

# A contemporary take on the blithedale romance

Literature



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Four individuals get together with thoughts on what an ideal society should be in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Blithedale Romance." Blithedale was a modern Arcadia founded by Charles Fourier which was eventually destroyed by the behavior of individuals who are only interested for themselves. These said members are the very four individuals who are the main characters in the novel.

These are Hollingsworth, a philanthropist and misogynist who wants to make Blithedale a colony for the reformation of criminals, Zenobia, an outspoken and opinionated feminist, Priscilla, a seamstress from the city and Miles Coverdale, the poet who is also the narrator in the story. Throughout spring and summer, Hollingsworth, Zenobia, Priscilla and Coverdale formed an intense friendship with one another. Just like the weather, this bond disintegrates the exact moment autumn comes. The book ends tragically. Coverdale is an unreliable narrator.

It was as if his manner of speaking represents spirituality to the masses who are already secular. This makes him appear someone who tries to popularize his beliefs. He is also a voyeur because he avoids interaction with those around him. He also doesn't like to be seen. Since he is the narrator, it seems as if he has the power. Truth is, his personality influences how the story is told. The politics, personal liberation and communal utopia he has in his head still depends on how the three other characters take it. Zenobia is the representation of the eternal feminine, to the delight of modern-day feminists.

The text describes her as "earthy, maternal, natural, sensual, domestic, brilliant, loving and demanding." Nonetheless, Zenobia is complicated and

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she represents the varying feminist qualities just as she mirrors the “materiality of the world” and her “resistance to desire.” It seems as if Zenobia was already the image of the feminist politics. On the other hand, Hollingsworth is often perceived as the American stereotype. He intends to “convert the heathen.” This is his way to redeem the fallen. He has projects that are philanthropic by nature. It masks his “will to power.”

” Hollingsworth is the typical white and male of today. It also seems that throughout the text, he is so masculine. Each trait he has reflects traditional masculinity. Finally, there is Priscilla. She is the exact opposite of Zenobia. She is passive, innocent, vulnerable and can easily be manipulated. She suffers from the control of the men in her life. However, in the book as written by Hawthorne, it will seem that Priscilla overpowers Zenobia. In the society that they are in, Zenobia’s strong feminist views do not coincide with the traditional norms.

” The Blithedale Romance” may be a classic but it is still relevant especially during political seasons. With the background check on the time Hawthorne wrote this, the Transcendentalists, Utopian Movement, Unitarians and Universalists still remain in the political ideologies of today. Just like modern Americans, the characters in the story are unsatisfied with what the United States is now. They believe that they are still living in the “sinfulness of man.” They intend to make heaven here on earth. In the book, they called their utopia “Happy Valley.”

” We see politicians striving for the same goal today. Each one of them have their own logos. In contemporary America, politicians always trying to fix things that do not need fixing. They believe they can ignore human nature..

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It is interesting to point that the ideologies represented in the book didn't work. It is pretty much a prediction because these movements - Socialism, Misogyny, Feminism- also do not work today. The part where Zenobia seems to be uncontrolled is an allusion to the power of the feminist movement. If you think about it, women want to be heard.

They have strong convictions and if the reader will use Zenobia as the symbol of the feminist movement, he can conclude that she bowed down to Hollingsworth, who represents the traditional male. It is unfortunate that despite women's determination to be heard, the masculine driven society we live in today results to an " abrupt and dramatic suicide" of the feminist's beliefs. <sup>1</sup> Hawthorne, during his time, was known to be a romance novelist. This work is different from his previous masterpieces simply because of its relative realism.

He made sure that the novel deals with social events that occur in an everyday fashion. There is also romance in extraordinary events. The novel manages to analyze the characters through the historical and social forces. Take this for example. A main complication in the novel is the conflict between the individual and the community. There is a subjectivity on the self because the focus is on will and personal freedom. Early on, it has been said that the town did not succeed because of the self-interest of the four characters.

That is why as much as the characters offer ethical benefit in order for the other person to do well, the individualism appears to be self determination. The pursuit of one's personal gain only complicates the matter even more. <sup>2</sup> Another conflict is Hollingsworth's take on spirituality. It seems that it is so  
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intangible that it needs public reckoning but most individuals in Blithedale wish to see this spiritual belief in evidence which the four characters cannot explain. Clearly, "The Blithedale Romance" is a romantic perception of something so real such as a society.

As much as one wishes to strive for utopia, the human nature of selfishness, self-interest and self-again will always prevent this from happening. Another concern is the different mindsets of people, as seen among the four characters in "The Blithedale Romance." This only comes to show that there will always be misunderstanding among us. 1 Hoeltje, Hubert H. *Inward Sky: The Heart and Mind of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, page 313, Duke University Press, 1962 2 Craig White, "A Utopia of Spheres and Sympathies", *Utopian Studies*, 1998.