceful co-existence, in which all participants are equals, working together for mutual benefit. After only a few months of existence, the community was no longer able to support itself and slowly fell apart, with Orestes Brownson reporting that "the atmosphere of the place" was "horrible"[14]. Similarly, the four main protagonists of *The Blithedale Romance* fail to adopt the proclaimed changes and thus remain "ordinary". Whether unable to change themselves, as Zenobia's case implies, or choosing not to do so, as Hollingsworth and Priscilla's cases seem to be, none of the characters manages to break their "ordinary relations to society", that is to say the way in which they relate to their surroundings. Albeit self-reliant and emancipated, Zenobia remains driven by "affection" and "sentiment", while Hollingsworth continues to exercise his "will" regardless of Zenobia's feelings towards him. As a consequence, the message of *The Blithedale Romance* seems to be that neither the relations between "manhood" and "womanhood", nor society as a whole, can be reformed.

As Alison Easton puts it in her essay on Hawthorne and the question of women, Hawthorne's "Blithedale is a back view; it remains inside the boundaries of the ordinary life even though it imagines itself beyond them"[15]. Similarly to the residents of Brook Farm, and presumably to Hawthorne himself, the characters strive to figure out an alternative to the existing relationship between "manhood" and "womanhood", based on the dominance of one

[13] *The Blithedale Romance* xiii.
[14] *Transcendental Ideas: Social Reform/History of Brook Farm* <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/ideas/brhistory.html>
[15] Alison Easton, *Hawthorne and the question of women*, in Richard H. Millington, *The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 94.

over the other, as well as an alternative to the capitalistic order based on competition. Instead of arriving at an alternative though, they only manage to make the existing conditions more evident and inadvertently point out their incapability of change. Coverdale observes this incapability at the very beginning of the romance, when the two female protagonists, soon to become rivals, meet:

> "She is neither more nor less", answered Zenobia, "than a seamstress from the city, and she has probably no more transcendental purpose than to do my miscellaneous sewing; for I suppose she will hardly expect to make my dresses."[16]

Zenobia and Priscilla meet in an environment supposedly unspoiled by economic competition, an environment that prides itself on cooperation inspired by visions of mutual benefit. Yet Zenobia places Priscilla below herself in the community's hierarchy and is quick to identify her as a mere seamstress, not even worthy of making her dresses. As we already know, the profession of a seamstress is frequently made use of in Hawthorne's novels, always in relation to the limits imposed on women by female gender role. Zenobia, the renowned and eloquent feminist, readily assigns it to Priscilla, clearly disdaining her and her potential abilities. With regard to his unofficial yet recorded break with Brook Farm, what Hawthorne seems to be pointing at is the danger of believing in and emotionally attaching oneself to visions of successful reform. Of importance here is Coverdale's assertion that "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."[17]

A motif present in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* emerges again in *The Blithedale Romance*: the protagonists contemplate a change that would free them from the burdens represented by social constructs and bring them nearer to their nature. The guidance they would then find within themselves is the only one capable of reform, as it would deconstruct the ascribed manner in which they view themselves, as well as the way in

[16] *The Blithedale Romance* 33.
[17] *The Blithedale Romance* 71.

which they relate to others. Hester contemplates setting aside the scarlet letter symbolizing an external intrusion on her self-definition, that is to say the part of her self that was instilled into her mind by society and has nothing to do with her nature. Physical Nature encourages her to take this step because her life in the woods outside the town frees her from the restraints represented by her community; the wilderness stands in opposition to civilization, with its artificial limits and constraints. However, when faced by her daughter's disapproval, she puts the letter back on, deferring to its heaviness. Even though Hester manages to combine her self-reliance with her mothering, and thus remains a nonconformist, her self-definition seems to be disturbed by Pearl's vision of her mother. In this sense, the character of Hester corresponds with Emerson's portrayal of a true woman, who is, in her nature, "more relative" and who sets her "whole fortune on the die" and loses herself "eagerly in the glory of" her child.[18]

Similarly, Phoebe is first described as a representative of newness, growth and progression, who "means to earn her bread". She is pictured as working actively at home and at the shop, happily connecting the public sphere with the private, domestic one. In the end, Phoebe's promising association with youth, freshness and newness dissolves as we begin to view her in relation to Holgrave's creative radicalism. What remains of the original vision of Phoebe as a creature of Nature is a confirmed creature of nurture: an inheritor of her ancestors' fortune, a defender of the old house and a devoted and deferential housewife to her husband, the now tame and settled conformist Holgrave. Together, Holgrave and Phoebe decide to settle down and construct their own "house", not only for themselves but also for their children. Since they knowingly wish to connect their present with their future and thereby to connect their descendants' future present to their past, they come to favor connectedness and interdependence over self-reliance.

[18] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Woman*, 28 November 2011 <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/woman.html>

Moving on to Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance*, we can notice that the feminist, self-reliant part of Hawthorne's "representative women" grows stronger. A feminist par excellence, Zenobia phrases what Hester obliquely anticipates. She knows what her position as a woman in society is and knowingly opposes it. She is aware of the inequality between genders postulated by history, culture, and society, and considers it an anachronism. Depicted by the narrator as a woman who grows out of her gender role, Zenobia recognizes its unfair limits and considers it a "given," for her, that these limits ought to be torn down. What is more, her powerful energy turns her into a woman attractive to men, even though she makes her refusal of male dominance no secret. Quite in keeping with what Emerson promises to those who acknowledge their inner voice and guidance, Zenobia's energy, strength and health shine through and turn her into a very powerful and influential person, admired and respected by others. At the beginning of the novel, Zenobia is characterized by "bloom, health and vigor, which she possessed in such overflow that a man might well have fallen in love with her for their sake only"[19]. Later on, she denies her inner guidance and disowns her own conscience, because it contradicts the visions and attitudes of Hollingsworth, the man who arouses her "affection". Thus, she devotes herself, her self-reliance and her future to another person, a man on top of that. Her self-reliance becomes unsettled as she gives precedence to Hollingsworth's beliefs and wishes over her own.

The most obvious link between Brook Farm and *The Blithedale Romance*, one that is relevant for Hawthorne's view on the question of women, is therefore a chronic mistrust in changes, both on the level of individuals and with regard to social order. While it remains uncertain whether he fears that the consequences of reform might be negative, or whether he fears that changes are mere illusion, because neither "womanhood" nor society is changeable, the fact that he tends to portray the reforms suggested in his romances as problematic

[19] *The Blithedale Romance* 17.

illustrate his mistrustful attitude toward them. His disappointment with the Brook Farm experience might have encouraged Hawthorne in this skepticism, and convinced him to "retain the ordinary relation to society", as opposed to becoming a nonconformist. In his mistrustful comment on reforms, Coverdale states that:

> 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.[20]

This unpredictability leads us back to Emerson's Nature/nature, in which "every moment is new", unexpected, unprecedented. Hawthorne elaborates this idea and says that to plan a future change and carry it out accordingly means to blaspheme against this perpetual movement forward. For Emerson, "life is a series of surprises" because "we do not guess to-day the mood, the pleasure, the power of to-morrow, when we are building up our being".[21] While Emerson's arguments always show signs of hope for the future and sound optimistic, we can sense concern and skepticism in the way in which Hawthorne uses the same arguments to point at the problematic nature of changes. Yet he does not move away from motifs alluding to the reformation of "womanhood's" subordination to "manhood". As Alison Easton puts it, "Hawthorne's skepticism about reformers does not mean that he did not share their questions"[22].The relationship between male and female gender role, and - on a more abstract level – between "masculinity" and "femininity" remains in the centre of his attention, as if he desired its change but feared its consequences at the same time.

## 4.2. "Femininity" versus "Masculinity"

With regard to society and in the context of social reforms, *The Blithedale Romance* revolves mainly around the tension between "manhood" and "womanhood". With regard to individuals and in the context of inner guidance and self-reliance, it revolves around the

[20] *The Blithedale Romance* 71.
[21] Emerson 211.
[22] Alison Easton, *Hawthorne and the question of women*, in Richard H. Millington, *The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 81.

tension between "masculinity" and "femininity". On the four main protagonists, Hawthorne shows the struggle between "manhood" and "masculinity" on the one side, and "womanhood" and "femininity" on the other side, commenting on their defining characteristics such as competitiveness, self-assertion and a certain kind of fighting spirit as opposed to caring, compassion and self-abasement. In "Woman", Emerson says that "we men have no right to say it, but the omnipotence of Eve is in humility"[23]. In the context of the difference between "masculinity" and "femininity", Emerson's "humility" seems to me to be the counterpart to the traits perceived as typically masculine, namely self-assertion and competitiveness. However, the attributes of "femininity" and "masculinity" manifest themselves not only in the individual characters and in their mutual disagreements, but also inside each of them. By means of building relationships with each other, Zenobia, Hollingsworth, Priscilla and Coverdale detect both the "feminine" and "masculine" within themselves. While Hollingsworth's "masculine" part prevails, Priscilla seems to be dominated by the "feminine" side of her. Nevertheless, the two tendencies together, as well as the discrepancy between them, manifest themselves most clearly in the character of Zenobia.

Once she enters the stage, Zenobia becomes the leading lady of the novel, self-confident, independent-minded and strong. Drawing Coverdale's attention, she is depicted as greatly admired and respected. Her "health and vigor" and her "admirable figure of a woman" are associated with "an influence breathing out of her", an energy that gives her power to influence others. This "vigor" comes from the inside and results from her recognition and acknowledgement of her inner guidance. She answers to the laws of her nature only, paying no attention to laws enacted by society. Thus introduced as a self-reliant woman, Zenobia creates a powerful sphere around herself about which Coverdale says: "Zenobia's sphere, I

[23] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Woman*, 28 November 2011 <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/woman.html>

imagine, impressed itself powerfully on mine, and transformed me"[24]. Yet the narrator seems reluctant to associate Zenobia's power and self-reliance with femininity. Rather, he puts the two in opposition, indicating that what Zenobia possesses in strength and self-reliance, she lacks in womanliness. As Coverdale tells us, Zenobia is a woman with:

> ...a combination of features which it is safe to call remarkably beautiful, even if some fastidious persons might pronounce them a little deficient in softness and delicacy.[25]

This portrayal of Zenobia might remind us of Emerson's assertion that "a masculine woman is not strong, but a lady is". Coverdale later develops this thought and mentions that by calling Zenobia "a true-woman" and by likening her to Eve, he did not mean to associate her with "especial gentleness, grace, modesty, and shyness" but with a "certain warm and rich characteristic, which seems, for the most part, to have been refined away out of the feminine system". This characteristic, I believe, is what society and gender roles as social constructs withhold from women, even though it is naturally present in them. It is the strength and vigor shining through Zenobia's self-confidence. However, Coverdale praises her self-reliance and force but points out at the same time that it takes away from her what society considers feminine, such as gentleness, delicacy, fragility or vulnerability. Zenobia does not need anyone to protect her – she is perfectly capable of taking care of herself, vulnerability being perhaps the last quality one might associate with her character at the time when we meet her. Thus, Zenobia's self-reliance relates to masculinity rather than femininity. Feminine traits such as caring and "humility" seem unfamiliar to her. Coverdale confirms this perception of Zenobia's strength and independence as unwomanly when he argues that Zenobia's attributes are uncommon among women, yet preferable: "we find enough of those attributes, everywhere. Preferable – by way of variety, at least – was Zenobia's bloom, health, and

[24] *The Blithedale Romance* 45.
[25] *The Blithedale Romance* 17.

vigor".[26] Alluding to gender equality established at Brook Farm, Zenobia confirms her strength associated commonly with men:

> …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!"[27]

Zenobia's strength and self-reliance seem most evident in relation to Priscilla, reminding us remotely of Phoebe and Hepzibah. After her arrival at Blithedale, Priscilla is introduced as a timid, dependent person, who relies on others and looks up to strong and self-reliant Zenobia. While Zenobia views herself as strong enough to "go afield", Priscilla is depicted as fragile, shivering and frightened by the country and physical Nature. When she comes to Blithedale, Priscilla feels for the first time "the awfulness that really exists in its [Nature's] limitless extent".[28] In comparison to Priscilla, Zenobia is more a creature of Nature, as she is in touch with her inner nature and inner guidance, capable of self-definition and thus self-reliant. Her fondness of Nature manifests itself in her flower, always fresh and colorful, "that Nature had evidently created, in a happy exuberance, for the one purpose of worthily adorning Zenobia's head".[29] Priscilla, on the other hand, "has never before known what it is to live in the free air", which might imply her initial unawareness both of Nature, and her inner nature and guidance. Under the influence of Zenobia and Nature, Priscilla gradually becomes healthier, more vigorous and more aware of her own strength and creative powers. When Coverdale later urges Priscilla to take his arm and rely on him during a walk in the woods, Priscilla answers: "No…I do not think it would help me. It is my heart, as you say, that makes me heavy."[30] Similarly to Hepzibah, Priscilla begins in the romance as a reliant, weary woman, imprisoned in female gender role and unaware of her capability of self-definition and self-reliance. Through the respective changes that take place in their lives, both of the characters begin a

[26] Ibid.
[27] *The Blithedale Romance* 18.
[28] *The Blithedale Romance* 35.
[29] *The Blithedale Romance* 43.
[30] *The Blithedale Romance* 115.

transition toward self-reliance and emancipation. Because the relationship and tension between "femininity" and "masculinity" seem to me to manifest themselves most clearly in the character of Zenobia and in her relation to Hollingsworth, let us continue with the duel between them.

Similarly to Phoebe, once confronted with a man, the self-assertive, progressive part of Zenobia's nature falters. The closer Zenobia and Hollingsworth get, the more uncertain Zenobia is of her confidence and the more she and her inner guidance grow apart. When confronted with a man who embodies many of the archetypically masculine traits, such as self-assertion and will to power, Zenobia's "masculine" side gives in and makes room for the "feminine" one. The previously forceful woman is suddenly described as "humble and confused". Once Hollingsworth meets Zenobia's eyes, with "that inauspicious meaning in his glance", he begins "his influence upon her life", as if Hollingsworth's masculinity and the power resulting from his inner guidance overpowered and conquered Zenobia's. The "feminine" side of her, seeking close relations to others rather than self-reliance representing the closest possible relation to one's own self, prevails within her because she wishes to become close to Hollingsworth.

Thus, she joins Hester and Phoebe in their need for interconnectedness, relationships and "sentiment". The comparison seems especially illustrative in the case of Hester and Zenobia. As opposed to their male counterparts, what disrupts these heroines' self-definition is that they never cease to think of themselves in relation to those who are close to them. In this, they provide a wider context for Emerson's self-reliance and express Hawthorne's objection to it. Both Zenobia and Hollingsworth are strong, self-reliant individuals, very Emersonian in their self-esteem. The one characteristic that distinguishes Hollingsworth from Zenobia and that determines Zenobia's fate is "will" to power and what seems like incapability of "affection". Unable truly to relate to anyone, Hollingsworth remains self-

reliant and more or less unaffected by Zenobia's emotional outbursts. Alison Easton, although focusing at that time on Faith in *Young Goodman Brown* and Catharine in *The Gentle Boy*, observes the same:

> These female haunted minds differ from their bewildered, divided male counterparts in retaining a strong sense of the connections that, even when fractured, still define them as daughters, wives and mothers.[31]

Zenobia's ability to devote herself to Hollingsworth, despite the fact that his beliefs defy her right to self-reliance, shows how vital these connections are for Hawthorne's women. Simply put, Zenobia's self-reliance, the source of her feminism, becomes disrupted by her affection for Hollingsworth, a man rejecting very resolutely the very idea of gender equality. Overlooking her inner beliefs in order to gain Hollingsworth's sympathy, Zenobia allows her affections to lead her to "set her fortune on the die". It is not, however, a man who deprives her of self-reliance: she suppresses it herself in favor of "sentiment". Aware of the femininity inside of her, which takes control of her partly masculine character, Zenobia confesses:

> It is a woman's doom, and I have deserved it like a woman; so let there be no pity, as, on my part, there shall be no complaint.[32]

Thus, self-reliant self-seeking and self-sufficiency is linked in *The Blithedale Romance* to manliness and "masculinity", as confirmed by Zenobia's condemnation of Hollingsworth's egotism: "It is all self!…Nothing else, nothing but self, self, self!"[33] Womanliness and "femininity", on the other hand, are portrayed as residing in relations, care, "humility" and potential self-sacrifice. In Zenobia, the "feminine" part prevails, while in Hollingsworth it is the other way around. His "feminine" side, demonstrated at the beginning of the romance by the "sympathy" and "devoted care" with which he tends to Coverdale, who has fallen sick, is suppressed in favor of his "will" to dominance, both in the sense of the power he has over himself and the power he enjoys having over others. Zenobia testifies to the defeat of

[31] Alison Easton, *Hawthorne and the question of women*, in Richard H. Millington, *The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 83.
[32] *The Blithedale Romance* 203.
[33] *The Blithedale Romance* 198.

Hollingsworth's "femininity" when she exclaims: "A great and rich heart has been ruined in your breast!"[34]

Judging by the character of Zenobia, Hawthorne praises and promotes what he regards as "femininity". In the romance, there are both feminist and anti-feminist tendencies to be traced, which results in Zenobia's alleged ambivalence and inconsistency, so frequently discussed in relation to Hawthorne's fondness for ambiguity and ambivalence. However, Zenobia reflects on her own inconsistency, when she recognizes that she, a renowned feminist, has sacrificed "the honor of her sex at the foot of proud, contumacious man"[35]. To a large extent, she does not grow apart from her inner guidance because she does not disclaim her "affection". Her self-reliance in fact leads her to affirm her "femininity", because her devotion to Hollingsworth is depicted as "affection" that comes from deep within. As such, it overpowers the credos and beliefs that she had constructed before Hollingsworth affected her. Thus, Zenobia exclaims: "Poor womanhood, with its rights and wrongs!" Quite in line with Emerson's beliefs expressed in "Woman", Zenobia first sees Hollingsworth through a "warm-tinted mist that envelops [her]". Her inner "sentiment" thus marginalizes the "rights and wrongs" as viewed by feminist "womanhood" and illustrates the close connection she has with her "innermost woman", to paraphrase Hawthorne's description of Holgrave.

The feminist tendencies of the romance, I believe, consist especially in the author's effort to praise this "feminine" part of Zenobia. Coverdale admires the intensity of Zenobia's feelings and is fascinated by the way in which she relates to Hollingsworth, preferring devotion to independence. Zenobia's suicide at the end of the romance testifies to the conflict between "masculinity" and "femininity" that takes place within her self. In the end, the intense ambivalence and inner conflict that seize control of Zenobia's character become self-destructive and tear her apart, thus reflecting on the ambivalence of "womanhood", as well as

[34] *The Blithedale Romance* 199.
[35] *The Blithedale Romance* 205.

on the complexity and difficulty of the process of combining female self-reliance and self-definition with "femininity". In this sense, it is the presence of both the "feminine", connected with "affection", "sentiment" and "humility", and the "masculine", perceived in relation to self-centeredness, independence and self-assertion, that lead to Zenobia's suicide.

The anti-feminist tone of the romance is then created by the fact that the notion of self-reliance and independence are described as inherently masculine and therefore problematic for "womanhood". The inequality between "manhood" and "womanhood" defied by Zenobia and approved of by Hollingsworth puts "femininity" in a subordinate position, indicating that it is "masculinity", its qualities and characteristics that set the rules. From Zenobia's and Coverdale's point of view, Hollingsworth is an egotist either unable or unwilling truly to relate to any of the other four. Yet he is powerful, influential and self-reliant. He does not let anyone change his perceptions of himself and the world around him, holding on to his "aboriginal Self". He reminds us of other male characters, such as Chillingworth or Rappacini, whom Leverenz calls "heartless male egotists"[36]. These men determine, to different extents, the lives of their female counterparts, illustrating not only the super-ordinate position of men in society, but also the lack of compassion that distinguishes them from women. Unable to relate to anyone, Chillingworth's and Hollingsworth's version of devotion to women is their control over them. Margaret Fuller comes to the same conclusion when she mentions that in Hawthorne's short stories, "holy love is impotent or delusory", because "male devotion to women…imprisons them"[37]. With "manhood" in power, "femininity" as bearer of "affection", "sentiment", closeness and connectedness withers away, oppressed by self-reliant self-seeking and self-centeredness, or, as Zenobia puts it, Hollingsworth's "self, self, self".

[36] Leverenz 246.
[37] Alison Easton, *Hawthorne and the question of women*, in Richard H. Millington, *The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 88.

At the centre of both of the tendencies, feminist and anti-feminist, is Emerson's empowering philosophy. It is only by means of Emerson's self-reliant self-seeking that "womanhood" can achieve gender equality. At the same time though, it is a process that might deprive women of "femininity" and draw them nearer to the self-assertive but isolated, unrelated "manhood". The perception of "manhood" as "unrelated" can be clarified by means of Emerson's perception of "womanhood" as "relative". In "Woman", Emerson says that women "lose half their weight" when they are "out of place" because "the circumstance must always fit". This can be interpreted as a woman's need for functioning relations. Once the position of women as mothers, wives, sisters or even members of community is fractured, they "lose half their weight" because "they are, in their nature, more relative"[38]. As I perceive it, Hawthorne's specific kind of feminism consists in his enthusiasm for "femininity" and its attributes, which he seems to view as morally superior to "masculinity". He wishes to empower it, so that it prevails, and simultaneously fears the influence Emerson's empowering philosophy might have on it. This confusion manifests itself most clearly in Zenobia, who shows signs of self-reliance and independence, which make her lack certain feminine traits on the one hand, but help her stand face to face to Hollingsworth on the other. In the end, Hawthorne makes Zenobia disclaim this masculine part of hers, fearing perhaps that by disclaiming her "affection" for Hollingsworth instead, she might come close to his "male egotism".

The already discussed link between Hawthorne and the character of Coverdale gains new dimension here if we perceive the narrator as a literary manifestation of the author's reflections on femininity. Inconsistent, ambiguous and at times confused, Coverdale acknowledges his own vulnerability:

[38] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Woman*, 28 November 2011 <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/woman.html>

> Illness and exhaustion, no doubt, had made me morbidly sensitive…the wintry blast of the preceding day, together with the general chill of our airy old farm-house, had got into my heart and the marrow of my bones.[39]

What he finds comfort in is Hollingsworth's and Zenobia's sympathy and care for him. Even though he seems to be more of an observer than an experiencer, as I have already mentioned, care, devotion and "affection" are what he seems to be seeking, and relationships and interconnectedness are what he is especially interested in. Coverdale's siding with femininity as opposed to masculinity is obvious. Throughout the novel, he finds himself strongly attracted to Zenobia's emotional outbursts. He often expresses compassion and admires those who show signs of devotion and "sentiment". By contrast, there are many comments uttered by the narrator that condemn what he calls "masculine egotism", of which Hollingsworth is considered guilty. Lacking masculine qualities, the narrator makes the impression of a very "feminine" character. In an essay focusing on American masculinity, T. Walter Herbert says about Hawthorne that he:

> …was present at the creation of an American masculinity that is now being challenged across a broad front, in the name of egalitarian relations between women and men.[40]

Keeping in line with our link between Hawthorne's views and Coverdale's femininity, Herbert continues by saying that:

> Hawthorne was sharply aware that the reigning model of manhood, defined by unceasing self-reliant competition, violated his own native temperament.[41]

Unable or unwilling to identify himself with the reigning model of "manhood" and the recently formed notion of American masculinity, Hawthorne might have found escape in the model of "womanhood", which he therefore wishes to emphasize and strengthen. Influenced and inspired by Emerson's empowering philosophy, he tries to apply its principles to women, similarly to Fuller and many other confirmed feminists, such as Gilman or Stanton. From the

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[39] *The Blithedale Romance* 39-43.
[40] T. Walter Herbert, *Hawthorne and American masculinity*, in Richard H. Millington, *The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 76.
[41] Ibid.

point of view suggested by Herbert, we can assume that the problem Hawthorne encounters in doing so might be his understanding of Emerson's philosophy as inherently "masculine". Herbert interprets Emerson in the same way, concluding that

> the instant popularity of Ralph Waldo Emerson's writing rests on the astuteness with which he promotes the emerging "self-reliant" style of manhood.[42]

Whether we agree with this understanding of Emerson's theses or not, it seems to be a perspective from which it is possible to view Hawthorne's ambiguity when it comes to the Woman Question. It does not clarify Hawthorne's ambiguous attitude toward emancipation because to describe Emerson's philosophy as "masculine" and to consider Hawthorne's perception of Emerson's principles as governed by objections against Emerson's alleged emphasis on "the emerging self-reliant style of manhood" would mean to simplify both Emerson's philosophy and Hawthorne's narrative, but it does offer an interesting perspective on Hawthorne's specific kind of feminism, which should be taken into consideration: while he wishes to establish gender equality and thus promote "femininity" in counterpoint to "masculinity", with which Hawthorne does not wish to identify, he is afraid at the same time that female self-reliance may endanger and not empower "femininity", since it might disrupt the relation of "womanhood" to "sentiment" and "humility".

An interesting metaphor of this concern is presented to us in his fourth and last finished romance. An ancient, disrupted and long overlooked sculpture of Venus is found by one of the two central couples, Donatello and Miriam. Described by the narrator as a "poor, fragmentary woman"[43], the sculpture is uplifted and assembled by Kenyon's mind into "womanhood" worthy of respect and described by the narrator as "perfect to the mind". The welfare of this "womanhood" does not last long, though, as it soon "falls asunder" and

[42] Herbert 61.
[43] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) 423.

becomes “a heap of worthless fragments”[44]. As a romance dealing to a large extent with the ambiguity and ambivalence of woman and “femininity”, *The Marble Faun* represents Hawthorne’s chronologically final, albeit less elaborated, fictional comment on “femininity”, “masculinity” and the relation of both to the Woman Question.

[44] *The Marble Faun* 424.

## 5. THE MARBLE FAUN

Set in Rome, Italy, the environment in which the life stories of *The Marble Faun*'s protagonists develop differs from the three previous romances. A large number of critics consider Hawthorne's Italy to be a predominantly oppressing place ruled by papal authority. The Catholic Rome, as depicted in *The Marble Faun*, is often interpreted as reinforcing Hawthorne's interest in the phenomenon of sin as perceived by Puritanism. When under the influence of traditional, religious Europe, Hawthorne allegedly withdrew from the topics and influence of New England Transcendentalism, its progressivism and its hopeful belief in inner guidance and growth, and turned to examine solely the much darker question of evil, sin and guilt. I do not believe this perception of Hawthorne's last romance as one that withdraws from reflections on Emerson's philosophy to be justified. If we focus on Emerson's principles as perceived in the previous chapters of this thesis, and if we relate these principles to the characters' transformations, connections arise between Emerson's philosophy and *The Marble Faun*. Let us begin with Rome, as it is mainly the setting that distinguishes *The Marble Faun* from the rest of Hawthorne's romances.

On the one hand, we cannot dismiss Hawthorne's comments on the impact that the city's long history has on its present, such as when he reflects on "all the mischief and ruin that has happened to it [Rome], from Nero's conflagration downward"[1]. Neither can we dismiss Kenyon's praise of America, the New World, where "each generation has only its own sins and sorrows to bear"[2], implying that the Old World, represented in Hawthorne's romance by Rome, is in fact pervaded not only by the sins and sorrows of those who live in the present, but also by the sins and sorrows of hundreds of past generations. This

[1] Turner 338.
[2] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 2 December 2011 <http://eldritchpress.org/nh/mf.html>

understanding of Rome corresponds with *The House of the Seven Gables*, where the impact of the past on the present represents one of the main themes. However, the history of the Pyncheons family only reaches back two centuries and occurs mainly during the Puritan period. With regard to Hawthorne's elaboration of the motif of the impact that our past has on our present, Rome certainly seems to be one of the best settings imaginable, far surpassing New England or the New World in general. Rome is described at the beginning of the romance as consisting of "a threefold antiquity", "Etruscan, Roman and Christian". It is the "centre" of "by-gone life", where the present moment is "pressed down or crowded out" and where "individual affairs and interests are but half as real as elsewhere"[3]. The "weight and density" of the past that the narrator emphasizes in different parts of the work are obstructions to "growth" in the Emersonian sense, that is to say in the sense that "Nature's law is growth". In Rome, where the power of the past seems to overshadow the present, as well as the future, it is especially difficult to "live forwards" without "looking backwards".

On the other hand, the character of Miriam might imply a different understanding of the setting, one that reminds us of the place Hester wishes to flee to, rather than of the Puritan community that considers her guilty of sin. Trying to leave her past behind, Miriam starts a new life in Rome. She does so "without introduction", indicating that Rome in fact enables her to mingle and consents to her trying to start anew. The narrator specifically says that in Rome, the ambiguousness of her past "did not necessarily imply anything wrong"[4]. Thus, Miriam completes the line of Hawthorne's women who wish for a personal fresh start, which relates her to Emerson's assumption that "In Nature, every moment is new". Hester contemplates the option of starting anew and establishing her life in a place where nobody knows of her letter, only to suppress the desire a while later. Phoebe begins as an embodiment of fresh starts, a woman unburdened by prejudices relevant in the past but not to the present,

[3] *The Marble Faun* 6.
[4] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 2 December 2011 <http://eldritchpress.org/nh/mf.html>

only to transform into a timid housewife unsettled by change. Zenobia approaches the accomplishment of a personal fresh start most closely, joining a community detached from society and aimed at keeping off the injustices, past and present, represented by society. While the respective settings of *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* complicate the women's tendency to free themselves of gender inequality, the utopian community in *The Blithedale Romance* offers some prospects for improvement, and Rome in *The Marble Faun* is partly depicted as Miriam's accomplice to her pursuit of a fresh start – annihilating and anonymizing her past by assimilating that past to its own.

Firstly, it provides her with an opportunity not to clarify the nature of her dark and mysterious past. Before the Model appears, Miriam manages to live and create not only without directly revealing her past to anyone, but also without attracting attention and arousing suspicion of her circumstances. The artistic setting of Rome seems to allow her to keep her past secret. Secondly, the presence of so large a number of great works of art, past and present, inspire and allow her to express her talents for painting freely and passionately. Rome thus provides her with an opportunity to develop her creative powers and natural abilities. Thirdly, it seems to be a place that allows Miriam to be very independent when it comes to her relationship with society. Throughout the romance, Miriam is repeatedly described as "airy", self-sovereign and with "apparent freedom of intercourse"[5].

However, the potential discrepancy between the papal, hierarchical, oppressing nature of Hawthorne's Rome and Miriam's freedom is to some extent clarified in the postscript to the romance, where Kenyon startlingly says:

> "Miriam, isolated as she seemed, had family connections in Rome, one of whom, there is reason to believe, occupied a position in the Papal Government".[6]

[5] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 2 December 2011 <http://eldritchpress.org/nh/mf.html>
[6] Ibid.

Miriam's independence and freedom, the freedom to start anew that Hester longs for when she contemplates leaving America, is retrospectively revealed as potentially illusionary:

> "Free and self-controlled as she appeared, her every movement was watched and investigated far more thoroughly by the priestly rulers than by her dearest friends."[7]

According to Kenyon's additional discovery, Miriam was neither unconditionally free nor unconditionally independent, because she was being monitored and perhaps protected from the government's intervention by a representative of the papal authority, who was, supposedly, her relative. Although Hawthorne thus undermines the emancipation of one of his strongest female characters, he does let her lead a considerably loose life throughout the romance, restricted neither by papal authority nor by female gender role, and only complicates this perception of Miriam in the afterword, perhaps to point out the complexity of her character and to show that there are always other perspectives than the ones presented to us. In addition, Hawthorne's final comment on Miriam might have been meant to point out that Miriam, like everyone else, is neither unconditionally free nor unconditionally independent.

Related to Miriam's mysterious past and the ominous tone employed every time the narrator mentions Miriam's "dark shadow", that is to say the unspecified event which took place earlier in her life, is a constant awareness of fate, or, as Henry James might have put it, "doom". At the beginning of the romance, the narrator begins to develop a feeling of some omnipotent fatal power, which intensifies throughout the story and gradually penetrates through the lives and perceptions of the characters, transforming each of them in a different way. As such, there is external power portrayed in the romance, which trifles with the lives of individuals and undertakes to determine their future. At some points of the romance, this power is depicted as the spirit of fatality itself, which tests the characters' strength and resoluteness, aiming at breaking their spirit if they are not strong enough, or, in words that

[7] Ibid.

remind us of Emerson, if they do not manage to transform, grow and process the blows to which this power subjects them. The possibility that they might not be able to survive the impact this menacing power seems to have on their lives is present in the romance. This aspect of the work might seem to detach Hawthorne from Emerson, or to defy Emerson's principle that emphasizes the creative powers of every individual, "the infinitude of the private man" and inner guidance, as opposed to fearing - and deferring to - external, omnipotent powers. In order to examine the link between Miriam and Hilda on one side, and Emerson's philosophy on the other, it is important to comment on two factors: Emerson's recognition of "Fate" as an external force that limits, at least to some extent, the power of individuals, and the way in which the omnipotent, fatal force as expressed by Hawthorne in *The Marble Faun* provokes a transformation of the characters, educating them and raising their self-awareness.

In "Considerations by the Way", Emerson says that "nothing is impossible to the man who will"[8] and thus summarizes his ubiquitous emphasis on the potential power of each individual. Nevertheless, he recognizes a force that shapes one's nature or inner guidance and that thus limits the power of each individual: Fate. In an essay entitled "Fate", Emerson explains that "whatever limits us, we call Fate"[9]. Although he does not seem to succeed in entirely clarifying the discrepancy between the two theses, that is to say the belief in each person's unique power, which he portrays as of infinite potential and sacred, and the recognition of an external force that in fact shapes this power, Emerson does provide us with a solution that is in line with the empowering effect of his philosophy : instead of looking at Fate and becoming overpowered by the sense of powerlessness, it is "wholesome" to each individual to look "the other way", inside and at the unique creative power that fate's shaping

[8] Emerson, *Considerations by the Way*, 1 November 2011 < http://www.rwe.org/complete/complete-works/vi-conduct-of-life/vii-considerations-by-the-way.html>
[9] Emerson, *Fate*, 1 November 2011 < http://www.rwe.org/complete/complete-works/vi-conduct-of-life/i-fate.html>

has opened to each individual's nature, inner guidance and "genius"[10]. Confirming his pragmatic views, Emerson thus suggests to gain as much as possible from our "genius", and to keep on using and developing our creative powers in reaction to the manifestations of the force that he calls Fate, as well as to the potential limitations and "calamities" it inflicts on us. The concept of Fate as external power that has a limiting effect on the power of the individual can thus also be perceived as a framework within which the individual, be it man or woman, can develop his or her potential. The power of Fate helps individuals map their creative powers and raises their self-awareness as they struggle to survive the sorrows and pitfalls to which Fate subjects them.

In the world of *The Marble Faun* and in the case of Miriam and Hilda, as well as Donatello and Kenyon, this external force - or Fate - is depicted as a rather sinister one. The events of the romance seem to be haunted by a malevolent force that threatens incessantly to catch up with the characters and turn their lives upside down. In this sense, it seems justifiable to view *The Marble Faun* as "the most nihilistic of Hawthorne's books", or to consent to Melville's recognition that Hawthorne is "peerless" at dramatizing darkness.[11] When the Model, the mysterious and threatening man of Miriam's past, first appears, the encounter is described as "dusky" and "death-scented". Donatello's irritation does not seem to be caused by fear, confusion or hatred, but by "instinctive, unreasoning antipathies"[12], sensing perhaps the upcoming blow of Fate, the engagement with what is depicted as the spirit of fatality itself and the commitment of sin to which this engagement leads him. The event then becomes a catalyst that initiates a transformation of all of the protagonists, even Hilda, who only views the murder from considerable distance, and Kenyon, who is not present at all.

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Kevin Frazier, *The Marble Faun: Hawthorne Feeds on Shadows*, 14 January 2010 <http://www.themillions.com/2010/01/the-marble-faun-hawthorne-feeds-on-shadows.html>
[12] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 2 December 2011 <http://eldritchpress.org/nh/mf.html>

This interconnection strengthens the readers' belief in the existence of forces that affect everyone in the romance and that connect them by means of a sense of shared experience. It is an experience that imbues them, to different extents, with a feeling of responsibility and guilt, which spreads so widely and penetrates the characters so deeply that none of them, not even Hilda, remains innocent. Thus changed, the characters grow and transform themselves into someone different and, arguably, more mature than who they used to be. In "Donatello as Hero of the Hopeful", R.W.B. Lewis speaks about "the soul's realization of itself under the impact of and by engagement with evil"[13]. If we view Fate in *The Marble Faun* as an "evil" and potentially malevolent force, as I believe we can, then it is possible to relate this perception of Donatello's transformation to Emerson's perception of Fate as a force that in fact educates individuals, because it acquaints them with their power and potential within their limited scope for action.

In "Fate", Emerson introduces a metaphor that likens the extent of a man's power to an arc: "man's power is hooped in by a necessity, which, by many experiments, he touches on every side, until he learns its arc"[14]. By committing sin, Donatello ceases to be innocent and begins to develop a strong sense of guilt. At the same time, he becomes aware of his conscience and thus approaches the "soul's realization of itself", a transformation related closely to Emerson's understanding of self-reliance, likewise involving a recognition of one's own perception of what is good and what is bad, as well as an acceptance of one's own responsibility for every act and decision one makes. In this sense, Lewis quotes Horace Bushnell, who says that Donatello is "a free person, who has just begun to be"[15]. His sin, that is to say the murder of the Model, and the subsequent "transformation of the soul in its

[13] R.W.B. Lewis, *Donatello as Hero of the Hopeful*, in Harold Bloom, *Bloom's Comprehensive Research and Study Guide: Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Broomall: Chelsea House Publishers, 2000) 75.
[14] Emerson, *Fate,* 1 November 2011 < http://www.rwe.org/complete/complete-works/vi-conduct-of-life/i-fate.html>
[15] R.W.B. Lewis, *Donatello as Hero of the Hopeful*, in Harold Bloom, *Bloom's Comprehensive Research and Study Guide: Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Broomall: Chelsea House Publishers, 2000) 75.

journey from innocence to conscience", can be understood as his reaction to a challenge to which Fate subjects him, a challenge that subsequently leads to his growth and to overcoming his moral dereliction. Thus, Hawthorne seems to be saying here that Donatello's sin, and the fatal "calamity" it represents, in fact educates the characters, thus affirming Emerson's pragmatic views on Fate as a force that gives us a sense of who we are, what we are capable of and who we can become. In the following chapter, attention will be paid to Miriam and Hilda, and their respective transformations, since Hawthorne's portrayal of these two heroines contributes greatly to the overall picture of female characters that the author provides us with in his four romances.

## 5.1. Miriam's Conscience and Hilda's Innocence

Similarly to Hester, the life of the character of Miriam is depicted as burdened by "sin", perceived as externally ascribed transgression of behavioral "norms", which functions as a catalyst of the women's growth. There is, however, a significant difference between the two heroines' own perception of their sin, as well as of their guilt. Hester accepts, to some extent, the guilt imposed on her by society, but distinguishes it sharply from her self-definition and inner laws, recognizing that it would be morally derelict not to distinguish between her own perception and the community's perception of what she has done and of who she has subsequently become. Miriam, on the other hand, struggles to come to terms with a sense of guilt that she alone imposes on herself, and that thus comes from deep within, as opposed to from society. While Hester's growth consists in her defiance of moral dereliction, and the subsequent acknowledgment of her inner laws and inner guidance, which leads her to spiritual self-reliance, Miriam's growth seems to consist in acknowledging and confronting her inner feeling of guilt, which leads her to acknowledge and accept all of the possible variants of her existence, even the one that involves experience of sin. Although she never

escapes the feeling of guilt, which is depicted as very painful and intense, she seems to recognize that she should not wish that she did not have this dark, potentially "sinful" part of her self. Rather, she seems to think that she should accept it as it is and experience the feelings it evokes, even if they were feelings of guilt, self-doubt and sorrow. However painful, the experience helps her grow spiritually and map her own understanding of who she is.

This perception of Miriam's experience and transformation becomes apparent especially if related to her female counterpart, Hilda. When the two women talk about a piece of art that is described by the narrator as Reni Guido's "sketch for the picture of the Archangel Michael, setting his foot upon the demon", Hilda praises integrity and moral purity, expressing her reverence towards the Archangel, who "turns away his eyes in painful disgust". Miriam perceives the encounter differently and expresses her contempt for the Archangel, whom she understands as either incapable of or unwilling to acknowledge the demon's existence: "He never could have looked that Demon in the face!"[16] Miriam thus confirms her position as a woman who is perfectly aware of the existence of evil, as well as of the impact it has on her life and nature. Hilda, on the other hand, wishes to remain "pure", innocent and unaffected by evil forces, and refuses to view them as part of her world and her self. Consequently, she can be understood as a woman who represents the traditional model of "womanhood" or, shall we say, idealized "femininity" – pure, untouched, restrained and obedient, that is to say morally derelict. Living in a tower, far away from the dirt and noisiness of Rome, Hilda insists on her invented vision of the world and herself in it, which does not acknowledge the existence of evil. As such, she seems to me to lack the "active soul" that Emerson talks about in "The American Scholar", being thus unwilling and unable to open herself to experience, and to explore her "aboriginal Self" and nature. Fearing perhaps that she might withdraw from her own vision of herself as morally pure and innocent were she to

[16] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 2 December 2011 <http://eldritchpress.org/nh/mf.html>

develop her own creative powers, Hilda voluntarily and respectfully copies paintings of "Old Masters" and refuses to recognize "the infinitude" of her private self, which might involve desires incompatible with her imitatively imagined resemblance to The Virgin Mary and the idealized vision of "femininity". Miriam, on the other hand, recognizes, expresses and develops her creative powers, thus acknowledging her nature and genius. As described in Emerson's essays, this acknowledgment always involves self-expression and self-mapping, because in order to become acquainted with our genius, it is necessary to express and develop our creative powers, with their particular capacities and incapacities, as it is a process that helps us understand who we are.

However, in "The American Scholar", Emerson emphasizes that this process also demands that we must not fear to take action and gain experience. There is no reason to believe that this excludes such experience as Hawthorne's world offers to Miriam and Hilda, that is to say experience that subjects the characters to consciousness of imagined or "real" sin, sorrow and guilt. To refuse to acknowledge such experience means to deceive our selves through insufficient self-scrutiny, or, in other words, to be morally derelict. In Hilda's case, this means to create an idealistic vision of her self based on society's definitions of "femininity" associated with the Virgin Mary, as well as with her goodness, modesty, chastity and purity, which Hilda seems to have internalized. In his analysis of Hilda's denial, Sacvan Bercovitch says that "original art, as in Miriam's case, demands an exposure of the secret self that Hilda is not prepared to make."[17] Whether unable or unwilling to expose her "aboriginal Self" to herself, Hilda intentionally disregards her self-perceiving and self-creative powers, and she does so in favor of her vision of her self as pure and innocent, a vision identical with society's vision of idealized "femininity". Thus, Hilda denies acknowledging her inner guidance and creative powers.

[17] Sacvan Bercovitch, *Hilda's Denial*, in Harold Bloom, *Bloom's Comprehensive Research and Study Guide: Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Broomall: Chelsea House Publishers, 2000) 82.

Bercovitch further marks Miriam's originality as "powerful" and "terrible"[18], which agrees with my belief that Miriam's "originality", which can be understood as a manifestation of her nature, her aboriginal Self and her creative powers, involves facing "the Demon" that exists as part of her nature, thus recognizing that her consciousness of "sin" and subsequent guilt are an essential part of the experience that helps her grow and understand herself. Therefore, that experience is both "powerful" and "terrible". The character of Miriam clearly withdraws from perceptions of "femininity" that view "true" women as restrained, timid and virtuous, a perception that Hilda adheres to religiously. In different sections of the romance, Hilda is depicted by the narrator as an almost inhuman and, to some extent, even allegorical character, resembling the Virgin Mary so strongly that she almost defies creating the impression of a real woman. While she can be understood as a symbol of female innocence and integrity on the one hand though, she should also be viewed, on the other hand, as inexperienced and morally derelict. Hilda cannot sympathize with Miriam's feeling of guilt because she fails to recognize that if a woman adheres to the model of the Virgin Mary and thus refuses to acknowledge the existence of evil or the possibility of her involvement with it, she denies herself the experience of the consciousness of "sin", which seems to be portrayed in the romance as an opportunity to transform oneself and grow. Hilda only views Miriam from the negative point of view, that is to say in relation to "sin" itself. She does not recognize that Miriam's involvement with the fatal force leads her to view her self and nature in its full extent, and not excluding its experience of the consciousness of "sin" and the growth to which such experience can lead. Miriam confirms this perception of "sin" not in relation to herself, but in relation to Donatello. While discussing the experienced "sin" with Kenyon, Miriam asks whether it might be possible that it was Donatello's encountering of evil, or, shall we say, fatality, and the subsequent "sin" that brought his "simple and imperfect

[18] Ibid.

nature to a point of feeling and intelligence which it could have reached under no other discipline"[19], thus implying that Donatello's nature was in fact imperfect until he experienced the blow of Fate, depicted in the romance. The tragic accident that the fatal force subjected him to caused him to lose his innocence, but provided him at the same time with the opportunity to become conscious of his feeling of guilt. By means of transformation from innocence to moral consciousness, Donatello seems to have recognized and acknowledged his soul, and he did so - as Lewis puts it – "under the impact of and by engagement with evil". Miriam, too, becomes engaged with evil, and she does not fear to "look the Demon in the face", as opposed to Hilda, who denies her soul "the journey from innocence to conscience".

Such perceptions of Miriam and Hilda can be understood as reason to believe that the two heroines in question are in fact Hawthorne's tools to comment on the complex nature of "womanhood" or, shall we say, the ambivalence of woman. While Hilda represents the idealized vision of "femininity", internalized by women who remain blind to the limiting power of such idealization, as well as of the gender role related to it, Miriam represents female self-awareness, achieved by women who withdraw from perceiving themselves from the perspective of idealized femininity and transform to recognize their aboriginal Self. With regard to the portrayal of both of the heroines, to state that Hawthorne favors one over the other would be to simplify the complexity of his, at times reluctant, feminist understandings. Hilda might be viewed as inexperienced and unconscious of her creative powers, and hence morally derelict, but she is also depicted as unspoiled and morally "pure". She is followed by white doves and lives in a tower closer to the sky than to the noisy, sinful life of Rome. To a large extent, the narrator expresses his approval of and admiration for Hilda's "integrity", obedience and consistent purity. In this sense, the romance emphasizes female purity and chastity, and marks "femininity" as a potential bearer of virtue and opponent to depravity.

[19] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 2 December 2011 <http://eldritchpress.org/nh/mf.html>

Such an attitude toward Hilda would, however, suggest a condemnation of Miriam's potentially "sinful" past, her self-awareness, passion and "depravity", which endanger Hilda's innocence. There is no such condemnation to be found in the romance. On the contrary, the narrator seems to sympathize with Miriam's sincere endeavor to acknowledge all of the possible variants of her existence, or, shall we say, her "womanhood", including the one that experiences sin and that involves "looking the Demon in the face". Thus, Miriam is depicted as a woman who has unknowingly outgrown her obedient, morally derelict "femininity" in favor of creativity and authenticity. Being able to bear the fear of the Model and his presence in her life, as well as the "sin" of experienced responsibility for his murder, Miriam is thus, at least to some extent, portrayed as very strong. In this respect, Harold Bloom likens Miriam to "the indomitable biblical women she is so fond of painting"[20].

Together, the two heroines can be understood as representing the complexity of "womanhood" and the ambivalence of woman, expressing the belief that both of the two versions of "femininity", the one embodying innocence, integrity, obedience and the wish to be perceived in relation to the notion of idealized "femininity", and the one symbolizing experience, authenticity, self-reliance and the wish to perceive one's self with regard to inner guidance and nature, are in fact approved and endorsed by Hawthorne, as by most women. If we compare the characters of Miriam and Hilda to Zenobia, Priscilla, Phoebe, Hepzibah and Hester, we can see that all of these heroines show, to different extents, signs of these two components of "womanhood", and thus illustrate Hawthorne's, and many women's, undecided stance on the Woman Question. When Easton speaks of "a certain instability and mystery in Hawthorne's texts", she ascribes it to his "combined concern with nature and

[20] Harold Bloom, *Bloom's Comprehensive Research and Study Guide: Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Broomall: Chelsea House Publishers, 2000) 72.

social construction"[21]. His approval and endorsement both of Nature/nature in the Emersonian sense and culture in the sense of social constructs can to a large extent clarify his specific kind of feminism. On the one hand, Hawthorne's heroines defy moral dereliction and articulate their right for manifestation and development of their genius, creative powers and inner voice. Hawthorne thus focuses on the issue of female self-reliance, self-awareness and self-definition, which opposes female gender role – one of the most pervasive social constructs of Hawthorne's time. On the other hand, he seems to me to express his great admiration for the idealized version of "femininity", part of which is represented in *The Marble Faun* by Hilda's innocence and purity. His female characters certainly show signs of loyalty to characteristics associated with the ideal of "femininity", such as Hester's motherliness, Hepzibah's compassion, Phoebe's and Priscilla's humility or Zenobia's devotion, and Hawthorne seems to praise them for their "true womanhood".

[21] Alison Easton, *Hawthorne and the question of women*, in Richard H. Millington, *The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 87.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to define and demonstrate a link that connects female characters in Hawthorne's four romances, and to outline a pattern that summarizes Hawthorne's representation of women. Subsequently, I wished to answer the question of whether or not – and if so, then in what sense – Hawthorne's narrative can be considered feminist. By means of analyzing the heroines of *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Marble Faun*, their respective transformations, their relationship to themselves and to their female, as well as male, counterparts, I have traced out a pattern that illustrates the connection between Hawthorne's romances and Emerson's philosophy, particularly the concepts of self-reliance, inner guidance, the aboriginal Self, moral dereliction and Nature/nature. These concepts, as defined and elaborated by Emerson, were used in my thesis as a tool to analyze the development of Hester, Hepzibah, Phoebe, Zenobia, Priscilla, Miriam and Hilda. In the previous four chapters, I have viewed these women from the perspective of Emerson's philosophy, which has been introduced here as a philosophy that is especially inspiring and enticing for advocates of disempowered groups of society. In Hawthorne's narrative, the group portrayed as disempowered by society and social constructions, and – consequently – considered in relation to Emerson's empowering philosophy, consists of women. As the similarities among the respective female characters analyzed in this thesis illustrate, women in Hawthorne's romances can be understood and interpreted as contemplating the principles inherent in Emerson's essays.

As my work on this thesis proceeded, it became obvious that there is a discrepancy between Hawthorne's portrayal of the heroines' self-reliance, reflecting Emerson's emphasis on self-definition and the aboriginal Self, and the heroines' "femininity", reflecting Hawthorne's emphasis on feminine characteristics traditionally ascribed to "womanhood" and

female gender role. This discrepancy began to imply that Hawthorne's female characters portray mainly the complexity, as well as the difficulty, of the situation in which a woman struggling for self-reliance, independence and emancipation, finds herself. In order to acknowledge their inner nature and guidance, to reveal and to defy moral dereliction, and thus to achieve self-reliance, Hawthorne's heroines are depicted as confronting the temptation to marginalize their "femininity," viewed by the author in relation to such attributes as devotion, compassion, humility, self-sacrifice, purity and innocence. As such, women in Hawthorne's romances seem to correspond, at least to some extent, with Emerson's understanding of "womanhood" and the Woman Question, which he addresses in "Woman." In this lecture, Emerson outlines a discrepancy between the rights and claims of the Women's Rights Movement, and what he calls "the best of women," that is to say "feminine" women, who answer to the traditional concept of "womanhood" as the bearer of "affection," "sentiment," "devotion" and "humility." My work on this thesis has shown that Hawthorne's romances contend with the same problem, elaborating the discrepancy described by Emerson in "Woman."

I began with Hester, the heroine of Hawthorne's first romance, and arguably the heroine most frequently discussed in relation to Hawthorne's feminist tendencies. Her self-reliance, acknowledgement of inner guidance and refusal of moral dereliction constitute the feminist basis of the character, while her "sentiment" and devotion to Pearl complicate her emancipation. Likewise, Phoebe and Hepzibah turned out to provide us with a view on "womanhood" that can be linked to Emerson's reflections on the Woman Question in "Woman." Contemplating the concept of self-reliance in connection to the conflict between Nature/nature on one side and nurture/culture on the other side, both Phoebe and Hepzibah wish to play a role that corresponds with female gender role, specifically the role of caregiver, housewife and guardian of bonds, relations and stability. Zenobia, a heroine comparable to

Hester in her strength and in her feminist beliefs, becomes overpowered by her "affection" and devotion to Hollingsworth, arguably realizing that her ability and willingness to relate to Hollingsworth are what constitutes the difference between them, as well as between "femininity" and "masculinity." Her "affection" testifies to her "femininity," which in turn suppresses her self-assertive "vigor" and independence, assigned, I believe, to a large extent to the "masculine" side of her. The complexity and difficulty of the situation in which a woman finds herself when she struggles for self-definition, self-assertion and gender equality, trying at the same time not to marginalize her "femininity," gained a new dimension in my analysis of Hawthorne's portrayal of Miriam and Hilda, who are perceived in this thesis as embodiments of two competing tendencies: the one that empowers inner guidance and the aboriginal Self, regardless of social constructs and the vision of idealized "femininity," and the one that wishes to remain true to the concept of idealized "femininity." This discrepancy can be understood as the basis for Hawthorne's specific kind of feminism: while he wishes to empower and promote "womanhood" by means of female self-reliance, he simultaneously expresses his concern about the influence that Emerson's empowering philosophy might have on "femininity" and its attributes.

I believe that Alison Easton arrives at a similar conclusion, when she states that "dismantling the simple binary of good and wicked women," Hawthorne in fact "struggled to redefine womanhood."[1] The overall picture of "womanhood" that he provides us with in his four romances comprises both "goodness" and "wickedness." While "goodness" amounts to a woman's identification with female gender role and the characteristics of the model of "femininity" as established and idealized by society, "wickedness" does not necessarily evince negative connotations. Rather, it shows signs of principles inherent in Emerson's empowering philosophy, which favors Nature/nature and self-definition over nurture and

[1] Easton 96.

definitions imposed on women by social constructions. Easton further states that Hawthorne's "misogyny fought, at times very unpleasantly, with some kinds of feminist understandings."[2] As my thesis illustrates, there are both feminist and anti-feminist tendencies to be traced in Hawthorne's romances. However, I do not consider it justified or accurate to claim that there is "misogyny" to be found in Hawthorne's portrayal of the female protagonists of his romances. Rather, I prefer to consider Hawthorne's endorsement of the "good," devoted, obedient and traditional part of "femininity" not as misogynist, but as only potentially anti-feminist, because although it complicates the issue of female self-reliance and emancipation, it simultaneously illuminates inherent conflicts in the issue that need to be confronted by potential feminists and anti-feminists alike. Notwithstanding this aspect of Hawthorne's portrayal of the heroines, I have, I believe, illustrated Hawthorne's interest in the process of empowering and improving the position of women and "womanhood". By means of examining the link between Emerson's empowering philosophy and Hawthorne's most elaborated female characters, I have illustrated Hawthorne's position as a writer deeply interested in and concerned, both positively and negatively, about feminism, as well as Emerson's influence on Hawthorne's romances, and on female protagonists of Hawthorne's romances in particular.

[2] Easton 96.

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