The Blithedale Romance

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born to Nathaniel and Elizabeth Hathorne on July 4, 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts. The family was not wealthy, but Nathaniel Sr.'s job as a shipman kept them financially afloat until his death in 1808. Elizabeth brought Hawthorne and his siblings to her brother's house (also in Salem) to live until they moved to Raymond, Maine in 1816. Hawthorne moved back to Salem to go to school in 1819 and then went on to Bowdoin College in 1821. Hawthorne was a rather unremarkable student but graduated in 1825 and began working on his writing career. Although Hawthorne didn't achieve much fame from his earliest short stories and other works, he continued trying while he took other jobs (including one in the Boston Custom House in 1839) throughout the 1820s and '30s. After meeting and falling in love with Sophia Peabody, Hawthorne joined Brook Farm (a would-be utopian community) in the hope that he'd be able to save up enough money to marry her. However, he left after less than a year. Hawthorne and Sophia married in 1842 and had three children—Una, Julian, and Rose—between 1844 and 1851. The Hawthornes moved several times between their marriage and 1850, when they moved to the Berkshires. Although Hawthorne hated living in such a cold place, some of his most notable works were written and published during his time there, including *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*. Hawthorne left the Berkshires in 1851 and, in 1853, moved to Liverpool, England after receiving an appointment to the US Consul there in 1853. Hawthorne did not publish anything during this period, but upon returning to the United States in 1860, he began publishing books again, beginning with *The Marble Faun*. The family settled in Concord, Massachusetts, but Hawthorne began feeling the effects of his old age and experienced mysterious stomach pains. Believing he just needed some fresh mountain air to recuperate, Hawthorne decided to travel in New England. While gone, he died in his sleep on May 19, 1864 in Plymouth, New Hampshire. Hawthorne was buried in the famous Authors' Ridge in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, Massachusetts.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* is partially based on his own time at Brook Farm, which was supposed to be a utopian-like agrarian community in Massachusetts. Brook Farm was just one of numerous utopian communities that popped up in America in the 19th century. Although most were religious, some, including Brook Farm, were dedicated to the arts, philosophy, individualism, and the belief that urban life was harmful to a person's individuality. Most of these communities were short-lived, but some lasted decades. Hawthorne was also active during the height of Transcendentalism, which advocated for greater individualism, simplicity, a deeper appreciation for nature, and self-reliance. Similarly, the members of Blithedale in Hawthorne's book embrace their individuality, strive to reconnect to nature by leaving large cities, and try to create a system in which they will be entirely self-reliant and will not need to depend on the outside world for food or shelter. Hawthorne had a reputation for criticizing mesmerism (also known as animal magnetism), which was something of a craze in the 18th and 19th centuries. Mesmerists used something like hypnosis to put people in a trance, and this trance was believed to allow the individual to do just about anything ranging from speaking to the dead to finding lost objects to healing themselves to reading minds. Like many others, Hawthorne believed mesmerism was at best an absolute sham and at worst a manipulative and abusive practice that enabled villainous men and women to victimize others.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Nathaniel Hawthorne was one of the most important writers of the American Renaissance. His most well-known work, *The Scarlet Letter*, is often cited as one of the greatest 19th-century American novels, and it inspired future writers like D.H. Lawrence. Most of the characters in *The Blithedale Romance* join the community because they want to escape the corrupting influence of life in America's big cities. Henry David Thoreau advocates for people to do something similar—to forsake the hustle and bustle of urban life in favor of a simple life close to nature—in his nonfiction work *Walden*. The characters in Hawthorne's novel are also predominately intellectuals who believe in gender equality, which was quite a radical statement for the time period. A similar group can be found in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*, which focuses on a small group of intellectuals living in an idyllic estate in rural 18th-century America. Gender roles are a major theme in *The Blithedale Romance*, and Zenobia is particular is rumored to have been based on Margaret Fuller, a real women's rights activist and friend of Hawthorne's. For more on Fuller's beliefs about gender equality, read her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Mesmerism and its evils are another prominent theme in *The Blithedale Romance*. Likewise, George Lippard highlights how mesmerists use their abilities to manipulate and victimize people—mostly women—in his sensational novel *Memoirs of a Preacher*. For another book featuring a tragic love triangle, try Emily Bronte's novel *Wuthering Heights*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Blithedale Romance
- **When Written:** 1852
- **Where Written:** The Berkshires near Lenox, Massachusetts
- **When Published:** 1852
- **Literary Period:** American Renaissance
- **Genre:** Romance, Literary Fiction
- **Setting:** 19th-century Boston
- **Climax:** Hollingsworth ends his relationship with Zenobia to start one with Priscilla, Zenobia commits suicide as a result
- **Antagonist:** Professor Westervelt
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Presidential Pals. In 1821 while he was traveling to Bowdoin College, Nathaniel Hawthorne met Franklin Pierce, the future 14th President of the United States. The two began a lifelong friendship—Pierce even stayed up watching over Hawthorne the night he died.

What's in a name? Nathaniel Hawthorne was actually born Nathaniel Hathorne (without the W), but he changed it early in life to distance himself from his ancestors. One of them, William Hathorne, had a Quaker woman publicly whipped and another, John Hathorne, was a judge during the infamous Salem Witch Trials of 1692.

PLOT SUMMARY

Miles Coverdale is about to abandon his comfortable bachelor pad in mid-19th-century Boston to start a new life and help launch a new rural utopian community called Blithedale. A number of young and popular intellectuals will be going there at the same time, making it a hot topic in the papers. On the night before his departure, Coverdale goes to see an exhibition of the Veiled Lady, a mesmeric phenomenon with widespread popularity in Boston at the time. At the show, Coverdale asked the Veiled Lady about the future of the project at Blithedale and he mulls over her vague answers while he walks home. An old man named Moodie stops him and says he has a favor to ask, but he abruptly changes his mind and says he'd rather ask a woman or an older man. Coverdale is confused, but he suggests that Moodie should talk to Hollingsworth, a philanthropist who is a bit older and is also about to move to Blithedale. Moodie thanks him and they part. The next day, Coverdale walks out of his apartment and joins four other men braving the snowstorm to walk to Blithedale.

By the time they reach the farmhouse at Blithedale, Coverdale is convinced he's caught a cold. Still, he's excited to meet Mrs. Foster, whose husband is going to teach him and the other men how to work the farm. Coverdale talks with some of the other people who have just moved to Blithedale until Zenobia—a beautiful writer and social reformer with a reputation as a women's rights advocate—comes in to greet them. Coverdale is immediately taken in by Zenobia's beauty and wit. He admires her sole ornament, an exotic hothouse **flower** in her hair. The group talks about their project until dinner.

After dinner, Zenobia comments on how strange it is that Hollingsworth is so late; just then, he knocks on the door. Coverdale lets him in and Hollingsworth surprises them by bringing in a pale young teenage girl who immediately gravitates towards Zenobia. The girl says her name is Priscilla, but she declines to share her last name. Coverdale speculates that Priscilla loves Zenobia because she has read Zenobia's stories and he shares this theory with Zenobia, but she laughs him off and says Priscilla is just a nervous seamstress whose life has thus far been spent in a hot, dirty room in the city. Silas Foster, the farm manager, tells everyone they should get to bed because they'll all have to wake up early.

As Coverdale predicted, he develops a bad cold overnight and the next morning he's wracked with a painful fever and can't get out of bed. Convinced he's dying, Coverdale asks Hollingsworth to send him back to the city but Hollingsworth refuses. Instead, Hollingsworth takes care of Coverdale day and night throughout his illness. Coverdale appreciates this, but he also realizes that Hollingsworth is obsessed with his philanthropic goal of criminal reform—he wants to build a facility in which he can reform criminals by appealing to their latent intellectual and spiritual sensibilities. Coverdale spends a lot of time wondering about Zenobia's sexual history because she acts more like a young wife than a chaste maiden. He is convinced that Zenobia has been married, though there's no evidence to support this theory and he's ashamed of himself for thinking about it so much.

On Coverdale's first day out of bed after his illness, he finds Zenobia decorating Priscilla with twigs full of blossoms and buds. Priscilla has grown quite beautiful and much livelier since arriving at Blithedale. Coverdale, too, feels like a new man and he excitedly dives into his work. Unfortunately, he soon realizes that his early ideas about the connection between physical labor and intellectual stimulation were wrong. Instead of finding fulfillment and inspiration in the work, Coverdale is too exhausted to work on his poetry. Zenobia teases him about his future life as a farmer, but Hollingsworth says the only reason Coverdale hasn't been able to write any poetry is because he's not a real poet. Hollingsworth, on the other hand, still feels like a philanthropist because it's part of his nature. Zenobia praises Hollingsworth, which makes Coverdale wonder if she and Priscilla—who spend a lot of time with Hollingsworth—are his proselytes.

Coverdale becomes obsessed with Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and

Priscilla. Although Hollingsworth is so dedicated to his philanthropic ambitions that Coverdale doesn't think he's capable of human emotion, both Zenobia and Priscilla are besotted with him. Coverdale worries that Priscilla will give Hollingsworth her heart and be devastated when she realizes that Hollingsworth can't love her the way she loves him. Zenobia is in a similar position, but Coverdale isn't as worried about her because she's so strong and intelligent. One night, Coverdale watches Priscilla contentedly sitting at Hollingsworth's feet on the porch until Zenobia appears. Zenobia calls Priscilla over, saying she must teach Priscilla about propriety. Coverdale wonders what's going to happen to the three of them.

One day Moodie approaches Coverdale and Hollingsworth and asks about Priscilla, and Coverdale realizes that Moodie was the one who sent Priscilla to Blithedale. They tell Moodie that Priscilla has grown very beautiful and happy, which makes Moodie happy. Moodie also asks about Zenobia and whether she's kind to Priscilla. Coverdale doesn't understand why Moodie would ask such a strange question, but they tell him that the two are like sisters. Hollingsworth and Moodie go to find Priscilla, but later Coverdale sees Moodie standing outside the farmhouse looking up at Priscilla's window. Priscilla appears in the window with Zenobia, but Zenobia loses patience and nudges Priscilla away. Coverdale sees Moodie shake his fist as he walks away.

A short time later Coverdale runs into a mysterious man named Professor Westervelt in the forest. Coverdale takes an immediate disliking to him, but he still tells Westervelt where he might run into Zenobia. Later, Coverdale overhears Westervelt and Zenobia talking, but he only understands some of what they say. Westervelt whispers something in Zenobia's ear that disgusts her, and she says that if God cares for her, then he'll release her from this bond.

The next evening, Zenobia tells the group a story about the mysterious Veiled Lady who disappeared at the height of her popularity: a young man named Theodore took a bet that he could find out the Veiled Lady's true identity and snuck into her drawing room to spy on her. However, when the Lady entered the room, she sensed Theodore's presence and called him forward. He took her **veil** off but only caught a glimpse of her face before she disappeared. At the same time that the Veiled Lady disappeared, a young girl appeared among a group of visionaries and immediately became attached to one woman. The magician who exhibited the Veiled Lady somehow discovered this, found the woman, and convinced her to help him capture the girl, who he revealed was actually the Veiled Lady. To capture the girl, the woman must throw the veil back over the girl and say some magic words. She complied and the magician successfully recaptured the Veiled Lady. As Zenobia tells the end of the story, she throws a veil over Priscilla, who is terrified as a result.

Shortly after this event, Coverdale, Hollingsworth, Priscilla, and Zenobia go to a strange rock formation called Eliot's Pulpit to relax. While they're there, Zenobia starts a debate about women's rights. She predicts that one day women will be granted equality and prove that they're more eloquent than men. Coverdale says he wishes women would be allowed to be rulers and religious leaders. Hollingsworth, however, says that a woman's proper place is at a man's side. Any woman who tries to go beyond that is monstrous and if too many women rise up to demand social change in their favor then Hollingsworth says he would use force to push them back into their sphere. Coverdale is horrified and thinks Zenobia will argue, but instead she tearfully tells Hollingsworth that women will willingly be what he says they should be if men are good and manly. A few days later Hollingsworth tries to convince Coverdale to join his project to open a criminal reform center in Blithedale, but Coverdale refuses. The two argue and Coverdale decides to leave.

Back in Boston, Coverdale stays in a dingy hotel far from his old haunts. The day after he arrives, he notices Zenobia, Westervelt, and Priscilla are staying in the boardinghouse across from his hotel. Westervelt and Zenobia catch Coverdale spying on them through their window and lower the curtain. The next day Coverdale goes over to see them, but Zenobia is mad that Coverdale is being so nosy. Westervelt appears in the room and says they all must leave. Coverdale frantically asks Priscilla if she's there by choice and she tells him she has no free will as she walks out.

Coverdale seeks out Moodie to ask him about Priscilla and Zenobia. He learns that they're half-sisters—Zenobia is Moodie's daughter fromhis first marriage and Priscilla is from his second. Zenobia was raised by a wealthy uncle, but Moodie raised Priscilla, who developed a reputation for being a clairvoyant. Before going to Blithedale, a magician began visiting Priscilla, but nobody understood why because Priscilla was so homely. Apparently, Priscilla went to Blithedale to meet Zenobia, who had no idea that she had a half-sister.

Coverdale goes to the Veiled Lady exhibition after hearing that the Lady has reappeared. He runs into Hollingsworth there, but Hollingsworth is apparently still mad at Coverdale. Shortly after the magician, Westervelt, begins the show, Hollingsworth goes onto the stage and simply says, "Come!" Priscilla pulls the veil off and leaves with Hollingsworth. Coverdale decides to return to Blithedale because he wants to know what's happened between Zenobia, Priscilla, and Hollingsworth since he left. He finds the three at Eliot's Pulpit and it's clear that they've reached some sort of crisis. Zenobia says she's on trial for her life and scolds Hollingsworth for being so self-absorbed. Coverdale infers that they've been discussing Zenobia's past, but they don't return to the subject. Zenobia asks Hollingsworth if he loves Priscilla and he says that he does now. Priscilla leaves with him.

Zenobia is devastated and she tells Coverdale that she must leave Blithedale. She assures him that she'll be fine but she takes off her flower and tells him to tell Hollingsworth that he's killed her. She leaves and Coverdale falls asleep in the forest. When he wakes up, he has a bad feeling about Zenobia and goes to get Hollingsworth and Silas. Coverdale shows them Zenobia's handkerchief and leads them to where he found it near the pond. The men fish around in the water for a while before they discover Zenobia's body at the bottom of the pond. They hold a funeral, which Westervelt attends. Coverdale tries to get him to reveal his connection to Zenobia, but Westervelt says it doesn't matter anymore.

A few years later, Coverdale gives in to his curiosity and seeks out Priscilla and Hollingsworth, who are apparently married. Consumed with guilt and haunted by the memory of how he treated Zenobia, Hollingsworth gave up his plans for criminal reform. Coverdale forgives him and leaves—he never sees either of them again. Coverdale mourns that Blithedale proved to be such a failure. He knows all the original members have left, although some people who came later might still be there. Coverdale's own life has been unremarkable and lonely. He decides to reveal a secret that he's kept throughout his narrative that might explain his obsessive behavior: he was in love with Priscilla.

CHARACTERS

Miles Coverdale – Coverdale, the story's narrator and protagonist, is a Boston poet who becomes one of the founding members of the utopian agrarian community of Blithedale. As intellectuals, he and the other founders believe that laboring in nature will combat the evils of industrial society (such as prejudice and inequality) while stimulating their intellect and creativity. However, as their experiment progresses, their assumptions and motives begin to seem less pure. Coverdale misses the comforts of upper-class Boston, he realizes that hard labor makes him unable to write poetry, and he seems less interested in egalitarian utopia than in prying into the secrets of those around him. In general, he has a deep interest in human nature and he loves to observe people and speculate about their pasts and their feelings, which doesn't always make him an empathetic or intuitive friend (in fact, his observations about people often lead him to incorrect conclusions). He is especially interested in his closest friends, Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla, who have mysterious pasts and whose connections to one another are difficult to parse—later, he reveals that his obsession with them is motivated in large part by his love for Priscilla. Incredibly secretive himself, Coverdale never tells Priscilla (who marries Hollingsworth) of his feelings. Just as Blithedale is beginning to thrive, Hollingsworth asks Coverdale to help him co-opt the Blithedale community for his own philanthropic project, and Coverdale's refusal leads him and Hollingsworth to fall out as friends. Feeling betrayed by Hollingsworth's selfishness, Coverdale returns to Boston, where he continues to seek information about his friends' pasts. On a trip back to Blithedale, he witnesses an argument between Zenobia, Priscilla, and Hollingsworth, after which Zenobia kills herself in grief over Hollingsworth loving Priscilla instead of her. As Zenobia unofficially led Blithedale, this is the end of their vision and idealism, and Coverdale returns to his solitary life in Boston, reflecting that the society—while a worthwhile daydream—was always doomed.

Zenobia – A founding member of Blithedale, Zenobia is the group's unofficial leader. She is beautiful, vibrant, independently wealthy, and a known writer and activist with a passion for women's equality. While Zenobia's past and identity are mostly a secret ("Zenobia" is itself a pseudonym), there are rumors of a past marriage and Coverdale observes that she has mysterious connections to others, including Moodie, Westervelt, and Priscilla. As the story continues, Hawthorne reveals what these connections are. The book implies that she is married to (but estranged from) the sinister magician Westervelt, and Coverdale suggests that their marriage might have been a traumatic loss of independence for Zenobia, which perhaps led to her feminist activism. Moodie turns out to be her father, who left her with a wealthy uncle when he fled debtors during her childhood, and Priscilla is her half-sister who has come to Blithedale to find her (although Zenobia never knew she existed). At Blithedale, Zenobia becomes good friends with Coverdale and she falls in love (and has a somewhat one-sided relationship) with Hollingsworth. Her relationship with Hollingsworth draws out a central tension of her character: while she cherishes her ideas about women's equality and independence, her love for Hollingsworth makes her change her behavior and rhetoric as she tries to align with his more traditional ideas about women. Zenobia also becomes close to Priscilla, despite being annoyed by the girl's clingy and affectionate demeanor. However, Zenobia comes to a moment of crisis when she realizes that Hollingsworth is using her for her money, manipulating her love so she will fund his philanthropic project while not actually being in love with her. After a confrontation, Priscilla and Hollingsworth walk off together, and Zenobia tells Coverdale that Hollingsworth has killed her then drowns herself in the pond. Zenobia's death marks the end of Blithedale's idealism, showing that the utopian experiment was doomed to fail. Her suicide is also a comment on the difficulty of being a 19th-century woman. Zenobia's despair comes from her inability to be herself while finding romantic fulfillment and from her sense that the world hurts women while protecting men.

Hollingsworth – A philanthropist obsessed with criminal reform, Hollingsworth is one of the founding members of Blithedale. He initially appears to be a friendly, devoted, and helpful man who works hard at Blithedale, encourages others,

and cares diligently for Coverdale when he is ill. However, as the story progresses, Coverdale becomes suspicious of Hollingsworth's single-minded obsession with his dream of building a facility to reform criminals. It seems to Coverdale that Hollingsworth's obsession with philanthropy might lead him to be manipulative and inhumane in pursuit of his goals, which turns out to be true: Hollingsworth joined Blithedale not to support the vision of the collective, but to secretly use the group's collective labor to further his own ambition for criminal reform. As it turns out, Hollingsworth always had plans to buy the Blithedale land (after everyone had worked so hard to make it fertile) and build it into his facility, a goal that nobody else shared. Zenobia and Priscilla, however, are blind to Hollingsworth's faults and motives and they both fall in love with him. Zenobia's love for Hollingsworth makes her very easy to manipulate, and Hollingsworth seems to use her love for him as a way to gain access to her substantial wealth (he wants her money to fund his criminal reform facility). Another odd aspect of Zenobia and Hollingsworth's relationship is their mismatched values; while Zenobia is an advocate for women's rights, Hollingsworth has very traditional views of a woman's role in society—namely, that women are meant to be men's helpers and inferiors. Hollingsworth's beliefs about women are a major factor in his decision to cut ties with Zenobia in the end—a breakup that leads distraught Zenobia to end her own life. During his final confrontation with Zenobia, Hollingsworth is horrified by her accusations that he's so self-interested and single-minded that he hurts other people. He is haunted by this conversation and by Zenobia's subsequent suicide for the rest of his life, and he is never able to achieve his philanthropic goals. He does wind up marrying Priscilla, however, and the two remain together.

Priscilla / The Veiled Lady – Priscilla is Zenobia's half-sister, Moodie's daughter from his second marriage, the woman behind the Veiled Lady act, and a founding member of Blithedale. She is a quiet, deferential, and obedient person who—despite having a difficult past—finds joy in living at Blithedale. When Priscilla arrives at Blithedale, she immediately attaches herself to Zenobia, who does not yet know that Priscilla is her half-sister, or that Priscilla has specifically come to Blithedale to get to know her. While the two do grow close (despite Zenobia's annoyance at Priscilla's clingy and subservient personality), the major fault-line of their relationship is that they both love Hollingsworth, and Zenobia senses that Hollingsworth loves Priscilla, too. Zenobia's jealousy creates some tension between the two women, but Priscilla is so trusting and loving that she doesn't seem to sense it. This makes Priscilla vulnerable, and Zenobia betrays her by handing her over to the sinister mesmerist Professor Westervelt, who manipulates and controls Priscilla, making her part of his stage act in which she wears a veil and performs mystical feats. However, Priscilla' deep love for Hollingsworth proves stronger than her obedience to Westervelt. When Hollingsworth shows up at a Veiled Lady performance and tells Priscilla to come with him, she walks offstage and joins him, eventually becoming his wife. The love between Priscilla and Hollingsworth leads Zenobia to kill herself in despair, but nonetheless, Priscilla and Hollingsworth remain together at the story's end. In general, Priscilla, is willing to do, say, or believe whatever those around her tell her to (at one point, she even tells Coverdale that she has no free will), and this makes her a good match for the chauvinist and controlling Hollingsworth.

Professor Westervelt – Professor Westervelt is the enigmatic magician who controls the Veiled Lady. It's also implied that he is Zenobia's estranged husband whose cruelty made her flee their marriage. Both Westervelt's physical appearance and his behavior are sinister and deceptive. He has dazzling white teeth, but there is a golden rod in his mouth, which indicates that his teeth—like his personality—are false. He is very handsome and well-dressed, and he uses a cane that has a snake's head on the top, which contributes to the rumors that he's demonic and dangerous. Westervelt first enters the narrative when Miles Coverdale runs into him in the woods surrounding Blithedale. Coverdale immediately takes a disliking to him, despite not knowing who he is, and he is suspicious when Westervelt asks about Zenobia and Priscilla, indicating that the three are connected. While Hawthorne never fully reveals the nature of the connection between these three characters, it's clear that Westervelt has tremendous power over both Zenobia and Priscilla. Zenobia asks God to release her from whatever connection she has with Westervelt (likely a marriage), which supports the idea that Westervelt is evil and possibly has supernatural demonic powers. (If Zenobia needs God's help to get free of him, then Westervelt's influence must be stronger than a mere marriage contract.) He also has tremendous power over Priscilla; once Zenobia betrays Priscilla and hands her over to Westervelt (possibly because Westervelt blackmailed her), Priscilla tells Coverdale that she has no free will. She becomes the Veiled Lady in Westervelt's mesmerism shows, where she follows all his orders and he exploits her for his own financial gain, highlighting his belief that other people are just tools for him to use. Westervelt takes his influence over other people for granted, which makes it doubly devastating for him when Priscilla runs away with Hollingsworth and Zenobia commits suicide.

Mr. Moodie / Fauntleroy – An enigmatic acquaintance of Coverdale's in Boston, Moodie is Zenobia and Priscilla's father. He is a peculiar old man who has a habit of never looking at anyone head on. He stays in the shadows as much as possible and nobody is quite sure what his personal history is. This is particularly odd because Moodie's job as a peddler forces him to be out and about in the public eye. After Coverdale discovers that Moodie is somehow connected to both Priscilla and Zenobia, he gets Moodie drunk and Moodie tells a story about a man named Fauntleroy, which is presumably Moodie's real

name. In the story, Fauntleroy was a conceited and materialistic man who was married with a daughter (implied to be Zenobia). However, after losing everything to debtors, Fauntleroy's wife died of shame and he fled his former life, leaving Zenobia with his brother. After this, Fauntleroy changed his ways. He married again and had another daughter, Priscilla, who—unlike Zenobia—grew up with her father, but with none of his wealth. Moodie (presumed to be the identity Fauntleroy assumed after fleeing his old life) seems stalked by shame—so much so that he becomes a person who literally lives in the shadows, not wanting anyone to know about his past failings. Hawthorne ultimately reveals that Moodie sent Priscilla to Blithedale so she could bond with Zenobia, as Moodie wanted the sisters (who had never met) to have a relationship. Moodie seems to see in Zenobia an echo of his old self; she is flamboyant, wealthy, and confident, just as he once was.

Silas Foster – Silas Foster, the farm manager at Blithedale, teaches Coverdale, Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla about animal husbandry and farming throughout their time at Blithedale. Although Silas lives at Blithedale from the beginning, he is not a co-founder of the society. A member of the laboring class, Silas is hired to help the Boston intellectuals learn to run a farm, but he doesn't share the same expectations or beliefs about Blithedale's future as an agrarian utopian society. In fact, Silas seems pessimistic about the farm's ability to thrive, suggesting that the founders will become tired and disillusioned soon enough, and his pessimism proves more or less correct when the project falls apart. Throughout the story, he has an almost uncanny ability to predict how people will act. For instance, after Coverdale decides to go to Boston for a couple of weeks following an argument with Hollingsworth, Silas implies that Coverdale is going to abandon the project. Coverdale denies this, but it proves true—Coverdale returns briefly to see Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla again (the night Zenobia drowns herself), but he leaves right after Zenobia's funeral and never returns. Silas helps find and retrieve Zenobia's body after she drowns herself.

Theodore – Theodore is the primary character in the story that Zenobia tells about the Veiled Lady. In the story, Theodore makes a bet with his male friends that he can discover the true identity of the Veiled Lady. He sneaks into the Veiled Lady's dressing room and hides there until she arrives after her performance. Somehow, the Veiled Lady knows that he's hiding and calls him forward. When Theodore says that he's determined to discover her identity, she tells him he has a choice to make: either kiss her through the **veil** before lifting it, in which case they will be bound together in a marriage-like relationship—or Theodore can skip the kiss and just lift the veil, but then he will never know happiness again. Theodore decides he'd rather see the Veiled Lady before kissing her because he's shallow and afraid she might be ugly, so he lifts the veil right away. He only sees her face for an instant before she disappears, but for the rest of his life, he pines for one more look at her face. Theodore's life is ruined because he violated the Veiled Lady's privacy and gave into his shallow impulses. His unhappy fate illustrates how secrecy can destroy both the secret keeper and the person trying to uncover the secret; not only does his behavior hurt the Veiled Lady (his removal of the veil is akin to a rape), but he also struggles to live with what he has done for the rest of his life.

Mrs. Foster – Mrs. Foster is married to the farm manager Silas Foster. Like Silas, she lives at Blithedale from the beginning of the experiment to the end, but she is not a founding member of the group; she is of a lower class than the others, and she helps with the housework and cooking.

TERMS

Mesmerism – Mesmerism was a popular form of entertainment in the 18th and 19th centuries. At the time, people believed that one could use natural energy to put another person in a trance (sort of like hypnosis) that would allow them to speak to the dead, predict the future, read minds, heal themselves, find lost objects, and more. Many people would pay to see mesmerism in action—one person (typically called a mesmerist or magician) would put another person in a trance and then that person might answer audience questions, start sharing messages from the afterlife, or perform some other seemingly miraculous feat. Like many other people, Nathaniel Hawthorne was very critical of mesmerism.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SELF-INTEREST AND UTOPIAN SOCIETIES

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* depicts the formation of a small agrarian society called Blithedale. Meant to be a utopian society, Blithedale is founded on the principles of equality, simplicity, hard work, nature, and community. The narrator of the book, Miles Coverdale, begins his adventure in Blithedale with the best intentions (namely to prove to the world that there is a better way to live and to hopefully effect a social revolution), but his dedication to the cause is soon eclipsed by his interest in three other founding members: the bewitching social reformer Zenobia, the single-minded philanthropist Hollingsworth, and a mysterious young girl named Priscilla. As the three become

ever more entangled in a web of passion and secrets, Coverdale soon realizes that their motives in forming Blithedale, his own included, are actually rooted in self-interest. Before a year is out, all four characters become disillusioned with their early dreams and beliefs about Blithedale and abandon the community. Inspired by his own experiences at the utopian community Brook Farm (which only ran from 1841 to 1846), Hawthorne suggests that people are generally too consumed by their own selfish desires to create a successful utopian society.

When Blithedale is established, its founding members truly believe that they are doing something for the betterment of humanity. Coverdale and several other intellectuals—both men and women—decide on a model in which everyone chips in time and labor to run a farm, believing that not only will the products of their labors be a good source of income, but also that the physical labor will stimulate their intellectual and creative growth. They want to "show[] mankind the example of a life governed by other than false and cruel principles," meaning a wholesome life devoted to communal work and creativity rather than ambition and social class. Furthermore, the people at Blithedale embrace "theories of equal brotherhood and sisterhood." They believe that women are equal to men, not inferior, which was a radical belief for the mid-19th century. Despite the plan not working out (which is implied in the opening pages of the book), Coverdale praises himself for having "had faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world's destiny." In other words, in the beginning he genuinely believed his work would benefit the rest of the world.

Despite such a promising start to their community, it doesn't take long for Coverdale to start questioning whether their initial beliefs were correct. In the beginning, Coverdale and the others believed that physical labor would stimulate intellectual activity that would benefit their artistic endeavors. However, he realizes that their "thoughts […] were fast becoming cloddish," meaning their thoughts actually began *losing* some of their originality and creativity as they devoted more and more time to working the farm. Although Coverdale never expresses regret over helping create Blithedale because the group had such a peaceful and largely happy summer there, he ultimately discovers that "Intellectual activity is incompatible with any large amount of bodily exercise." In Coverdale's opinion, wearing out one's body takes a toll on the mind as well, and it actually hinders creativity rather than benefits it.

Coverdale ultimately realizes that not only were their initial beliefs about the relationship between physical labor and intellectual development incorrect, but also that the founding members' motives in establishing the community were self-interested instead of selfless. In the early weeks of their time at Blithedale, Coverdale realizes that Hollingsworth is consumed by his idea of creating a large facility in which he and his followers can reform criminals. By the end, Coverdale realizes why Hollingsworth really wanted to join the project: "Our beginnings might readily be adapted to his great end." This means Hollingsworth wanted to join the community so that later he could use them to create and maintain the facility he envisioned, not because he genuinely believed in their cause. Coverdale also learns from Moodie (Priscilla's father) that Priscilla had been obsessed with the idea of Zenobia since her early childhood, culminating in Priscilla's decision to "follow[] her to Blithedale." Priscilla, then, joins the Blithedale community to get closer to Zenobia, not because she wants to be a part of the project. Thinking of himself, Coverdale is surprised by "how unreservedly [he] had given up [his] heart and soul to interests that were not [his]." This implies that, although Coverdale really thought he was going to do something meaningful at Blithedale, it was not his primary interest when he joined—he simply wanted to be a part of something.

Blithedale was supposed to set an example for the whole world of how good and fulfilling life can be when it's lived authentically, rather than for social ambition or monetary gains. However, some of the core founders only got involved for selfish or ambitious reasons, and this leads to tragedy for all involved. In fact, as Coverdale explains in the end, after Zenobia's suicide the project failed and all the founders abandoned it.

PROGRESSIVE VS. TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

One of the fundamental ideas behind the creation of the would-be utopian community at Blithedale was that men and women are essentially equal. This idea is in part pioneered by Zenobia, one of the community's founders, who is a social reformer known far and wide for her lectures on women's rights. However, when Zenobia falls in love with Hollingsworth, she seems to give up her beliefs in favor of his values, which are very traditional—namely, that women exist to marry and comfort hard-working men. Ultimately, their relationship falls apart and Hollingsworth falls for another woman, one who is genuinely more in line with his ideals. After this betrayal, Zenobia seems to scorn Hollingsworth's notion of ideal womanhood, returning to her belief that women should be strong-willed, intellectual, and independent. However, Hollingsworth choosing a more docile woman seems to have broken Zenobia, and she dies by suicide after bitterly remarking on how the world harms women while protecting men. Through Zenobia's tragic romance with Hollingsworth, Hawthorne suggests that women who don't fulfill the gender roles assigned to them will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to experience real happiness in the world because so few people are willing to accept them as they are.

Zenobia has a reputation as an advocate for women's rights and her rhetoric on women's issues is initially quite progressive and

strident. In reference to Zenobia, Coverdale says, "The sphere of ordinary womanhood was felt to be narrower than her development required." This means that Zenobia is too assertive, strong-willed, independent, and proud for her to play the part of submissive housewife and mother, which is what most women were expected to do in that time. Even before helping form Blithedale, Zenobia was well-known for her writings and lectures on feminism; Zenobia, then, is one of the increasing number of 19th-century American women who wrote articles and small pamphlets that circulated throughout the country advocating for gender equality. Among the numerous injustices women faced, Zenobia particularly disliked how few options women had for their futures: "How can [a woman] be happy, after discovering that fate has assigned her but one single event, which she must contrive to make the substance of her whole life?" This rhetorical question that Zenobia poses emphasizes her personal anger at society for only encouraging young girls to look forward to "one single event" in their whole lives: marriage.

However, when Zenobia falls in love with Hollingsworth and learns what his vision of an ideal wife is, she immediately changes her beliefs to accommodate him. Hollingsworth believes that women were made to complement men and he explains that "Man is a wretch without woman; but woman is a monster […] without man, as her acknowledged principal." This means that not only are women without men actually inhuman, but women must also recognize men as superior leaders. In fact, Hollingsworth asserts that, if the women's equality movement gains more ground, he would like to get his male friends together to force women back into the domestic sphere. Coverdale is disgusted by what Hollingsworth says, calling it "masculine egotism" that "centred everything in itself, and deprived woman of her very soul […] to make it a mere incident in the great sum of man." Coverdale, then, believes that women don't merely exist to be used by men, but instead have something real and meaningful to contribute to the world. Given Zenobia's long history as an advocate of women's rights, Coverdale confidently believes that she will be disgusted with Hollingsworth, too. However, Zenobia replies, with tears in her eyes, that if "man be but manly and godlike, […] woman is only too ready to become to him what you say!" It seems that because Zenobia is in love with Hollingsworth, she's willing to openly adopt his beliefs even though they go against her principles.

When Zenobia and Hollingsworth's relationship ends and he begins a romance with Priscilla, Zenobia derides his traditional beliefs about gender roles. She believes that Hollingsworth is mistaken and that he'd actually be happier with a woman who defies traditional gender roles. Zenobia asks Hollingsworth if he loves Priscilla and when he says he does, she is enraged and exclaims, "At least, I am a woman—with every fault, it may be […] but still a woman!" This reveals some of Zenobia's own prejudices against women who would naturally be happier in a domestic sphere (like Priscilla) than a public one (like Zenobia herself). When Hollingsworth leaves with Priscilla, Zenobia says that "he has flung away what would have served him better than the poor, pale flower he kept." Zenobia thinks she would be a better wife for Hollingsworth than Priscilla *because* Priscilla is too similar to Hollingsworth's definition of an ideal woman—as an intellectual, Hollingsworth needs intellectual stimulation, and Zenobia doesn't think Priscilla can give him that. When Coverdale asks Zenobia what she thinks the moral of the situation is, she says it's that there's a "common cause against the woman who swerves one hair's breadth out of the beaten track." Because Zenobia doesn't adhere to the traditional gender roles that 19th-century American prescribes for women, she has little chance of finding a fulfilling relationship, especially with a man like Hollingsworth who truly values traditional gender roles.

SECRECY AND SELF-DECEPTION

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, all the characters seem to be concealing something: their real motives for wanting to be a part of Blithedale, their pasts, their true identities, their relationships, or their feelings. The story's narrator, Miles Coverdale, is particularly obsessed with these deceptions; he spends much of the novel trying to uncover the mysterious pasts, motivations, and desires of his closest friends at Blithedale, which sometimes makes him a poor friend and generally distracts him from the collective project of building a utopian society. Deception and secrecy are not just destructive to Coverdale's morality and work ethic, though. The characters' various deceptions and self-deceptions lead them inadvertently to destroy themselves and others, which incites the story's tragic ending in which Zenobia takes her own life. By showing the corrosive effects of secret-keeping, Hawthorne suggests that deception and self-deception—even when well-intentioned—undermine the foundations of society, leading unintentionally to ruin.

Coverdale's obsession with uncovering secrets shows how secrecy breeds an atmosphere of mistrust, which can undermine a society's shared goals. At Blithedale, all the members are working towards creating an egalitarian utopia, which should make for a harmonious society. However, when Coverdale gets a sense that his co-founders have mysterious pasts, his thoughts quickly shift from his lofty social vision to petty concern with what the people around him are hiding. This is a physical distraction to him, as he begins to spend more time in his hermitage (a concealed spot high in a tree where he can observe Blithedale without being seen himself) rather than working in the fields. But his obsession with secrecy is also, more significantly, a moral distraction. Rather than thinking about how to make Blithedale better, for example, he spends an

inordinate amount of time speculating about whether or not Zenobia has been married (and, therefore, whether she is a virgin), a question that is not only irrelevant to their life at Blithedale, but which is also profoundly inappropriate and intrusive. In addition, Coverdale's obsession with prying into people's pasts often makes him a poor friend. He is so consumed with learning about Zenobia's secret past, for example, that he completely fails to recognize her distress in the present. Had he been more interested in listening and less interested in spying, he might have understood that her despair was so great as to be dangerous, which could have enabled him to save her life. Clearly, then, a culture of secrecy—and particularly an obsession with uncovering secrets—leads to an atmosphere of mistrust and alienation that shreds the social fabric.

In addition to secrecy creating a toxic atmosphere, Hawthorne shows how self-deception leads characters to act immorally—sometimes to a degree that is lethal. This is most evident in Hollingsworth's character arc. At the story's opening, Hollingsworth seems to be a friendly and devoted community member whose primary ambition is to open a center for criminal reform. While his philanthropic interests make him believe that he is a good person, he becomes so single-mindedly devoted to criminal reform that his ethics become monstrous; he is willing to manipulate and discard others as long as it benefits his goal. Notably, he does this with Zenobia when he takes advantage of her love for him to gain access to her money (funds for his criminal reform center), and then discards her because he loves Priscilla instead. Hollingsworth's self-deception is so extreme that he believes that his inhumane actions are justified until Zenobia, heartbroken, tells him who he truly is: he's a "cold, heartless, self-beginning and self-ending piece of mechanism," and a "masquerader" whose "disguise is self-deception." While he takes Zenobia's words seriously, his reckoning with self-deception comes too late; he has caused Zenobia so much harm that—after telling Coverdale that Hollingsworth killed her—she drowns herself. In this case, Hollingsworth's relentless self-deception not only leads to the dissolution of the community and its goal, but also to the death of his friend.

The story's most powerful illustration of the destructive power of secrecy is perhaps the story of the Veiled Lady, a mysterious woman whom the sinister magician Westervelt exploits during his theatrical performances of mesmerism. Because the Lady's identity is concealed behind a **veil**, she becomes a public sensation. The secrecy surrounding her draws huge, fascinated crowds, but the underbelly of this success is a pervasive desire among lecherous young men to be the one to unmask her. For these men, the Lady's value *is* her mystery, and if that mystery were solved, she would lose all her allure—nonetheless, they can't help but want to know who she is. Zenobia tells a story about the Veiled Lady in which a man hides in her dressing room and then removes her veil by force—an act that violates the Veiled Lady and also ruins the young man's life, as he is forever haunted by what he has done. The alluring secrecy of the veil, then, is doubly destructive: it makes the Veiled Lady vulnerable to violence and predation, and it leads to the man's life-ruining quest to uncover the mystery. Through the Veiled Lady, Hawthorne makes his clearest case that secrecy—even well-intentioned secrecy—is naturally and inevitably destructive to everyone involved.

MANIPULATION, CONTROL, AND AMBITION

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* is full of ambitious dreamers who want to improve their lives. While some of the novel's characters pursue their ambitions honestly (like Coverdale, who goes to Blithedale hoping to find a better life), others try to use manipulation and dishonesty to achieve their goals. Hollingsworth, for instance, tries to manipulate his friends into helping with his project while letting them think that he's contributing to the collective, and Westervelt pursues his ambition to get rich by using mesmerism to exploit and control the Veiled Lady. In the end, however, neither Westervelt nor Hollingsworth succeeds in their ambitions; Westervelt loses the act that brought him fame and fortune, while Hollingsworth never establishes his center for criminal reform. By directly tying Westervelt and Hollingsworth's failures to the consequences of their manipulative behavior, Hawthorne suggests that it's self-defeating to try to achieve a goal through unethical means.

Hollingsworth is the story's first example of a master manipulator, a man who plays the part of a devoted, friendly, and helpful community member, but only to achieve his own ends. Coverdale first gets an inkling of this at the beginning of the story when he falls ill and Hollingsworth cares for him with tender devotion. It's an act that appears kind, but is actually meant to put Coverdale in Hollingsworth's debt; when he gets better, Hollingsworth questions how Coverdale can really be his friend if he doesn't help Hollingsworth make Blithedale a criminal reform center. This leaves Coverdale with a "horrible suspicion" that Hollingsworth only took care of him to make him "a proselyte" for a cause he wouldn't otherwise support.

Hollingsworth likewise pretends to be kind to Zenobia in order to manipulate her into helping him. Zenobia loves Hollingsworth immediately, and he pretends to reciprocate her feelings until she gives him access to her considerable wealth. All Hollingsworth wanted was funding for his criminal reform project, though, and he discards Zenobia like a "broken tool" once he secures her money, cruelly pursuing her half-sister Priscilla instead. This leads Zenobia to tell Hollingsworth who he truly is—a deceptive, manipulative, selfish person—and then kill herself in despair. Notably, despite Hollingsworth getting what he wanted (he marries Priscilla and has access to

Zenobia's money), he never achieves his criminal reform dream. Years later, Hollingsworth tells Coverdale that he hasn't opened the facility because he's "been busy with a single murderer," meaning himself. It was the fallout of Hollingsworth's manipulative tactics, then, that has prevented him from reaching his most cherished goal, showing how manipulation is a poor strategy for achieving ambitious goals.

Hawthorne shows this same arc of diabolical manipulation leading to dashed ambitions in Westervelt's character arc. Westervelt, who seems to want wealth and fame, uses mesmerism to manipulate and control Priscilla into being the Veiled Lady in his stage shows. By charging audiences to see her, he exploits her to grow his personal wealth. Testifying to Westervelt's scary ability to manipulate people, an audience member at one of the Veiled Lady shows says of Westervelt, "Human character [is] but soft wax in his hands." Furthermore, in the hands of Westervelt, Priscilla says she "never ha[s] any free-will" and therefore can't choose to disobey him. In addition to this dynamic being obviously abusive and cruel, Westervelt's strategy to manipulate and exploit Priscilla for money fails. When Hollingsworth realizes that Priscilla is the Veiled Lady, he orders her to come with him, and—accustomed to following orders—Priscilla obeys. She walks offstage, humiliating Westervelt in front of his audience, puncturing the mystique of his act, and leaving him without a performer. Presumably, this is all devastating to his ability to make money, showing how the manipulative aspect of his money-making scheme has directly led him to fail.

The echo between Westervelt's and Hollingsworth's failures drives home Hawthorne's central point; no goal can be achieved by deceiving and manipulating others. However, Hawthorne does *not* imply that honest ambition succeeds any better. After all, the earnest reformers at Blithedale abandon their project after Zenobia's death, and Moodie's sweet plot to connect his daughters backfires when Priscilla runs off with Zenobia's love. Coverdale even confirms that honest, well-intentioned dreams are doomed to fail: "if the vision have been worth the having," he says, "it is certain never to be consummated otherwise than by a failure." But this is not to say that honest and dishonest ambitions are equal. At the very least, the story's non-manipulative dreamers may have regrets, but they can live with themselves. They know that they've failed serving something good, rather than doing something terrible.

NATURE, ARTIFICE, AND SEXUALITY

When a group of Boston intellectuals co-found Blithedale, a utopian society on a farm a few miles outside of the city, they believe that returning to nature, working the land, and abandoning the corruption and social artifice of the city will improve their lives. At first, it seems to work; the reformers learn to grow crops, they are friendly and cooperative with one another, and they seem happy. However, as time goes on, they realize that nature—both the natural world and human nature—do not appeal to them as much as they hoped. Living in nature and working the land does not inspire Coverdale's poetry and it doesn't make the community more moral or honest; as it was in the city, Blithedale is rife with secrets, disagreements, and the lingering social norms and hierarchies that they tried to discard. Furthermore, Coverdale learns that he perhaps prefers the artificial conventions of city life to the reality of liberated human nature, particularly as it applies to female sexuality. This is to say that, despite his idealism, Coverdale winds up preferring the obedient and rule-bound Priscilla to the more natural and sexually-liberated Zenobia—a preference for convention and artifice that he cements by abandoning Blithedale altogether and returning to his life in the city. By showing Coverdale's disillusionment with human nature and the natural world, Hawthorne suggests that artifice is alluring and that nature itself isn't inherently pure.

From the very beginning, Coverdale identifies Zenobia with nature. Namely, he is fascinated by the fact that she exudes a natural sexual energy—one that women more beholden to social norms try to hide. During their first meeting, Coverdale observes that "One felt an influence breathing out of [Zenobia], such as we might suppose to come from Eve, when she was just made." This means that Zenobia seems completely natural and untainted by artifice, convention, or refinement. Therefore, this passage implies that Zenobia's exuberant sexuality is natural to women (and that women who are chaste and demure are repressed by artificial social norms). Further associating Zenobia's sexuality with nature, Coverdale thinks that "There is no folded petal, no latent dew-drop, in this perfectly developed rose!" This passage—a reference to Zenobia—implies that she is not a virgin (a "folded petal" or "dew drop" would be her virginity). If a "perfectly developed rose" has no virginity, then Coverdale is suggesting that sexual knowledge is the natural state of a grown woman. However, he does not mean this to be entirely admiring; he's drawn to Zenobia's sexuality and also repulsed by it, as he seems to find it improper. This shows that Coverdale himself—even though he came to Blithedale to escape artifice and oppressive social convention—is uncomfortable leaving all of that behind.

If Zenobia represents pure nature, Priscilla represents pure artificiality. She does not grow naturally into her own person and she does not express her own preferences and desires—instead, she is quiet and shy, and her actions and personality are shaped by the world around her. In contrast to Zenobia, Priscilla is described as virginal and repressed, drawing attention to her distance from the natural sexuality that Zenobia embodies. Hawthorne implies that there is something eerie about this. When Coverdale first sees Priscilla, he describes her as "unsubstantial" and later, even though she's gained a bit more color in her cheeks, he says she's

"shadowlike." These descriptions suggest that Priscilla isn't quite a full person—she doesn't have vibrancy or individuality, which also means that it would be particularly easy for a man to exert his influence to shape her into whatever kind of woman he wants her to be. This happens repeatedly throughout the story; Westervelt saps Priscilla of free will and turns her into the Veiled Lady, for instance, and then Hollingsworth controls her throughout their marriage. In general, then, Priscilla adheres to social norms and allows the men around her to determine her fate rather than making her own decisions or even expressing her preferences. Instead of being her natural self, Priscilla is "the type of womanhood, such as man has spent centuries in making it"—that is to say, Priscilla has no nature of her own, just artificial qualities that men have deemed desirable for a woman to have.

When Hollingsworth and Coverdale both fall in love with Priscilla instead of Zenobia, it shows that—despite their rhetoric of embracing nature—they are both ultimately more comfortable with artifice. For both men, this revolves around their inability to accept female sexuality. Early on, Coverdale says that he wouldn't fall in love with Zenobia "under any circumstances" and part of the reason for this seems to be that he feels "defrauded" by the sexual history he suspects she has. "Defrauded" is a loaded word here, because it suggests that women should naturally be virginial, and to have any experience with sex makes them fraudulent or unnatural. By associating sexually liberated Zenobia with nature, however, the story suggests that the opposite is true; nonetheless, Coverdale seems unable to accept or embrace that Zenobia's sexuality is natural. Likewise, Hollingsworth describes human sexuality (as presented in the works of Fourier) as "the portion of ourselves which we shudder at." Once he discovers Zenobia's "whole character and history," including her sexual past, he rejects her and "rest[s] on […] Priscilla," meaning he turns from Zenobia's sexuality and embraces Priscilla instead, who seems to have adhered to the artificial sexual norms that Hollingsworth values. In this way, both Hollingsworth and Coverdale reject what's natural (Zenobia) and embrace the artificial (Priscilla)—a choice they cement by abandoning their rural experiment altogether and returning to city life.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE VEIL

The veil in *The Blithedale Romance* represents the mystery and allure of innocence, which all too often attracts its own destruction. The veil both obscures the true identity of the Veiled Lady and puts a target on her back by creating an alluring mystery that the audience wants to uncover. As Zenobia says in her story, young men spend hours talking and theorizing about what they'd find if they took the Lady's veil off. They are drawn to her innocence (her veil), but only because they want to personally be the one to take the veil away. If the veil were removed, however, the Lady would no longer be an object of temptation, as her central mystery—that of her identity and appearance—would be known. She would be, in effect, ruined by the removal of her veil in the same way a woman at the time was said to be ruined by extramarital sex.

Not coincidentally, the imagery of removing the Veiled Lady's veil mirrors the act of removing a veil during a wedding ceremony, after which the bride and groom—who are now officially married—may kiss. Therefore, for both a bride and the Veiled Lady, the state of being concealed under a veil is associated with innocence and virginity, and removing the veil—symbolically associated with sex—diminishes their value in the public's eye. Because of this, the Veiled Lady must always be on her guard; she can't be too open with people, she must be careful who she trusts, and she leads a rather isolated existence with a veil standing between herself and the rest of the world. It's for these reasons that the Veiled Lady says that the veil makes her feel like a "sad and lonely prisoner," and she clearly wants someone to liberate her from it, but only if they do it the right way: by kissing her through the veil first, thus binding them together in a marriage-like relationship. It seems that what the Veiled Lady really wants to escape is the scrutiny she's constantly under because her veil excites so many rumors about her—and she also wants to escape the threat the veil invites, as it makes her particularly vulnerable to treacherous and lascivious young men.

ZENOBIA'S FLOWERS

One of the most notable things about Zenobia is that she always wears a beautiful exotic flower in her hair. These flowers represent the pride she has in herself and her actions. When Miles Coverdale first meets Zenobia in Blithedale, she's wearing a real exotic flower that she got out of a nearby hothouse, and every day she wears a new one. At this time, Zenobia is very proud of herself and her accomplishments as a writer and women's rights activist. These things give her pride because they help her stand out from the crowd as a strong, independent woman who lives life on her own terms. At this period, her flower—like she herself—is authentic, vibrant, and unique.

Every day that Zenobia is in Blithedale, living in total equality with the men and doing what she thinks is right, she wears a real flower. However, when Zenobia leaves Blithedale and brings Priscilla (the famed Veiled Lady and, as Zenobia later learns, her half-sister) back under the villainous Professor Westervelt's control, she starts wearing a fake flower that's

been decked out with brilliant jewels. This transition from a real flower to a fake one indicates that Zenobia's pride has become false. Zenobia feels compelled to return Priscilla to Westervelt so he can continue to exploit her for financial gain as the Veiled Lady, but she's not at all proud of herself for doing it because it goes against her naturally kind and generous nature (and, besides, it's throwing another woman to the wolves for selfish reasons, which contradicts her feminist values). As brilliant and bright as her new jeweled flower is, Zenobia is secretly ashamed of herself and she is only wearing a flower to keep up appearances.

In the end, after Hollingsworth chooses to marry Priscilla instead of her, Zenobia takes her fake flower off and tells Coverdale to give it to Priscilla. This is Zenobia's way of saying that Priscilla is now the one who should be ashamed because she chose to leave with Hollingsworth even though it meant breaking her beloved half-sister's heart. Without any pride in herself left (either genuine or false)—which is symbolized by the loss of her flower altogether—Zenobia loses her defining characteristic and commits suicide.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *The Blithedale Romance* published in 1983.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Yet, after all, let us acknowledge it wiser, if not more sagacious, to follow out one's day-dream to its natural consummation, although, if the vision have been worth the having, it is certain never to be consummated otherwise than by a failure. And what of that! Its airiest fragments, impalpable as they may be, will possess a value that lurks not in the most ponderous realities of any practicable scheme. They are not the rubbish of the mind. Whatever else I may repent of, therefore, let it be reckoned neither among my sins nor follies, that I once had faith and force enough to form generous hopes of the world's destiny—yes!—and to do what in me lay for their accomplishment; even to the extent of quitting a warm fireside, flinging away a freshly lighted cigar, and travelling far beyond the strike of city-clocks, through a drifting snow-storm.

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10-11

Explanation and Analysis

Miles Coverdale is writing about his experiences at Blithedale many years after they happened, and here he stops to reflect on himself. In this passage, he takes a moment to explain that he doesn't regret his decision to go to Blithedale, nor his motives in doing so. Coverdale seems to believe that most legitimate daydreams that are "worth the having" will be so lofty and impractical that they can't possibly be successfully translated into reality, thus they are only "consummated [...] by a failure." Still, these daydreams speak to the best of a person's humanity. In Coverdale's case, his daydreams are founded in his generosity, good will, ambition, and selflessness. He's willing to sacrifice a lot—his comfortable bachelor pad, upper-class social circle, bottles of good wine, large dinners, and trips to the theater or his club—to test his theory that a simple life spent in hard work for the good of a community is more spiritually fulfilling and intellectually stimulating than the artificial life of 19th-century New England's upper classes.

Coverdale's thoughts are notable here because he plainly says that it's preferable to "follow out one's day-dream to its natural consummation" than to simply give up on it. However, he frequently derides Hollingsworth's daydream of opening an institution dedicated to reforming criminals, which one might argue is more practical and likely to succeed than Coverdale's daydream.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ The most curious part of the matter was, that, long after my slight delirium had passed away—as long, indeed, as I continued to know this remarkable woman—her daily flower affected my imagination, though more slightly, yet in very much the same way. The reason must have been, that, whether intentionally on her part, or not, this favorite ornament was actually a subtile expression of Zenobia's character.

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale (speaker), Zenobia

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

While Coverdale is battling a serious fever during his earliest days at Blithedale, he develops an obsession with the flower Zenobia is always wearing in her hair (every day she gets an exotic flower from a nearby hothouse and it is typically her only ornament). Coverdale has a deep interest in human nature and the inner workings of the mind. He frequently theorizes about other characters and goes out of

his way to try to solve their various mysteries. He believes that Zenobia's flowers reflect her character, but this is somewhat troubling because she's not wearing a traditional, run-of-the-mill rose or daisy—she wears exotic, rare, strikingly beautiful ones. This means that Zenobia is difficult to understand because she's not like most of the people—men or women—that Coverdale typically runs into. She is her own person, and Coverdale, despite professing to have some very progressive views, struggles to accept that.

While Zenobia's flowers ultimately represent her personal pride, flowers themselves are generally associated with female sexuality, which is another element of Zenobia's character that Coverdale struggles with. He is drawn to her because she has so much sex appeal (Coverdale frequently comments on the shape of her body and even pictures her naked), but he's simultaneously repulsed by it because, despite his progressive views, he still has some implicit prejudices against women who deviate from the prescribed sexual mores of the time.

❝ Then, also, as anybody could observe, the freedom of her deportment (though, to some tastes, it might commend itself as the utmost perfection of manner, in a youthful widow, or a blooming matron) was not exactly maidenlike. What girl had ever laughed as Zenobia did! What girl had ever spoken in her mellow tones! Her unconstrained and inevitable manifestation, I said often to myself, was that of a woman to whom wedlock had thrown wide the gates of mystery. Yet, sometimes, I strove to be ashamed of these conjectures. I acknowledged it as a masculine grossness—a sin of wicked interpretation, of which man is often guilty towards the other sex—thus to mistake the sweet, liberal, but womanly frankness of a noble and generous disposition. Still, it was of no avail to reason with myself, nor to upbraid myself. Pertinaciously the thought—'Zenobia is a wife! Zenobia has lived, and loved! There is no folded petal, no latent dew-drop, in this perfectly developed rose!'—irresistibly that thought drove out all other conclusions, as often as my mind reverted to the subject.

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale (speaker), Zenobia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Coverdale theorizes about Zenobia's sexual history, highlighting his growing obsession with her sexuality. He describes her behavior as "not exactly maidenlike," meaning she doesn't act like an innocent young virgin. Her openness would be acceptable for a "youthful widow, or a blooming matron," meaning a woman who has had sex (presumably because she has been married) and therefore no longer needs to protect her innocence. Zenobia does not act submissive, shy, or restrained, which is what one would expect from an unmarried woman. To Coverdale's credit, he does say that he tried to talk himself out of entertaining these thoughts and was self-aware enough to realize he was doing Zenobia a wrong by thinking about her sex life, a topic that is definitely not his business.

Although it's not explicitly stated, Coverdale's real concern is that Zenobia was *not* married, but still has had sex. This kind of open and free sexuality was heavily stigmatized and criticized in the 19th century—so much so that Hawthorne wouldn't have been able to publish this book if he were any more explicit than he is in this passage (or, if he somehow did find a publisher, it could have ruined his reputation as a respectable writer). Coverdale has previously stated that if Zenobia has been legally married, she has somehow managed to keep it a total secret. This makes it all the more likely that if she has had a sexual relationship in the past, it was not a legal marriage.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ "Did you ever see a happy woman in your life? Of course, I do not mean a girl—like Priscilla, and a thousand others, for they are all alike, while on the sunny side of experience—but a grown woman. How can she be happy, after discovering that fate has assigned her but one single event, which she must contrive to make the substance of her whole life? A man has his choice of innumerable events."

Related Characters: Zenobia (speaker), Priscilla / The Veiled Lady, Miles Coverdale

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

After Coverdale recovers from his illness and leaves his bed, Zenobia talks to him about how strange it is to see how happy Priscilla has become since her surprise arrival at Blithedale. When Zenobia first mentions how happy Priscilla is, Coverdale says that most women are generally happier than most men, but Zenobia disagrees. Zenobia considers the time before marriage the "sunny side of experience" for women. In her estimation, that is the only time in life when a woman has something to look forward to.

Once she is married (the "one single event" a woman's life revolves around), there isn't much to look forward to anymore: women were expected to get married, have babies, take care of the house, take care of their husbands, and maybe, on occasion, attend social events to maintain the family's social status. While this role is important, it's the only role that women were encouraged to take; all others were nearly impossible to break into. Zenobia is unique because she's earned a reputation as a writer and lecturer. She is financially independent and, despite Coverdale's theories about a past marriage, she doesn't seem to be beholden to a husband.

Zenobia's criticism of the common belief that marriage should "make the substance of [a woman's] whole life" was not only out of the ordinary for the 19th century, but offensive to a lot of people. *The Blithedale Romance* was written before the first wave of the American feminist movement really got going. Feminism and women's rights were just gaining attention, but they were far from popular. Zenobia is particularly radical because she's not just concerned with women's legal rights (a big controversy at the time was whether husbands should have a legal right over their wives' inheritances and whether women could seek legal protection from abusive husbands); she is also concerned with women's *happiness*, which wasn't a huge topic in that day. Her belief is that limiting women's future options doesn't just have an adverse effect on their ability to attain financial independence, but it potentially destroys their happiness and ability to seek fulfillment, particularly because divorce was so taboo and it was legally difficult for women to divorce their husbands. This also reveals some potential bitterness on Zenobia's part, perhaps indicating that she might be speaking from personal experience.

❝ Our labor symbolized nothing, and left us mentally sluggish in the dusk of the evening. Intellectual activity is incompatible with any large amount of bodily exercise. The yeoman and the scholar—the yeoman and the man of finest moral culture, though not the man of sturdiest sense and integrity—are two distinct individuals, and can never be melted or welded into one substance.

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

Coverdale shares his earliest struggle with life in Blithedale.

He and the other founders of Blithedale created the community believing that physical labor would help their intellectual, spiritual, and creative development. Proximity to nature, the personal pride that comes from honest work, and the simplicity of life in the country versus life in the city were supposed to help them become the best possible version of themselves. Instead, Coverdale finds that hard labor on a farm causes the opposite—he's not thriving as a poet, he's just dirty and tired and sore. He's expending so much energy on the physical work that he has nothing left to devote to intellectual work. This means that it becomes clear very early on that the fundamental ideas behind Blithedale were faulty—they made a mistake, an error in judgment, but they've made huge sacrifices for it and so it's no longer as simple as just walking away.

Coverdale's realization reveals how far removed he's been from the working classes. As a member of the upper circles of Boston society, Coverdale doesn't really need to engage in hard physical work. This has enabled him and the others to romanticize working on a farm. They don't recognize how uncomfortable it is, the blisters a person develops from handling a hoe all day, the sunburns, or sheer amount of energy that's expended just to plough a field. All they initially saw was the possibility of being surrounded by nature, putting distance between themselves and the corruption that ran rampant in America's big cities, and the personal pride one must experience after a long day of honest work. On the other hand, this experience helps Coverdale develop a better understanding of the laboring classes and why they seem (to him) to lack "moral culture."

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Thus, as my conscience has often whispered me, I did Hollingsworth a great wrong by prying into his character, and am perhaps doing him as great a one, at this moment, by putting faith in the discoveries which I seemed to make. But I could not help it. Had I loved him less, I might have used him better. He—and Zenobia and Priscilla, both for their own sakes and as connected with him—were separated from the rest of the Community, to my imagination, and stood forth as the indices of a problem which it was my business to solve.

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale (speaker), Priscilla / The Veiled Lady, Zenobia, Hollingsworth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

Starting during his illness, Coverdale begins devoting a lot of his mental energy to studying Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla. He sees his three friends as puzzles that must be solved, and each of them pose unique challenges. In "prying into [Hollingsworth's] character," Coverdale is trying to pick him apart so he can understand Hollingsworth as a whole better. However, Coverdale is liable to exaggerate Hollingsworth's negative qualities and overlook his positive ones, which is why he says it might be wrong to "put[] faith in the discoveries" he makes. Coverdale uses a rather peculiar excuse to justify the focus he places on Hollingsworth's bad qualities by saying that if he "loved [Hollingsworth] less" then he might have "used him better." This implies that, despite what Coverdale just said about focusing on Hollingsworth's negative qualities, Coverdale is actually biased in Hollingsworth's favor. The focus on Hollingsworth's negative qualities, then, could actually be a form of overcompensation for the love Coverdale has for Hollingsworth.

In the end, Coverdale reveals that he was in love with Priscilla the whole time; however, he also always knew that Priscilla was in love with Hollingsworth. This, in addition to Coverdale's own love for Hollingsworth, makes it even harder for Coverdale to develop an unbiased opinion about Hollingsworth's character. On one level, Coverdale *wants* to believe that Hollingsworth has more bad than good qualities because then he might able to convince Priscilla to recognize those bad qualities, too. That, of course, might lead to her recognize all of Coverdale's good qualities and then perhaps she would fall in love with him instead. On the other hand, if Coverdale truly loves Priscilla and sees that Priscilla truly loves Hollingsworth, he might also want to see the good in Hollingsworth in hopes that Hollingsworth could make Priscilla happy. Coverdale is clearly torn between loving Hollingsworth and hating him, making it impossible for him to truly be objective and unbiased.

Furthermore, Coverdale starts to separate himself, Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla from the rest of the community at Blithedale. This division becomes easier to see over the course of the narrative. Coverdale's interest in picking apart Hollingsworth to discover his secret character and his fascination with the mystery surrounding Zenobia and Priscilla are what really bind him to Blithedale after a few months. That isn't to say that Coverdale doesn't maintain a high level of engagement with the rest of the community or that he doesn't still believe in its fundamental ideals, but he invests so much of his energy and interest in these three people that as soon as there's a rupture in their friendship, Coverdale abandons the rest of the community. This small crack in the community will lead to Blithedale's ultimate failure.

❝ "For, little as we know of our life to come, we may be very sure, for one thing, that the good we aim at will not be attained. People never do get just the good they seek. If it come at all, it is something else, which they never dreamed of, and did not particularly want. Then, again, we may rest certain that our friends of to-day will not be our friends of a few years hence; but, if we keep one of them, it will be at the expense of the others—and, most probably, we shall keep none."

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale (speaker), Priscilla / The Veiled Lady

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75-76

Explanation and Analysis

Coverdale writes that he sometimes tries to convince Priscilla not to be too happy or else she might use it all up and have none left one day. This passage is part of his attempt to both understand why Priscilla is so happy and to try to convince her to save some of her happiness to help her through future heartaches. This passage is notable because Coverdale seems to be predicting their fate. He says that "the good we aim at will not be attained," which proves true—Blithedale fails and all the founding members abandon it. However, Coverdale also often talks about his high hopes for Blithedale's future, so he might think that the Blithedale project might be the exception to this rule. Coverdale also says that "our friends of to-day will not be our friends of a few years hence." Here Coverdale is actually thinking of Hollingsworth, who Coverdale worries is incapable of maintaining a friendship with anyone unless they're as devoted to his ambitions as he is. Coverdale thinks that Hollingsworth will shake Priscilla off one day when she's no longer useful or amusing, which is why Coverdale says that their current friends won't be there in a few years. For Priscilla, this sort of proves true—she marries Hollingsworth, but first she betrays her sister, walks away from Coverdale, and ultimately, they leave everyone else at Blithedale. Priscilla keeps one friend, but it costs her all of her other close friends. Coverdale, however, does find himself completely alone and friendless in the end.

Chapter 12 Quotes

This hermitage was my one exclusive possession, while I counted myself a brother of the socialists. It symbolized my individuality, and aided me in keeping it inviolate.

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

Coverdale finds a secretive cave-like structure in a tree in the forest surrounding Blithedale. Coverdale's hermitage is his one great secret—he never tells anyone about it, let alone how to find it. Coverdale uses this hermitage to keep himself somewhat separate from the rest of the community at Blithedale. He helped found the community with the intention of completely surrendering himself to it, but he secretly maintains a sense of distance and otherness by retiring to this hermitage whenever he has time or a reason to use it. It's telling that this hermitage is also so high above the rest of the farm. Coverdale, too, believes that he's above many of the people there. During his first dinner at Blithedale, he congratulates himself on being so open-minded as to dine with the lower classes (implicitly a condescending attitude), and he is constantly passing judgment on other people and focusing on their faults.

Coverdale wants to keep his individuality "inviolate." Part of that means keeping many of his inner thoughts and feelings private. This is particularly ironic because Coverdale spends so much of his time trying to dig into other people's pasts, minds, feelings, and characters. In other words, Coverdale wants to spy on other people and nose around in their lives, but he's fiercely protective of his own privacy. Even his hermitage places him at a unique advantage where he can snoop on other people while they have no chance of getting a glimpse of him unless he purposely reveals himself.

Now, as I looked down from my upper region at this man and woman—outwardly so fair a sight, and wandering like two lovers in the wood—I imagined that Zenobia, at an earlier period of youth, might have fallen into the misfortune above indicated. And when her passionate womanhood, as was inevitable, had discovered its mistake, there had ensued the character of eccentricity and defiance, which distinguished the more public portion of her life.

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale (speaker), Professor Westervelt, Zenobia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

After meeting Westervelt in the forest, Coverdale develops an immediate hatred for him. This hatred is intensified when he realizes how dismissive Westervelt is of Zenobia's anger and feelings while they're walking in the woods. Coverdale believes that men who dismiss women's feelings lack humanity and he pities the women who make the mistake of marrying them. Coverdale has frequently theorized about the possibility that Zenobia has been married before, and seeing her with Westervelt leads Coverdale to the theory that, if she was married before, then her marriage was not happy—she would have married a man as cold and cruel as Westervelt seems to be. Zenobia is still a young woman, but she is wise beyond her years. Such an unhappy marriage might have been the source of this wisdom. As young as she is, Zenobia has little faith in other people but seems to have ample faith in herself, as if she has learned from experience how treacherous other people can be but also how strong she herself is.

Coverdale says Zenobia has a "character of eccentricity and defiance." These traits, too, might be the result of an unhappy marriage. Zenobia lives life on her own terms and Coverdale sometimes theorizes that she must have passed through some tragedy to have so much confidence in herself. Her defiance might be the result of having experienced an enormous, life-altering betrayal. After such a traumatic event, Zenobia demands that the rest of the world let her have her way. She refuses to take advice from other people when she makes decisions and she openly defies everyone to try to control her. This is one of the most notable characteristics of her public life and has made her a popular lecturer on women's rights.

Chapter 14 Quotes

"It is my belief—yes, and my prophecy, should I die before it happens—that, when my sex shall achieve its rights, there will be ten eloquent women, where there is now one eloquent man. Thus far, no woman in the world has ever once spoken out her whole heart and her whole mind. The mistrust and disapproval of the vast bulk of society throttles us, as with two gigantic hands at our throats! We mumble a few weak words, and leave a thousand better ones unsaid. You let us write a little, it is true, on a limited range of subjects. But the pen is not for woman. Her power is too natural and immediate. It is with the living voice, alone, that she can compel the world to recognize the light of her intellect and the depth of her heart!"

Related Characters: Zenobia (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

During one of their usual Sunday afternoons at a rock formation called Eliot's Pulpit, Zenobia begins a debate about women's equality with Hollingsworth, Coverdale, and Priscilla. Zenobia believes that women are not only equal to men, but superior to them. She is particularly angry that women are prohibited from speaking when they want, how they want, and about what they want. In the 19th century, this was largely true. Society stigmatized women who spoke out on controversial topics like women's property rights, divorce, prohibition, suffrage, abolition, legal protections, and even child custody. For this reason, many women simply didn't speak up about injustice. Zenobia singles out speaking versus writing because she believes that women can be more persuasive when they don't have to translate their own voice onto an inexpressive piece of paper. Speaking also happens to be more dangerous to the woman in question because it's nearly impossible to maintain total anonymity and give public speeches at the same time.

Zenobia's frustration with women's lack of a voice in American society reflects her frustration at her own inability to give a voice to her internal thoughts. Zenobia gives this speech right after her conversation in the woods with Westervelt and it's clear, at least to Coverdale, that the conversation was very upsetting to her. However, she feels prohibited from talking about it to anyone else. It might be fear of judgment or that Westervelt might punish her, but in this instance she's unable to speak up the way she wants to. This is a cruel twist of fate because, if she did speak up, her friends might have been able to help her and Zenobia's story might have had a very different ending.

"I hate to be ruled by my own sex; it excites my jealousy and wounds my pride. It is the iron sway of bodily force, which abases us, in our compelled submission. But, how sweet the free, generous courtesy, with which I would kneel before a woman-ruler!"

"Yes, if she were young and beautiful," said Zenobia, laughing. "But how if she were sixty, and a fright?"

Related Characters: Zenobia, Miles Coverdale (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

Coverdale shares his own opinion about women's equality after listening to Zenobia's speech. Coverdale idealizes women. Throughout his narrative, he loads praise on womanhood in general and mourns that women aren't as free to do as they please as men are. However, Coverdale takes it a bit too far. He endows women with almost superhuman goodness, gentleness, kindness, and generosity. He loses sight of the fact that sometimes women are liars, they can be cruel, they might be rough with others, and they might be stingy. Coverdale says that male rulers make him jealous. He prefers female rulers because he doesn't see them as competition—they don't threaten his place in the world. Coverdale would find it so easy to kneel to a "woman-ruler" because he still has a latent sense of superiority over women.

Zenobia's response reveals the probable flaw in Coverdale's words. Coverdale idealizes women, but when he thinks of women he thinks of women like Zenobia—beautiful, brimming with sex appeal, intelligent, witty, and generous. He doesn't consider older women with gray hair and deep wrinkles. Male leaders are often middle-aged or older, so presumably female leaders would be, too—they have the benefit of more experience, wisdom, and reason than their younger counterparts. In idealizing women—particularly beautiful women—Coverdale overlooks generations of women who are past their physical prime but still have something good to offer the world.

"She is the most admirable handiwork of God, in her true place and character. Her place is at man's side. […] All the separate action of woman is, and ever has been, and always shall be, false, foolish, vain, destructive of her own best and holiest qualities, void of every good effect, and productive of intolerable mischiefs! Man is a wretch without woman; but woman is a monster—and, thank Heaven, an almost impossible and hitherto imaginary monster—without man, as her acknowledged principal! As true as I had once a mother, whom I loved, were there any possible prospect of woman's taking the social stand which some of them—poor, miserable, abortive creatures, who only dream of such thinks because they have missed woman's particular happiness […]—if there were a chance of their attaining the end which these petticoated monstrosities have in view, I would call upon my own sex to use its physical force, that unmistakable evidence of sovereignty, to scourge them back within their proper bounds! The heart of true womanhood knows where its own sphere is, and never seeks to stray beyond it!"

Related Characters: Hollingsworth (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 122-123

Explanation and Analysis

Hollingsworth also idealizes women, but not as being superior to men. Hollingsworth sees women as objects or tools that are meant to decorate a man's life. He believes that a woman's "true place and character" is "at man's side," but he doesn't mean as equals, either. Man must be woman's "acknowledged principal," meaning women must acknowledge that men are naturally superior. Hollingsworth's ideal wife is one who essentially worships him as her husband, and she devotes her entire life to making his better. In the mid-19th century, this ideal wife was often referred to as an "Angel in the House," after Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name.

Hollingsworth doesn't just think women are naturally inferior to men, but he thinks that any woman who so much as hints at wanting to be man's equal is inhuman. He uses words like "abortive," "monster," and "monstrosities" to describe women who try to forge a life for themselves outside of marriage. This is because if women do start becoming self-sufficient outside of marriage, then it will be harder for men to assert their superiority. Nineteenth-century women's equality, to Hollingsworth and millions of other men, was perceived as a threat to the patriarchal systems that placed men above women on both personal and national levels. This is why Hollingsworth is even willing to use force against women who strive for equality—he's not just beating back inhuman "monstrosities," but fighting to keep his identity as their superior.

Chapter 15 Quotes

It appeared, unless he over-estimated his own means, that Hollingsworth held it at his choice (and he did so choose) to obtain possession of the very ground on which we had planted our Community, and which had not yet been made irrevocably ours, by purchase. It was just the foundation that he desired. Our beginnings might readily be adapted to his great end.

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale (speaker), Hollingsworth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

Coverdale has always known that Hollingsworth is completely obsessed with his goal of opening a sort of institution to reform criminals by appealing to their creativity, spirituality, and intellects. Coverdale also knew that there would probably come a time when Hollingsworth would formally ask Coverdale to take part in the plan. When Hollingsworth finally does ask, he makes the startling revelation that he actually has the money to buy the land and start the project. Even more surprising is that Hollingsworth wants to buy the land that Blithedale sits on. To Coverdale, this is a huge betrayal because he does have high hopes for Blithedale's future, and he's invested time, money, and his own comfort to establish it and help it grow. Hollingsworth knows that Blithedale means a lot to Coverdale—supposedly one of Hollingsworth's best friends—and yet he's been scheming to buy the land and thus stop the Blithedale project just as the community is starting to prosper.

Hollingsworth's revelation also shows that he probably had ulterior—possibly treacherous—motives for coming to Blithedale. All the work and time put into starting Blithedale would save Hollingsworth the effort of starting his own project from scratch: "It was just the foundation he desired." Furthermore, Hollingsworth knew that Blithedale's "beginnings might readily be adapted to his great end." This implies that Hollingsworth might have spent a lot of time planning for all of this—he pretended to value the same things and have the same goals as the other founders, but really he just wanted them to get a movement started so that he could take over eventually. Hollingsworth gets the money for this project from Zenobia, which also tells

Coverdale that Hollingsworth is even willing to manipulate a trusting woman's heart to further his own ends. In this light, Hollingsworth seems more like a villain than a friend, let alone the benevolent philanthropist he claims to be.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ Even her characteristic flower, though it seemed to be still there, had undergone a cold and bright transfiguration; it was a flower exquisitely imitated in jeweller's work, and imparting the last touch that transformed Zenobia into a work of art.

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale (speaker), Zenobia

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 163-164

Explanation and Analysis

After leaving Blithedale, Coverdale is surprised when Zenobia and Priscilla move into the boardinghouse across from his hotel. When he goes over to visit, he's even more surprised to see that Zenobia—who was always simply dressed and only decorated her hair with one fresh flower—is all decked out in fashionable clothes and jewels. Zenobia's flowers seem to have magical qualities (at least to Coverdale) and they represent her personal pride. Coverdale has only ever seen her wear real, fresh flowers, so it's surprising to see her wearing a jeweled one and this immediately alerts him to some fundamental change in her character. Although Coverdale doesn't find this out until later, during this time Zenobia is working with Westervelt and will ultimately give him control over Priscilla. In other words, Zenobia is doing a lot of things that she has no reason to be proud of. Just as her flower is now false, Zenobia's pride in herself is false.

Zenobia's excessive jewelry and ornamentation also reduce her from a woman who seems natural to a "work of art." She's no less beautiful than she was at Blithedale—she might even be more so—but she's not quite herself. She's something to look at and admire, but she no longer seems human. She also doesn't display much humanity. She repeatedly makes cruel comments about Coverdale's latent snobbery, the simple-minded people who devote their entire lives to Blithedale, and Coverdale's lack of greatness (compared to Hollingsworth's abundance of greatness). Zenobia would never have spoken to Coverdale this way in Blithedale, but in her new artificial role in town, she is as cold and sharp as the jewels she's wearing.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ "Oh, this stale excuse of duty!" said Zenobia, in a whisper so full of scorn that it penetrated me like the hiss of a serpent. "I have often heard it before, from those who sought to interfere with me, and I know precisely what it signifies. Bigotry; self-conceit; an insolent curiosity; a meddlesome temper; a cold-blooded criticism, founded on a shallow interpretation of half-perceptions; a monstrous scepticism in regard to any conscience or any wisdom, except one's own; a most irreverent propensity to thrust Providence aside, and substitute one's self in its awful place—out of these, and other motives as miserable as these, comes your idea of duty!"

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale, Zenobia (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

Coverdale feels like he has a duty to look out for Priscilla because she's so young, innocent, and helpless. This disgusts Zenobia who launches into a tirade against duty. Coverdale's sense of duty is rooted entirely in his belief that, as a man, part of his job is to protect women from others or even from themselves. Zenobia resents this because it implies that she and other women are incapable of taking care of themselves or of determining what's best for their lives.

During her rant, Zenobia sheds light on some of Coverdale's worst qualities, the ones he tries hard to conceal or even justify to himself. Zenobia says duty implies "self-conceit." Coverdale is, in fact, a rather conceited man. At several points in the narrative, he questions why people don't appreciate his intellect or recognize that he's uniquely qualified to pass judgments or give out advice. Zenobia also mentions a "meddlesome temper," which Coverdale clearly has. He continually tries to drop hints or comments, especially to Priscilla, that he thinks might change the nature of her friendships or even romantic relationships (such as telling Priscilla what a good couple Zenobia and Hollingsworth make for the sole reason of trying to get Priscilla to stop pursuing Hollingsworth). Zenobia also derides Coverdale's habit of founding criticism on "a shallow interpretation of half-perceptions." Coverdale only ever seems to get half the story—he only hears part of Zenobia's conversation with Westervelt, he only gets Moodie's side of Zenobia's history, and he only catches the tail end of the

final confrontation between Zenobia, Priscilla, and Hollingsworth. Even still, armed with only "half-perceptions" and limited evidence, Coverdale passes judgment on those around him in order to justify prying into their lives to find their secrets.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ Nor was her reputation seriously affected by the report. In fact, so great was her native power and influence, and such seemed the careless purity of her nature, that whatever Zenobia did was generally acknowledged as right for her to do. The world never criticised her so harshly as it does most women who transcend its rules. It almost yielded its assent when it beheld her stepping out of the common path, and asserting the more extensive privileges of her sex, both theoretically and by her practice. The sphere of ordinary womanhood was felt to be narrower than her development required.

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale (speaker), Zenobia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 189-190

Explanation and Analysis

Coverdale gets Moodie to tell him about Zenobia and Priscilla's shared history. Moodie reveals that there were once rumors that Zenobia had been either attached or even married to an unprincipled young man (Coverdale has long wondered if Zenobia was ever married, so he treats this as confirmation). Surprisingly, Zenobia's reputation isn't destroyed by these rumors. In 19th-century American culture, young women (especially from the white middle and upper classes) were expected to follow very strict rules of propriety. This was because a woman's reputation was everything. It determined what kind of man she could marry (for instance, a parson could never dream of marrying a woman whose name had been associated with some kind of romantic scandal), which social circles she could move in, and even whether she would be allowed in polite society at all. The simple existence of a rumor that a woman might have married well below her social class could destroy her reputation and thus her future prospects. That's why it's so remarkable that Zenobia's reputation survived these rumors.

Zenobia is very wealthy which both makes her a target for smooth-talking young men who want to take advantage of her, and it enables her to break more rules than a woman with less money who would have to rely more on her reputation to secure a good marriage. Zenobia's wealth, then, is probably why she's allowed to break so many social rules without it destroying her good name. Upper-class men from polite society will still want to marry her because of her wealth, and so she's still accepted into those social circles.

Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ How strangely she had been betrayed! Blazoned abroad as a wonder of the world, and performing what were adjudged as miracles—in the faith of many, a seeress and a prophetess—in the harsher judgment of others, a mountebank—she had kept, as I religiously believe, her virgin reserve and sanctity of soul, throughout it all. Within that encircling veil, though an evil hand had flung it over her, there was as deep a seclusion as if this forsaken girl had, all the while, been sitting under the shadow of Eliot's pulpit, in the Blithedale woods, at the feet of him who now summoned her to the shelter of his arms. And the true heart-throb of a woman's affection was too powerful for the jugglery that had hitherto environed her.

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale (speaker), Professor Westervelt, Priscilla / The Veiled Lady, Hollingsworth

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

Coverdale goes to a Veiled Lady exhibition and happens to run into Hollingsworth there. As soon as he sees that Westervelt is the magician, Coverdale realizes that there's a good chance the Veiled Lady is really Priscilla. Hollingsworth also realizes the same thing after Coverdale asks him where Priscilla is. So, when Hollingsworth tells the Veiled Lady to come with him, she takes the veil off and leaves with Hollingsworth. Coverdale says that Priscilla has "been betrayed." By this he actually means that Zenobia has betrayed her by handing her over to Westervelt. Priscilla is a very nervous, shy girl, so it seems particularly cruel to parade her around on stage in front of large, loud, jeering audiences.

Just like the Veiled Lady from Zenobia's legend, Priscilla as the Veiled Lady has been the object of speculation among groups of young men who wish to violate her by taking away her veil. For Priscilla, the veil is the one thing that stands between her and the rest of the world. There she enjoys a

"deep seclusion" that allows her to maintain her "virgin reserve" and "sanctity of soul" instead of falling prey to temptation or even violence. The fact that Priscilla was willing to remove that protection to go to Hollingsworth is a testament of the deep love and trust she has for him.

Chapter 25 Quotes

"Ah, this is very good!" said Zenobia, with a smile. "What strange beings you men are, Mr. Coverdale!—is it not so? It is the simplest thing in the world, with you, to bring a woman before your secret tribunals, and judge and condemn her, unheard, and then tell her to go free without a sentence. The misfortune is, that this same secret tribunal chances to be the only judgment-seat that a true woman stands in awe of, and that any verdict short of acquittal is equivalent to a death-sentence!"

Related Characters: Zenobia (speaker), Hollingsworth, Miles Coverdale

Related Themes:

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

When Coverdale returns to Blithedale, he stumbles upon Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla at Eliot's Pulpit, and it's clear that something really important has taken place between the three of them. Zenobia says she's on trial, but it's a special kind of tribunal that men hold to pass judgment on women. Because men dominate society, their opinion on people, especially women, often carries a lot of weight and can determine how other people treat that person. Zenobia says that during these tribunals, men "judge and condemn her, unheard." This means that they look only at the bare facts of a case or someone else's word, but they don't give the woman in question the opportunity to speak for herself. There's no grey area in these judgments—either a woman committed the "crime" or didn't, and the reasons behind that crime don't matter at all (these "crimes" typically involve the woman's sexuality or modesty). More importantly, the men at these tribunals don't deliver a sentence. A person serves a sentence to make up for their crime, and once they've served it then people no longer hold those crimes against them. By not giving the women a sentence, these men don't give them the chance to make up for whatever crime they supposedly committed and so it is forever held against them.

Once a woman is found guilty, it's the same as a "death-sentence," but it doesn't mean her literal death. It's the death of her good reputation, her place in society, and her future prospects. Once a woman is found guilty by these tribunals, her reputation is ruined and it will be nearly impossible for her to find happiness as a result.

"It is all self!" answered Zenobia, with still intenser bitterness. "Nothing else; nothing but self, self, self! The fiend, I doubt not, has made his choicest mirth of you, these seven years past, and especially in the mad summer which we have spent together. I see it now! I am awake, disenchanted, disenthralled! Self, self, self! You have embodied yourself in a project. You are a better masquerader than the witches and gipsies yonder; for your disguise is a self-deception."

Related Characters: Zenobia (speaker), Hollingsworth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

Zenobia accuses Hollingsworth of being all self because he's obsessed with his own personal plans (namely for criminal reform). Coverdale already suspects that Hollingsworth's real motives in joining Blithedale were actually to manipulate the community into adopting his own plans, and now Zenobia arrives at the same conclusion. However, she takes this a step further by saying that Hollingsworth engages in "self-deception." This would mean that Hollingsworth has been hiding his true motives and even his flaws from himself. Hollingsworth likes to think of himself as selfless, intelligent, hardworking, dedicated, and generous. He holds onto this image of himself even while his obsession with criminal reform slowly corrupts his good qualities and turns them into their opposites. In Hollingsworth's case, someone else has to point out to him that he's deceiving himself by concealing his true nature, and this makes him unique in the story.

After this outburst, Hollingsworth begins second guessing himself. It's to his credit that Hollingsworth doesn't just shrug Zenobia's words off and convince himself they're not true—she inspires him to take a step back and ask himself if he's being motivated by love of others or by love of himself. Hollingsworth wants to help others, but he also wants to be the person who is known for helping others. In this way, his project is motivated by self—he wants the praise and accolades and the pride in knowing that he's better than other people.

Chapter 26 Quotes

"A moral? Why, this:--that, in the battlefield of life, the downright stroke, that would fall only on a man's steel head-piece, is sure to light on a woman's heart, over which she wears no breastplate, and whose wisdom it is, therefore, to keep out of the conflict. Or this:--that the whole universe, her own sex and yours, and Providence, or Destiny, to boot, make common cause against the woman who swerves one hair's breadth out of the beaten track."

Related Characters: Zenobia (speaker), Miles Coverdale

Related Themes:

Page Number: 224

Explanation and Analysis

After Hollingsworth and Priscilla leave, Zenobia cries for a while and then pulls herself together to joke with Coverdale about the poem he'll be able to write about her tragedy. Coverdale asks her what the moral of the poem should be, and this is her answer. Zenobia compares life to a battlefield and says it would be wiser for women not to get too involved because the things that should hurt men end up hurting women. In Zenobia's moral, women do not protect their hearts nearly as well as men protect their heads. This reflects how hard it is to change a man's mind once he's settled it on something (in Hollingsworth's case, that whatever Zenobia has done is unforgivable and wrong). Instead of hitting the man in the head, it hits a woman in the heart. In other words, women get hurt when men don't keep an open mind and a willingness to change their ideas. Men have nothing to lose in this situation because their heads are protected by helmets, but women do have something to lose and that's why it's easier for them to get hurt.

Zenobia also highlights how the world treats women who deviate from their prescribed gender roles. Nineteenth-century women were expected to walk a very fine line or "beaten track" to keep her reputation. One step off of it and she could be lost. The image of a "beaten track" highlights the fact that women have had to walk the same one for generations.

"But I am weary of this place, and sick to death of playing at philanthropy and progress. Of all the varieties of mock-life, we have surely blundered into the very emptiest mockery, in our effort to establish the one true system. I have done with it [...]. It was, indeed, a foolish dream! Yet it gave us some pleasant summer days and bright hopes, while they lasted. It can do no more; nor will it avail us to shed tears over a broken bubble."

Related Characters: Zenobia (speaker), Miles Coverdale

Related Themes:

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

Zenobia tells Coverdale that she intends to leave Blithedale immediately, not just because of what happened between her and Hollingsworth but because she's become disillusioned with their original reasons for establishing the community. Even though the community itself stays intact for a while longer, Zenobia's decision to leave it marks the true end to the Blithedale experiment because she was the de facto leader of the movement—everyone looked up to her, she was the first one there, and she made all the major decisions. Zenobia says that she's tired of "playing at philanthropy and progress," which indicates that she has been playing a part for at least some of the time. She calls their life at Blithedale a "mock-life," meaning it's something they've all been acting out, but it is not reality. This echoes Coverdale's comment in Boston that their life at Blithedale seemed like a dream that does not accurately reflect reality.

Even though Zenobia is essentially declaring Blithedale a failed experiment, she takes a rather optimistic view of it. The experiment may have failed, but it gave them momentary happiness and that makes up for the disappointment that accompanies their disillusionment. Zenobia compares Blithedale to a "bubble." Like a bubble, Blithedale was never going to last forever—the founders were too idealistic, naïve, and inexperienced, but they can walk away from the experience a little wiser and with happy memories of their only summer there. This is also why Zenobia says there's no reason to "shed tears" over it.

Chapter 28 Quotes

It was a woful thought, that a woman of Zenobia's diversified capacity should have fancied herself irretrievably defeated on the broad battle-field of life, and with no refuge, save to fall on her own sword, merely because Love had gone against her. It is nonsense, and a miserable wrong—the result, like so many others, of masculine egotism—that the success or failure of woman's existence should be made to depend wholly on the affections, and on one species of affection; while man has such a multitude of other chances, that this seems but an incident.

Related Characters: Miles Coverdale (speaker), Hollingsworth, Zenobia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 241

Explanation and Analysis

After Zenobia's death, Coverdale mourns that she felt the need to cut her own life short just because she was disappointed in love. He doesn't blame this on her own weakness, but on society for raising young girls to believe their whole existence should be defined by their relationships with men. Coverdale's comparison of life to a battle-field hearkens back to Zenobia's idea for the moral of Coverdale's poem (that blows that are meant to land on men's heads frequently land on a woman's unprotected heart instead), but now Coverdale says it's the woman who is striking her own heart. Zenobia has "fall[en] on her own sword," but she does this so that nobody else on the battlefield can hurt her anymore.

Coverdale insinuates that a man in the same position as Zenobia would not be as tempted to hurt or kill himself because he has "such a multitude of other chances, that this seems but an incident." For men, relationships are not the end all, be all of life. This helps explain why Hollingsworth didn't have any qualms about shifting his affections from Zenobia to Priscilla, and possibly even faking those affections to get to their money. To Hollingsworth, relationships are a minor thing and it doesn't even occur to him that someone else (namely Zenobia or Priscilla) might not see it that way. This is why he's so surprised when he finds out that Zenobia committed suicide.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: OLD MOODIE

On the night before Coverdale goes to Blithedale, he goes to see the Veiled Lady. Coverdale explains that she's one of the first figures to win fame in the "mesmeric line." In the Veiled Lady's day, there was a conscious effort to create an air of mystery and etherealness, whereas in the current day, the exhibitors continuously emphasize that they are using natural rather than supernatural laws to perform seeming miracles. Whatever the Lady's abilities are, her real allure is that nobody knows her identity because she's covered from head to foot in a **veil**. This has little to do with the main events of the story, except that Coverdale asked her about Blithedale's fate and is mulling over her answers, which can be interpreted in numerous ways.

The "mesmeric line" refers to the widespread practice of mesmerism, which included things like hypnosis, communing with the dead, or using telepathic powers to find lost objects. This was very popular in the 19th century. By going to a Veiled Lady show and asking questions, Coverdale reveals his own belief that, through mesmerism, the Veiled Lady can tell the future. It also reveals his own fear that the Blithedale project might not work out.

A man calls out to Coverdale twice before Coverdale recognizes him. It's Moodie, a mysterious old man who has a habit of only revealing half of himself at a time by standing in shadows or doorways. Moodie asks Coverdale if he's going to Blithedale in the morning and Coverdale confirms that he is. Moodie says he must ask a favor of Coverdale, who readily agrees even though he has very little time to spare. Moodie abruptly changes his mind, saying he might prefer to have an older man or lady help him. Coverdale is confused as to what his age has to do with the favor, but he mentions he has an older friend named Hollingsworth who is joining Blithedale the next day, as well. Coverdale thinks Hollingsworth's reputation as a philanthropist makes him seem reliable, whereas Coverdale's own reputation as a poet makes him less so.

Moodie, like so many other characters in the narrative, seems to have something to hide. His tendency towards concealment is apparent in his habit of standing in shadows or leaning out of doorways—this also echoes the veiled lady's concealment of herself behind a veil. Even Coverdale's name reflects the novel's concern with secrecy: "cover" in Coverdale makes it seem that hiding is central to who he is. Moodie's attempt to conceal himself in this passage, and his unexplained decision not to reveal what the favor he needs is, sets the stage for the rest of the book, in which it always seems like only half the story is being told and the reader must figure out the rest.

Coverdale assures Moodie that he wants to help, but Moodie refuses to explain what he needs. He asks Coverdale if he knows Zenobia. Coverdale says he does, but not personally. Zenobia is an author and a women's rights advocate, but "Zenobia" is not her real name—it's a name she uses to obscure her true identity from the world, much like the Veiled Lady's **veil**, but a little more transparent. Moodie thanks Coverdale but says that he'd still rather not explain. He offers to visit Coverdale at home the next day, but he never comes. It's only much later that Coverdale figures out what favor Moodie meant to ask him. That night Coverdale smokes his cigar and mulls over the step he's about to take by going to Blithedale—a step that irrevocably entangles him in the "Blithedale affair." Coverdale goes to bed around midnight.

Coverdale is writing about these events years after they happen, so he frequently comments on how his perceptions have changed between the events of the story and the current day, or how he only learned the truth of something later on. Here Coverdale also hints that the Blithedale project is ultimately unsuccessful (calling it the "Blithedale affair" implies that it did not last long and was just one episode in his life), which also means that the project itself is not the primary subject of his narrative.

CHAPTER 2: BLITHEDALE

Now that Coverdale is getting old and has white hairs in his mustache, he can't imagine a cheerier fire than the one they had on their first night in Blithedale. Gathering around the fire, the group spoke of starting a new Paradise, which nobody else in New England was thinking of doing. The group at Blithedale created a Paradise that lasted an entire summer. It's mid-April when Coverdale and the others move there; the weather is clear in the morning, but by noon there's a violent snowstorm. Still, Coverdale walks out of his cozy rooms and into the storm, fully believing that he's heading towards a better life.

Coverdale reiterates that it has been many years since the events of the story, but this time he emphasizes that the project, although failed, was not entirely unhappy. Coverdale emphasizes how idealistic and progressive he and his group of friends were by mentioning that they chose to attempt something that nobody else in the area even talked about at the time.

In the present, Coverdale says that the "better life" probably doesn't look better now. It's heroic to overcome doubt that one might be making an unwise decision, but genuine wisdom is being able to differentiate between when doubt should be resisted and when obeyed. Still, Coverdale thinks it's wiser for individuals to try to make their daydreams a reality, even though any daydream worth having can only end in failure. This, however, doesn't matter to Coverdale—daydreams have a value, they're not just clutter. Whatever else Coverdale regrets, he thinks it was neither a sin nor a folly that, as a young man, he truly believed he was doing something for the greater good and made sacrifices to make his daydreams come true.

The "better life" Coverdale is looking for is supposed to be more intellectually and spiritually fulfilling; materially, Coverdale already has all he needs and more. Although Coverdale thinks it was heroic of him to leave luxury and comfort behind in the name of progress and idealism, he doesn't think it was wise—he should have listened to his doubts and not gone because it would have saved him the heartache of seeing it fail. Even still, he admires his younger self for being so generous and determined, implying that he has since lost these qualities.

At Blithedale, Coverdale trudges through the storm with four other men. Hollingsworth, he knows, has been delayed and will join them later that night. The snow in the city seems dingy, but once they get into the country the men believe the air and snow is purer, less tainted by smoke and the grime. Snowdrifts are building up along the fences, and the sole traveler the men encounter does not return their cheerful greeting (in the present, Coverdale notes that this might have been an omen). Coverdale suspects he's caught a cold. At the farmhouse Mrs. Foster (whose husband will teach them how to run the farm) and two women greet them. Zenobia walks in shortly after these initial greetings. Although it's not her real name, "Zenobia" seems fitting for her because she has as much natural pride as a queen.

Throughout the narrative, the people at Blithedale struggle to win the acceptance of others. This is why, looking back, Coverdale believes the traveler's rudeness in not responding to their greeting was an omen—it should have prepared them to be treated with indifference at best and hostility at worst. Although Coverdale knows Zenobia's real name, he never does reveal it. It's also perhaps an omen that, despite the men's appreciation of nature (their sense that the snow is purer at Blithedale than in the city), the storm makes Coverdale sick. While the idea of Blithedale is that nature will purify the community members and make them better people, Coverdale's immediate sickness is a bad sign.

CHAPTER 3: A KNOT OF DREAMERS

When Zenobia greets Coverdale, she expresses her love for his poetry and says she hopes he doesn't plan to give up writing, especially because she likes to sing some of his verses on summer nights. Coverdale says he actually hopes to write even better poetry and would love, above all things, to hear Zenobia sing his verses. Coverdale takes note of Zenobia's appearance: she is simply dressed, one of her bare shoulders can be seen between her kerchief and gown, her hair is up without curls, and her only ornament is an exotic **flower** that immediately catches Coverdale's attention. Although some people might find fault with Zenobia's beauty for not being delicate or soft enough, Coverdale admires her for being so womanly and having the perfect blend of intellect and beauty. She is healthy and vigorous, which Coverdale thinks anybody can admire.

Coverdale is immediately sexually attracted to Zenobia. He takes note of her bare shoulder and pays close attention to her figure. Zenobia's flowers represent her pride in herself, but flowers are also traditionally sexually-charged symbols that represent female sexuality. This highlights how Zenobia is unafraid and unashamed of her sex appeal—rather than modestly covering it up as one would expect a 19th-century woman to do (such as trying to hide her shoulder better), she embraces it as part of her natural identity.

Zenobia explains that their new life as brothers and sisters will begin at dawn. Women will take care of domestic duties (cooking and cleaning) for the present, but eventually some women might prove more adept at fieldwork and some men more adept at housework. Coverdale says it's too bad they can't do away with some of these domestic duties altogether because it supports an "artificial life." After all, Eve had no dinner pots or clothes to wash in Paradise. Zenobia laughingly replies that they don't live in Paradise and she can't assume "the garb of Eden" until May-day. In an aside, Coverdale says that, through no fault of her own, Zenobia's words made him picture her naked. In fact, Zenobia often inspires these thoughts, though Coverdale initially thinks she's unaware of it. Unlike so many women, Zenobia always seems like a woman—her sex appeal hasn't been lost to custom.

Even though Blithedale is supposed to be a very progressive society that defies traditional gender roles, they begin by perpetuating them: women must remain in the domestic sphere while men work outside of the house. Coverdale associates domesticity (and therefore femininity, since the domestic sphere is the feminine one) with an "artificial life," effectively saying domestic tasks are useless and unnatural. This helps explain his attraction to Zenobia, who defies traditional femininity and social mores in favor of her natural identity. The "garb of Eden" Zenobia refers to means nudity (Adam and Even were initially naked in Eden). She is making a joke, but a wildly inappropriate one for the staid 19th century.

The women bustle around, making the final dinner preparations while the men sit around the fire. Silas Foster comes in from tending to the cattle and tells them all they'll wish they were back in their warm homes soon. Despite the gloom outside, the men remain optimistic. They all feel comfortable expressing their hopes and dreams for the future, having left rigid rules and social systems behind them for the generous purpose of creating an example for the world of how much better it is for people to work together than separately or in competition with each other. Coverdale says they shouldn't be ashamed if all their plans turned to dust—for his own part, Coverdale admires that he was once able to think better of the world than it deserves, calling it a mistake most people don't fall into twice.

Coverdale continually reminds the reader that, even though founding members of Blithedale had the very best intentions, their plan ultimately fails. This highlights that while Coverdale in the present can appreciate their motives, he knows they were all naïve and the plan was very foolish. Still, it highlights his better nature—no matter how disillusioned he is now, back then he was generous, selfless, ambitious, and worthy of admiration. It's also worth noting that the women are hard at work here preparing for dinner while the men are lounging around the fire and talking about their vision of this society. From the very beginning, then—despite their goal of equality—they reinforce the gender roles of the outside world.

Silas reminds the group of practical matters—they need to get pigs and there aren't enough experienced gardeners to enable the farm to compete with other vegetable sellers in Boston markets. To himself, Coverdale realizes that Silas's points highlight how the group stands in hostility to society rather than as a new brotherhood. Coverdale hopes this will change over time. Zenobia calls them to the dinner table. She tells Coverdale how odd she thinks it is that Hollingsworth is late because he's not the type to be stopped by a bit of snow. While she doesn't know Hollingsworth personally, she has heard his lectures and mourns that he's so devoted to criminal reform. She asks Coverdale if he thinks Hollingsworth will be happy there for long. Coverdale says he likely won't unless they all take turns committing crimes. Zenobia gives Coverdale a look he doesn't understand.

Zenobia betrays her interest in Hollingsworth very early on, before he even arrives at Blithedale. This foreshadows the obsessive love she'll soon develop for him that causes her to compromise her principles and look over his deep faults. Her mysterious look at Coverdale after he cracks a joke about committing crimes indicates her displeasure with him for joking about Hollingsworth, who, as Coverdale will note later, is the one person Zenobia can't laugh about because she takes him so seriously. Coverdale's joke is also revealing in another sense: Hollingsworth is so devoted to improving society that, as Coverdale jokes, he'd only be happy if the people around him were criminals that he could reform. In other words, Hollingsworth's utopian streak coexists with a craving for chaos and imperfection—a dynamic that will plague the whole group as they move forward.

CHAPTER 4: THE SUPPER-TABLE

By the light of the fire, the men look young and energetic and the women look even more beautiful. Zenobia urges everyone to sit without any pomp or ceremony and enjoy the tea. At the table, the group awkwardly looks around at each other, considering this the first test of their theory of equality and unity. Those belonging to the upper classes consider this a successful first step, but Coverdale knows it's more difficult for the laborers because they must sense the condescension. All along, many members of the group know that they can return to their fine porcelain and silver whenever they wish. In an aside, Coverdale says he deserved to be cuffed for putting so much weight on social class while he was trying to act like the laboring class's equal.

The awkwardness at the table is due to the social prejudices that characterize 19th-century America. Ordinarily, it would be unthinkable for a member of the upper classes to sit and dine at the same table as a member of the lower classes. This is why Silas and his family feel condescended to—the group is pretending to be of a class they aren't, when in reality they could all return to their upper-class lives. This is obviously a privilege that true laborers do not enjoy, and it undermines the sincerity of the experiment immediately. Coverdale will continue to struggle with his own feelings of superiority over comparatively uneducated people like Silas throughout his time in Blithedale, showing how good intentions do not necessarily mean good results.

After an awkward silence, Coverdale comments on how picturesque the farmhouse must look with the fire blazing inside. Zenobia says it'll undoubtedly attract a wayfarer and just then someone pounds on the door. Everyone hears it, but nobody gets up until they knock a second time and Zenobia says it must be Hollingsworth. Coverdale opens the door and it is, indeed, Hollingsworth, who comments on how long it took someone to let him in. He says he has a visitor and carries in a young girl. Coverdale asks Hollingsworth who she is, and he says he doesn't know, but that she must be expected. Coverdale notes that nobody is welcoming her, which indicates that she's not expected. The girl is small and pale, evidently from spending so much time indoors. She stands in the doorway and stares at Zenobia, finally dropping to her knees and looking pleadingly up at her.

The young girl is immediately attracted to Zenobia, which is the first indication that she has some previous knowledge of who Zenobia is and has decided to come to Blithedale for the sole purpose of being close to Zenobia. She clearly hopes and expects that Zenobia will simply accept her, which indicates that the girl already thinks she knows Zenobia, even though they've never met face to face before. The group's hesitation to open the door shows their uneasiness and lack of goodwill. On the first night of their utopian experiment—in a moment of peak optimism and generosity with one another—they hesitate to open the door for a stranger caught in the storm, not opening it until they're reasonably sure it's actually their own guest. This shows immediately that this community is not as welcoming as they might hope.

Zenobia sharply asks who the girl is and why she doesn't talk. Hollingsworth—who is very tall and shaggy—says the girl's heart will freeze if the women can't warm it up with whatever kindness is supposed to be in their own. Mortified, Zenobia says she's very willing to befriend the girl and asks what she can do for her. Hollingsworth asks the girl if she has something to ask Zenobia. She says she wants to always be close to Zenobia. When Zenobia asks, the girl says her name is Priscilla, but she's unwilling to share her last name. Coverdale repeats this name to himself until he can't imagine her having any other. Zenobia says they shouldn't pry into Priscilla's secrets, but instead they should welcome and care for her. Hollingsworth says an old man asked him to take Priscilla to Blithedale. Silas says she'll feel better after getting something to eat and drink.

The most striking difference between Priscilla and Zenobia is how open Zenobia is and house mysterious Priscilla is. Even though she adopts a pseudonym, Zenobia gives people the impression that she's an open book and has nothing to hide. Priscilla, on the other hand, actively tries to obscure her true identity and history. It's also noteworthy here that Hollingsworth has to remind Zenobia to be kind to Priscilla—another indication that this community will not be automatically welcoming or warm. Finally, when Hollingsworth says that an old man asked him to bring Priscilla, readers should recall that Coverdale told Moodie that Hollingsworth might be willing to do him a favor.

CHAPTER 5: UNTIL BEDTIME

That night, Silas works on a pair of shoes and Mrs. Foster knits. Coverdale notices how trustingly Priscilla surrenders herself to Zenobia's care. Coverdale theorizes that Priscilla worships Zenobia because she has read some of Zenobia's stories or tracts about women's equality. When Zenobia changes seats, Coverdale tells her this theory and she laughs, saying he should write a ballad about it. Zenobia thinks Priscilla is a nervous seamstress (indicated by the needle marks on her fingers) that has spent too much of her life indoors eating junk food. Coverdale and Zenobia realize that Priscilla is watching them and crying. Zenobia thinks Priscilla must have heard their conversation and she tells Coverdale that she intends to be nice to Priscilla, although Priscilla's overabundance of love for Zenobia might get annoying. Zenobia goes over and strokes Priscilla's hair, which elates the young girl and fixes her place as part of the group.

Even though Zenobia professes to like Coverdale's poetry, she frequently teases him about it, saying he should write a ballad about this or that. These jokes are meant to discredit any of the theories or ideas Coverdale shares with her. It sends the subtle message to Coverdale that she doesn't take him very seriously—he's too dramatic and romantic, not real or serious enough. It's also important that Coverdale thinks that Priscilla's behavior might be a result of her admiration for Zenobia's writings on women's equality. Priscilla does not behave like a woman who has become awakened to female oppression; instead, she is shy, needy, and unable to fend for herself. If Coverdale interprets this behavior as coming from Priscilla's admiration for women's equality, then it seems like he profoundly misunderstands that movement. This is yet another indication that gender roles won't be radically overturned at Blithedale.

Priscilla pulls some materials out of her bag and starts making a unique type of purse that seems impossible to open without being shown how. Coverdale (who has a purse just like it) thinks this reflects Priscilla's own mystery. Occasionally Priscilla looks up like someone is calling her name, but she refuses to answer the call. Hollingsworth doesn't talk much, and if someone talks to him, he looks very sternly at them. Coverdale attributes this habit to how intensely Hollingsworth dwells on his own ideas at every moment. Coverdale thinks Hollingsworth was never passionately involved in their project because he was always too wrapped up in his ideas for reforming criminals. The rest of the group debates what they should call the community, tossing up several ideas before deciding to keep it Blithedale. Silas tells them they should get to bed. Coverdale realizes he's developed a bad cold and has a hard time sleeping.

Coverdale frequently expresses a deep interest in all of the other people around him. He's constantly theorizing about their behavior, wondering about their pasts, and thinking about the connections between them. This desire to make sense of other people who are different than him contributes to Coverdale's continued interest in Blithedale—even after he becomes disillusioned with it, he stays because the people are interesting. And even in the present day, years after the events in the story, Coverdale is still preoccupied with thoughts about the other characters. The discussion about naming Blithedale calls attention to the meaning of the community's name. The word "blithe" means cheerful indifference—a stupidly optimistic disregard for important details. A "dale" is a valley. Calling the community Blithedale, then, indicates that the group's attitude towards the natural world in which they have chosen to live is perhaps a little too lighthearted and casual to succeed.

CHAPTER 6: COVERDALE'S SICK-CHAMBER

The next day, as Silas warned, the call to wake up comes early. From his bed, Coverdale listens to everyone get up and get ready, including Hollingsworth saying his prayers (Coverdale is impressed by this). For his own part, Coverdale says that his pampered life in cozy city apartments has contributed to the severity of his cold. He questions why he decided to take on this project that would involve uncomfortably hard work when he was perfectly content living in his apartment where everything is comfortable and familiar. Coverdale shivers in his bed through breakfast until Hollingsworth knocks on his door to ask what's wrong. Coverdale says he's sick and wants to go back to the city, but Hollingsworth insists that he can take care of Coverdale. Coverdale is sick for a long time, but he says he has fond memories of this period nonetheless.

Coverdale's dedication to Blithedale's cause is shaken as soon as he gets sick, which indicates that he might not have been as invested in it as he now claims he was. Because Coverdale is telling this story years later, he is a somewhat unreliable narrator—he might paint a prettier picture of himself than he deserves, obscuring his negative qualities. This passage is also important because it proves Silas right; just as Silas predicted the night before, Coverdale wants to return to his upper-class life at the first sign of discomfort. This paints Silas and the laboring classes as having a wisdom and foresight that these upper-class intellectuals do not, an ominous sign for their project.

Coverdale says that, even though most men are indifferent towards people who are seriously ill, Hollingsworth patiently takes care of him—perhaps because there is "something of the woman" within Hollingsworth that, unlike most men, he isn't ashamed of. Hollingsworth is so kind and gentle that during the worst part of his illness, Coverdale insists on having Hollingsworth always with him. From the present, Coverdale remarks that he sometimes wishes he could have died then with Hollingsworth with him—now, however, Hollingsworth probably wouldn't come at Coverdale's request, nor would Coverdale be comforted by his presence. While sick at Blithedale, Coverdale says he should be allowed to die while he's in the mood to and Hollingsworth asks if he has nothing to live for. Coverdale says he has nothing but to "play a part" at Blithedale. He says Hollingsworth is so tender he should be a priest, but Hollingsworth completely disagrees.

Coverdale attributes some feminine qualities to Hollingsworth (saying there's "something of the woman" in him), which might explain why Coverdale is so drawn to him. Coverdale's friendship with Hollingsworth soon borders on attraction as he focuses on all of Hollingsworth's feminine qualities. However, he indicates that the friendship between himself and Hollingsworth has since gone sour—he knows Hollingsworth would no longer be willing to help him. Coverdale describes his presence at Blithedale as him "play[ing] a part," which further indicates that Coverdale isn't as genuinely concerned with Blithedale's aims as he previously claimed.

Even though Hollingsworth tells Coverdale that he's not dangerously ill, Coverdale is mortified to realize that he's getting better instead of dying. Everyone is unfailingly kind to Coverdale during his illness. Zenobia brings him gruel she made herself and talks to him whenever she has time. Coverdale thinks Zenobia is truly wonderful—not even the simplicity of her outfits and ornaments can conceal how beautiful her body is. Coverdale notices that, somehow, Zenobia gets a new **flower** for her hair every day. The flowers are all so exotic and beautiful that it seems like they were made to adorn Zenobia in particular. In his fever, Coverdale becomes convinced that Zenobia is an enchantress, probably the Veiled Lady's sister, and her flower has magical properties. Zenobia laughs at this, but Coverdale never quite loses the feeling that Zenobia's flowers are enchanted. This might be because the flowers subtly reflect Zenobia's character.

Even though Coverdale repeatedly says he admires Zenobia's mind, it's clear that he's fixated on her sexuality more than her ideas. He pays close attention to her body, believing that he knows what it looks like beneath her clothes. It's a bitter irony that Zenobia, an accomplished writer and activist for women's equality, would be reduced to her appearance, especially at a utopian community that is trying to create gender equality. What's worse is that Coverdale seems to slightly blame Zenobia for her effect on him. He convinces himself that Zenobia's flower has the power to enchant him, which seems to be an attempt to deny his own lust by attributing to her slightly sinister powers of enchantment. In his mind, it seems that she's willfully choosing *to wear enchanted flowers that will captivate him, even against his will or better judgment.*

Coverdale obsesses over the thought that Zenobia has been married. She is young, wealthy, and beautiful, but if she has ever been married then nobody in the world seems to know. Then again, Coverdale remembers, her hometown in far away and any rumors of her marriage might not reach Boston. Coverdale asserts that there is no hard evidence for his beliefs. Still, few "girl[s]" laugh or talk like Zenobia. Although Coverdale tries to shame himself out of his preoccupation with Zenobia's past, he can't shake the thought that she has been married and has had sex. Zenobia asks why he stares at her and Coverdale says he wants to solve the mystery of her life, though she'll never tell him about it. According to Coverdale, bachelors feel cheated when women they know have given themselves away. Coverdale isn't in love with Zenobia, but he still wants to satisfy his curiosity.

Coverdale is obsessed with Zenobia's sexuality, but he doesn't want to be. He reveals his own shame for having these feelings but emphasizes that he can't help it (possibly due to her enchanted flowers). In Coverdale's mind (and in the language throughout the book) the difference between a "girl" and a woman isn't age, but experience. A girl is sexually innocent and pure, but a woman has real sex appeal and probably some sexual experience. This is why Coverdale thinks of Zenobia as a woman and Priscilla as a girl, even though there's no justifiable reason to believe Zenobia has any more sexual experience than Priscilla, or that Priscilla has any less.

CHAPTER 7: THE CONVALESCENT

When Coverdale begins to recover from his illness, he asks about Priscilla. A letter that should have reached Blithedale long before has been delivered and it hints that Priscilla has escaped some kind of trouble and might still be liable to fall back into it. The group charitably welcomes her, though she maintains an air of mystery. Priscilla is very devoted to Zenobia, but Zenobia sometimes loses patience with her. Priscilla also favors Hollingsworth and the two often talk together. Coverdale would like Priscilla to favor him, too, but she doesn't grow as close to him as to Zenobia and Hollingsworth. One day Priscilla brings Coverdale a nightcap she made for him and a letter. Looking at her, Coverdale realizes that she resembles Margaret Fuller, who happened to write him the letter. Coverdale tells her this and she petulantly tells him she wishes people wouldn't have such odd thoughts about her.

Margaret Fuller was a highly influential lecturer and writer. Like Zenobia, she was a vocal women's rights advocate. It's believed that Priscilla's appearance is supposed to be based on Fuller's, but Zenobia's character is more like Fuller's character. Hawthorne, however, maintained that his characters were all pure fiction, not caricatures of real people.

During his convalescence, Coverdale reads every available book at Blithedale, including works by Fourier. Coverdale is impressed with these because there are similarities between Fourier's ideas and the ones behind Blithedale's creation. Coverdale discusses these ideas with Hollingsworth, who is horrified by some of them and orders Coverdale to hide the book before he throws it in the fire. While Coverdale doesn't bring Fourier up again, he believes that, even if Fourier had come up with a wiser system, Hollingsworth still wouldn't accept it. Coverdale realizes that Hollingsworth didn't join Blithedale because he sympathized with their values, but because he, too, felt estranged from the world. Whatever tenderness and warmth Hollingsworth must naturally have, according to Coverdale, is ultimately wasted on his philanthropic ideas—he has become its "bond-slave." Coverdale thinks this is sad, but not unusual since Hollingsworth has been taught to focus all his benevolence in one direction.

Charles Fourier was an early French socialist and philosopher. The ideas that Hollingsworth has such a strong negative reaction to are likely Fourier's beliefs about women, sexuality, and monogamy. Fourier believed that women were just as capable as men to do the world's work and should therefore be allowed the same educational and career opportunities. He also had some radical ideas about human sexuality, namely that people have a range of sexual needs and attractions and that they should be able to pursue them as long as nobody is being victimized. This included same-sex relationships and extramarital sexual relationships, especially because he believed traditional marriages victimized women and limited their potential for happiness and fulfillment. These last ideas are probably the ones that offended Hollingsworth, who values traditional marriage and female chastity.

In retrospect, Coverdale thinks that during this time Hollingsworth was going mad. He became monomaniacal, spending all of his time thinking of one idea, only talking with others about his one plan: to get enough money to build a large facility in which he could reform criminals by helping them cultivate their creativity and appreciation of the arts. Coverdale frequently caught Hollingsworth sketching floorplans for this building, or even making small models out of twigs and stones. Coverdale remembers telling Hollingsworth that he wished he could be as enthusiastic about the plan as Hollingsworth himself and he asked if Hollingsworth would be okay if Coverdale can't become excited about it. Hollingsworth said he'd give it time but questioned how they could be friends if Coverdale doesn't share his goals. This made Coverdale suspicious that Hollingsworth only took care of him during his illness to make him a "proselyte."

Coverdale fears that Hollingsworth wants to make him a "proselyte," or follower. This means that Coverdale fears that Hollingsworth is trying to start his own movement that he will be the leader of, co-opting the others in service of his own goals rather than advancing the goals of the collective. This is dangerous if Hollingsworth is going mad and directing all of his humanity and kindness in one direction. He's likely to be willing to sacrifice his own followers if it benefits his own cause, so Coverdale worries that if he becomes a follower, than he will fall victim to Hollingsworth's monomaniacal pursuit of criminal reform. It's also noteworthy how, despite Hollingsworth's charitable zeal, Coverdale suspects he might be quite selfish: all the tenderness and care he showed during Coverdale's illness might, in fact, have been because he wanted to manipulate Coverdale.

CHAPTER 8: A MODERN ARCADIA

Coverdale leaves his bed in May. He wanders outside, toward the sound of Zenobia and someone else laughing. In the barn he sees that Zenobia is decorating Priscilla with blossoms and greenery, but Coverdale also notices an ugly weed. The mischievous glint in Zenobia's eye tells him she did it maliciously. Zenobia asks Coverdale how Priscilla looks, and he says there's only one thing wrong. Zenobia removes the weed and tells Coverdale that Priscilla has grown quite wild, climbing trees and running everywhere. Zenobia says it's ridiculous and somewhat provoking to see such a happy girl. Coverdale says that females are typically happier than males, but Zenobia disagrees and asks if he's ever seen a happy woman—not a girl like Priscilla, but a woman. Zenobia questions how a woman can be happy once she realizes she only has one event to look forward to while men can do anything.

Coverdale realizes that Zenobia has a truly malicious side because she puts a stinky weed in Priscilla's hair. This is particularly cruel because Priscilla trusts and loves Zenobia so much, and perhaps she doesn't even realize that Zenobia is insulting her. Zenobia, like Coverdale, differentiates between a woman and a girl—a woman has worldly experience while a girl maintains her innocence and naivety. Zenobia's phrasing here indicates that she herself is a woman, which implies that Coverdale might be correct that she has had sex.

Priscilla sees Hollingsworth coming in from the field and runs to meet him. Halfway there, she suddenly stops and looks around like someone has called her. Zenobia says she's seen Priscilla do the same thing before and doesn't know why it happens. Priscilla listlessly sits on a rock until Hollingsworth comes up to her, but even then, she seems despondent. Finally recovered and out of bed, Coverdale feels like a new man—his illness has helped him get over old prejudices and follies. Looking around at the others, Coverdale thinks that the men look stronger and the women more beautiful, indicating the success of their enterprise thus far. Many more people of all sexes, creeds, and circumstances have joined the project, none of them very old or exceedingly young. What binds them all together is that they have some quarrel with "the old system" and want to help create a new one.

The basic premise behind life at Blithedale is that if everyone contributes time and labor to the farm, then they'll have more time for their creative pursuits without worrying about income or the hustle and bustle of city life. Furthermore, physical labor is supposed to help their intellectual and spiritual development by deepening their connection to the earth and nature around them. In this passage, it seems like this might be working: Coverdale has recovered, the men seem to have gotten stronger (implying that they have become more adept at farm life), the women look more beautiful (which seems to suggest that they are flourishing), and more members have joined to help with the project. Notably, they're joined together by their issues with the society they come from, rather than by a specific vision for how to improve. This perhaps foreshadows troubles ahead.

As the people at Blithedale learn how to help run the farm, they grow stronger and even develop callouses on their hands. Having become nearly as capable as Silas, they fall into a comfortable routine. The surrounding neighbors tell some slanderous lies about what a terrible job the people at Blithedale are doing and how they make ridiculous mistakes (like that they dug up the corn and nurtured weeds all summer), but Coverdale recognizes it as basic envy and malice. The danger wasn't that they'd fail to become farmers, but that soon that's all they'd be. Before moving to Blithedale, they romanticized the idea of labor and how it would deepen their spiritual connection to nature and creativity. Unfortunately, Coverdale soon realizes they were wrong—their minds become sluggish and he writes that nobody can be both a scholar and a yeoman.

It doesn't take long for Coverdale to become disillusioned with his early ideas about the connection between physical labor and his mind, spirit, and creativity. Instead of writing more, he's writing less. And while he might have fallen into a comfortable routine and is physically benefiting from the exercise, the parts of himself that he values the most—his mind, writing, and spirit—begin to atrophy because he no longer has time or energy to stimulate them. This is a core failing of their utopian project, a withering of their primary vision.

Zenobia arrives at a similar conclusion. When Coverdale returns one day, she asks if he's written any poetry, like Burns when he reaped barley. Coverdale confidently says that Burns was never simultaneously a poet and a farmer. Zenobia launches into a humorous description of Coverdale's future: he'll be like Silas, his mind will turn into cauliflower, he'll only read the Farmer's Almanac, he'll fall asleep whenever he sits down, and he'll speak with a drawl. Hollingsworth says Coverdale hasn't written poetry because hard labor takes away men's "nonsense" and leaves only their nature—Hollingsworth is unchanged because he's earnest, while Coverdale is not. Zenobia says she can't imagine being around such a great mind without being strengthened by it. This makes Coverdale realize that Hollingsworth has two followers—Zenobia and Priscilla—and he wonders what they all plan to do with each other.

Robert Burns (the poet Zenobia references) was a beloved English poet in the 18th century who was famous for also being a farmer. Burns might have been part of the reason Coverdale thought that physical labor would help his creativity. However, his comment that Burns couldn't have been a poet and a farmer at once echoes his previous assertion that nobody can be an intellectual and a yeoman at once—on must choose between physical and intellectual labor because too much of one will ultimately ruin the other. In Zenobia's mocking comparison of Coverdale to Silas, she reveals her hostility towards the laboring classes. Even as the community tries to create an equal society and find dignity and pleasure in work, they can't help but betray their class prejudices, undercutting their utopian mission.

CHAPTER 9: HOLLINGSWORTH. ZENOBIA, PRISCILLA

Coverdale writes that it's not good to spend too much time studying individual people, especially because if they're friends then one tends to magnify all their quirks, pick them apart, and then struggle to put them back together again. For this reason, Coverdale admits he might have done Hollingsworth wrong by studying him too closely. Had Coverdale been more indifferent to Hollingsworth, he might have been more objective in his assessments. As it is, Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla stand apart from the rest of Blithedale and seem like a problem that Coverdale must fix. Although the three dominate Coverdale's thoughts, he knows they don't think much of him, which makes him feel lonely. Even though Coverdale loves Hollingsworth, he feels like there's something about him that might ruin the happiness of anyone close to him.

In his mind, Coverdale starts creating divisions among Blithedale residents: he separates himself from the other members who are themselves separate from Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla. In a sense, Blithedale has already failed for Coverdale. Instead of bringing people together, he's only broken them up into factions. Furthermore, Coverdale is becoming more and more obsessed with thinking about these three people than he is with the work he meant to do at Blithedale, namely producing better poetry. It's interesting that Coverdale reflects on how his judgments of his friends might be clouded by the intensity of his feelings for them—this suggests that, even as he closely observes them and tries to discern their motives and characteristics, he might be utterly wrong. This calls attention, once again, to what an unreliable narrator he is.

Anyone who is solely dedicated to one purpose, in fact, might bring about ruin. It's better to avoid these people because they're no longer capable of human emotions and will trample a person underfoot if that person can be helpful, using them and discarding them. They worship their ideal and fail to recognize when their initial benevolence transforms into egoism. Coverdale admits that he might be exaggerating, but his words illustrate Hollingsworth's dangerous tendencies. For his own part, Coverdale is torn between love for his friend and repulsion for his single-mindedness. Furthermore, Coverdale feels it's his duty to save Priscilla from thinking too much of Hollingsworth, as many young women might. Hollingsworth is affectionate with Priscilla, and Coverdale knows Zenobia would give anything for Hollingsworth to show her the same. Coverdale would like to protect Priscilla from the possible consequences of the situation.

Ironically, Coverdale accuses Hollingsworth of being too single-minded when it comes to his idea for prison reform while Coverdale himself is becoming increasingly single-minded in his study of Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla. This implies that Coverdale's obsession might have dangerous consequences, too—could he use and discard someone for his own gain, as he thinks Hollingsworth might? Coverdale starts seeing himself as a sort of savior, meant to rescue Priscilla from giving her heart to someone who doesn't deserve it. In this way, his own initial benevolence (wanting to care for a mysterious young girl with a tragic past) turns into egoism (Coverdale is the only one who can save her) without Coverdale realizing it.


Priscilla has become beautiful and energetic, always running and playing with other girls. As she settles in, Priscilla plays pranks on others, but they all love her and readily forgive all her mischief. Coverdale writes that Priscilla's abundant happiness made him sad, and he worried that she'd use it all up too quickly. Sometimes he would try to convince her to be less happy so that her store of happiness would last longer. One day Coverdale asks Priscilla what she sees in the world to make her so happy. She says everyone is kind to her and she loves them. Coverdale asks if she has any bad memories and then says he'd rather look back than forward because he knows the friends of today likely won't be there in the future. Priscilla says mentioning the past makes her sad, but it can't repeat itself so she's unafraid.

Coverdale has a deep interest in human nature and he wants to discover anything anyone is trying to keep hidden. In this passage, Coverdale is trying to get Priscilla to admit something about her past because he thinks this will help him understand her better, but also because he's determined to discover all of her secrets. It's noteworthy, though, that Coverdale doesn't seem to be great at guessing people's emotions or motivations. Just as he earlier (mistakenly) thought that Priscilla's obsession with Zenobia might be due to Zenobia's writings, here he implies that he believes that Priscilla's past must be lovely for her to be so happy, which is clearly untrue. This paints Coverdale as somewhat silly: he spends all his time observing and contemplating the people around him, but he seems to have no insight at all.

Hollingsworth tells Priscilla to stop running around for the night, so she contentedly sits at his feet on the porch. Coverdale wonders what Priscilla sees in Hollingsworth but enjoys the image of the two sitting together. Zenobia appears in the doorway and stares at them a moment before telling Priscilla to come with her. Priscilla worries that Zenobia is mad, but Zenobia explains that she intends to be Priscilla's aunt and tell her all about propriety and social manners. Still worried, Priscilla goes inside with Zenobia, who smiles at Hollingsworth and Coverdale but looks vindictive as soon as she turns away. At the time, it amazed Coverdale that Hollingsworth would show so much affection to Priscilla without considering what it might do to her heart, which he might inadvertently crush. Coverdale has similar thoughts about Zenobia's heart, but he ultimately trusts that she knows what she's doing and risking.

Zenobia is actively hiding the jealousy she feels about the kindness Hollingsworth shows Priscilla. Zenobia says she wants to teach Priscilla about propriety, which means she intends to tell Priscilla that there are certain rules she must abide by in her relationship with Hollingsworth or else people will think less of her. In this time period, women were not supposed to openly show affection to men they weren't married to, so it would be considered a breach of etiquette and serious societal faux pas for Priscilla to spend so much time curling up at Hollingsworth's feet. However, Blithedale is supposed to be a much less restrictive place where people can break these meaningless social rules without fear of judgment—and, in addition, Zenobia herself is in favor of freeing women from oppressive norms. Zenobia's real aim, then, is to get Priscilla to back off from Hollingsworth because Zenobia wants to pursue him herself. This shows Zenobia's selfishness; she's willing to betray her values and ideals about women's equality to manipulate Priscilla out of taking the man Zenobia wants. It's also worth noting that Coverdale is more worried about Priscilla than Zenobia; in light of how things unfold, this will be another example of Coverdale observing people closely and coming to the wrong conclusion.

The gossips in Blithedale theorize that Hollingsworth and Zenobia are in love. They frequently take long walks alone together, with Hollingsworth talking about his projects and Zenobia hanging on his every word, the look in her eyes softer than usual. They frequently go to a slope that commands a gorgeous view of Blithedale and everyone believes they plan to build a cottage together there. Coverdale tries to find out if this is true by mentioning that he'd choose a different spot for a cottage, a little further back towards the trees for the benefit of the shade. Hollingsworth replies that his structure is supposed to be an example to the world, and so it must be out in the open. Coverdale doesn't know what to make of this reply.

Zenobia talks about having to teach Priscilla about propriety, but Zenobia herself breaks some of society's biggest social mores regarding unmarried men and women. It would be indecent for an unmarried man and woman to talk about building a house together before they're even engaged, because it implies that they'd live in it together, which implies that they're having a sexual relationship before marriage. This was a major sin in the 19th century, but the people in Blithedale don't seem to be judging either Zenobia or Hollingsworth—they simply accept their romantic relationship, which highlights that most of the people in Blithedale are truly progressive. Nonetheless, it's noteworthy that Zenobia—who is otherwise a strident advocate for female equality—doesn't have much to say in their conversations. She seems to put her own interests and opinions aside in order to listen to Hollingsworth talk.

CHAPTER 10: A VISITOR FROM TOWN

One day while Hollingsworth and Coverdale are eating lunch under some trees after hoeing potatoes, they spot someone coming up the path. This isn't unusual because a lot of people have come to see the community for themselves, but this person seems to have another purpose—he is old, shabbily dressed, and seems to want to hide half of himself. Coverdale indicates that he recognizes the man, but that he doesn't know anything about his history, although it must be interesting. When he gets closer, Hollingsworth greets Moodie and offers him some bread and cheese. Moodie seats himself so he's mostly obscured by a shrub. Coverdale reminds him of a little purse he bought from Moodie once and asks who made it. Moodie says normally he wouldn't reveal that secret, but Coverdale currently knows more about the purse-maker than he does.

Moodie is unique because he tries to balance an active social life (this is necessary to his job as a peddler, which requires him to go out into public to try to sell his purses and other trinkets) with concealing himself from the public eye. This is slightly different from Zenobia, who uses a pseudonym but doesn't deny her real identity in society. Moodie wants to be simultaneously seen and unseen, which is the first clue that he has other, bigger secrets to hide. Recall in this moment that, on their first night at Blithedale, Priscilla was making a purse of which Coverdale took note.

Hollingsworth playfully scolds Coverdale, saying that surely Coverdale has already figured out that Priscilla makes the purses. Hollingsworth tells Moodie it's good that he's come to visit Priscilla—she's grown lively and beautiful since coming to Blithedale. Moodie is happy to hear this, but he says that maybe it'd be better not to see her and remind her of the unhappy past. Hollingsworth tells Moodie he's wrong—Priscilla talks about him all the time and she'd be happy to see him. Before going to find her, Moodie asks if anyone has called for Priscilla (nobody has) and if there is a beautiful lady, one he knew when she was a child, who wears a **flower** in her hair. Coverdale quietly asks Hollingsworth what the connection between Moodie and Zenobia can be. Hollingsworth says that Moodie is out of his mind and he tells Moodie that there is someone of that description, and she's very kind and sisterly to Priscilla.

This is the second clue that Zenobia and Priscilla are somehow connected, and that Moodie is the element that connects them. Moodie's question about someone coming to see Priscilla reveals his concern that whatever bad situation Priscilla escaped from has to do with another person who might be trying to track her down.


Moodie tells Hollingsworth that nothing would make him happier than to see the "beautiful lady" holding Priscilla's hand. Hollingsworth says they might catch them doing just that and leads Moodie towards the farmhouse. Alone, Coverdale thinks that Moodie doesn't seem out of his mind like Hollingsworth said. In fact, Coverdale thinks the community should take care of Moodie and make him happy, which would benefit both Moodie and the community in general. Later, as he heads back in, Coverdale sees Moodie in the yard staring at a window. Suddenly Priscilla appears there with Zenobia. Coverdale thinks Priscilla is doing this for Moodie's benefit. However, Priscilla is a little too affectionate and Zenobia pushes her away and gives her a condescending look. Moodie shakes his head and walks away but turns back around to shake his fist.

Interestingly, Moodie doesn't refer to Zenobia by name now even though he did use her name (her pseudonym, at least) the night before Coverdale left for Blithedale. He calls her the "beautiful lady," but not Zenobia or her real name. Moodie's angry reaction to seeing Zenobia push Priscilla away indicates that he expects—for some mysterious and secret reason—Zenobia to accept Priscilla and shower her with affection. He's angry at her for being so proud that she can't graciously accept Priscilla's affection.

CHAPTER 11: THE WOOD-PATH

One day, Coverdale decides to take a day off to wander alone through the forest and refresh himself. In the forest, Coverdale looks around for a good spot to spend the day and he is so lost in his own thoughts that he doesn't realize someone is there until they call out to him and call him a friend. Coverdale is immediately irritated—he doesn't like being interrupted and he doesn't like the person's tone. Coverdale asks what he wants and reminds the man that he's not even an acquaintance, much less a friend. The man drily says they're clearly not friends but asks if Coverdale, as a member of Blithedale, can do him a favor. Coverdale snaps that he's busy and takes stock of the man—he is young and somewhat handsome, though not to Coverdale's taste. There seems to be something inexplicably rude and indecorous about him.

Despite his love of society and studying people, Coverdale is an introvert who must have some amount of periodical solitude so that he doesn't burn out. The man's inopportune intrusion on Coverdale's solitude immediately creates the foundation for the hatred Coverdale has towards him for the rest of the narrative.

Coverdale immediately hates the man, but he still feels ashamed of his rudeness and asks what the man needs. The man apologizes for the way he addressed Coverdale and asks if a woman named Zenobia lives there. Coverdale confirms this, although Zenobia is a pseudonym. The man says he knows that and asks where he can find her. Coverdale points out the farmhouse and tries to excuse himself, but the man says he'd rather meet Zenobia in private, away from prying eyes. Coverdale points out where Zenobia takes her usual walk, close enough to the farmhouse that someone can hear her if she calls. The man then asks about a shaggy philanthropist who wants to build a large facility but lacks the funds—a man who might expect one lady they both know to put up the money for it. For some reason this makes the man laugh, exposing a gold bar on his teeth.

Since Moodie just asked anxiously if anyone has come asking for Zenobia, this man's appearance seems foretold. Coverdale only shows the man where Zenobia goes walking because it's close enough to the farmhouse that she can call for help. Coverdale, then, doesn't merely hate the man, but also believes that he might be dangerous. The man's comment about a shaggy philanthropist—clearly meaning Hollingsworth—in need of money is also the first clue that Hollingsworth might entertain a relationship with Zenobia for her money, as this would allow him to build his center for criminal reform. The gold bar in the man's teeth is his defining feature and implies that he's actively using props to obscure his real appearance.

The sight of the gold bar makes Coverdale laugh—he thinks that the man might have a lot of fake body parts. When they stop, Coverdale expresses his regret that laughing has cost him the right to resent the man's description of Hollingsworth. Coverdale tries to leave, but the man stops him with another question—whether there is a pale, weak young girl named Priscilla there. Instead of answering, Coverdale asks the man for his name. The man gives him a card saying his name is Professor Westervelt. Coverdale says that he's shown the man where to find Zenobia but he'll have to ask Priscilla's other friends to lead him to her. Westervelt leaves and Coverdale regrets it because the man might have shed light on the obvious connection between Zenobia and Priscilla. Instead of his walk, Coverdale lurks around Zenobia's path, close enough to interfere if needed.

Coverdale again casts himself in the role of rescuer. He creeps around Zenobia's walk and says it's because then he'll be nearby if she needs help, but this position will also allow him to hear their conversation (if they have one) and hopefully figure out how they're connected.

CHAPTER 12: COVERDALE'S HERMITAGE

Early on in Blithedale, Coverdale discovered that a wild grapevine had grown up the tree and created a perfectly hidden cave high up in the branches. From this perch, Coverdale can poke through the leaves and see every part of Blithedale without being seen himself. Coverdale retires to this hermitage frequently to write, think, smoke, and simply keep his individuality intact during his time at Blithedale. After speaking with Professor Westervelt, Coverdale climbs into his hermitage, which is near Zenobia's usual walking path. From his perch, Coverdale sees Hollingsworth in the field with the oxen. Coverdale thinks to himself that Hollingsworth sees people as oxen and questions what gives Hollingsworth the right to be the driver. Coverdale sees Priscilla and tells a passing bird to warn her about Zenobia and Hollingsworth. He tells the bird that only he (Coverdale) cares for her, but mostly for the qualities he's endowed her with rather than for her own sake.

Coverdale is determined not to let Blithedale encroach upon his individuality, which calls into question just how much of himself he's willing to put into the project. Coverdale's hermitage also illustrates his tendency to want to be able to see everyone, pry into their lives, and discover all their secrets while remaining somewhat concealed himself. Coverdale has his own secrets and it's doubtful that he's revealing all of them to the reader, even though he insists other characters reveal theirs to him. However, he does partly reveal himself to the bird (who, notably, cannot actually reveal this secret to anyone else), suggesting that he cares for the qualities he projects onto Priscilla, rather than for Priscilla herself. Coverdale has persistently misunderstood Priscilla, so this is a moment of near-clarity for him; he understands that, even as he observes others, he's really projecting his own assumptions and desires onto them without seeing them for who they are.

Up in his hermitage, Coverdale soaks in the smells of the forest, but he is suddenly overwhelmed by the feeling that heroism and morality don't exist and their Blithedale experiment is doomed to failure. To himself, Coverdale admits that it would be better to abandon the experiment. Suddenly Coverdale hears Westervelt's distinctive laugh in the forest below and he realizes that his thoughts about Zenobia, Hollingsworth, Priscilla, and Blithedale were actually reflections of Westervelt's opinions, and his influence has darkened Coverdale's mind. Coverdale hates Westervelt more because his own nature had responded to Westervelt's influence. Catching sight of Zenobia and Westervelt walking together, Coverdale notices that Zenobia appears angry and scornful, but there is still an air of familiarity indicative of a past love affair between them. Zenobia is careful not to brush against Westervelt and Coverdale wonders if there's always been a chasm between them.

Coverdale ascribes some kind of supernatural ability to Westervelt, saying that Westervelt's mere presence is enough to make Coverdale think the worst about everything. This foreshadows the conclusion Coverdale ultimately comes to about Westervelt's relationship to Zenobia and Priscilla—somehow, Westervelt is able to control their minds to the point where they feel beholden to him and must do whatever he tells them to.

Unlike Zenobia, Westervelt is cool and collected. He looks perplexed about Zenobia's anger, but he is likely writing it off as feminine absurdity that no man can understand. Coverdale wonders how many women have ruined their lives by marrying men like that—marrying them and then finding that they lack humanity or delicacy, leaving the woman wretched and angry. Watching Zenobia and Westervelt, Coverdale imagines that Zenobia might have made that mistake in her youth, which would explain her characteristic defiance and eccentricity now.

Westervelt immediately dismisses and delegitimizes Zenobia's feelings by attributing them to her just being an absurd woman. This implies that any feelings a woman has shouldn't be taken seriously. For his part, Coverdale is also *reducing Zenobia's emotions. By explaining Zenobia's personality, opinions, and activism as being a result of a previous bad marriage, Coverdale is, in a way, crediting a man with her achievements rather than accepting the possibility that Zenobia might just be who she is.*

Coverdale wonders if fate will lead Zenobia and Westervelt to stop under his tree so he can hear their conversation, but this doesn't happen. Still, he catches some of it, although he admits he might have misheard them. Zenobia says she won't throw off "the girl" and asks what harm the girl could possibly do. Westervelt whispers something in her ear that evidently disgusts her. She asks what kind of person she's connected to and says if God cares for her at all then he'll "release [her] from this miserable bond!" Westervelt says he didn't think it was so bad as that, but Zenobia says it'll strangle her. Zenobia utters a heart-wrenching moan and the two keep talking, but Coverdale can't understand anything else they say as they walk off. The wind in the trees sounds like the word hush and Coverdale decides never to tell anyone what he heard.

The "girl" Westervelt and Zenobia are talking about is Priscilla. What parts of their conversation Coverdale catches indicate that Westervelt knows more about Priscilla than almost anyone else, and he knows what connects the two women. Zenobia mourns being in a "miserable bond," probably a bond to Westervelt. She doesn't cry to the legal system to free her from this bond—instead, she asks God. This implies that whatever hold Westervelt has over her transcends a marriage. No worldly power (such as divorce) can truly destroy the toxic relationship between Westervelt and Zenobia.

CHAPTER 13: ZENOBIA'S LEGEND

The people at Blithedale are devoted to working for the betterment of mankind, but they make time for relaxation and enjoy putting on theatrical performances from time to time. The night after the incident with Westervelt, Zenobia proposes that they put off acting for the evening so she can tell a story. Zenobia has a gift for making stories up on the spot, so the group excitedly encourages her idea. The young girls ask for a ghost story, but Zenobia says what she has in mind isn't quite a ghost story but close to it. She tells Priscilla to stand in front of her so Zenobia can draw inspiration from Priscilla's eyes. Coverdale doubts that he can quite do the story justice on paper, but he'll try. The story is called "The Silvery **Veil**."

It is notable that Zenobia places Priscilla directly in front of her. Zenobia clearly means to direct this story at Priscilla, but it's unclear why or if Priscilla will be able to understand it.

Everyone has heard of the Veiled Lady, who once drew huge crowds but abruptly disappeared months earlier. Zenobia tells of the last known incident involving the Lady: a group of young men are discussing the Veiled Lady over some bottles of champagne and theorizing about her identity, bandying about the idea that she's a wealthy heiress. One young man names a woman who must be the Lady because she always disappears during Veiled Lady performances, but one of the men, Theodore, objects and says he saw that woman at a Veiled Lady exhibition once. Nobody can adequately argue against this, so they change the topic to whether the woman within the **veil** is beautiful or horrifyingly ugly. They also speculate about the handsome magician, who purportedly exchanged his soul for a "familiar" for seven years, this being the final one.

Much like Coverdale, the men in this story want to learn all the secrets about the Veiled Lady. It's not enough for them to appreciate her alleged supernatural abilities or that her performances are entertaining, they must know who she is and what she looks like. A "familiar" is a supernatural creature or entity that attaches itself to a magician or witch and helps them do their magic. However, they're also considered evil, which means the Veiled Lady might have evil propensities and the magician who summoned her definitely does.

Theodore runs out of patience with speculating and says he'll make a bet that he can find out the Veiled Lady's real identity that night. After some discussion, the men agree to terms and Theodore sneaks into the apartment that the Veiled Lady withdraws into after her performances. Inside, Theodore hides and listens to the exhibition. The performance ends and soon the Veiled Lady enters the room. Zenobia says at this point Theodore was likely becoming frightened with the thought of what he was about to do. The Lady seems to float through the room, evidently looking for something. Suddenly she approaches Theodore's hiding spot and calls him by name, saying he can come out. She asks what he wants with her and he says he must know her identity. She says she can't tell him, so he'll have to lift her **veil**.

Theodore uses dishonest means to try to ascertain the Veiled Lady's identity. Instead of openly approaching her, Theodore chooses to sneak in and essentially ambush her. He also doesn't ask for consent to lift her veil, but he tells her that he must do it and gives her no choice. Theodore is essentially willing to violate the Veiled Lady to satisfy his own idle curiosity, revealing his belief that, as a man, he has a right to her body.

Theodore steps forward to lift the Veiled Lady's **veil**, but she steps back and tells him there are conditions he must hear first. She says she's a prisoner beneath the veil, but before he lifts it, she wants him to kiss her through it. If he does, they'll be bound together and have a beautiful future—this is all she can say behind the veil. If he doesn't like this, then there is another way. Theodore wants to know what that is, which seems to make the Lady sad. She asks if he only wants to satisfy idle curiosity. If that is so, he may lift the veil without kissing her but then she must become his "evil fate" and he'll never be happy again. Theodore is skeptical and doesn't want to kiss her and thus bind himself to her without knowing what she looks like first.

The first option the Veiled Lady gives Theodore resembles marriage. Only once they've sealed themselves together with a consensual kiss will he be able to remove her veil and truly know her. This will bring him lasting happiness. Still, she can't stop him from forcibly removing her veil, which resembles rape. If he does this, however, he will be haunted by the act (she'll be his "evil fate") and by the knowledge that he'll never get to know her the way he would if he had done the right thing by gaining her consent through a kiss. That kiss must be done while she's still under the veil, or still in a state of innocence.

Theodore tells the Veiled Lady he'll take her **veil** off first and decide whether to kiss her afterwards. He takes her veil off and catches a momentary glimpse of a beautiful face before the Lady disappears, leaving Theodore to waste his life searching for another glimpse of her face. At the same moment the Veiled Lady disappeared, a pale young girl appears amongst a group of visionaries, all of whom grow to love her. The girl attaches herself to one woman in the group above all others. A male figure appears to this woman and says the maiden is her enemy who will ruin her life, but the woman can stop her by putting the veil over her and calling the magician. The woman does it and the magician grabs and enslaves the Lady. At this moment, Zenobia throws some gauze over Priscilla, leaving her shaken and scared.

The latter half of Zenobia's story—when a girl pops up among a group of visionaries and becomes attached to one woman in particular—echoes Priscilla's entrance into Blithedale. This is the first clue that there is some connection between the Veiled Lady and Priscilla. Priscilla's strong reaction seems to indicate that Zenobia has struck a chord. This would mean the story was Zenobia's way of telling Priscilla that she knows the truth about her past—worse, it seems like a warning to Priscilla of what's to come.

CHAPTER 14: ELIOT'S PULPIT

In Blithedale, Sunday is a day of rest. Some people go to church, some people go into the city, and others enjoy the scenery around Blithedale or take long naps in the barn. Hollingsworth, Coverdale, Zenobia, and Priscilla make a habit of going to a strange nearby rock formation they call Eliot's Pulpit, where legend says the Apostle Eliot preached to Native Americans. Hollingsworth sometimes climbs atop the rocks to deliver speeches on a range of topics and then climbs back down to rest while the others talk about the speech. Ever since talking with Westervelt, Zenobia's moods have fluctuated more than usual from day to day. One day, after listening to Hollingsworth's speech at the Pulpit, she passionately criticizes the world for how it limits women's freedom to speak out in public. She determines to speak up more about this in future, which makes Coverdale smile.

Zenobia's decision to discuss her frustration that women can't speak when they want to reflects her own anger that she can't speak out about whatever her inner conflict—probably having to do with Westervelt—is about. Zenobia has a chance to speak out and tell her friends the truth but feels like she can't. She might be keeping silent out of fear of Westervelt's retribution of possibly of being judged by others. Zenobia, then, knows that whatever Westervelt asked her to do is wrong, but she is too worried about her own reputation to tell people the truth.

Zenobia sees Coverdale smile and says it's indicative of shallow thought. She predicts that as soon as women are granted full rights and equality, there will be ten times more eloquent women than men. As it is, laws and society limit women's freedom to speak, which is unfortunate because women are better speakers than writers. Coverdale doesn't tell Zenobia this, but the real reason he smiled was because he believes women don't become passionate reformers unless they're experiencing great inner turmoil—Zenobia is so passionate now because of her internal conflict. Instead, Coverdale says he wishes women would be rulers instead of men. Male rulers make him jealous, but he'd gladly kneel to a "woman-ruler." Zenobia laughingly says this might be true if the woman is beautiful, but she questions if he'd be as enthusiastic if the woman were 60 and ugly.

Zenobia's opinion is that women are superior to men and the only thing stopping them from proving it are the laws men created. Even though Coverdale seems to agree out loud, his private thoughts (that women don't become reformers unless they're suffering some internal conflict) reveal his own prejudice. He, like Westervelt, considers Zenobia's sudden speech an indication that she's just being emotional. This highlights how Coverdale and Westervelt aren't as different as Coverdale thinks. Furthermore, the notion that Coverdale would be jealous of a male ruler but not a female one implies a prejudice, too, as it seems he sees men as a threat to his status but not women.

Coverdale says it's Zenobia who "rate[s] womanhood low." He says that he never like bearded male priests and wishes women were the religious leaders instead, since women were made for religious work. Priscilla says she can't believe what he says and doesn't want to believe it's true. Zenobia scornfully says Priscilla is the "type of womanhood [...] man has spent centuries in making" because a man isn't happy unless he can degrade himself by stooping towards what he loves. Priscilla asks Hollingsworth if this is true and he says none of it is true. Zenobia asks if he hates women. He says he doesn't—woman is God's greatest creation when she's in her proper place at man's side. To Hollingsworth, women without men are monsters, and Hollingsworth would call upon other men to use physical force to push women back into their place if necessary—true women never venture beyond their sphere.

Coverdale accuses Zenobia of being the one who's prejudiced towards women (she "rate[s] womanhood low") just because she points out that Coverdale might not be as serious as he pretends to be. Zenobia's charge that Priscilla is the kind of woman "man has spent centuries in making" is an insult; it means that Priscilla is submissive, chaste, gentle, dependent, and happy to take an inferior position in society. Priscilla, then, is the opposite of Zenobia, who is assertive, independent, and openly sexual. Hollingsworth's ideas about womanhood are representative most of society's beliefs about womanhood in the 19th century, but it's striking that he expresses this while being so close with Zenobia.

Priscilla contentedly smiles up at Hollingsworth, happily absorbing everything he says. Coverdale knows the type of womanhood Hollingsworth idealizes is at his feet. He turns to Zenobia, expecting her to be as horrified by Hollingsworth's words as he is; to Coverdale, Hollingsworth's opinion strips women of their spirit, making them mere objects in the greater life of men. Hollingsworth's opinion belongs to millions of despots, and Coverdale expects Zenobia to fight against it. He's surprised to see that she's crying tears of grief, not anger. She says she thinks Hollingsworth is right and if men would just be "manly and godlike" then women would be happy to be all Hollingsworth described. Coverdale smiles bitterly, observing that both women seem to worship Hollingsworth even though Coverdale tries to speak up in support of their cause. Coverdale wonders if women do this by nature or just because they're used to humbling themselves.

Coverdale's opinions here reflect Hawthorne's own opinions. In most of Hawthorne's works, he highlights injustices done towards women and how those injustices damage all of society, not just women. Zenobia's tears of grief and her statement that women would be happy to be what Hollingsworth describes imply that she wants to be in the kind of relationship Hollingsworth describes. Zenobia wants the security associated with having a husband who works for the greater good and genuinely appreciates all that his wife does to make his life better. It seems reasonable to intuit here that Zenobia is trying to ingratiate herself with Hollingsworth, suggesting that she would become that kind of woman for him. It's bizarre to see her shed her defining beliefs so easily.

Without another word, the group gets up and heads back. Priscilla skips on ahead, followed by Hollingsworth and Zenobia, and Coverdale in the back. Coverdale sees Zenobia press Hollingsworth's hand to her breast. Coverdale recognizes a world of meaning in the gesture—Zenobia has professed her love for Hollingsworth. Priscilla can't possibly have seen this happen, but at the same moment she seems to droop. Hollingsworth and Zenobia pass her, but Coverdale slows down and asks her what's wrong. She says her heart hurts, though she doesn't know why. Coverdale talks about Zenobia and Hollingsworth, pettily pointing out that the two make a gorgeous couple. Coverdale admits this was malicious, but it's unfair that Hollingsworth has a monopoly on the women's affections. Priscilla runs off, leaving Coverdale to wonder whether Zenobia is offering herself to Hollingsworth as a free woman that nobody else has a fair claim over.

Priscilla has a sixth sense and she picks up on the shift in energy between Hollingsworth and Zenobia when she presses his hand to her body. Priscilla senses this and it makes her sad, revealing her own growing love for Hollingsworth. However, Priscilla also loves Zenobia, so she feels torn between the two. She must either resign herself to losing Hollingsworth or risk losing Zenobia if she pursues Hollingsworth. Either way, Priscilla is obviously keeping her feelings a secret, although Coverdale picks up on them. Coverdale's petty attempt to hurt Priscilla by pointing out how happy Hollingsworth and Zenobia look is also meant to encourage Priscilla to give Hollingsworth up. In other words, Coverdale is trying to fulfill his role as Priscilla's savior by trying to convince her that giving her heart to Hollingsworth is useless.

CHAPTER 15: A CRISIS

As the summer wears on and Coverdale adjusts to life in Blithedale, he begins to look forward to the future and the group starts making permanent plans for cottages and larger communal living quarters. Hollingsworth engages in these discussions but without enthusiasm. Shortly after the event at Eliot's Pulpit, Coverdale is sharing his opinion on how future generations of Blithedale will honor the founders. Hollingsworth says this is nonsense, but Coverdale passes over the criticism and keeps talking about Blithedale's future—he's excited for the first baby to be born there and wonders where they should set up the cemetery when someone inevitably dies. Hollingsworth stops him and says Coverdale's words have made him realize how ridiculous the whole Blithedale experiment is and he mourns that they've wasted a whole summer on it. Still, Coverdale says he thinks they'll be successful.

Despite his initial disappointment and disillusionment about how intellectually deadening physical labor can be, Coverdale still expresses a belief that Blithedale has a bright future. This is quite a contrast to his pessimism when he was observing Westervelt and felt infected by Westervelt's thoughts. It's not clear, then, what Coverdale's actual beliefs are. It does seem that he enjoys being part of something and thinking that he's important. Part of what makes his friendships with Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla bittersweet is that he knows they don't quite accept him into their group, nor do they think of him the way he thinks of them. Hollingsworth, however, begins to show his motives in joining Blithedale.

Hollingsworth says he neither believes in nor values Coverdale's expectations for Blithedale and insists that Coverdale should try to be serious and join him in his project. Coverdale says there's no need to repeat the whole conversation—Hollingsworth again shares his plan for criminal reform and says that he has the means of buying the land Blithedale is on. Hollingsworth wants to use the community for his own ends, and he has carefully prepared an argument in favor of this plan. Coverdale asks how Hollingsworth can afford this and he vaguely replies that he has the money. Coverdale believes Zenobia is giving Hollingsworth the money and wonders if she gave herself to Hollingsworth as well. They argue over how the rest of the community might feel, Hollingsworth's secrecy, and whether Hollingsworth should give the others a say before he moves forward with his plan, which Hollingsworth refuses to do.

Hollingsworth's revelation that he wants to buy Blithedale is a serious betrayal. It indicates that Hollingsworth may have really come to Blithedale because he wanted to use the readily-available land and manpower to fuel his own project. In doing so, he completely ignores how others might feel. Most of the people in Blithedale truly believe that they're doing something great, and it will distress them all to learn that one of Blithedale's founders manipulated them for months to win their trust so he could get them to do what he wants to do. Hollingsworth doesn't see people as people, but as tools that he can either use for his own purposes or discard at will without a second thought.

Hollingsworth cuts the discussion short and says he wants an answer: will Coverdale join Hollingsworth's cause and thus finally do something meaningful with his life or not. Hollingsworth says he doesn't love any other man like he loves Coverdale and asks Coverdale not to forsake him. In a narrated aside, Coverdale says that Hollingsworth's appeal tugged at his heartstrings and he nearly gave in, but the truth is that he thought Hollingsworth's plan was odious and bleak. Still, had he just touched Hollingsworth's hand, he might have given in. Back in the story, Coverdale asks if Zenobia is part of the plan and he is surprised that she is. Hollingsworth assures Coverdale that he didn't use "base" methods to get her on board, but he can't look Coverdale in the eye while he says it.

Hollingsworth is being very emotionally manipulative. He knows that Coverdale loves him and is willing to use that love to get Coverdale to compromise his own values and adopt Hollingsworth's. This also means that Hollingsworth wouldn't hesitate to do something similar to Zenobia, who everyone knows loves him. In fact, it's likely that he appealed to her love for him to get the money he needs for the building. Hollingsworth says he wouldn't use "base" (corrupt, dishonorable) methods to get the money, but he's already shown a tendency to lie so neither Coverdale nor the reader can believe him.

Coverdale asks Hollingsworth what's supposed to happen to Priscilla. Suddenly Hollingsworth looks fierce and asks why Coverdale insists on bringing her and Zenobia into the conversation. He again demands an answer from Coverdale—will he join the enterprise or not? Coverdale angrily asks if Hollingsworth is willing to throw over a friend just because that friend doesn't want to join his project. Hollingsworth says Coverdale is either for him or against him. Coverdale replies that Hollingsworth's plan is ill-advised and his methods in pursuing it dubious, so he will not join it. In the present, Coverdale says it wasn't easy to tell Hollingsworth no, and Hollingsworth himself looked as if he'd been shot through the heart. Back in the story, Hollingsworth looks like he wants to say something, but he only manages to say "Well!" before turning away to fix a fence.

Hollingsworth seems so hurt because Coverdale's rejection was so unexpected. Hollingsworth was sure that he could successfully manipulate Coverdale—who he sees as a directionless, idle pawn—into joining his cause for criminal reform. Coverdale's rejection sends the message that Hollingsworth has overestimated his own abilities, which leaves him second-guessing himself.

CHAPTER 16: LEAVE-TAKINGS

A few days after his argument with Hollingsworth, Coverdale announces that he's going to leave for a holiday. This upsets Silas, who doesn't want to lose a good worker; he predicts that Coverdale is leaving for good. Coverdale insists that he'll only be gone for a couple of weeks to enjoy the sea air and would never abandon Blithedale. The truth is that Coverdale's life at Blithedale has become troublesome since his argument with Hollingsworth—even his friendship with Priscilla and Zenobia changes after the fight. Although they're kind to him, Coverdale senses a change in their feelings that makes him uncomfortable. The rest of the community, too, senses that something momentous occurred between Hollingsworth and Coverdale, and it weighs heavily on them all. Coverdale wants to take a step back to think about all that's happened before deciding what to do with his future.

Coverdale's departure truly marks the beginning of the end of Blithedale. As a founding member, it's a big step for Coverdale to leave. Even though he says he'll be back in two weeks, it's clear that he's deceiving himself. He's no longer happy at Blithedale because he senses that its mission is crumbling and the people he's most interested in no longer like or trust him. Even though Priscilla and Zenobia aren't rude to Coverdale, the change in their manner towards him is their way of punishing him for hurting the man they love. Coverdale recognizes that he has to really think hard about his future because he's becoming disillusioned with Blithedale, which was supposed to be his future.

In an aside, Coverdale writes that there are so many opinions on the world—what it should be, what it shouldn't be, how to change it—that he was beginning to forget what the world was actually like. He believes that no wise man can maintain his wisdom if he's constantly surrounded by reformers and that sometimes it's necessary to return to the old system and reevaluate the state of the world. To that end, Coverdale decided to go back to the city. Before he leaves, Coverdale asks Zenobia if he should announce that she'll be delivering lectures about women's rights soon. Zenobia smiles and says that women don't have rights. Zenobia says she's sad that he's leaving because it's like this phase of their lives is ending for good.

Coverdale has hitherto adopted the schemes and plans of the other reformers, but now he's determined to arrive at his own conclusions about the world, about Blithedale, and about what he wants his life to be like. Zenobia, too, realizes that Coverdale's departure is the beginning of the end for Blithedale, but also for their relationships. In ending his friendship with Hollingsworth, Coverdale has also ended his friendship with Zenobia, who can't accept anyone who doesn't accept and admire Hollingsworth.

Zenobia tells Coverdale that she's thought about confiding in him, but she won't because he's so young and she can't confide in him now that he's leaving. Coverdale goes to say goodbye to Priscilla, who's making another purse. He asks her if she'll still be there when he comes back and says he has a bad feeling that even if he comes back the next day then everything will be changed. Priscilla says she doesn't ever want to leave and doesn't think things will change. Coverdale squeezes her hand, but she doesn't return it—he knows there's no room in her heart for him. Coverdale walks past Hollingsworth without a word and towards the pigsty. Silas is there and says Coverdale must come back for spare ribs. Coverdale replies that pigs are the only happy creatures and it'd be better for them to eat people than the other way around.

Zenobia admits that she has something to hide by saying she's considered confiding in Coverdale. This also means she senses Coverdale's curiosity about her life, and therefore his willingness to listen to her problems and complaints. Coverdale is aware that by leaving, he is probably ruining his chances of ever fixing his friendships with Zenobia, Priscilla, and Hollingsworth. This is why he feels like nothing will be the same even if he's only gone for a night.

CHAPTER 17: THE HOTEL

Coverdale stays in a hotel in the city far away from where he used to spend time and where there's little chance of running into old friends. He feels a little like a traveler who has just returned to a familiar place. His time in Blithedale was not just a jaunt into the country for a summer, but part of another epoch and world. At one instant, Coverdale's present living situation seems unreal, while at the next it's Blithedale that's dream-like. This makes the world feel fluid instead of solid. Just as Coverdale loves solitude in nature, he loves observing city life and listening to the sounds of people going about their lives in the streets. Still, Coverdale isn't ready to join in the hustle and bustle, so he stays in, reads, and looks out his hotel window.

Coverdale initially sees his departure from Blithedale as a fresh start. He's closed one chapter on his life and is free to start another. However, he's unwilling to start a new life on his own, which is why he starts observing the lives around him, becoming progressively more preoccupied with how other people live, their relationships, and their secrets.

Coverdale soon becomes familiar with the range of houses outside his window. His room faces the backyards of these houses and he takes special note of the various fruit trees, grapevines, and other plants that grow in them. In one yard, there's a cat stalking some birds in a tree. Coverdale prefers looking at the backs of houses rather than the fronts because the front is always artificial and made to look nice for passersby; the backs, however, are more authentic and natural. The houses outside of Coverdale's window all look very similar and this makes Coverdale think about how all people are generally alike, too. The hotel waiter tells Coverdale that the building is a well-to-do boarding house. Two bachelors stay there, a picturesque family, and there are some empty rooms being prepared for new occupants. Coverdale watches the cook and servants prepare dinner while a dove flies between the buildings.

Coverdale believes that looking into the backs of people's houses will reveal the truth about their lives by giving him access to something beyond the facades that people construct to look presentable in public. It eliminates the mystery and enables Coverdale to just enjoy getting to know them even though they don't know he's watching. In fact, Coverdale is the only one with something to hide—he knows it's wrong to secretly pry into people's lives and essentially spy on them, and so he doesn't ever tell anyone else about this habit.

CHAPTER 18: THE BOARDING-HOUSE

Coverdale sleeps in after a late night at the theater. His sleep was tormented by dreams about Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla. In one, Hollingsworth and Zenobia bend across his bed to passionately kiss each other. Priscilla sees it from a window and fades away, leaving only a feeling of sadness in Coverdale's heart. It's a gloomy day and Coverdale feels homesick for Blithedale. He feels sure that he might have done something to prevent misfortune from falling on his friends, but he's abandoned them to fate. Coverdale goes to look out the window, hoping it will distract him from his depressing thoughts. Coverdale looks into the windows of the boardinghouse and sees the vacant rooms are now occupied and, as if he knew this would happen, Coverdale is unsurprised to recognize Zenobia in one window and Priscilla in another.

Coverdale still feels like it was his job to prevent some tragedy from befalling Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla. His dream reveals his fear that Hollingsworth and Zenobia will break Priscilla's heart and cause her death if they openly engage in a romantic relationship. Coverdale has never dreamed about the three before, so the fact that he is dreaming of them now highlights just how far his obsession has gone—putting distance between them is not stopping him from obsessing over their lives like he believed it would, which means his obsession has gotten out of control.

Zenobia is fashionably dressed, but she still has an exotic **flower** in her hair. She walks away from the window, but Coverdale expects that she'll return because she's probably pacing through the room instead of taking her usual daily walk (she wouldn't want to get her dress muddy in the city streets). When Zenobia reappears, Westervelt is behind her. It seems to Coverdale that only Moodie and Hollingsworth are missing to complete the set of people that have fascinated Coverdale for so long. Even though Coverdale knows that Zenobia kept rooms in town throughout her time at Blithedale, Coverdale thinks the fact that she's so close is a "fatal" coincidence and he even longs for some catastrophe to happen to one of them so that he can see it happen and then move on with his life.

Coverdale calls this coincidence "fatal" because he takes it as a sign that he'll never really escape his obsession with Zenobia, Priscilla, and Hollingsworth. Because Zenobia is so close, Coverdale knows he won't be able to stop himself from prying into her life and trying to learn her secrets again. Coverdale's anguish manifests itself in his wish for a catastrophe to befall them. Coverdale thinks if he can see them all get hurt as a result of their secrets, actions, and relationships then he'll finally be able to leave them behind because he won't have to worry about saving them anymore.

Coverdale watches Zenobia and Westervelt talk to each other. Zenobia's gestures and other body language indicate that she's passionate about whatever they're discussing. Zenobia abruptly walks away and Westervelt leans against the window, looking out with a mysterious smile. Westervelt inexplicably looks straight up at Coverdale and recognizes him. He calls Zenobia to the window and she scornfully looks up at Coverdale. She gives him a nod of recognition, but she immediately drops the curtain so Coverdale can't see into the room anymore. Coverdale notices that Priscilla is no longer in the other room doing needlework.

When Zenobia lowers the curtain, she sends the message that she doesn't want Coverdale to have any part in her life anymore. This is very different from when Coverdale left Blithedale and she told him that she was actually tempted to confide in him and let him in on her secrets. This could mean that Zenobia is now ashamed of whatever she's doing and doesn't want Coverdale to judge her for it.

CHAPTER 19: ZENOBIA'S DRAWING-ROOM

For the rest of the day, Coverdale wonders why Zenobia and Priscilla are in town instead of at Blithedale. He feels insulted by Zenobia's decision to shut the curtain. In fact, Coverdale thinks Zenobia should have been appreciative of his intellect and heart, both of which compel him to take an interest in her life and relationships. Furthermore, Coverdale believes that he is particularly fit to observe and judge both Zenobia and Hollingsworth because even though he'd judge and punish them for their wrongs, he would appreciate their good qualities and their struggle against temptation. More importantly, Coverdale would still love them. While he thinks, Coverdale stays near his window and occasionally looks back at Zenobia's rooms to no avail—the curtain remains closed. Towards evening Coverdale realizes that, as their friend, he has a right to visit them, so he impulsively rushes over to the boardinghouse.

Coverdale understands that Priscilla and Zenobia's presence in the city is another indication of Blithedale's imminent failure. Zenobia has always kind of been the primary leader at Blithedale, and if she abandons the project then it probably will languish and die out for lack of leadership. Coverdale reveals his latent narcissism and conceit in his defense of his spying. He doesn't see his prying into Zenobia's private life as a violation or trespass, but something she should thank him for because he has the best intentions and would be a great judge of her behavior. This entitlement calls attention to how unreliable Coverdale is as a narrator and as an observer of others.

A servant leads Coverdale to Zenobia's rooms. When he enters Zenobia laughs, but Coverdale detects some scorn in her manner. Zenobia jokes about Coverdale watching her and her decision to close the curtain. Coverdale takes her hand and notes the lack of warmth between them, which is so different from how they first greeted each other in Blithedale. Her appearance has also changed—she's dressed up in finery and her usual **flower** is made up of jewels. Coverdale says it feels like years since they were together in Blithedale and he asks if she ever really considered herself part of the group. Zenobia coldly replies that only narrow minds restrict themselves to one idea. Coverdale is bewildered by both Zenobia's manner and the opulent room they're in. Coverdale feels as if he's seeing her real character: passionate, unrefined, and incapable or simplicity or good taste.

Zenobia has always worn an exotic flower in her hair and she still does, but now it's a fake flower. This confuses Coverdale and he begins to question what else about her character, either now or in Blithedale, was false. However, it is notable that the flower Zenobia wore in Blithedale was real while this one is fake. It seems to indicate that Zenobia, like her flower, was more in her natural element in Blithedale, whereas in the city she must play a part and live up to a certain image of herself. Coverdale doesn't seem to understand this.

In the next instant, Coverdale realizes that it's only right for Zenobia to make herself as beautiful as she wants, but he always wonders who the true Zenobia is: the woman of luxury he meets in town, or the simple beauty he knew in Blithedale. Coverdale says their time together in Blithedale feels like a dream and asks if she's abandoned the project. Zenobia questions why he would think this and says it's ridiculous to limit one's self to one mode of life when there are so many available. However, she assures him that she thinks no less of people who do only embrace one lifestyle. Coverdale is irritated by what seems like unfair criticism of the people who have truly devoted their entire lives to Blithedale. He wants to make Zenobia reveal her true self instead of acting a part.

Coverdale prides himself on being a good judge of character, so when Zenobia makes these backhanded comments about the people at Blithedale, he feels humiliated. To him, it means he misjudged her character—she might not be the generous, kind, enthusiastic person he thought she was. Furthermore, he resents that Zenobia is deriding people who are living authentically while she's clearly being deceptive and false.

Coverdale coldly tells Zenobia that her description of single-minded people reminds him of Hollingsworth and his nonsensical philanthropic plans. As Coverdale predicted, Zenobia flares up in passionate anger, thus betraying her true feelings for Hollingsworth. Zenobia quickly recovers from her anger and scornfully tells him that while blind adherence to one idea can be ridiculous, great men only attain greatness through devotion to one cause. However, she supposes Coverdale wouldn't know anything about that, and so it's only natural that he'd think Hollingsworth is absurd instead of heroic. Coverdale doesn't respond to this but asks Zenobia if she brought Priscilla. He mentions that he always worried about Priscilla spending so much time with Hollingsworth. Coverdale observes that Hollingsworth could never be happy with an independent woman, only one he could absorb into himself, and he mentions how tenderly Hollingsworth treats Priscilla. Zenobia turns pale and calls Priscilla in.

Coverdale's comment about Hollingsworth is meant to evoke a natural response from Zenobia—not a fake one, but one that comes from the bottom of her heart and reveals her true character. This is a manipulative move on Coverdale's part and he comes off as something of a villain because he's willfully hurting her just to satisfy his own curiosity. Coverdale also plays on Zenobia's jealousy of Priscilla's relationship with Hollingsworth by mentioning how tender Hollingsworth is with Priscilla. For Zenobia, this is a reminder that she might lose Hollingsworth's heart to Priscilla.

CHAPTER 20: THEY VANISH

Priscilla immediately answers Zenobia's call and comes into the room. This is somewhat surprising to Coverdale, who initially thought Zenobia might prevent him from talking to Priscilla. However, Priscilla's complete lack of free will and choice makes her safe—there's no chance she'll tell Coverdale about Zenobia's plans. Coverdale tells Priscilla that seeing her is like seeing a dream, but she assures him she's real enough by squeezing his hand a little. Priscilla adds that Zenobia is more like a dream because she's so beautiful, but Coverdale is taken by how beautiful Priscilla is in her new dress and adornments. Zenobia asks Coverdale what he thinks of Priscilla and he notes a sad sort of kindness in the way Zenobia looks at her. Coverdale compares Priscilla's beauty to a flower, which Zenobia attributes to his poetic tendencies.

Coverdale is worried that Zenobia has forcibly removed Priscilla from Blithedale, probably to get her away from Hollingsworth so Zenobia doesn't have to compete with her. Coverdale thinks this because just before he left Priscilla told him that she never wanted to leave Blithedale because it was such a happy place. Furthermore, Coverdale knows that Westervelt is sometimes in the house—he possibly even lives there—and so he has reason to worry that Zenobia might have brought Priscilla and Westervelt together for nefarious purposes that might destroy Priscilla's happiness forever.

Zenobia wonders why Coverdale never considered falling in love with Priscilla, insinuating that social class had something to do with it. Coverdale replies that he would have made a fool of himself if he fell in love with Priscilla in Blithedale and then he slyly asks if Hollingsworth has seen Priscilla in her new dress. Zenobia lashes out and asks why Coverdale keeps bringing Hollingsworth up. She says that Coverdale doesn't understand how dangerous his words are. Coverdale explains that he's motivated by a sense of duty, which makes Zenobia angrier. She tells him that duty signifies bigotry, rude curiosity, meddlesomeness, and an irreverent tendency to put one's self in God's rightful place. Zenobia adds that she will hold Coverdale responsible for any mischief that arises out of his interference.

Zenobia's jab about social class preventing Coverdale from falling in love with Priscilla reveals Zenobia's own intuition—she knows that Coverdale is somewhat ashamed of his own class prejudices and strives to hide them. Zenobia's comment threatens to drag them out into the light of day. It is humiliating for Coverdale who thinks he has successfully hidden his unfair bias. Zenobia also says she'll hold Coverdale responsible if anything bad comes out of his meddling, which she knows will scare him. Coverdale wants to be the savior, and he would be horrified if anyone could rightfully accuse him of actually being the villain of this story, which is a kind of moral vanity.

Coverdale is on the verge of leaving after Zenobia's outburst, but he catches sight of Priscilla huddled in a corner and goes up to her first. He asks her if she left Blithedale of her free will and she tells him that she has none. Coverdale asks her if Hollingsworth knows where she is, and Priscilla says he urged her to come with Zenobia. Coverdale mentally notes that Hollingsworth is responsible for whatever happens. Before Coverdale can leave, Westervelt comes in and the sight of him makes Coverdale's skin crawl. Zenobia tells Priscilla it's time to leave, but Coverdale asks Priscilla if she knows where she's going and if she wants to go. Coverdale assures her that he's her friend, but Westervelt says Priscilla recognizes him as an older friend than either Coverdale or Hollingsworth. Westervelt beckons Priscilla to him and they leave.

Coverdale asks Priscilla so many questions about what she wants and if she feels like she has a choice because if she were to just admit that she's being compelled to do things she doesn't like then he can justify rescuing her. However, Coverdale fails to account for the fact that, as the ideal 19th century woman, one of Priscilla's defining characteristics is her submissiveness. She is so submissive that it simply doesn't occur to Priscilla that she can *have a choice or exert any free will.*

CHAPTER 21: AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

After Coverdale's interview with Zenobia and Priscilla, he admits that it would be reasonable for him to find new places to go and new people to spend time with, since they don't want him around. Instead, Coverdale decides to seek out Moodie and get more information about Priscilla from him. Coverdale goes to Moodie's usual bar to wait for him. Moodie isn't there, but Coverdale enjoys watching the barkeepers and drunk patrons. Coverdale thinks about how people turn to alcohol to feel young again and he wonders if anybody has poured alcohol into the fountain full of fish. Coverdale finally sees Moodie and offers to buy him lunch and a drink, which he accepts. Moodie talks about how wine reminds him of his youth and Coverdale says he'd love to hear some of Moodie's memories. Moodie is reluctant at first, but after a few glasses of wine, he shares his life story.

Coverdale's renewed determination to find out the truth about Zenobia and Priscilla's pasts is rooted in his belief that if he discovers the whole truth, he can somehow use it to save them from Westervelt. Moodie himself seems afraid to share what he knows about their pasts because it will reveal more about his own (as Coverdale has already discovered, Moodie is one of the ties that binds Priscilla to Zenobia).

CHAPTER 22: FAUNTLEROY

Moodie says the events of his story take place 25 years earlier and the story involves a man Moodie calls Fauntleroy. Fauntleroy is conceited, shallow, materialistic, and very wealthy. He only loves his wife and daughter for their beauty, which reflects well on him. After a few years of excessive spending Fauntleroy realizes he's about to lose everything to debt collectors and he gets caught conspiring to commit a crime to avoid financial ruin. Fauntleroy has to flee, his wife dies of shame, and his daughter is left in his brother's care. Fauntleroy settles in dirty city lodgings under a new name. For a while his family sends him a small allowance to keep him out of trouble, but his deep shame in himself and his desire not to be seen is what really keeps him out of trouble.

Fauntleroy is actually Moodie, although this may not actually be his original name. The first indication of this is that Fauntleroy, like Moodie, uses shadows and doorways to simultaneously move through society and keep himself out of sight. Also like Moodie, Fauntleroy lives in poverty in the city, trying to keep his present separate from his past.

Fauntleroy marries a seamstress who gives birth to his second daughter but dies shortly thereafter. Fauntleroy's second daughter is pale and nervous, but affectionate. Fauntleroy tells Priscilla stories about her beautiful, wealthy half-sister instead of fairy tales until she grows to love the idea of her sister above all things. This love helps keep Priscilla from succumbing to the despair that surrounds her. Priscilla's nervousness, overactive imagination, and pallid features earn her a reputation as a "ghost-child" among the people who live in the building. This reputation spreads and people tease Moodie, as he's now called, about his clairvoyant daughter. A mysterious but strikingly handsome man with a gold bar on his teeth starts visiting Priscilla. People don't suspect a scandal (Priscilla is too homely to be an object of lust), but they believe the man is a wizard with nefarious plans. Still, nobody quite understands his relationship with Priscilla.

This passage confirms that Moodie is Priscilla's father. Fauntleroy fills Priscilla's head with stories about her beautiful sister and all the wealth she enjoys, which highlights that Fauntleroy himself still loves wealth and misses his former lifestyle even though trying to maintain it cost him so much. The man with the gold teeth that comes to visit is evidently Westervelt (the gold bar on his teeth is one of his defining traits; Coverdale saw it when he met Westervelt in Blithedale). In this case, Priscilla's homeliness is a type of protection—Westervelt doesn't want to take sexual advantage of her, he just wants to exploit her quirks and oddities to make money (this will be seen later when Priscilla reveals that she's the Veiled Lady).

Meanwhile, Fauntleroy's first daughter grows up in wealth and luxury with Fauntleroy's brother. Without a mother's influence, the young girl is largely left to form her own character as a child. She is naturally passionate and self-willed, but also generous and kind. Zenobia's uncle dies while she's still young and she inherits his wealth. After this, her history is somewhat obscure. Rumors swirl about an attachment or marriage to an unprincipled but fascinating young man, but they disappear over time. The rumors don't ruin her reputation—she's so admired that most people assume that whatever she does is right without criticizing her very much. Most people believe the typical women's sphere is too narrow for Zenobia and they accept her choices. For inexplicable reasons, Zenobia chose to join Blithedale and Priscilla—who, at the time, was in a mysterious bondage—found out and followed her there.

Zenobia's wealth and independence are what save her from having to follow all of the same societal rules as most women. People must accept Zenobia's quirks because she's an heiress and therefore she can support herself; if she needed a man to support her financially, then she would likely have to conform to social norms to make herself marriageable. In fact, being wealthy makes her *an object of desire for men who want to marry for money. So, in Zenobia's case, her wealth allows her to compromise her reputation without fear; in Priscilla's case, her poverty and lack of beauty protect her from rumors about her reputation. Otherwise, both of them might have been ruined by the rumors that float around about them.*

A few months after Priscilla's departure, Zenobia goes to Fauntleroy's rooms. Coverdale doesn't know the details of their conversation, but he presents what he believes passed between them. Zenobia believes the man needs her charity, but he tells her not to give him money. Instead, he asks to be allowed to look at her. Fauntleroy tells her to keep her wealth, but with one condition—she must be no less than a sister to Priscilla. Zenobia leaves and Fauntleroy is glad that his former self still lives in Zenobia, who enjoys all his wealth without any of his shame. Still, he wonders if he's right to give up his wealth to Zenobia while Priscilla goes without. Fauntleroy decides wealth is useless to Priscilla, but he hopes Zenobia knows better than to hurt her. Little does he know, that very night Priscilla is either snatched away or Zenobia throws her away.

Fauntleroy's comment to Zenobia that she must be like a sister to Priscilla if she wants to keep her wealth is both a threat and a revelation. Because Zenobia's uncle has died, Fauntleroy actually has a superior legal claim on his wealth (Zenobia's inheritance) than she does. If she's not nice to Priscilla, Fauntleroy can rightfully claim the money (although Zenobia might not quire realize this in the moment). The threat also reveals that the two are sisters. This makes it look extra suspicious that, on this same night, Priscilla seems to disappear. Or, as Coverdale notes, Zenobia might have thrown her away to protect both her relationship with Hollingsworth and her wealth.

CHAPTER 23: A VILLAGE-HALL

Over the next few weeks, Coverdale struggles to put his memories of Blithedale and his concern for Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla behind him. Try as he might, he can't stop thinking about them and wondering what their lives are like beyond what he reads about Blithedale in the papers. Coverdale returns to his old life and friends, and he jokes about his project at Blithedale, downplaying its significance, but he's never physically far away from Blithedale. On one autumn day, Coverdale ventures out to a Lyceum-hall to see the Veiled Lady. The hall is crowded, but Coverdale notices a familiar form sitting nearby. He tries to surprise Hollingsworth by asking where Zenobia is, but Hollingsworth calmly replies that the last time he saw her, she was at Blithedale. Hollingsworth doesn't say more, so Coverdale listens to the people around them talking about the power magicians have over other people's emotions.

Even now that he knows Zenobia and Priscilla's secrets, Coverdale doesn't use the information to try to save them. In fact, he does the opposite and tries to forget them by slipping back into his old life and habits. This means that Coverdale actually is willing to abandon Blithedale since the most interesting part of life there (the mysteries surrounding Priscilla and Zenobia) have been explained and Coverdale feels like there's nothing he can do with the information, especially if they also abandoned the project. This shows the self-serving nature of his curiosity. When Coverdale asks Hollingsworth about Zenobia, Coverdale intends to surprise and perhaps even hurt Hollingsworth. The information that Zenobia is back in Blithedale could indicate that she's once again freed herself from Westervelt.

The audience calls for the show to start and a bearded man enters the stage. Coverdale recognizes Professor Westervelt; he shudders and asks Hollingsworth where Priscilla is but gets no answer. Westervelt beckons the Veiled Lady forward to take her seat on stage. Westervelt says that beneath her **veil**, the Lady is in the land of spirits and doesn't see or hear the audience. Several audience members test this claim by making loud noises near her ear, but she never responds. Hollingsworth abruptly steps onto the stage and tells her to come. She takes her veil off and Coverdale wonders at how she was betrayed but believes she kept her innocence throughout her ordeal. Under the veil, she was as safe and alone as if she were back at Eliot's Pulpit with Hollingsworth. The Lady runs to Hollingsworth.

Coverdale realizes that the real danger is not that Westervelt has Zenobia, but that Westervelt has Priscilla. Coverdale's question reveals his growing suspicion that Zenobia won her freedom from Westervelt by sacrificing Priscilla's. Even though Coverdale doesn't name Priscilla once she takes the veil off, it's clear that the Lady is Priscilla because Coverdale describes her being at Eliot's Pulpit and sitting at Hollingsworth's feet in Blithedale, which is something only Priscilla does in the narrative.

CHAPTER 24: THE MASQUERADERS

Two days later Coverdale decides to go back to Blithedale. It is a beautiful day and the closer Coverdale gets, the happier his heart is—he can almost imagine that Hollingsworth will warmly shake his hand, and Priscilla and Zenobia will greet him with open arms. Coverdale keeps thinking of them as he walks, sometimes bitterly thinking about how easily he gave up his whole heart to someone else's interests and questioning why he feels compelled to go back to them. He notes that it's dangerous to get too involved with the passions of a group he doesn't belong to. Coverdale wonders what he'll find at Blithedale and thinks fondly of the honest work he did there, calling it his home where he might be buried one day. Coverdale decides to sneak in and ascertain how things are going before presenting himself.

Coverdale isn't so much returning to Blithedale as he is returning to Zenobia, Priscilla, and Hollingsworth. When Coverdale left Blithedale, he worried that if he came back then nothing would be the same, but he still entertains the hope that somehow everything will have gone back to the way it was before he rejected Hollingsworth. Furthermore, Blithedale is where Coverdale did work that he's truly proud of and that he believes is more meaningful than his poetry. Still, Coverdale is suspicious and chooses to sneak in, which also gives him the option of sneaking back out if everything has changed for the worse.

Coverdale climbs into his hermitage to get a better view of the farm, but he doesn't see anyone outside. Confused, he climbs back down and searches for signs of life. Eventually, he hears familiar laughter and sneaks towards it. In a clearing, Coverdale sees that everyone is dressed up and dancing together. Some people are dressed as witches and devils, but Silas is wearing his usual clothes and watching the people dance and laugh. During a lull in the revelry, Coverdale laughs and someone recognizes his voice. They all dart into the woods to find him, but Coverdale eludes them. Lost in thought, he wanders around until he hears someone say his name. A woman's voice tells him to step forward, but she says he's missed quite the scene. Coverdale realizes he's at Eliot's Pulpit—Priscilla is sitting at Hollingsworth's feet and Zenobia is standing in front of them.

When Coverdale runs from the other people at Blithedale, it confirms that he's really there to find Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla, not the other friends he made there whose lives aren't so interesting. When Coverdale finds them at Eliot's Pulpit, it's clear that the catastrophe or crisis he knew must happen, has happened. Coverdale once looked forward to this, thinking he'll be able to move on with his life once the situation is resolved.

CHAPTER 25: THE THREE TOGETHER

Hollingsworth is wearing his usual clothes, but Zenobia and Priscilla are both in costume. Zenobia is wearing a jeweled **flower** in her hair still and looks like a queen, but one who's been dethroned or is on trial for her life. Coverdale realizes that the three have reached some kind of crisis and immediately wishes he was far away from them. He tries to excuse himself, but Hollingsworth and Zenobia say he's free to stay there. Zenobia says that if Coverdale had come in sooner he might have seen the darkest corners of the human heart exposed and she explains that she's been on trial. Looking around, Coverdale notes that Hollingsworth does look like a Puritan judge, Zenobia resembles a sorceress, and Priscilla looks like the pale victim. All that's missing is a pile of wood.

Zenobia is still wearing a fake flower, which indicates that she's still playing a part and her pride in herself is false. Interestingly, even though Coverdale has looked forward to witnessing the crisis in Zenobia, Priscilla, and Hollingsworth's love triangle, when he has the chance to do so he tries to run away. Instead, Zenobia and Hollingsworth insist that she should stay, thus forcing him to finally take a part in the drama he spent so long trying and failing to be more of a part of. The description of Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla as players in a witch trial reflects Hawthorne's interest in the 1692 Salem Witch Trials, in which one of his ancestors was a judge.

Zenobia tells Hollingsworth that it was unfair that one man has been her judge, jury, and accuser. She suggests that they should both plead their cases to Coverdale and let him judge them. Hollingsworth says he never meant to judge Zenobia except that he has a right to determine how he should treat her. Zenobia smiles and notes that it's so easy for men to hold a secret tribunal during which they judge and condemn a woman but set her free without a sentence. Unfortunately, it's also the only tribunal a woman really stands in awe of because anything short of acquittal is essentially a death sentence. Coverdale believes this confirms that he's walked in on the final moments of a crisis and realizes they must have discussed Zenobia's past, her connection with Westervelt, her and Hollingsworth's intentions towards each other, and how much Zenobia knew about Priscilla's victimization.

Zenobia resents that she's the only one who's being found guilty of doing something wrong. She wants Coverdale to hear both her and Hollingsworth's sides of the story because she knows Coverdale will validate her feelings that Hollingsworth is at fault, too. Coverdale knows that if the three of them are discussing Zenobia's past then they've discussed her sexual history, which means Priscilla and Hollingsworth now both know whether Zenobia has been a wife. This is something Coverdale obsessively thought about in his earliest days in Blithedale.

Hollingsworth starts to leave but Zenobia stops him and says it's only fair for him to answer her questions after she answered so many of his. Hollingsworth says he has nothing to hide. Zenobia asks if he ever thought of her as wealthy and Hollingsworth replies that he has the same opinion on that as the rest of the world. Zenobia says that three days earlier she learned about something that might make her poor, but she changes the subject and says that Hollingsworth knows what she was going to do with her wealth and asks if she ever demanded a promise in return for the money. Hollingsworth says she didn't. Zenobia accepts this and asks if he's in love with Priscilla. Hollingsworth says that he always felt like an older brother to her, but now he does love her.

Zenobia suspects that Hollingsworth only pretended to love her to get his hands on her money for his project. She did, indeed, freely promise to give him money without making demands in return. However, this calls into question whether Hollingsworth really does love Priscilla because they have all recently discovered that Moodie has a better claim to Zenobia's inheritance and can take it to give it to Priscilla instead. Hollingsworth might be claiming to love Priscilla because he wants the money, which would mean he has no honor, integrity, honesty, or any other good qualities they used to believe he had.

Zenobia lashes out and declares that she, at least, is a real woman—she might have faults and use cunning to achieve her ends, but she's still a real woman that might have become a better person if God had been kinder to her. Hollingsworth, on the other hand, is not a man, but a monster eaten up with conceit. Zenobia tells him that he's all self and disguises his conceit with self-deception. She accuses him of throwing Coverdale away for not joining his project and doing the same to her now that she's no longer "available." Hollingsworth says this is all a woman's limited view. Zenobia tells him to be silent because he doesn't know anything about men or women. She tells him to leave, but before walking away, Hollingsworth tells Priscilla to come with him. Zenobia smiles, sensing that Hollingsworth's faith in himself has been injured.

When Zenobia says she might not be "available," this could indicate that she's still married or it might have something to do with how flimsy her claim to her uncle's inheritance is. In a way, Hollingsworth needs Priscilla to choose to go with him because then he knows at least one person believes in him and thinks he's a good person. Zenobia's assault on his character has made him second guess himself and has confronted him with how much of his humanity he's lost because he devoted too much of himself to philanthropy.

Priscilla shakily stands up, totters over to Zenobia, and collapses at her feet. Zenobia tells Priscilla that she has won, and Hollingsworth is waiting for her. Priscilla gasps out that they're sisters. Coverdale understands this as Priscilla offering herself to Zenobia, but Zenobia takes it another way and says she's right. Zenobia explains that she only just found out about their relationship and that she just wanted a clear path before her. She asks Priscilla's forgiveness, but Priscilla is sobbing and says she feels like she's the guilty one. Zenobia assures her that she's not guilty and asks what she'll do when the love in Hollingsworth's heart burns out. Priscilla says she'll die when that happens, which makes Zenobia smile. As Priscilla leaves with Hollingsworth, Coverdale realizes she'll never believe Hollingsworth was guilty of anything because of her all-consuming love. Zenobia drops to her knees and cries against the rocks.

Zenobia tried to clear her path to Hollingsworth by essentially giving Priscilla to Westervelt. This is why she asks forgiveness in the end. Although she doesn't clearly admit it, Zenobia is ashamed of herself. She's not a villainous person by nature, and her decision to hand Priscilla over to Westervelt was uncharacteristic of her. Priscilla's love makes her blind to Hollingsworth's faults, but she notably doesn't deny that his love for her might soon burn out. On some level, Priscilla knows Hollingsworth doesn't love her like she loves him.

CHAPTER 26: ZENOBIA AND COVERDALE

Zenobia forgets that Coverdale is there, but he decides to stay and witness her grief. He draws an analogy between her situation and his own but doesn't explain what he means. Coverdale wishes he could comfort Zenobia but he knows he can't. Finally, Zenobia stands back up and notices Coverdale. She says he must be turning the whole event into a ballad and begs him to recite it. Coverdale tells her there's an ache in his soul, but she prattles on about the tragedy and her faith in his ability to turn sympathy into ballads. Coverdale asks her what the moral should be and she says it's either than any stroke meant to land on a man's steel helmet will inevitably land on a woman's unprotected heart, which is why it's best to stay out of battle; or that there's a united cause against those who deviate from the beaten track.

Coverdale starts to hint at his own secret, which he reveals in the final line of the narrative. He says there's cause to draw an analogy between his situation and Zenobia's, which implies that he's lost someone he loves, too. Coverdale almost opens up to Zenobia about this by mentioning the ache in his soul, but she mistakes his meaning and thinks that Coverdale just has a lot of sympathy and pity for her heartbreak. Zenobia thinks that she's somehow being punished for not adhering to standards of traditional femininity—she's too outspoken, passionate, independent, and sexual.

Coverdale says this moral is too stern, but Zenobia changes the subject and says Hollingsworth has thrown away something that would have been better for him. She wonders what Priscilla can do for him and then claims the best Priscilla can do is give him all her love without real sympathy. Zenobia says there will be times when Hollingsworth needs the intellectual sympathy that she could give him, but Priscilla cannot. Coverdale calls Hollingsworth a wretch, which upsets Zenobia. She says that Hollingsworth did nothing wrong, that everything was her fault and she's happy Hollingsworth separated himself from her. Zenobia goes silent and then tells Coverdale that she'll leave Blithedale but first asks him to tell Hollingsworth that he's murdered her and to give Priscilla her jeweled **flower**, which she rips out of her hair. Coverdale mentally notes that this is like watching a queen throwing away her crown.

Zenobia again mistakes Coverdale's meaning when he says that Hollingsworth is a wretch—he's not thinking about what Hollingsworth did to Zenobia, but what Hollingsworth might do to Priscilla. Coverdale still thinks that Priscilla is throwing her heart away on Hollingsworth and the pain of realizing this one day might kill her. He thinks it's irresponsible for Hollingsworth to lead Priscilla on, knowing how naïve and innocent she is. Without her flower, Zenobia no longer seems like Zenobia. Coverdale has long associated the flower with Zenobia's character, so taking the flower off, from Coverdale's perspective, is like erasing her own identity.

While Zenobia talks, Coverdale admires how beautiful she looks. She notices his look and gets pleasure from it. She tells him she should have thought of winning his love instead of Hollingsworth's—she probably would have succeeded, and most people would think Coverdale is more worth winning. Coverdale asks Zenobia where she'll go and she says it doesn't matter, she's just sick of "playing at philanthropy" and says that they've all stumbled into the emptiest form of mockery. Still, she admits they got some happiness from it and bids Coverdale farewell. Coverdale takes her hand and kisses it before she leaves. Once Zenobia is out of sight, Coverdale can't shake the feeling that she's still there. Despite this, exhaustion overtakes him, and he falls asleep. When he wakes up, the moon is high in the sky and he's trembling.

Zenobia says she's been "playing at philanthropy," which seems to indicate that she has, to some extent, been playing a part at Blithedale. This leaves Coverdale to continue questioning whether Zenobia was ever being her authentic self at Blithedale and what she really hoped to get out of the experience. Some readers believe that this moment is not literally one of Coverdale falling asleep, but instead it is another example of his unreliability as a narrator: it's possible that he's actually repressing his involvement in the tragedy that will soon transpire by convincing himself that he was asleep the whole time.

CHAPTER 27: MIDNIGHT

Around midnight Coverdale goes to the farmhouse and calls to Hollingsworth to come out. Coverdale is alarmed by the sound of his own voice. Hollingsworth comes outside and asks what's wrong. Coverdale asks if he's seen Zenobia and Hollingsworth states that he hasn't, nor does he expect to. Silas leans out a window to see what's going on, so Coverdale urges him to come down and help them. Silas grumbles, but he pulls his clothes on. Meanwhile, Coverdale shows Hollingsworth a handkerchief and explains his suspicions. When Silas comes out, Hollingsworth explains the same thing to him. Silas bluntly repeats that Coverdale thinks Zenobia drowned herself and wonders why she would even think of doing it. Coverdale urges Silas to help him find out, so Silas goes to get equipment, muttering the whole time that it must be a mistake.

Zenobia asked Coverdale to tell Hollingsworth that he murdered her. Now that Coverdale suspects that Zenobia has committed suicide, her words take on new meaning. Zenobia is not an impulsive person, so she probably did know what she was going to do when she gave Coverdale this message. This also makes the moment she removes her flower all the more symbolic—she really is removing her identity, both by giving away her flower and then by ending her own life.

Silas, Coverdale, and Hollingsworth hurry down to the water. After waking up, Coverdale felt himself drawn to the spot. He points out some footprints leading to the water and Silas finds Zenobia's shoe; Coverdale takes it as a keepsake. The men get into a boat and start rowing back and forth, stabbing a hay-rake into the water trying to find Zenobia's body. After several passes, Coverdale wonders if they'll ever find her and Silas says she probably just lost her shoe in the mud and will laugh at them all over breakfast in the morning. However, moments later Hollingsworth jabs the rake into the water, and they feel him hit Zenobia's body. They pull her body to shore and lie her out under a tree. Her body is rigid, and it almost looks like she's praying. Hollingsworth is horrified when he realizes he stabbed her heart with the rake.

Hollingsworth is so struck by the fact that he accidently stabbed Zenobia in the heart because he's also aware that he broke her heart just a few hours previously. This is the moment when Hollingsworth really understands that he caused Zenobia so much pain that she felt she had to kill herself. Even though Zenobia's body looks like she died in the act of prayer, it also indicates that she struggled in her final moments and was probably very scared. This makes her death even more tragic because it seems like she didn't really want to die.

Coverdale, Hollingsworth, and Silas make a bier to carry Zenobia's body back. The thought occurs to Coverdale that Zenobia probably would have chosen a different method of suicide if she knew how terrifying her body would look. He believes she was thinking of pictures of gorgeous maidens peacefully floating down a river. Coverdale argues that this shouldn't take away from the tragedy of the situation, but instead it actually highlights how corrupt society is that not even committing suicide can be simple. The men get Zenobia to the farmhouse and leave her body with some tire-women.

Part of the reason Zenobia and Coverdale established Blithedale was to enjoy a simpler life. However, in choosing how to end her life, Zenobia's choices reveal that she never really embraced simplicity. She tries to choose a picturesque death that will make her look beautiful and peaceful. Instead, her corpse seems to reflect her inner pain and turmoil. Tire-women are women who specialize in preparing corpses for burial, which is why Coverdale and Hollingsworth give them Zenobia's body.

CHAPTER 28: BLITHEDALE-PASTURE

There is no cemetery in Blithedale, so they must discuss where to bury Zenobia. Coverdale suggests Eliot's Pulpit, but Hollingsworth insists that they bury her on the hillside where they planned to build their cottage. Priscilla and Moodie go to the ceremony together, as do Hollingsworth and Coverdale. Together, they watch while Zenobia's coffin is lowered into the grave. A strange man that Coverdale recognizes comes up and is the first one to throw some dirt on the coffin. Coverdale walks over to him and Westervelt says Zenobia's suicide was foolish. Coverdale argues that she had every reason to—she'd lost her love, her money, and her projects all failed. Furthermore, Zenobia labored under a burden only Westervelt truly knows about. Westervelt argues that Zenobia had a whole life ahead of her and could have done something great in the world either on her own or through her influence over men.

Early on in Blithedale, there was an unproven rumor that Hollingsworth and Zenobia wanted to build a cottage to live in together. Earlier, when Coverdale tried to find out the truth, Hollingsworth gave him a vague answer. Now, however, Hollingsworth confirms that this was their plan (that's why he wants to bury Zenobia there), which also confirms that they had a deep, meaningful relationship at one time. It's notable that Westervelt is the first one to throw dirt in Zenobia's grave because that privilege is typically reserved for spouses or close family. Westervelt seems to be confirming that he and Zenobia were married once, which is the "miserable bond" Zenobia so badly wanted to escape from when Coverdale heard them talking in the woods.

Coverdale says nothing Westervelt just described would've satisfied Zenobia's heart. Westervelt contemptuously says she would have learned to control that. Coverdale asks how Westervelt is connected to Zenobia, but then says he doesn't want to know exactly how Westervelt controlled her—if their bond could only be dissolved through death, then it's better that she's dead. Westervelt says it doesn't matter what he was to Zenobia because she's beyond his reach and has thrown her life away. Coverdale hopes that heaven annihilates Westervelt. Still, Coverdale admits that Westervelt is right about how much potential Zenobia had and mourns that she felt so defeated by the loss of her love that she was compelled to kill herself. Coverdale blames this on the world, which insists that women's existence should rely on her relationships with men while men have so many other options.

Zenobia ultimately takes her secrets to the grave, at least as far as Coverdale is concerned. Ironically Coverdale is the one person who was most interested in her secrets and he's the only one left who didn't get to hear about her history directly from her. Zenobia's death also highlights just how devastating it was for a woman in the 19th century—who had been raised to believe that her relationships to men are what defined her—to lose the man she loves.

Coverdale worries about Priscilla but knows that her heart only has room for a single all-consuming affection. While Zenobia's death is heartbreaking, it doesn't destroy Priscilla. The worst that can happen to her is if Hollingsworth is unkind. In the present, Coverdale says Priscilla is still alive, so Hollingsworth is clearly still kind to her. Rhetorically, he asks if Hollingsworth should be left to enjoy Priscilla's devotion after doing so much evil. With this question in mind, he went to find Hollingsworth and Priscilla a few years after Zenobia's funeral. Coverdale sees them walking, but Priscilla is protective and tries to indicate to Coverdale not to come forward. He does anyway. Coverdale asks how many prisoners Hollingsworth has reformed. Hollingsworth calmly replies that he's been busy with a single murder. This breaks Coverdale's heart as he remembers Zenobia's final message to Hollingsworth—he's still haunted by her.

When Coverdale confronts Hollingsworth, it's with the intention of hurting and punishing him for the role he played in Zenobia's suicide. Coverdale has long believed that Hollingsworth is incapable of human emotion because he's too devoted to philanthropy, which is why it's so moving for Coverdale to realize that Hollingsworth has changed and deeply regrets how he treated Zenobia. Furthermore, Zenobia's final message to Hollingsworth—that he is her murderer and she will haunt him—seems to have come true, but in the end she actually forgave him so it can be inferred that she wouldn't be happy to see how miserable Hollingsworth is now.

Coverdale says the moral of Hollingsworth's life is that when a person devotes their entire being to philanthropy, it can destroy their heart even though their intentions are good. Returning to Zenobia's grave, Coverdale says he doesn't have a doubt that **plants** grow in abundance above her and that nature has reclaimed her body in death, although a crop of weeds has sprouted up from where her heart should be.

Coverdale was always curious about what parts of Zenobia were natural and which were artificial. To him, there is something poetic in the thought that nature has literally reclaimed Zenobia by using her body as fertilizer. This recalls the symbolism throughout the book of Zenobia's flower; while she wore a flower to signal her pride in herself while she was alive, even in death there are plants growing around her body, perhaps showing how her legacy lives on.

CHAPTER 29: MILE'S COVERDALE'S CONFESSION

Coverdale notes that he hasn't been a very prominent figure in his own story—he has very little to tell. He left Blithedale a week after they buried Zenobia and hasn't returned since. Sometimes he thinks fondly of his time there and all that Blithedale was supposed to become. Coverdale writes that if any of the original founders were still there, he might consider joining them to enjoy the final years of his life. Unfortunately, the community ultimately failed and only paupers are there now. After leaving, Coverdale traveled extensively, but he never married. He leaves social reformation to others but insists that if he found a cause worth dying for then he'd be willing to do so. Still, he hasn't changed all that much. He has one secret to reveal that might explain his disappointing life and shed new light on his past behavior: he was in love with Priscilla.

Coverdale's ultimate revelation of his love for Priscilla explains why he felt so compelled to save her and took such a serious interest in her past. However, Zenobia's earlier accusation that he would never fall in love with Priscilla because she's so far below him socially leaves the reader to question if this is why Coverdale never seemed to actively pursue Priscilla. On the other hand, he might have kept his distance because he knew that Priscilla loved Hollingsworth and Coverdale just didn't want to endure the pain of rejection. Coverdale's love for Priscilla is also why he saw an analogy between himself and Zenobia when Hollingsworth and Priscilla left together—they did both lose someone they loved deeply.

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