

Fiction and Reality: Hawthorne's Creation of *The Blithedale Romance*

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Kim, Jungmin. Fiction and Reality: Hawthorne's Creation of *The Blithedale Romance*. *The New Studies of English Language & Literature* 69 (2018): 103-123. In *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne made the best use of his own experience as a resident of Brook Farm with abundant materials of reality. The Blithedalers, like the Brook Farmers, seek to take flight from the discontents of urban life. Expecting the collective farm to satisfy their needs, the reformers vaguely dream that Blithedale can be transformed into a communal Eden. Yet far from establishing an Eden, they have to witness the collapse of the commune. Coverdale's Blithedale does not become the regenerate community it professes to be, just as Hawthorne's Brook Farm didn't. Through the failure of these two communes, Hawthorne who urgently needed the "Faery Land" atmosphere as an American romancer came to recognize a paradoxical paradigm: the fairyland is absent in America but exists only at experimental utopias in which reality and fiction are indistinct. (Seoul National University of Science and Technology)

Key words: Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, Brook Farm, Transcendentalism, fiction vs. reality, utopian experiment

I. Introduction

Literature is primarily art, and a great deal of art criticism has concentrated around the correlation between fiction and reality for a long time. Nathaniel Hawthorne, as an artist, incessantly paid attention to it, fundamentally believing that art should be based upon reality. Hawthorne's famous, rather artificial, distinction between the "Novel" and the "Romance," particularly in the Preface of *The House of the Seven Gables* may be understood in terms of the conception of art as an idealized presentation of reality. If the idealization is the essence of the artistic

process, the imagination is its primary agent. Hawthorne's creative imagination lies at the center of his aesthetics and plays the key role in transmuting the raw material of reality into the finished product of art. Thus His ultimate concern as an artist is said to search for "the truth concealed in imagination by fictionalizing real historical facts (Min 43).

In *The Blithedale Romance* embodied by such imagination, the most obvious correlation between fiction and reality may be represented by the similarity between Blithedale and Brook Farm, where Hawthorne stayed from April to November, 1841. Hawthorne, though one of its founding members led by a former Unitarian clergyman, George Ripley, was unhappy during his residence there, either because he was not a strong adherent of the community's ideals, or because he could not afford to take up his pen while living there.

Hawthorne sought to compose *The Blithedale Romance* chiefly by selecting and manipulating his observations and experiences in his life, especially at Brook Farm. We expect, of course, that the book reveals the author's view of life and outlook on the world. Nevertheless, in the Preface to the romance, Hawthorne expresses an attitude of ambivalence regarding its origin. He first acknowledges the resemblance between Blithedale and Brook Farm: "In the 'Blithedale' of this volume, many readers will probably suspect a faint and not very faithful shadowing of Brook Farm." And then he admits that "he had this community in mind" when he set about designing the romance. But he considers "the Institution itself" as "the fictitious subject of handling" and declares that "these characters" in the work "are entirely fictitious."¹ The Preface including both Hawthorne's admittance and disclaimer of the correlation

¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance and Fanshawe*. The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. 3. Ed. Roy Harvey Pearce et al. (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1964). 1-2. This and all subsequent parenthetical quotations are from this edition.

between fiction and reality is by no means the least important of the book, for these two apparently contradictory statements do not at least interrupt a variety of its reading. In this respect, William E. Cain paradoxically makes an appropriate comment: "Blithedale both is and is not connected to Brook Farm—which is how Hawthorne wanted it" (404).

Hawthorne's ambivalent remarks in the Preface have not prohibited most readers from looking for the fiction's sources in his real surroundings. Moreover, the fruits of knowledge in the real world usually become a competent factor in understanding the fictional world. Although the full implications of the work are not explicitly formulated, some definable meanings will be intensified by the breadth of knowledge and sympathy which one takes with him into the fictional world.

Based upon the premise that the more reference data the reader brings to a novel, the more he will get from it, this study does not suggest that it had better collect as much background materials as possible when reading *The Blithedale Romance*. Neither does it argue that there is only one valid approach to the work by binding Brook Farm too tightly to the fiction. It rather aims to read it with necessary information to broaden the horizon of its reading and enrich the field of its research. Taking note of how Hawthorne's imagination creates the romance, this paper will focus chiefly on the transforming process of the materials from the author's real life, the interpolating of some practical passages into the text, and the correlations between actual incidents and fictional ones.

II. Brook Farm vs. Blithedale

Hawthorne was plainly an unwilling heir of the Puritanism in many respects. Yet this is in no wise true in conjunction with the idealism which he shared as a part of his inheritance. On the contrary, he affirmed

the Puritanism in a serious way in which an artist can bear out tradition. As far as the utopian experiment of Brook Farm is concerned, Hawthorne's motives in joining it were as mixed as those of his Puritan ancestors in coming to America. In the first place, he looked forward to a comfortable livelihood there, investing a substantial sum of money to the venture² with a hope that he could eventually make a snug home with Sophia Peabody to whom he had been engaged for nearly two years. But we need not take so earnestly the strictly economic aspect in Hawthorne's biography. In fact, like many people who went to Brook Farm³ with expectations which no organization could satisfy, Hawthorne had a good deal of simple faith in the ideal behind the venture before he could think his share in the farm to be a good investment.

In *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne presents vividly the scheme at Brook Farm and portrays in detail some incidents of life there. Through the Blithedale story described by the character-narrator, Miles Coverdale, Hawthorne represents the utopian experiment of Brook Farm as an extension of the Puritan tradition. The valuable importance of the Blithedale community in the novel is that it embodies the visionary expedient of early American settlers. The analogies and parallels run like rich threads throughout the patterns of the romance. Certain words and phrases written in the letters and journals closely correspond to the passages that appear in the romance, becoming its important textual sources. On some occasions, we can easily detect considerable links

² Hawthorne made a purchase of "two shares, numbers fifteen and nineteen, at \$500 each and made an additional investment of \$500" (Miller 189).

³ A strange collection of people took up residence at Brook Farm: "There were disaffected clergymen like Ripley, young aesthetes like Charles King Newcomb, youthful members of the upper middle-class like George William Curtis and his brother or Margaret Fuller's brother Lloyd, and disenchanted women, some young, some along in years" (Miller 189).

between some scenes and events both in Hawthorne's documents and in the novel. On other occasions, similar sentiments are remarkably noted in both cases, but with differences in language.

On April 12, 1841, Hawthorne travelled from Boston to Brook Farm in the middle of a snowstorm, though in spring. He expected that the small, supportive community would allow him private time for his literary craft in addition to a residence as mentioned above. In his first letter to Sophia written the next day at Brook Farm, Hawthorne referred to his arrival through the blizzard and alluded to the beach landing of the Puritan forefathers: "I know not how to interpret this aspect of Nature — whether it be of good or evil omen to our enterprise. But I reflect that the Plymouth pilgrims arrived in the midst of storm and stept ashore upon mountain snow-drifts" (*Letters* 526). Here first Hawthorne expressed his uncertainty of his enterprise, wondering how to explain the meaning of the nasty weather.

However, Hawthorne soon comforted himself with the thought of the final victory of the Pilgrims as described by William Bradford.⁴ When the *Mayflower* approached the present-day Plymouth Bay, a winter storm nearly sunk the boat, but the explorers, suffering from severe exposure to the cold and waves, managed to successfully land on Clark's Island. Eventually, they succeeded to found so great a country, the United States of America. Hawthorne emphasized in the same letter to Sophia that the Pilgrims had struggled successfully against many difficulties in

⁴ The passengers of the *Mayflower*, both Separatist and non-Separatist, are commonly referred to as "Pilgrims." The term is derived from a passage in Bradford's journal, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, written years later, describing their departure from the Netherlands: "With mutual embraces and many tears, they took their leaves of one another, which proved to be the last leave to many of them . . . but they knew they were pilgrims and looked not much on these things, but lifted their eyes to heaven, their dearest country and quieted their spirits" (Bradford, Book 1, Chapter 7; underline mine).

settlement, and looked forward to such a success for his expedition at Brook Farm: “. . . nevertheless they prospered, and became a great people – and doubtless it will be the same with us” (*Letters* 526). Undoubtedly, Hawthorne associated his arrival at “the would-be New Jerusalem” with the landing ashore of the Mayflower Puritans who came to the American wilderness to establish “the new Eden” (Donohue 96).

At first glance, Brook Farm looked very promising for Hawthorne. Possibly because of his fame and his solid financial investment, he received favored treatment. “Thy husband,” he wrote to Sophia, “has the best chamber in the house, I believe; and though not quite so good as the apartment I have left, it will do very well” (*Letters* 527). Besides, the West Roxbury countryside, with woods, meadows, and a nearby river, was nearly ideal in its pastoral scenery. Hawthorne expressed his delight in the landscape, remarking in a May 3 letter to his sister Louisa: “This is one of the most beautiful places I ever saw in my life, and as secluded as if it were a hundred miles from any city or village” (*Letters* 539). Hawthorne had confidence that he and his wife-to-be, Sophia, would prosper in such a setting and that his literary endeavors would thrive there. The next day, on May 4th, he announced to be “engaged in a righteous and heaven-blessed way of life” (*Letters* 543).

From early in *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne describes the scene of the expedition’s departure to Blithedale in the same way as he does his own experience toward Brook Farm. The Blithedale story of the participant narrator, Miles Coverdale starts on an April day as the journey of Hawthorne did. Being full of warmth and hope in spring, Coverdale finally decides to leave Boston representing the “prison of institutions and conformity” (Baym 352) and join the party, aiming in an atmosphere of informality and innovation to establish a community of labor and love which will express and liberate, rather than inhibit and distort, the human spirit. The Blithedale experiment is first expressed as an attempt to avoid

the embrace of time. Coverdale and his friends ride “far beyond the strike of city clocks” (11) into pure, snow-covered space with an effort to blur the distinction between seasons to overcome the desolation of winter by the warmth of their reforming zeal. Upon moving to Blithedale, Coverdale proclaims his own rebirth. In the end, the Coverdale party’s trip is nothing but a challenge to find a quest for the betterment of the world.

However, since a small doubt lingers in the back of his mind, Coverdale does not have a complete assurance in his future. On the eve of his departure, he looks forward to a new regenerated life at Blithedale on the one hand, but feels anxiety about the uncertain future on the other. Just as Hawthorne felt dubious about the Brook Farm enterprise in the beginning of his first letter from there, so Coverdale, who abandoned “his cosey pair of bachelor-rooms—with a good fire burning in the grate” and dived into “the heart of the pitiless snow-storm,” is not very confident of “a better life” (10). His sense of uneasiness is amplified specially by the awful weather of the travelling day and a series of difficulties on the way to Blithedale due to a fearful blizzard with strong blast. The day on which the visionaries assemble at Blithedale in order to begin “the life of Paradise anew” (9) is probably bleaker and less encouraging than the day of Hawthorne’s arrival at Brook Farm—even than the day of the Pilgrims’ landing ashore.

The parallel of the expedition of the Blithedalers to that of the Brook Farmers (or the Pilgrims) also continues to be drawn ever since Coverdale’s arrival. When the tourist party is seated by the blazing hearth of the farmhouse at the end of the tempestuous journey, Coverdale comes to ponder: “the old Pilgrims might have swung their kettle over precisely such a fire as this.” And then, comparing the wood-fire of this rural cottage to the coal-grate of his apartment in the old city from which Blithedale was hardly a day’s walk, Coverdale reflects that “we had

transported ourselves a world-wide distance from the system of society that shackled us at breakfast-time” (13), which reminds us of the long-distance journey of the Pilgrims.

Immediately after his arrival at Blithedale, especially when he is sick in bed the next morning, Coverdale does not feel so assured of his quest for the better world. In Boston, Coverdale enjoyed the “sweet, bewitching, enervating indolence” (19) of a genteel bachelorhood, and had fun in his “pleasant bachelor-parlor, sunny and shadowy, curtained and carpeted, with the bed-chamber adjoining” (40). Nevertheless, he decides to plunge into the ocean of venture, for this pleasant life lacks vigor. In its atmosphere of tepid hedonism, art is but another languid pastime. Coverdale would like to become a poet, “to produce something that shall really deserve to be called poetry—true, strong, natural, and sweet” (14). Possibly, the new community will offer him an opportunity to write such poems.

At Brook Farm, Hawthorne and others were busy cutting and carrying wood, chopping hay, and plowing and planting the fields. He was initially euphoric about the possibility of combining dignified manual labor with his writing. On the second day at Brook Farm, writing to Sophia, he announced: “I shall make an excellent husbandman. I feel the original Adam reviving with me” (*Letters* 529). He said in his letters he enjoyed the countryside, the routine, and the fellowship; he marveled at the tasks he performed. The revived Adam’s milking was so marvelous an event that he emphasized it with three exclamation points. He signed “Nath. Hawthorne, Ploughman” at the end of his letters to his sisters Elizabeth and Louisa who feared the effects of too much time and work under the sun. In a May 3 letter to his sister Louisa, Hawthorne announced, “I am transformed into a complete farmer” (*Letters* 539). Hawthorne’s dedication inspired other intellectual colleagues, who expressed their delights to see him work hard there.⁵

In *The Blithedale Romance*, Coverdale and other people, like Hawthorne in the early days of Brook Farm, are enthusiastically excited about a “Modern Arcadia” unfolded before their eyes. In the first evening at Blithedale, they form “a committee for providing our infant Community with an appropriate name.” The names proposed at the meeting such as “Blithedale,” “Sunny Glimps,” “Utopia,” and “The Oasis” (37)—though of these names Blithedale is temporally adopted—are sure enough to confirm the overwhelming expectations of the new citizens of the community. In particular, Coverdale who makes a complete recovery from a bad cold experiences an inspiring regeneration as a rite of initiation. He begins to fling aside “a worn out or unseasonable garment” and “to be clothed anew.” In a literal sense, he is reborn as “quite another man” (61) or as a new man.

Although they believe themselves to be actually Arcadians, the Blithedalers including Coverdale have to do manual labor. They willingly work for so long, tedious hours to make themselves independent of the larger society. They are at first clumsy in farming, but after a period of training, they become increasingly familiar with farming utensils such as the “plough, the hoe, the scythe, and the hay-fork.” They are more and more adjusted to hard work enough to live stable lives as true agrarian men: “Our faces took the sunburn kindly; our chests gained in compass, and our shoulders in breadth and squareness; our great brown fists looked as if they had never been capable of kid gloves” (64). In the end, Coverdale, like Hawthorne at Brook Farm, has changed into a competent

⁵ Elizabeth Peabody remarked in an April 26, 1841, letter to John Sullivan Dwight that “Hawthorne has taken hold with the greatest spirit and proves a fine workman” (qtd. in Haraszi 17). In a May 6 letter to Dwight, Mrs. Ripley wrote exuberantly about Hawthorne’s presence at Brook Farm: “Hawthorne is one to reverence, to admire with that deep admiration so refreshing to the soul. He is our prince—prince in everything—yet despising no labour and very athletic and able-bodied in the barnyard and field” (qtd. in Haraszi 18).

farmer worthy of the name.

With enormous expectation, certainly, and with good will out of Transcendentalist or Socialist convictions, Hawthorne and other members of Brook Farm were initially very proud to belong to the community during its heroic phase. Yet the idyll of utopian community did not last long. As was to be expected, the novelty of the communal life at Brook Farm soon wore off. The biggest obstacle was unbearably onerous farm work. Hawthorne, like many of other Blithedalers, naively believed that a few hours of work a day would suffice to run a farm. Yet the reality of the backbreaking nature of manual labor came as a tremendous shock. Hard muscular labor such as hoeing turnips, feeding pigs and milking cows turned out less romantic than anticipated. Hawthorne's letters and journals disclosed clearly the changing process of his attitude toward Brook Farm.

Hawthorne's delicate signs of dissatisfaction were evidently revealed as early as April 22, exactly ten days since his living at Brook Farm, when he apologized to Sophia for his "abominable" hand-writing resulted from having chopped wood or having turned a grind-stone for long hours. "It is an endless surprise," Hawthorne confided in that letter, "how much work there is to be done in the world" (*Letters* 533). On arriving at Brook Farm, Hawthorne had to face a pile of 320 wagonloads of manure that needed to be carried and spread. After a few weeks of work on the dunghill, which he ironically called the "gold mine," he wrote to Sophia on June 1 that "a man's soul may be buried and perish under a dung-heap or in a furrow of the field, just as well as under a pile of money" (*Letters* 545). On July 16, he finally complained to G.S. Hillard, editor of *The Token*, that his hands were "covered with a new crop of blisters—the effect of raking hay" (*Letters* 550). Finally, Hawthorne lacked even energy to write to Sophia, and, by August 12, he declared that "labor is the curse of this world" (*Letters* 558).

The grave effect of such an unceasing manual labor was to deaden his perception of reality. Above all things, hard labor prohibited writing. The inability to get serious writing done was something most heartbreaking. On June 1, Hawthorne confessed that he had been too busy to write: "I think this present life of mine gives me an antipathy to pen and ink, even more than my Custom-House experience did," and bemoaned the onerous work he was obliged to perform (*Letters* 545). On July 16, he had to tell G.S. Hillard that he could not submit a story he had promised, and expressed his discontent: "My former stories all sprung up of their own accord, out of a quiet life. Now, I have no quiet at all" (*Letters* 550).

After four months with the cows, the milking, the furrowing, and the manure pile, Hawthorne expressed in a letter to Sophia his strong wish to escape such bridles by alluding to John Bunyan: "... in a little more than a fortnight, thy husband will be free from his bondage. . . free to think and feel! I do think that a great weight will then be removed from me, than when Christian's burthen fell off at the foot of the cross" (*Letters* 557-58). In several letters to Sophia, Hawthorne still referred to his bondage and enslavement at Brook Farm. His letters to Sophia at this time were "short, grouchy, and choppy" (Miller 196), perhaps because he was restless and unhappy. He now had little faith in the economic viability of Brook Farm. At last, in an August 22 letter, Hawthorne intimated that he and Sophia might not reside there after all: "Thou and I must form other plans for ourselves; for I can see few or no signs that Providence purposes to give us a home here" (*Letters* 563). Hawthorne repeatedly expressed his ambivalence and uncertainty for the future of Brook Farm in his letters in September and again in mid-October.

Although there were a lot of activities for the community solidarity at Brook Farm, Hawthorne was rapidly distanced and separated from the

others. He was intensely connected not to anyone there but rather to Sophia. In this regard, according to the biographer Edwin H. Miller, Hawthorne was “the most unlikely” of the utopians, and he was “too skeptical to place much confidence in Christian or utopian idealism” (189). Before the end of September 1841, Hawthorne knew he could not spend the winter there, and was convinced he could not find a permanent home at Brook Farm. Early in November, Hawthorne finally left the experimental farm.

In *The Blithedale Romance*, the same uncertainty of Coverdale’s position as that of Hawthorne’s at Brook Farm is evident. Recovering from his illness which he got on his arrival of Blithedale, Coverdale sees a number of new recruits to the community as individuals with distinct past and marked personality. As some of them are too crooked to be bound up “into a faggot,” Coverdale thinks it difficult to associate with them, foreseeing the unfortunate future of the community: “On the whole, it was a society such as has seldom met together; nor, perhaps, could it reasonably be expected to hold together long” (62-63).

Moreover, the theory and practice in the labor there do not go hand in hand. Coverdale records the demands of manual labor in places—particularly in chapters eight and ten. The “delectable visions of the spiritualization of labor” are what Coverdale is pleased with only when his enterprise of Blithedale lies “all in theory.” There is clearly a gap between the theory and practice in working there, which shows the most salient deficiency in effectiveness of the physical labor agenda. Far from spiritualizing anything, the labor leaves him “mentally sluggish in the dusk of the evening.” The physical work has nothing to do with intellectual activity, in that the “yeoman and the scholar . . . are two distinct individuals, and never be melted or welded into one substance” (65-66). The labor is nothing less than a pain. The clods of earth will not be converted into thoughts, but rather the thoughts fast become

cloddish. Coverdale begins to perceive that his enthusiasm has “insensibly been exhaled, together with the perspiration of many a hard day’s toil.” And he also witnesses vividly that the other colleagues’ passion dwindles “with a quarter-of-an-hour’s active labor, under a July sun” (81-82). Coverdale poignantly concludes that hard farm labor is by no means conducive to intellectual creativity.

III. Parallels of Scenes and Events

Hawthorne, both on and off the community of Brook Farm, tended to enjoy the scenery not as an ardent appreciator but as an indifferent onlooker. In his diary dated on September 28, 1841, Hawthorne called himself “a mere spectator both of sport and serious business,” the same posture as that of his narrator, Miles Coverdale. Hawthorne’s description of how he “lay under the trees and looked on” (*American Notebooks* 202) is akin to Coverdale’s persistent voyeurism in the romance.

One day Hawthorne discovered a sequestered, suitable spot to repose himself and look all around. On the journal entry of September 26, 1841, Hawthorne took a walk that Sunday morning, a “clear, breezy morning, after nearly a week of cloudy and showery weather.” He walked “along the edge of the meadow towards Cow Island” near Brook Farm. There were “large trees, almost a wood, principally of pine, with the green pasture glades intermixed.” Finally he located such position as Coverdale’s hermitage and described: “I found several grape vines, hung with abundance of large purple grapes. . . . One vine had ascended almost to the tip-top of a large white pine tree, spreading its leaves and hanging its purple clusters among all its boughs” (*American Notebooks* 196-98).

In the romance, Coverdale constantly shows voyeurism throughout the story. His voyeuristic interest is clearly unfolded in the chapter twelve, “Coverdale’s Hermitage,” where he finds out “a little hermitage” for

himself in the woods. Ascending the pine-tree to sit in the comfortable nest, he peeps out through several cracks in the leaves. His lofty hermitage serves as “an observatory, not for starry investigations, but for those sublunary matters in which lay a lore as infinite as that of the planets” (92-93). Coverdale’s hermitage is shaped among the pine tree and a grape-vine entangled—a “hollow chamber, or rare seclusion” (98) of his exclusive possession. The “tree house” (Person 91) equipped with “loop-holes through the verdant walls” symbolizes his “individuality” and aids him “in keeping it inviolate.” Coverdale retreats to this place of seclusion several times in order to observe others with escaping detection. It is on “this natural turret” (98-99) that Coverdale watches the suspicious meeting between Zenobia and Westervelt.

Hawthorne sometimes went back to Salem or Boston for a brief respite from the reformers. He spent the first three weeks of September at home in Salem, and had an opportunity to introspect objectively his life at Brook Farm. In his letter to Sophia of September 3, 1941, Hawthorne showed his reluctance to stay there with a sense of its unreality: “But really I should judge it to be twenty years since I left Brook Farm; and I take this to be one proof that my life there was an unnatural and unsuitable, and therefore an unreal one.” To put it bluntly, “It already looks like a dream behind me.” Hawthorne was back to Brook Farm by September 22, but he was no longer obliged to toil in its stubborn furrows. In the same letter, Hawthorne went so far as to profess that “the real Me was never an associate of the community” (*Letters* 566).

In *The Blithedale Romance*, Coverdale also leaves Blithedale for a vacation very shortly after his unpleasant encounter with Hollingsworth. The day before his departure they disagree so severely that Coverdale renounces Hollingsworth and effectively ends their friendship. Coverdale puts up at a hotel in Boston, where he has an opportunity to reflect his residence at the community. In retrospect, his life there appears to

be “only a summer in the country” on the one hand, but a “part of another age, a different state of society” on the other. Blithedale also looks “vague, as if it were at a distance both in time and space.” Curiously enough, Coverdale is really in “a mood that so robbed the actual world of its solidity” (146). Coverdale’s feeling of emptiness at this moment echoes Hawthorne’s sense of unreality of Brook Farm while he was temporarily away. Coverdale will return, although not for long, but his former friendship with Hollingsworth cannot be restored. The drama culminates with Coverdale’s leaving the farm and returning to the city, marking the turning point in the novel.

Hawthorne realized well that reality exists at the rear as compared with the facade, which is fitted up for the public eye. There are usually a number of things to see at the back side of a building instead of in the front, as he referred to the “greater picturesqueness and reality of back-yards.” For Hawthorne, it is natural that there is “much to be learnt, always, by getting a glimpse at rears.” And he suggested that as we pass “the rear of farm-houses, instead of the front, a very noticeable aspect is presented” (*American Notebooks* 239). It was at the rear of a building that Hawthorne could find such animals as cat and dove especially in a rainy day. Almost ten years later, on the journal dated May 14, 1850, Hawthorne caught sight of a cat in the back ground of his house and recorded: “a cat occasionally stealing along on the roofs of the low outhouses; descending the flight of wooden steps into the brick area, investigating the shed, and entering all dark and secret places; cautious, circumspect, as if in such of something.” And on the journal of May 16, 1850, Hawthorne expressed another similar experience: “It has been an easterly rain yesterday and to-day. . . . Once, this morning, a solitary dove came and lit on the peak of an attic-window, and looked down into the area” (*American Notebooks* 506-8). Hawthorne explicitly used these passages regarding such animals when writing *The Blithedale*

Romance.

It is to get a good rest undisturbed that Coverdale leaves away and stays at a hotel. The weather is gloomy with an occasional rain and an ugly-tempered wind. Coverdale enjoys the back view of the building there. He soon finds himself “getting pretty well acquainted with that little portion of the backside of the universe which it presented to my view” (148). He watches a cat, “creeping along the low, flat roofs of the offices, descending a flight of wooden steps, gliding among the grass, and besieging the buttonwood-tree, with murderous purpose against its feathered citizens” (149). Subsequently, searching all over the houses on the opposite side of the building, Coverdale also finds a dove, “looking very dreary and forlorn,” sitting “on the peak of one of the dormer-windows” (152).

Here at the hotel, Coverdale, as a “literary snoop” (Carabine 179), displays voyeurism in its fullness, peeping at a boarding house and discovering a few families. Whilst snooping around through a back window of the hotel, to his surprise, he spies Zenobia and Westervelt in an apartment of the boarding house. Realizing they notice him, Coverdale, embarrassed and motivated by curiosity, visits them to be chastised by Zenobia for his spying. Coverdale’s voyeuristic behavior corresponds to Hawthorne’s habit of observance out of curiosity.

The scene of the masquerade in the romance was known to be based on a picnic party held one September day to celebrate the harvest season.⁶ In a journal entry, dated September 28, 1841, Hawthorne described the picnic in the woods in detail: “I strolled into the woods, after dinner, with Mr. Bradford; and in a lonesome glade, we met the apparition of

⁶ On that day, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller visited Brook Farm and joined the picnic, which Hawthorne excluded from the novel, possibly because he didn’t want to have the fiction restricted by the fact.

an Indian chief, dressed in appropriate costume of blanket, feathers, and paint, and armed with a musket." And Hawthorne found there "a young gipsy" and "the goddess Diana." He came to "a company of fantastic figures, arranged in a ring for a dance or game." There were "a Swiss girl, an Indian squaw, a negro of the Jim Crow order, one or two foresters; and several people in Christian attire" (*American Notebooks* 201-2). Hawthorne's depiction of the harvest celebration is in great measure identical to the masquerade scene described by his narrator, Miles Coverdale,

Coverdale's voyeurism is most represented in the "The Masqueraders," "the most dream-like chapter of all" (Griffith, Jr. 8). After a short-term living in the city, Coverdale goes back, on foot, to Blithedale. In "a breezy September forenoon," he walks along the country pathway "with sunny freshness" (204-5). Approaching nearer to Blithedale, Coverdale has a sense of foreboding that something unfavorable might have happened during his absence. "Yielding to this ominous impression," Coverdale turns aside "into the woods, resolving to spy out the posture of the Community, as craftily as the wild Indian before he makes his onset" (207).

Coverdale soon comes to his "hermitage, in the heart of the white-pine tree, and clambering up into it," sits down to rest. While devouring the grapes, he looks on all sides through the peep-holes of his hermitage and sees the farm-house and the fields. Curiously finding "not a single human figure in the landscape," Coverdale comes down out of the tree and goes to the edge of the wood. Then he sees "a concourse of strange figures" appearing, vanishing, and coming again "beneath the overshadowing branches." Among them "an Indian chief" and "the goddess Diana" stand out. There is another group consisting of "a Bavarian broom-girl, a negro of the Jim Crow order, one or two foresters of the middle-ages, a Kentucky woodsman," and "a Shaker elder" (208-9). Besides there are a number

of eccentric figures who dress in odd costume and are decked with incongruous things. Being tickled by the oddity of his associates who join in this masquerade, Coverdale cannot hold his laughing. Presently there is a great fuss about finding him. He will soon be discovered and his habitual pryingness is brought to light at last. And he incurs Zenobia's grudge that "you come half-an-hour too late, and have missed a scene which you would have enjoyed!" (212). Thus Coverdale's curiosity increases more and more like that of Hawthorne as a writer.

IV. Conclusion

A piece of literary work is in some way admittedly autobiographical, propagandistic, or topical; it is related to its contemporary events somehow or other. It is surely dangerous to assume that a work of art must always be judged or looked at or taught as if it were disembodied from all experiences except the strictly aesthetic. Especially, a novel which usually makes us perceive the importance of human relations as well as social issues is seen considerably, if not exclusively, as a reflection of its author's life and times as well as its characters'. Thus the novel is likely to be more meaningful when either its milieu or that of its author is well understood.

In *The Blithedale Romance*, the setting of the story is laid at Blithedale, an imaginary community on the model of the well-known Brook Farm consisting of the people with the purpose of first avoiding, but eventually improving, the world. Hawthorne's reminiscences as well as his journals and letters concerning the experimental farm became important sources for the romance. In composing it, Hawthorne resorted to the cut-and-paste interpolating of his recorded passages into the text, mainly in describing scenes and events as well as characters. Many passages, extracted from his documents but not all from the time he lived at Brook

Farm, were pretty accurately inserted into the novel.

The subject of the novel appears to be an idealization of Brook Farm, but the author disavows having taken either the characters from the group really assembled there or the events from the incidents actually happened there. In regard to the Preface of the romance in which Hawthorne urges the readers not to take the characters and occurrences of the novel as representative of real-life people and events, many readers have continued to express skepticism

In *The Blithedale Romance*, Coverdale and other main characters, like the Brook Farmers including Hawthorne, flee from reality such as the discontents of urban, industrial life. The Blithedalers expect the communal farm to satisfy their wants and to extricate them from any anguish. They vaguely dream that Blithedale can be transformed into a communal Eden. Even though the residents effort to reform the nature both internally and externally, nobody and nothing change much at Blithedale.⁷

Recognizing that the "Faery Land" atmosphere is what American romancers urgently need, Hawthorne ventured to use his recollections of Brook farm as being, certainly, the most romantic episode of his own life. Hawthorne's final appraisal of the community was, as he confessed in the Preface, "essentially a daydream, and yet a fact" which he employed as "an available foothold between fiction and reality" (2). Hawthorne twisted a little this ambivalent phrase so that he came to learn a paradoxical lesson: the Faery Land is absent in America but exists at experimental utopias in which the border of reality and fiction becomes

⁷ Coverdale must be a representative of such unchanging persons: he confesses in the first chapter that he does not care to do others a kindness only if it involved "no special trouble to myself" (7), and in the last chapter that he may offer up his life only if "the effort did not involve an unreasonable amount of trouble" (246).

blurred. Indeed, in the curious story of Hawthorne's association with Brook Farm, we find it difficult to separate a practical American from a visionary dreamer.

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