Decidedly to its credit, modern literature is moving closer to certain sciences that, up until now, art and poetry have carefully avoided: indeed, contemporary writing has become a veritable course in moral medicine. The other day, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* put before our eyes the evidence in the great debate over the question of slavery.¹ Besides that, other recent novels and literary works frequently have called attention to the condition of the English working or rural classes. In Miss Fuller’s *Memoirs* we had an opportunity to analyze moral aberrations, dangerous subtleties, and the ravages of pride.² A study of this latter class of maladies is what America now sends us in *The Blithedale Romance* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. This time the question is not about the miseries and sorrows wrought by slavery and its injustices; instead we are presented with the philosophical foolishness and social deviance of the literati. With scientific superstitions and animal magnetism supplanting religion and the supernatural world, with a belief in electrical currents replacing a belief in eternal ideas, with the laws of the material world substituting for the laws of the moral world, with Fourier’s passionate attraction replacing the sacrament of marriage, with the idea of obligation replaced by the idea of happiness and the vague impulse of devotion toward one’s peers founded on the self-centered desire for individual well-being, we see the refined, the subtle, the quintessential illustration of the moral principle articulated by Molière’s Sganarelle: “When I have drunk and eaten well, I want everyone
else in my house to be intoxicated.”⁴ A different kind of social exploitation has not been sufficiently analyzed—namely, the exploitation of an individual by his peers, not to achieve material gains, but to satisfy an abstract idée fixe, a systematic mania, a philosophical hobbyhorse. These are the beautiful things that the subtle and ingenious Mr. Hawthorne offers us in his latest work.

Before beginning an analysis of this book—a book that takes us back six years and makes us daydream of a time filled with intellectual debate, intellectual frivolity, naive philosophical musings, and ambiguous aspirations for human betterment—we would like to sketch briefly the general character of Hawthorne’s talent. We know that even in this journal the author of The Scarlet Letter has found a spiritual admirer.⁴ All the same, The Blithedale Romance will be an indecipherable enigma unless the reader knows something of the author and his mental disposition.

Nathaniel Hawthorne is a true American, descended from the first settlers of New England. In certain Walter Scott novels, we remember those dreadful characters, walking alone in the countryside, who read the Bible aloud with sword in hand.⁵ We recognize those invincible men who dominate seventeenth-century English history—Scottish Presbyterians, Anglican dissenters who were shorn of their ears and put in the stocks, Cromwell’s martial saints, the Mayflower emigrants. These zealous and somber characters—“grim and earnest” as the English would say—resemble Hawthorne’s ancestors. It has been two hundred and twenty-five years since the first Hawthorne arrived in America, one of the colonists who built the small town of Salem, Massachusetts, and who, as his descendant has said, struck the family’s roots deep into the soil of New England.⁶ The first Hawthorne was a terrible man. “He was a soldier, legislator, judge; he was a ruler in the Church; he had all the Puritanic traits, both good and evil” (SL 9).

Tolerance was not exactly his defining trait. The Quakers have immortalized his name in their histories as a reminder of the persecution and injustice to which he subjected them. His son, who inherited both his virtues and his bigotry, made his mark by branding agents of the devil in the village of Salem, notorious for its witch trials. This is the stock from which Nathaniel Hawthorne comes. Humbly and obscurely perpetuated by shopkeepers and seafarers, this family at last produced an artist and a novelist. Whenever Hawthorne speaks of his terrible forebears, he speaks with respect, almost with fear. He asks this century’s forgiveness for their intolerance and zeal, because he is liberal and a democrat, a would-be socialist and humanitarian. In this he is mistaken. His ancestors were capable of burning witches, but they never would have joined the communal experiment at Roxbury.⁷
In the most remarkable preface to his novel entitled The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne imagines some of his ancestors discussing and judging the behavior of the latest descendant of their family. What would they say about him? Certainly, they would not approve of his ambitions nor would they applaud his literary successes. “What is he?” murmurs one grey shadow of my forefathers to the other. ‘A writer of story books! What kind of business in life—what mode of glorifying God, or being serviceable to mankind in his day and generation—may that be? Why, the degenerate fellow might as well have been a fiddler!’ Such are the compliments bandied between my great grandsires and myself, across the gulf of time! And yet, let them scorn me as they will, strong traits of their nature have intertwined themselves with mine” (SL 10).

In this, Hawthorne is not mistaken. In spite of his fondness for tolerance, progress, and democracy, the old Puritan nature lives on in him. Hawthorne’s talent marvelously explains the persistence of ancestral values that are perpetuated over time—the “music of the blood,” as Calderón says, that (especially in provincial society) repeats in successive generations the same melody but with different variations. Hawthorne betrays the symptoms: he rarely goes to church, but even at home can hear the hymns of the faithful and the exhortations of the minister. His ideas would have been anathema to his forebears and his profession would have been detested. He no longer believes and lives the way they did, but he does have their intellectual outlook. He may no longer have their *soul*, but he does have their *spirit*. He follows their practice of strict investigation and pitiless analysis. Only a descendant of the Puritans would be capable of devoting himself to the perpetual examination of conscience that one finds in Hawthorne’s work. He alone would be capable of excavating the recesses of the soul to discover not treasure, but rather the repressed evidence of human frailty, finding subjects of horror, sleeping reptiles, witnesses to forgotten crimes. The very agreeable and useful ability to deceive oneself does not belong to the present-day Hawthorne any more than it did to his ancestors. His eyes are as piercing as those of a lynx. He can apprehend lurking evil. He can discover the devil in his many disguises, even those that appear honorable. He can say with John Bunyan: “I have seen that there are roads that leave from heaven and go straight to hell.” His true foundation lies in his Puritanical nature. Upon that foundation, the nineteenth century has overlaid the ideas of liberalism, democracy, and socialism. Our times have also given Hawthorne his literary manner: his love of color, his romanticism, his facility in handling his material. He also has another quality that sets our century apart from all others in matters of literature: a willingness
to extrapolate meaning from a first encounter—a strange face, the color of someone’s hair, a mysterious event—with as much passionate conviction as if it were the absolute truth.

In the life of Hawthorne, there are three principal events. All three are related in his books: his participation in the Fourierist Roxbury community that has resulted in *The Blithedale Romance*; his time spent at Concord in the old venerable domicile that brought us *Mosses from an Old Manse*; and his stint as an employee at Salem’s custom house that enabled him to form the idea and collect the materials for *The Scarlet Letter*. In Massachusetts he was a part of a small group of intellectuals and also the close friend of Miss Fuller. “In 1842,” wrote Emerson, “Nathaniel Hawthorne, already then known to the world by his Twice-Told Tales, came to live in Concord, in the ‘Old Manse,’ with his wife, who was herself an artist. With these welcomed persons Margaret formed a strict and happy acquaintance. She liked their old house, and the taste which had filled it with new articles of beautiful form, yet harmonized with the antique furniture left by the former proprietors.”

Hawthorne has been influenced by many different philosophies and genres, but they have not marked him indelibly. He is a man with a sharp mind who knew how to escape the despotism (something that is not always easy) of the men with whom he has lived. Hawthorne has lived among utopians, reformers, sectaries, and *philosophes*. Never did he give in to them. While he was attracted to some of these secular religions, he never became a convert to any of them. There is a very curious passage in the preface to *The Scarlet Letter*. The author recounts that, when he became a humble customs inspector, he felt no dismay with the practical work he had to do and that he even found great charm in his duties. Tired of philosophy and abstraction, he escaped the yoke of ideas and his friends.

After my fellowship of toil and impracticable schemes with the dreamy brethren of Brook Farm; after living for three years within the subtle influence of an intellect like Emerson’s; after those wild, free days on the Assabet, indulging fantastic speculations, beside our fire of fallen boughs, with Ellery Channing; after talking with Thoreau about [pine-trees and] Indian relics in his hermitage at Walden; after growing fastidious by sympathy with the classic refinement of Hillard’s culture; after becoming imbued with poetic sentiment at Longfellow’s hearthstone—it was time, at length, that I should exercise other faculties of my nature, and nourish myself with food for which I had hitherto had little appetite. Even the old Inspector was desirable, as a change of diet, to a man who had known Alcott.
This passage is important, and the impetus behind these lines circulates in all of Hawthorne's work. He is mistrustful. He is afraid of being the fool. He uses his wits to maintain his intellectual independence. He refuses to accept the domination of ideas; he fears that this would compromise his originality. He wants to put his talent above moral ideas. All of this is in vain and possibly even criminal! At the end of The Blithedale Romance, Hawthorne puts these remarkable words into the mouth of Miles Coverdale (who is a stand-in for the author himself): "I have no goal. . . . I am disoriented; my life has become completely sterile, and I have arrived at an impasse."11 Hawthorne's work, for all its perfection, suggests an analogous kind of incompleteness. It does not have an overriding purpose; it is not held together by a unifying principle. His works are artistic fantasies, insightful but inconsistent. A certain skepticism dominates them all. Clearly, the author is disillusioned with many things and sure of nothing. This defiance, this fear of the domination of ideas that is very common among artists and writers, always produces the same deplorable results. The writer must have a purpose, just like a politician or a general. He must be the servant of an idea, and not allow it to become an auxiliary vehicle for his talent. If he falls into this sin of pride and of rebellion against morality, he will be punished. His skepticism will not keep him from being a fool. He will fall into all the excesses of the systems of thought that he has visited out of curiosity and while looking for inspiration. He will only attain the ridiculous instead of finding the real, and, at the end of thirty years of a life of literature, he will find himself to be a great dilettante, an author of admirable fragments that have no common aim, admirable essays that answer no need. This observation does not apply to Hawthorne exclusively—there are more examples of this elsewhere than in America.

We have said that Nathaniel Hawthorne is a quintessential American. In this regard, we shall see that similarities drawn thus far between American and European literatures perhaps have been exaggerated: as soon as a new author appears, we hear it said, "He is not an American, he's English, he's German." I often hear people say that Emerson is a German. Some people have spoken of Lamb in relation to Hawthorne; I have even heard Godwin's name mentioned! Nothing is more certain than that Emerson has studied German literature. But the application he makes of it is essentially American: his morality, style, eloquence—all are entirely original and American. No one is formed on his own; every writer receives his education in a particular literature. This does not at all mean that he cannot be original. Our French writers all were educated by means of Latin literature. Are they less French because of it? To say that Emerson is German is no more accurate than to
say, for example, that Montaigne is Roman. The resemblance that has been supposed between Hawthorne and Lamb is no better founded. Here and there in Hawthorne’s work, there are little essays that resemble Lamb’s; in general, however, nothing less resembles Lamb’s delicate pages (that delicious writer’s quaintness, his little passions and small bachelor disappointments, the small egotisms of his excellent heart and the small sensualities of his exquisite soul) than the lugubrious stories, the merciless and almost perverse analysis of the supersubtle American storyteller. Neither does Hawthorne resemble Godwin because he strikes an entirely different chord. Godwin has only one deep and overriding sentiment—justice. He is violent, passionate, like a man who has only one love and one hate. It is not at all for pleasure that he speaks to us of terrible things and shows us frightening scenes. Hawthorne, on the contrary, loves the funereal and terrible; he looks for it, he has a taste for it as some people have a taste for cemeteries. Whereas Godwin’s gothic tales foment anger, Hawthorne’s remain cool and dispassionate. Once again, this indeed is the author of *The Blithedale Romance*. He is certainly an original. He is the most American writer that the United States has produced since Emerson.

The characteristic element of Hawthorne’s talent is his dramatic power. He has what I will call a feeling for impalpable things to the utmost degree: fear, solitude, terror of annihilation—above all, the apprehension of those monstrous fancies that are spontaneously and unpredictably born in even the most moral and spotless minds. After reading his work, we tremble to examine ourselves for fear of finding some latent madness, some thought of crime, some unsuspected depravity. His characters are truly mad philosophers who reason with a desperate logic and who abandon themselves to enormous eccentricities. Here is a minister who puts a black veil over his face and who dies without taking it off, a symbol of human egoism and man’s mistrust of his peers. There is an old man who, at sixty, marries a woman to whom he had been engaged in his youth, but whose arrival at the wedding chapel is marked by the sound of a death knell; the groom is covered in a funeral shroud, to be joined with his bride no longer for life, but instead for the eternity of the tomb. Elsewhere there is a character who sets out to find the Unpardonable Sin and who, after a thousand pilgrimages, finds it in himself. This Unforgivable Sin was to put affection at the mercy of reason, to break the hearts of those who love us in order to feel the rapture of immoral pride—in a word, to trample the human race like the idolatrous chariots of India that careen over the bodies of the faithful—in order to satiate a perverse intellectual ambition. The funereal dominates. An odor similar to that which surrounds mortuary preparations—the pall,
the boxwood branch that is placed in holy water, and the smell of those sadly everlasting flowers\textsuperscript{15}—rises to your nostrils and makes your head spin. The religious terror of Protestantism, the fear of eternal damnation, circulates in these tales without the author’s knowledge. And yet, in spite of this dramatic talent, Hawthorne’s works are cold. A certain transcendental skepticism permeates his stories. He judges and explains human actions. He does not allow us to arrive at our own interpretations or to make judgments of our own free will. His characters are all intellectual abstractions: they are too metaphysical, they have no blood, no entrails, no muscles—they rarely even have tears.

Hawthorne’s tales have made a bizarre vision pass before my eyes: I see myself multiplied a hundred times in miniature, and everyone of me has just been caught in the filaments of a delicate web, at the center of which yet another me sits watching all the rest! The American romancer’s talent makes us think of a spider’s web, a seine that surprises a fish, a snare that holds a bird captive, the insect held under the microscope of a scientist or pinned in the herbarium of a naturalist—of all the ways to be caught in a trap. In a word, we cannot help attributing to him an egoism that is peculiar to an artistic nature that is afraid of nothing, that profits from everything and most innocently amasses little treasures of observation and anecdote without emotion, without hate, without sympathy. All the artists and poets who have had this capacity for cold, impartial, lucid, and indifferent analysis have produced finely tooled, accomplished, well composed, often profound works, but from which passion is lacking, sometimes even absent. This is the case for Hawthorne: his dramatic effects and the very real terror that they invoke are equally abstract. Our minds shudder—but not our entire being—when we contemplate these dramas that seem to take place between two or three ideas in one of the regions of the human brain.

With Hawthorne there is also a very delicate point that we will not insist upon, but which we are obliged to note: his writings are ambiguous and display many different mannerisms. At first it is impossible to know what to think about the author’s general philosophy: What does he think? What does he believe? What doctrines does he support? If the author wanted simply to entertain us, why then this profusion of philosophical ideas? Why such profound depth beneath the details? To what end does he employ his powers of analysis? If he wants to instruct us, why can we never perceive his general idea, his explicit intention? His mind seems like an intricate timepiece, chiming minutes, but not hours. The details of his work are admirable—the first thought is almost always imperceptible. Yet these writings are ambiguous because the author loves to play with a number of dangerous things.
He has a predilection for suspect notions; we even perceive here and there the passing shadow of the taboo. Essentially there is something unhealthy in his work that at first we do not discern, but that in the long run acts upon us like a very weak and very slow poison. Such reading is difficult to bear: it leaves us chagrined and morose, uncertain of what to think about a host of ideas important to man and society.

Let us drop this unpleasant subject. Hawthorne is an analyst and he constructs his society out of intellectual types—this is more or less obvious in his writings. Among the different influences that have affected him, Emerson's has been the most significant. In many short sketches, in a number of passages in his novels, this influence is easily noted. He has made numerous applications of Emerson's philosophical counsels and has rendered his abstractions into concrete, dramatic, and animated form. We know that Emerson's thought is epitomized in the essay “Self-Reliance”: spiritual excellence comes only when it acts upon instinct itself, when man's depraved will does not overexcite it or impel it to diseased modes of action. Self-reliance has its sole worth insofar as it joins a man's activity with a child's innocence and naïveté. Let childlike simplicity and tranquility be the law of your nature, Emerson instructs his fellow Americans, and you will again see an age of miracles, prophets, and saints; your life will be surrounded by new forms, new colors—fresh and original. Hawthorne has transported this idea to a tale called “The Great Stone Face.” Somewhere in New England, there lies an outcropping of rocks arranged in such a way that, from a distance, it offers the viewer a profile of a gigantic human face. A prophetic tradition, which embodies American pride (and which recalls the legend of the severed head found beneath Rome's Capitol), says that there will appear in America a man whose traits will resemble those of the Great Stone Face. This man will be the greatest figure on earth, he will dominate America, and through him America will dominate the universe. From childhood, a young American who has heard this legend looks everywhere for the man whose visage is similar to the Stone Face; others around him do the same and think they have found him: first they gather around a rich merchant whose vessels are sailing the seas and who holds in his hands tremendous capital; next they flock to a general who has won many battles; then they cleave to an eloquent orator. “He is the very image of the Great Stone Face!” they cry, but they are always let down and the great man never appears. Meanwhile, the young child becomes an innocent devoted man. With quiet modesty, he accomplishes the work that, little by little, is put before him by obligation or necessity. He earns his keep, helps his neighbors—even with the smallest of jobs—and over time he finds that by excelling in life he has earned a fine
reputation without even thinking about it. His neighbors, his city, then the state, and then the entire Nation, perceive that they have among them a man who grew up inconspicuously, like a solitary oak in the forest, simple, but full of strength all at once. And the traits of this man resemble those of the Great Stone Face. Another tale, “The Threefold Destiny,” contains Emerson’s idea that our most infinite wishes can be realized in the most limited space and that we should be content to stay there without chasing after fate. A young man dreams of three things: that he will discover treasure; that the most beautiful woman in the world will love him; that he will be named king and rule over all mankind. He leaves to search for all of these things, and, after many long years of sojourning, returns without finding anything, weary and sad. Upon his return, he discovers the treasure at home, at the base of a tree in his garden: a young girl, a companion from childhood, gives him her heart. And, with regard to temporal power, the responsibilities of a village schoolmaster compensate him amply: he who forms human character and instructs a child to embrace virtue—is not he a veritable king more than a dictator or czar?

We now know the writer’s characteristics and influences. His latest book will shed light on the writer himself and on certain facets of an intellectual movement in the United States. Around 1840, a group of dreamers formed a Fourierist association in Roxbury, Massachusetts, under the direction of George Ripley. A crowd of young enthusiasts made up this association, some of whom Hawthorne names in the preface to his new novel: Mr. Channing (Junior), Mr. Parker, the poet Dana, utopians, philanthropists, and several young women. From the memory of his stay with the association at Brook Farm, Hawthorne has selected the elements of his new novel. He has not written a history, nor does he chronicle the association’s activities. He gives us the novel and says less about what did happen there than about what might have happened. If this tale has a moral, it is incontestably the following: utopian societies are more impossible for intellectuals than for the rest of humanity for the simple reason that the most educated, more quickly prone to fantasizing than others, also recognize their mistakes more promptly and find living in the absurd intolerable.

What is socialism in the United States? We have spoken about this question—a question that is raised out of necessity by Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel—many times here. Socialism has awakened interest in the United States and still captivates certain types of demagogues. If you wanted to know which class sports the greatest number of socialists, the rich and educated would be a good bet. There are two reasons for this: one is literary, the other clearly political.
The political reason is unique: socialism has the allure of science; it speaks of political harmony, hierarchy, and remuneration according to deeds of merit. Where are these things most lacking? Quite possibly in the American Union. There, the multitude is an absolute master: it rules, governs, makes laws, and makes the state in its own image. The United States present the aspect of a large multitude of people who are only ephemerally linked together, forming groups that are broken as quickly as created, joining together on one issue, disbanding because of another. This is the image that comes to mind when thinking of this country. Minorities count for nothing and have no power, no matter how cultivated or moral they may be. Thus, the idea that there are higher laws than those of the Constitution has entered many minds. It has been said that there have been men who are more righteous than entire nations and that they have claims over and above the majority. The abolitionists of the North, for example, a great majority of whom are Whigs, have taken this idea from the socialists and have made it a weapon against the South. When they are accused of attacking the Compromise of 1850, they protest that there is a law more fundamental than political law. This is the famous theory of the higher law that the abolitionists, the Syracuse convention, Seward, Hale, Gerritt Smith, and many others have used so much in recent years. Socialist doctrines are more favorable to a strong central government than to the original ideals of democracy. There are even highbrow Whig newspapers—the New York Tribune, for example—composed with talent, that are drenched with socialism. Additionally, the democrats, partisans of government by the masses, arm themselves with all the socialist ideas that appear favorable to the progress of the multitude. There is also a sort of agrarian law—The Homestead Act—that has been under discussion for the last two years a law that would give one-hundred-sixty acres of land for free to any family who agrees to cultivate it for five years. This project, rejected so far by the Whigs, has given rise to speeches where socialist ideas naturally find their place. The thinkers and well-educated, who grow weary more quickly than others of the multitude’s yoke, have asked in turn, like certain socialists, that the state be better managed by the laws of intelligence and reason. In a word, American socialism almost resembles the battle of the books in Boileau’s Le lutrin where the different parties throw doctrines at each others’ heads. In behaving this way, the parties are true to their role: they can make arrows out of any kind of wood. This may not be entirely sound, but this is the way things are.

The literary reason for socialism’s success can be found in the American appetite for the marvelous. American poets and novelists have nothing to
sustain the magic of memories that can exist only among nations with long
histories. All around them they see a new, positive, practical, serious people,
little disposed to reverie, whose minds and manners are devoid of the mar-
velous. What then are American novelists to do? They idealize everything at
all costs, they romanticize the most vulgar and ordinary things. The noises
of the street become the music heard in dreams; the lights that illuminate
the merchants’ shop windows at night transform them into palaces from
_The Arabian Nights_; a little girl is a fairy, a woman a sorceress; an old man
with white hair and deep wrinkles is a wise man; every country bumpkin
a being in touch with nature’s hidden forces; a young gentleman has the
stature of a Walter Raleigh or a Sir Philip Sidney; a bourgeois who, at first
glance, is only a character with a vulgar sense of humor, becomes a clown,
the likes of which Shakespeare never invented. What is more, Americans
idealize even things that are not animate, even the scientific: an experiment
with electricity, a séance of animal magnetism, a combination of numbers,
a magnetized needle, astral gravitation, planetary laws—all become elements
of poetry. Anyone who has read Edgar Poe’s tales—“The Gold-Bug,” “A
Descent into the Maelström,” “The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans
Pfaall”—knows this. A Poe story employs the calculation of probabilities and
transforms mathematical axioms into natural and supernatural agents. There
are more bottles and laboratory apparatus in his tales than men or women.
Americans share the tendencies of their writers: they have superstitions that
are scientific in character. This is easily conceivable: the imagination, while
looking for fodder and no longer able to believe in old superstitions, turns
to the first thing that can astound it. It does not believe in witches any more,
but instead in magnetizers. It no longer finds the devil frightening, but is
amused by electric lights and hot-air balloons. The so-called Spiritualist sect
that chats with dead spirits through a sleep-walking intermediary is based
on animal magnetism. Socialism has much in common with the marvels of
science and magnetic experiments. Socialism has all the characteristics of
the marvelous: passionate attractions, a human race made for happiness, the
prospect of joys without end, a new heaven and earth evoked by all-powerful
formulas, the transformation of men into Olympian gods, and Hell itself
becoming a sufficiently comfortable place to live. All of this is genuinely
seductive. The socialists can transform themselves very easily into more or
less marvelous characters, magicians and alchemists. It should not be sur-
prising, then, that socialist doctrines have seized the minds of novelists, for
whom these ideas offer the marvelous. All these superstitions—all the bizarre
beliefs of the well-educated (made of the most artificial, the most charlatan-
esque stuff), the rage of animal magnetism that has reigned for a long time
in the United States and that has not yet completely disappeared—all of this is reflected in Hawthorne’s novel and his conception of the fantastic.

Socialism’s marvelous uniqueness has always attracted certain writers. Well-educated Americans never speak of the doctrine’s moral implications except with repugnance. We did not descend from the Puritans, we were not formed by their harsh discipline and by two centuries of positive energy only to be corrupted by the first depraved reverie. Thus we must see in Hawthorne’s novel the efforts that these honest believers often make to reject the morality of modern reformers. However much they are socialists, they cannot consent to be unprincipled men, when “unprincipled” is the most offensive word in the English language. Here is the conversation between two of Hawthorne’s characters about Fourier’s doctrine:

“Let me hear no more of it!” cried he, in utter disgust. “I never will forgive this fellow! He has committed the unpardonable sin; for what more monstrous iniquity could the Devil himself contrive than to choose the selfish principle—the principle of all human wrong, the very blackness of man’s heart, the portion of ourselves which we shudder at, and which it is the whole aim of spiritual discipline to eradicate—to choose it as the master workman of his system? To seize upon and foster whatever vile, petty, sordid, filthy, bestial, and abominable corruptions have cankered into our nature, to be the efficient instruments of his infernal regeneration! And his consummated Paradise, as he pictures it, would be worthy of the agency which he counts upon for establishing it. The nauseous villain!”

“Nevertheless,” remarked I, “in consideration of the promised delights of his system—so very proper, as they certainly are, to be appreciated by Fourier’s countrymen—I cannot but wonder that universal France did not adopt his theory at a moment’s warning. But is there not something very characteristic of his nation in Fourier’s manner of putting forth his views? He makes no claim to inspiration. He has not persuaded himself—as Swedenborg did, and as any other than a Frenchman would, with a mission of like importance to communicate—that he speaks with authority from above. He promulgates his system, so far as I can perceive, entirely on his own responsibility. He has searched out and discovered the whole counsel of the Almighty in respect to mankind, past, present, and for exactly seventy thousand years to come, by the mere force and cunning of his individual intellect!”

“Take the book out of my sight,” said Hollingsworth with great virulence of expression, “or, I tell you fairly, I shall fling it in the fire! And as
for Fourier, let him make a Paradise, if he can, of Gehenna, where, as I conscientiously believe, he is floundering at this moment!”

“And bellowing, I suppose,” said I—not that I felt any ill-will towards Fourier, but] merely want[ing] to give the finishing touch to Hollingsworth’s image—“bellowing for the least drop of his beloved limonade à cèdre!”

(BR 53–54)

It is fairly difficult to explain the merits of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s last book through simple analysis. The plot is extremely subtle and light. Its characters speak a language and express feelings that are not the language or the feelings of the ordinary world. These characters are cultivated, but (happily) the world does not yet know that every man who has raised himself to a certain level of literary culture possesses certain qualities—delicacy, subtlety, acute sensibility. Such minds eventually become susceptible to perceptions of an almost supersubtle kind. The necessary notions of morality, all the eternal and indestructible social commonplaces, are viewed differently and by optical instruments that modify their character. The mind no longer submits absolutely to eternal laws; but, almost by way of compensation, conscience becomes less forgiving. Why not establish a new moral system in advance, based upon principles no matter how absurd? Why not give one’s desires the force of a law of nature, as Descartes said? In practice, however, contradictions surface everywhere. So it is for the inhabitants of Blithedale. Their plans for social reformation are absurd, but they soon recognize the obstacles they face. On the one hand, there are two characters who butt heads and whose stubbornness makes one doubt the possibility of establishing a genuine community. On the other, there is a free-thinking woman who demands equal rights for her own sex, but whose will is less strong than her passion. In chasing an uncertain goal, we sometimes neglect the better portion of our nature; instead of working to found another Eden, we work simply to exhaustion. The poet makes no verses, the philosopher conceives not a single idea, the enthusiastic woman loses her vigor—this is the inevitable result of a life sacrificed for an unattainable goal. The one lesson that comes from this book is that if a priori systems of reform are stillborn in the hands of ordinary folk, they are even less suited to the educated classes. Of no use for the people in general (who act according to their instincts, and not through reflection or perseverance of will), these systems are even more useless to analytical minds, proudly defiant and always on guard against stupidity.

This novel is not, properly speaking, a novel. Analysis, not the storyline, takes precedence. If we were obliged to define it absolutely, we would
say that Hawthorne has orchestrated a philosophico-humanitarian ballet, danced by four main characters. The characters make socialist entrechats and logical faux pas; and their footwork is not always confident. They cannot keep time with their system’s music. They mock one another or explode in each other’s faces. That is a quick summary of The Blithedale Romance. What happens and is said there is very peculiar, but this book’s peculiarity is completely psychological, as we shall see.

As we have already mentioned, four characters dominate the whole novel: a poet, Miles Coverdale; a utopian, Hollingsworth; a free-thinking woman, Zenobia; and a victim of all the evil spells of modern-day charlatans, Priscilla. The poet Miles Coverdale—in other words, Hawthorne—is the least eccentric of the four. He is the one who does his best to keep his moral health intact and who fears losing it the most. The other three are dreams incarnate. By all appearances, they live, they eat, they sleep, they speak like the rest of us. But they are clothed chimeras. They each have arrived at that particular perversion where the soul collapses. It does so when, having conversed only with abstractions and dreamy formulas, it loses a feeling for real things and believes utterly in impossibilities. All of them have, as the Scriptures say, emptied their heart and soul of all natural feelings and of all commonly accepted ideas that come from experience and, instead, have filled them with feelings and ideas of their own making and they gorge themselves on this empty meat. They appear eloquent, poetic. And, indeed, they are: eloquent as a gust of wind on an arid plain, upon which there is neither tree to uproot nor leaf to blow; poetic like the lone sound one hears at night, audible only because of the absence of all other sounds. They are as profound and vast as nothingness or the three dimensions of space. Miles Coverdale is not like this. Conscientious and defiant, he analyzes everything, he meditates on everything, he lets nothing escape him. Before leaving for Blithedale, he procrastinates. En route there, he regrets having abandoned the comforts of town. Meeting a traveler along the way, Coverdale’s companions greet him like a brother, saying to him enthusiastically, “We are going to regenerate the world!” The man looks flabbergasted as if he doesn’t understand. We will have trouble regenerating the human race, thinks Miles Coverdale. At the end of a three-month stay at the farm, he is no more convinced of the community’s success than on the first day. Hour by hour he notes the faults of the system: his literary habit of analyzing everything that he perceives bothers him enormously, because there is nothing like the faculty of analysis to reduce to dust the fantasies and chimeras begotten by pride. Every system that springs from human will, every synthesis based upon abstract and a priori ideas that is not a simple generalization of fact,
cannot survive analysis. The Baconian method is unassailable on this point. This is Miles Coverdale, then: the skeptical utopian, the would-be socialist.

Hollingsworth is the simple opposite of Miles Coverdale. Where Coverdale is timid, Hollingsworth is daring. Heroically, he marches off into the realm of the absurd. Courageously, he resists the facts. He exerts enormous will power to realize his illusions. Yet it is not for the greater glory and success of Blithedale that he summons this heroism and will power. (He is just as skeptical as Coverdale with regard to the community.) For his own personal ideas, for his own philosophical hobbyhorse—what he calls the “moral regeneration of criminals”—he would sacrifice the entire universe.

Hollingsworth also displays a frightening mark that utopia imprints on its lovers—egoism. The man believes himself to be devoted because he commits his life to the service of a private idea. He cannot see that this idea is nothing more than the reflection and extension of himself; that he loves his shadow; that he falls to his knees before his own thinking; that he commits an act of fetishism and pride worse than that of Pygmalion. Like every egoist, inebriated with himself, Hollingsworth ossifies his capacity for sympathy. He will trample you underfoot; he will break your heart; he will forsake you after having drawn you to him; he will sacrifice all his feelings to his monstrous conceptions. The love of this philanthropist is not reserved for the virtuous or the good. In fact, he prefers the guilty. He cannot love you unless you are triflingly criminal, innocuously poisonous, slightly murderous. As for the rest, quick as many of the utopians are in general, he will stop at nothing to make allies and partisans for himself until the day when, his army formed, he (an incurable despot) can command as a sovereign. While waiting for this army to fall into its ranks, he abandons himself to the design of a future palace—a penitentiary—drawing up architectural plans and constructing the imaginary edifice where one day his illusory project can be realized.

Zenobia is what used to be called a “free” woman. She is the queen of the association, a prideful monarch, incurably disdainful. When she smiles at you, her smile seems to say that she pities you. When she speaks to you with words of affection, she is indulging in an act of charity. Modest appearances are not at all for her; silk and velvet are her favorite fabrics, and her hair is always adorned with a rare and precious flower from the tropics, expensively renewed every morning. Her beauty has nothing of fleeting modernity. Through her physical traits, the shape of her body, the outline of her physiognomy, Zenobia recalls a type of beauty that has virtually disappeared today: solid beauty—substantial, precise, strong, and proud—that has been dethroned by the pale English ideal. Our conceptions of beauty suffer revolutions and vicissitudes just as do empires and the planets themselves.
Seeing Zenobia pass with her head held high and a regal sureness in her step, we cannot help noticing that she confronts us with a strange dilemma: is she really a queen or merely an actress? Clearly, she is a dangerous woman. Whenever we think of her, our thoughts turn to dramatic scenes: her natural accoutrements would seem to be the classic dagger or the romantic vial of poison. Miles Coverdale, who watches her with trepidation, who glances at her furtively, who even (in his mind’s eye) undresses her, discovers something remarkable: he is convinced that she has been someone’s wife. No one has ever heard of her marriage, yet no one would mistake her for a virgin. Zenobia has none of the freshness or the dewy atmosphere that surrounds young girls. She is a rose whose petals are all blown and whose calyx retains not the smallest dewdrop. Whether marriage or seduction, therein lies the secret of Zenobia’s story.

Priscilla, the young girl brought to the farm by Hollingsworth and placed by him under the protection of Zenobia, is an ethereal, sickly creature, always falling prey to a slight nervous trembling. She walks with the lightness of a somnambulist; her eyes seem magnetically transfixed by something far away; her spirit is timid like that of a human being who has been tutored by the despotism of necessity or an imperial nature. She has neither character nor will. She can only obey. She is a fragile and charming toy, free to be taken up even by the hand of a child. A poor, pale flower who is lacking air and sun to grow, she is taken to the farm by Hollingsworth in order that her health might improve; but, in fact, he has intervened to wrest her from the hands of a tyrant and charlatan. But is there not something strange about these four characters? It is obvious that they will never reform the world. All four of them are going to find themselves face to face with one another. Their personal intrigues will occupy us more than the history of the community. Let us stop, then, for a moment to contemplate the spectacle of this fraternal society.

Nothing is more important than the first evening our reformers spend together at Blithedale after supper. Their society is made up of two very distinct types of people: those who are accustomed to work and those who prefer to dream. Once the table is cleared, what can they do with one another? Silas Foster, the old Yankee who is in charge of making the farm work and keeping an eye on the practical needs of the establishment, sets about fixing an old pair of boots. His wife, already half asleep, pulls a stocking from her pocket and begins to knit. One of her servants hems a hand towel. Another labors over a pair of sleeves to embellish her Sunday best. And our dreamers, what are they doing? Sitting on a stool, as if in a sort of ecstasy, Priscilla watches the beautiful Zenobia, who turns from time to time, with
VII. Émile Montegut (1852)

eyes full of disdain, to look at the young girl. Hollingsworth, dismayed by this hauteur, looks angrily at Zenobia. And the observer Miles Coverdale contemplates all three. While the others work with their hands, the more refined characters prefer to employ only their thoughts and perceptions. Then arises a great and very important question: what name shall they call their community? The word Blithedale means nothing. Extraordinarily, the old name that the Indians gave to the place seems now irrelevant. Zenobia proposes the name of “Sunny Glimpse.” The skeptic Coverdale pronounces the name “Utopia.” Others put forward the name “Oasis.” This important discussion might have continued for a good part of the night if not for the practical Silas Foster, who interrupts and ends it with these words: “‘Take my advice, brother-farmers, [said he, with a great, broad, bottomless yawn,] and get to bed as soon as you can. I shall sound the horn at day-break; and we’ve got the cattle to fodder, and nine cows to milk, and a dozen other things to do, before breakfast’” (BR 37).

This is how things begin. And, here, several months later is the spectacle presented by this Arcadia when it is in full bloom, before the characters start to offend each other, before hopes begin to fade, while they are still working toward the regeneration of the world:

On the whole, it was a society such as has seldom met together; nor, perhaps, could it reasonably be expected to hold together long. Persons of marked individuality—crooked sticks, as some of us might be called—are not exactly the easiest to bind up into a fagot. But, so long as our union should subsist, a man of intellect and feeling, with a free nature in him, might have sought far and near without finding so many points of attraction as would allure him hitherward. We were of all creeds and opinions, and generally tolerant of all, on every imaginable subject. Our bond, it seems to me, was not affirmative, but negative. We had individually found one thing or another to quarrel with in our past life, and were pretty well agreed as to the inexpediency of lumbering along with the old system any further. As to what should be substituted, there was much less unanimity. We did not greatly care—at least, I never did—for the written constitution under which our millennium had commenced. My hope was, that, between theory and practice, a true and available mode of life might be struck out; and that, even should we ultimately fail, the months or years spent in the trial would not have been wasted, either as regarded passing enjoyment, or the experience which makes men wise.

Arcadians though we were, our costume bore no resemblance to the beribboned doublets, silk breeches and stockings, and slippers fastened with
artificial roses, that distinguish the pastoral people of poetry and the stage. In outward show, I humbly conceive, we looked rather like a gang of beggars, or banditti, than either a company of honest laboring-men, or a conclave of philosophers. Whatever might be our points of difference, we all of us seemed to have come to Blithedale with the one thrifty and laudable idea of wearing out our old clothes. Such garments as had an airing, whenever we strode afield! Coats with high collars and with no collars, broad-skirted or swallow-tailed; pantaloons of a dozen successive epochs, and greatly defaced at the knees by the humiliations of the wearer before his lady-love—in short, we were a living epitome of defunct fashions, and the very raggiest presentment of men who had seen better days. It was gentility in tatters. Often retaining a scholarlike or clerical air, you might have taken us for the denizens of Grub Street, intent on getting a comfortable livelihood by agricultural labor; or Coleridge’s projected Pantisocracy in full experiment; or Candide and his motley associates at work in their cabbage garden; or anything else that was miserably out at elbows, and most clumsily patched in the rear. We might have been sworn comrades to Falstaff’s ragged regiment. Little skill as we boasted in other points of husbandry, every mother’s son of us would have served admirably to stick up for a scarecrow. And the worst of the matter was, that the first energetic movement essential to one downright stroke of real labor was sure to put a finish to these poor habiliments. So we gradually flung them all aside, and took to honest homespun and linsey-woolsey, as preferable, on the whole, to the plan recommended, I think, by Virgil—“Ara nudus; sere nudus,”—which as Silas Foster remarked, when I translated the maxim, would be apt to astonish the women-folks.

After a reasonable training, the yeoman life throve well with us. Our faces took the sunburn kindly; our chests gained in compass, and our shoulders in breadth and squareness; our great brown fists looked as if they had never been capable of kid gloves. The plough, the hoe, the scythe, and the hay-fork grew familiar to our grasp. The oxen responded to our voices. We could do almost as fair a day’s work as Silas Foster himself, sleep dreamlessly after it, and awake at daybreak with only a little stiffness of the joints, which was usually quite gone by breakfast-time.

To be sure, our next neighbors pretended to be incredulous as to our real proficiency in the business which we had taken in hand. They told slanderous fables about our inability to yoke our own oxen, or to drive them afield when yoked, or to release the poor brutes from their conjugal bond at nightfall. They had the face to say, too, that the cows laughed at our awkwardness at milking-time, and invariably kicked over the pails; partly in consequence
of our putting the stool on the wrong side, and partly because, taking offence at the whisking of their tails, we were in the habit of holding these natural fly-flappers with one hand and milking with the other. They further averred that we hoed up whole acres of Indian corn and other crops, and drew the earth carefully about the weeds; [and that by dint of unskilful planting few of our seeds ever came up at all, or, if they did come up, it was stern-foremost; and that we spent the better part of the month of June in reversing a field of beans, which had thrust themselves out of the ground in this unseemly way. They quoted it as nothing more than an ordinary occurrence for one or other of us to crop off two or three fingers, of a morning, by our clumsy use of the hay-cutter.] Finally, and as an ultimate catastrophe, these mendacious rogues circulated a report that we communitarians were exterminated, to the last man, by severing ourselves asunder with the sweep of our own scythes! and that the world had lost nothing by this little accident.

But this was pure envy and malice on the part of the neighboring farmers. The peril of our new way of life was not lest we should fail in becoming practical agriculturists, but that we should probably cease to be anything else. While our enterprise lay all in theory, we had pleased ourselves with delectable visions of the spiritualization of labor. It was to be our form of prayer and ceremonial of worship. Each stroke of the hoe was to uncover some aromatic root of wisdom, heretofore hidden from the sun. Pausing in the field, to let the wind exhale the moisture from our foreheads, we were to look upward, and catch glimpses into the far-off soul of truth. In this point of view, matters did not turn out quite so well as we anticipated. It is very true that, sometimes, gazing casually around me, out of the midst of my toil, I used to discern a richer picturesqueness in the visible scene of earth and sky. There was, at such moments, a novelty, an unwonted aspect, on the face of Nature, as if she had been taken by surprise and seen at unawares, with no opportunity to put off her real look, and assume the mask with which she mysteriously hides herself from mortals. But this was all. The clods of earth, which we so constantly belabored and turned over and over, were never etherealized into thought. Our thoughts, on the contrary, were fast becoming cloddish. 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.

Zenobia soon saw this truth, and gibed me about it, one evening, as Hollingsworth and I lay on the grass, after a hard day’s work.
"I am afraid you did not make a song today, while loading the hay-cart," said she, "as Burns did, when he was reaping barley."

"Burns never made a song in haying-time," I answered very positively. "He was no poet while a farmer, and no farmer while a poet."

"And on the whole, which of the two characters do you like best?" asked Zenobia. "For I have an idea that you cannot combine them any better than Burns did. Ah, I see, in my mind's eye, what sort of an individual you are to be, two or three years hence. Grim Silas Foster is your prototype, with his palm of sole-leather, and his joints of rusty iron (which all through summer keep the stiffness of what he calls his winter’s rheumatize), and his brain of—I don’t know what his brain is made of, unless it be a Savoy cabbage; but yours may be cauliflower, as a rather more delicate variety. Your physical man will be transmuted into salt beef and fried pork, at the rate, I should imagine, of a pound and a half a day; [that being about the average which we find necessary in the kitchen]. You will make your toilet for the day (still like this delightful Silas Foster) by rinsing your fingers and the front part of your face in a little tin pan of water at the doorstep, and teasing your hair with a wooden pocket-comb before a seven-by-nine-inch looking-glass. Your only pastime will be to smoke some very vile tobacco in the black stump of a pipe."

"Pray, spare me!" cried I. "But the pipe is not Silas’s only mode of solacing himself with the weed."

"Your literature," continued Zenobia, apparently delighted with her description, "will be the ‘Farmer’s Almanac;’ for I observe our friend Foster never gets so far as the newspaper. When you happen to sit down, at odd moments, you will fall asleep, and make nasal proclamation of the fact, as he does; and invariably you must be jogged out of a nap, after supper, by the future Mrs. Coverdale, and persuaded to go regularly to bed. And on Sundays, when you put on a blue coat with brass buttons, you will think of nothing else to do but to go and lounge over the stone walls and rail fences, and stare at the corn growing. And you will look with a knowing eye at oxen, and will have a tendency to clamber over into pigsties, and feel of the hogs, and give a guess how much they will weigh after you shall have stuck and dressed them. Already I have noticed you begin to speak through your nose, and with a drawl. Pray, if you really did make any poetry to-day, let us hear it in that kind of utterance!"

"Coverdale has given up making verses now," said Hollingsworth, who never had the slightest appreciation of my poetry. "Just think of him penning a sonnet with a fist like that! There is at least this good in a life of toil, that it takes the nonsense and fancy-work out of a man, and leaves nothing but
what truly belongs to him. If a farmer can make poetry at the plough-tail, it must be because his nature insists on it; and if that be the case, let him make it, in Heaven's name!"

(BR 62–68)

In this Arcadia, undertaken for the cause of progress (and where each individual's nature, instead of developing itself, shrinks)—in this Arcadia founded on false principles, we can expect that all feelings and all affections will also be false and artificial. Love—the passion *par excellence*—does not wait to gain entrance to this community. By assimilating their language and demeanor, love can blend in with the members of this eccentric society. Our four dreamers love—or, more precisely, three of them love and one is loved: Hollingsworth. This egotistical man, this dry and obstinate philanthropist, this walking utopia, conquers the hearts of the two young women, Zenobia and Priscilla, because Hollingsworth possesses that kind of magnetic fascination which usually distinguishes the more intellectual bird of prey from others of his species, and very often acts upon women like Zenobia: gifted with intelligence, but deprived of wisdom, incapable of justifying their passions, incapable of finding a being who really deserves to be loved, incapable of distinguishing a rascal from his imposing appearance or discovering the madman concealed beneath the guise of genius. Zenobia is one of these creatures. Once upon a time, she loved a monstrous, cynical, immoral being whose shameful soul wore a mask of great exterior beauty; and she was fooled. Now she turns to Hollingsworth, a man whose heart is completely dried up, whose affections have been melted by the ardent fire of Utopia just like a piece of candy brought too close to the blacksmith's forge. She will be fooled again, except that this time, she will die because of it. These two mistakes—impossible to forgive—deserve an exemplary punishment. Proud Zenobia, the promoter of women's rights, bows her head before this utopian. He scoffs at her, he criticizes her ideas, he condemns her projects to emancipate women, he tramples on all of which she is proud, but Zenobia's passion for him only grows larger. She begs for this dreamer's pity and lowers herself until she comes to accept her own inferiority. One day Coverdale surprises Zenobia, who, after a violent dispute about women's rights, is effusively shaking Hollingsworth's hand. This creature, who rebels against the whole world, finds herself crushed by the limits that nature has assigned to her sex, and the passions of her heart repudiate the theories of her intelligence. As for Priscilla, she is attached to Hollingsworth like ground ivy to an oak. She falls for him like a bird enchanted by a snake. The most equivocal situation is that of Miles Coverdale. He would not dare fall in love with Zenobia; he
Part 2: Transatlantic Reflections

secretly loves Priscilla yet says nothing of it. Through all this imbroglio of intrigue, of overheard conversations and suggestive handshakes, in the end Miles Coverdale plays the role of the star-struck lover familiar to comedies and novels.

The characters of Zenobia and Hollingsworth, perfectly false in nature, are entirely real in the times in which we live. They are two contemporaries. Haven’t you met a Zenobia? Haven’t you chatted with a Hollingsworth? Haven’t you been witness to the horrible exploitation of one person by another, to the moral servitude imposed upon a weak and passionate creature by some despotic dreamer or some audacious charlatan? Hollingsworth calmly allows himself to be loved. He achieves his goals by any means, even by the feelings he inspires. Zenobia will be of great help to him in the realization of his plans. When she is no longer of use, he will know well how to break this fragile instrument. Zenobia will be sacrificed to the reformation of criminals. However, Hollingsworth does not restrict himself to the conquest of Zenobia. He is on the lookout for supporters and attempts to convert Coverdale. Hesitating and timid though he may be, the latter has the strength to say no. What a curious scene! The day when Coverdale voices certain apprehensions about the success of their socialist enterprise, Hollingsworth takes him at his word and seeks his discipleship in order to realize his own utopias.

“But,” said I, “whence can you, having no means of your own, derive the enormous capital which is essential to this experiment? State Street, I imagine, would not draw its purse-strings very liberally in aid of such a speculation.”

“I have the funds—as much, at least, as is needed for a commencement—at command,” he answered. “They can be produced within a month, if necessary.”

My thoughts reverted to Zenobia. It could only be her wealth which Hollingsworth was appropriating so lavishly. [And on what conditions was it to be had? Did she fling it into the scheme with the uncalculating generosity that characterizes a woman when it is her impulse to be generous at all? And did she fling herself along with it? But Hollingsworth did not volunteer an explanation.]

“And have you no regrets,” I inquired, “in overthrowing this fair system of our new life, which has been planned so deeply, and is now beginning to flourish so hopefully around us? How beautiful it is, and, so far as we can yet see, how practicable! The ages have waited for us, and here we are, the very first that have essayed to carry on our mortal existence in love and mutual
help! Hollingsworth, I would be loath to take the ruin of this enterprise upon my conscience.”

“Then let it rest wholly upon mine!” he answered, knitting his black brows. “I see through the system. It is full of defects—irremediable and damning ones!—from first to last, there is nothing else! I grasp it in my hand, and find no substance whatever. There is not human nature in it.”

[“Why are you so secret in your operations?” I asked. “God forbid that I should accuse you of intentional wrong; but the besetting sin of a philanthropist, it appears to me, is apt to be a moral obliquity. His sense of honor ceases to be the sense of other honorable men. At some point of his course—I know not exactly when or where—he is tempted to palter with the right, and can scarcely forbear persuading himself that the importance of his public ends renders it allowable to throw aside his private conscience. Oh, my dear friend, beware this error! If you meditate the overthrow of this establishment, call together our companions, state your design, support it with all your eloquence, but allow them an opportunity of defending themselves.”

“It does not suit me,” said Hollingsworth. “Nor is it my duty to do so.”

“I think it is,” replied I.

Hollingsworth frowned; not in passion, but, like Fate, inexorably.

“I will not argue the point,” said he.]

“What I desire to know of you is—and you can tell me in one word—whether I am to look for your cooperation in this great scheme of good? Take it up with me! Be my brother in it! It offers you (what you have told me, over and over again, that you most need) a purpose in life, worthy of the extremest self-devotion—worthy of martyrdom, should God so order it! In this view, I present it to you. You can greatly benefit mankind. Your peculiar faculties, as I shall direct them, are capable of being so wrought into this enterprise that not one of them need lie idle. Strike hands with me, and from this moment you shall never again feel the languor and vague wretchedness of an indolent or half-occupied man. There may be no more aimless beauty in your life; but, in its stead, there shall be strength, courage, immitigable will—everything that a manly and generous nature should desire! We shall succeed! We shall have done our best for this miserable world; and happiness (which never comes but incidentally) will come to us unawares.”

It seemed his intention to say no more. But, after he had quite broken off, his deep eyes filled with tears, and he held out both his hands to me.

“Coverdale,” he murmured, “there is not the man in this wide world whom I can love as I could you. Do not forsake me!”

(BR 131–33)
The conversation continues for a long time. Coverdale hesitates and Hollingsworth cries out all of a sudden:

“I must have your answer! Will you devote yourself, and sacrifice all to this great end, and be my friend of friends forever?”

“In Heaven’s name, Hollingsworth,” cried I, getting angry, and glad to be angry, because so only was it possible to oppose his tremendous concentrativeness and indomitable will, “cannot you conceive that a man may wish well to the world, and struggle for its good, on some other plan than precisely that which you have laid down? And will you cast off a friend for no unworthiness, but merely because he stands upon his right as an individual being, and looks at matters through his own optics, instead of yours?”

“Be with me,” said Hollingsworth, “or be against me! There is no third choice for you.”

“Take this, then, as my decision,” I answered. “I doubt the wisdom of your scheme. Furthermore, I greatly fear that the methods by which you allow yourself to pursue it are such as cannot stand the scrutiny of an unbiased conscience.”

“And you will not join me?”

“No!”

I never said the word—and certainly can never have it to say hereafter—that cost me a thousandth part so hard an effort as did that one syllable.

(Coverdale, after this rupture, decides to leave the farm for a little while. This argument gives him a pretext to separate himself from a society that has begun to oppress him like a nightmare. In the company of these dreamers, his faculties lose their balance, his feelings their strength. Reality loses its salutary sway over the empire of his mind. “No sagacious man will long retain his sagacity, if he live exclusively among reformers and progressive people, without periodically returning into the settled system of things, to correct himself by a new observation from that old standpoint. It was now time for me, therefore, to go and hold a little talk with the conservatives, the writers of ‘The North American Review,’ the merchants, the politicians, the Cambridge men [and all those respectable old blockheads who still, in this intangibility and mistiness of affairs, kept a death-grip on one or two ideas which had not come into vogue since yesterday morning].” Almost daily, then, he discovers a new fault with the community. One day, he remarks that they have neglected to make provision for a cemetery; on another, he notes the absence of a plan for matrimony; as if these forgetful utopians were never supposed to
die and were going to regenerate the world by eternal celibacy! Furthermore, perhaps he will find clues to certain mysteries that have bothered his mind and piqued his curiosity for some time now. Disgust, boredom, and mental restlessness urge him, all at once, to leave the farm.

This bizarre story, very complicated under its apparent simplicity, now becomes more ambiguous than ever. The conscience of all these characters is not healthy, as we have seen. Notions of good and evil, of honor and virtue, having gone into their minds, are deformed there. How can one begin (like Zenobia, for example) to pledge one's heart to unreal passions? How does one get to the point of loving, like Priscilla, without being aware of one's addiction to loving? A mystery envelops the existence of these two women. While he is at the farm, Coverdale receives two singular visits—the first from a poor old man named Moodie, who inquires about Zenobia and Priscilla. “Does Zenobia love Priscilla?” the old man asks. Then, hidden behind the trees, he watches Zenobia's face with rapture, as only a father or a lover can. On another occasion a stranger approaches Coverdale and, with insulting familiarity, interrogates him about Zenobia and Priscilla, wanting to know certain particulars about their current life. Coverdale rebuffs his interlocutor, who seems outwardly handsome but from whose pores, as it were, licentiousness and knavery ooze. “His beauty,” says Hawthorne, “seems like a mask. It might be easily removed, and, once the mask was taken off, one would find underneath his true face: that of a deformed elf or the fearful grimace of a dead man.” This evil genius betrays all the customary signs of vulgarity and, as is common with his sort, his charm seems like an imitation. This character gives his card to Coverdale, who discerns these words on it: “Westervelt, doctor of medicine.” Evidently this Westervelt is an adventurer or a charlatan. Now, do you remember Priscilla’s nervous trembling? Do you remember that her whole being renders her vulnerable to magnetic influence, that her weak character makes her prey to the will of the first comer? Then you will understand why Mr. Westervelt, M.D., inquires about her with such zeal; why Hollingsworth takes her to the farm while recommending that Zenobia keep an eye on her; why old Moodie comes to ask if Zenobia loves the poor girl and if she is really safe.

Coverdale takes leave of Zenobia and Priscilla and he goes into town. During the first days of his arrival, he is preoccupied in his character as a poet with observing the little incidents of the neighborhood and all the little movements of life that demonstrate, even in the most solitary and cramped place, nature’s activity—children playing in the window, cats wandering in the gutters, turtledoves cooing in their dovecote. He notices precisely the same Westervelt in a window facing his own. Westervelt motions and soon
Zenobia appears, the same Zenobia whom Coverdale had left behind at the farm a couple of days before and who had demonstrated then no desire to leave. Coverdale fears some catastrophe. He goes to visit Zenobia and finds her in the company of Priscilla and Westervelt. The awful truth begins to shine into his eyes. Priscilla is the victim of this charlatan. Priscilla is the veiled lady whose magnetic clairvoyance everyone (several months earlier) had gone to admire. He urges her to leave for Blithedale in order to escape the tyranny of this miserable charlatan. But the influence of Westervelt on Priscilla is such that—with one single word—he forces her to reject Coverdale’s admonition. What role, then, does Zenobia play? (Who, though present at this scene, cannot speak a single word in favor of Priscilla?) What influence does Westervelt exercise on her as well? Just now, Coverdale recollects old Moodie, who earns his living by selling purses and other little fancy goods in public markets and taverns. Coverdale the poet has always been struck by his timid and mysterious habits. He has loved to see him walking on tip-toe in the most public of places, going by without being seen, suddenly appearing in front of you to offer you his wares while whispering in your ear, then disappearing like a rat who scurries back into its hole. Where does this strange reclusiveness come from? Is it the cause of his long miseries? Can it explain his tattered clothes? Or his helplessness before the mockery and rudeness of customers upon whom his earthly existence depends? Coverdale sets off to find this vagabond, and he locates him in one of those taverns in which, even as a young man, he has been accustomed to spend his nights. “So, he’s neither temperate nor wise,” Coverdale says. Here, he takes old Moodie aside and, not without some pain, extracts his story.

Old Moodie has seen better days. In those days, he went by the name Fauntleroy. He was a man of despicable character who derived all his happiness from superficial luxury. Ruined in turn by prodigal self-indulgence, he commits a crime—a theft or a forgery—and departs, leaving behind a young girl who is taken up by her relatives. The child he abandons in this manner was precisely the beautiful Zenobia, a veritable portrait of his first existence, proud and superb on the outside—inside, artificial. After his disasters, Fauntleroy fled to the North and, suddenly, his character changed. He becomes as timid, as servile, as fearful as (previously) he had been sumptuous and arrogant. From a second marriage with a poor common woman, he had a small daughter, Priscilla, a living replica this time around of his second existence. Timid, without will, without character, this child—with every passing year—betrays all the symptoms of excessive nervous susceptibility. This trait earns her the nickname “Little Prophetess” among their neighbors and attracts the attention of one of those fakirs who are so common in the
United States, where medical charlatanism reigns supreme. You know the rest. The charlatan is Westervelt. He makes a fortune from Priscilla. In order to maintain this lucrative income, he goes to look for her at Blithedale where she has found refuge. And if Zenobia cannot protect her sister, it is because Westervelt has, in fact, seduced Zenobia (and, by some accounts, secretly married her): she is bound to him by who-knows-what shameful ties that she cannot break.

Having been apprised of this sad and ugly story (haven’t we read its familiar parallels in our own Gazette des Tribunaux, redolent of modern crime fiction and characterized, too, by a certain scientific charlatanism and the philosophical exploitation of the stupidity of others?), Coverdale, in the midst of an excursion, stops in a small Massachusetts village and enters a room where the Yankee country folk have come to witness a séance of magnetism’s miracles and marvels. Here the author takes us to watch a spectacle of modern superstitions—one that might make us regret the supersession of witches and their sabbath. In the crowd, Coverdale discovers Hollingsworth; both of them are plagued by a sinister foreboding in which neither is mistaken. The magician is Westervelt and the veiled woman is Priscilla. Hollingsworth throws himself up on the stage, wrests Priscilla from her tyrant’s domination, and takes her back to Blithedale as if to a safe harbor.

Coverdale does not tarry either in going back to Blithedale. While approaching the farm, he hears joyous voices. He conceals himself to observe the source of this glad commotion. And what does he see? All of our reformers in fantastic costumes, masquerading through the woods. This scene is only an incident, but it is very curious and gives rise to too many reflections for us not to take notice of it.

Skirting farther round the pasture, I heard voices and much laughter proceeding from the interior of the wood. Voices, male and feminine; laughter, not only of fresh young throats, but the bass of grown people, as if solemn organ-pipes should pour out airs of merriment. Not a voice spoke, but I knew it better than my own; not a laugh, but its cadences were familiar. The wood, in this portion of it, seemed as full of jollity as if Comus and his crew were holding their revels in one of its usually lonesome glades. Stealing onward as far as I durst, without hazard of discovery, I saw a concourse of strange figures beneath the overshadowing branches. They appeared, and vanished, and came again, confusedly with the streaks of sunlight glimmering down upon them.

Among them was an Indian chief, with blanket, feathers, and war-paint, and uplifted tomahawk; and near him, looking fit to be his woodland bride,
the goddess Diana, with the crescent on her head, and attended by our big lazy dog, in lack of any fleeter hound. Drawing an arrow from her quiver, she let it fly at a venture, and hit the very tree behind which I happened to be lurking. Another group consisted of a Bavarian broom-girl, a negro of the Jim Crow order, one or two foresters of the Middle Ages, a Kentucky woodsman in his trimmed hunting-shirt and deerskin leggings, and a Shaker elder, quaint, demure, broad-brimmed, and square-skirted. Shepherds of Arcadia, and allegoric figures from the Faerie Queen, were oddly mixed up with these. Arm in arm, or otherwise huddled together in strange discrepancy, stood grim Puritans, gay Cavaliers, and Revolutionary officers with three-cornered cocked-hats, and queues longer than their swords. A bright-complexioned, dark-haired, vivacious little gypsy, with a red shawl over her head, went from one group to another, telling fortunes by palmistry; and Moll Pitcher, the renowned old witch of Lynn, broomstick in hand, showed herself prominently in the midst, as if announcing all these apparitions to be the offspring of her necromantic art. But Silas Foster, who leaned against a tree near by, in his customary blue frock and smoking a short pipe, did more to disenchant the scene, with his look of shrewd, acrid, Yankee observation, than twenty witches and necromancers could have done in the way of rendering it weird and fantastic.

A little farther off, some old-fashioned skinkers and drawers, all with portentously red noses, were spreading a banquet on the leaf-strewn earth; while a horned and long-tailed gentleman (in whom I recognized the fiendish musician erst seen by Tam O’Shanter) tuned his fiddle, and summoned the whole motley rout to a dance, before partaking of the festal cheer. So they joined hands in a circle, whirling round so swiftly, so madly, and so merrily, in time and tune with the Satanic music, that their separate incongruities were blended all together, and they became a kind of entanglement that went nigh to turn one’s brain with merely looking at it. Anon they stopt all of a sudden, and staring at one another’s figures, set up a roar of laughter; whereat a shower of the September leaves (which, all day long, had been hesitating whether to fall or no) were shaken off by the movement of the air, and came eddying down upon the revellers.

Then, for lack of breath, ensued a silence, at the deepest point of which, tickled by the oddity of surprising my grave associates in this masquerading trim, I could not possibly refrain from a burst of laughter on my own separate account.

“Hush!” I heard the pretty gypsy fortuneteller say. “Who is that laughing?”

“Some profane intruder!” said the goddess Diana. “I shall send an arrow
through his heart, or change him into a stag, as I did Actaeon, if he peeps from behind the trees!"

“Me take his scalp!” cried the Indian chief, brandishing his tomahawk, and cutting a great caper in the air.

“I'll root him in the earth with a spell that I have at my tongue's end!” squeaked Moll Pitcher. “And the green moss shall grow all over him, before he gets free again!”

“The voice was Miles Coverdale's,” said the fiendish fiddler, with a whisk of his tail and a toss of his horns. “My music has brought him hither. He is always ready to dance to the Devil's tune!”

Thus put on the right track, they all recognized the voice at once, and set up a simultaneous shout.

“Miles! Miles! Miles Coverdale, where are you?” they cried. “Zenobia! Queen Zenobia! here is one of your vassals lurking in the wood. Command him to approach and pay his duty!”

The whole fantastic rabble forthwith streamed off in pursuit of me, so that I was like a mad poet hunted by chimeras.

The scene is truly charming—but what singular reformers! Poor children who have tried to remake the world! This masquerade is a scene from The Decameron, a scene from an Italian comedy, a scene from Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor. It is one of those diversions that the author's ancestors would have called pagan, one of those scandalous rituals (so they still say) that they outlawed, and which the severe John Endicott had stopped as soon as he arrived in New England, as Hawthorne himself recounts.34 Decidedly, Blithedale's joyous association will never stretch to the far reaches of the globe.

The dénouement of this strange story is tragic. With Zenobia's and Hollingsworth's first words, Coverdale perceives that the friendship that brought them together is now dead and, henceforth, that everything is finished between them. Hollingsworth uses Zenobia's conduct toward Priscilla and the destitution in which she leaves her as a pretext for his rupture. He almost accuses her of connivance with Westervelt. That is only the apparent reason. The true reason is the likelihood that Zenobia's fortune has been compromised, and that she can no longer be of any help to him in realizing his plans. Faithful to his cold abstractions, Hollingsworth breaks the heart of the woman he has never really loved, but whose love he has tolerated as long as it could be of use to him. The split occurs—full of bitter reproaches, accusations, tears—one of those rifts in which long-standing friends (soon
to become enemies of or indifferent to each other) mutually discover all of the other’s evil instincts, the criminal thoughts, and shockingly egotistical designs that have permeated their intercourse. After this rupture, Zenobia confides in Coverdale her intention to quit the community forever, and she says her farewells. Coverdale, worried and full of terrible suspicions, wanders the whole night until the moment when the imagined possibility of Zenobia’s suicide utterly consumes him. Obeying a mysterious inspiration, he wakes Hollingsworth and Silas Foster to share his premonitions and makes them come with him to search for the body. The scene is a beautiful one: the hushed conversation between Coverdale and Hollingsworth through the raised farmhouse window; the appearance of old Silas Foster in his night-cap, thrusting out his head to find out what all the commotion is about; his astonishment when he is asked to join the two friends in their search; his disbelief when he learns that Zenobia has drowned (not to mention all his out-of-season pleasantry’es—so rustic and incongruous); discovering the body; Hollingsworth’s and Coverdale’s overwrought anxiety; Silas’s lugubri- ous raking of the streambed (as if he were merely fishing for salmon); the description of the body as it is pulled from the water, under the clear white moonlight. All these brushstrokes make up a sinister nocturnal painting. In this manner, The Blithedale Romance comes to a close. All these romantic passions, all this chimerical ardor, culminate in a larger (the largest) reality—death. Suicide is the natural end to the book, because a crime against humanity is the inevitable punishment for false existences and artificial passions. When life is founded on false principles and, as a consequence, cannot continue, suicide is the logical resolution to the crisis. In such a way, then, Providence has found a punishment for passions that transcend—and transgress—natural limits: a retribution equally contrary to nature.

We have tried to give an idea of this subtle book, one that recommends itself to careful analysis. The Blithedale Romance has excellent moments, but as a whole it is too metaphysical, and the dramatic element of the novel is taken up in a world that is too exceptional. For this reason, we prefer certain other books by Hawthorne. His style, however, is what deserves praise. From one end of the story to the other, he sometimes runs quickly, sometimes capriciously, sometimes voluptuously, sometimes ethereally. Never has Hawthorne exhibited so many descriptive qualities and such strength of expression. Among the marvelous descriptions contained in The Blithedale Romance, we cite those of Coverdale’s hermitage at Blithedale, the tavern where he meets old Moodie, the village lecture hall where he watches the magnetic séance. All of these places, vulgar in and of themselves, take on—from Hawthorne’s pen—the appearance of a palace, with aspects resembling
those that Puck’s and Ariel’s retreats could have had. His style is, so to speak, 
*impersonal*. He cloaks his thoughts, but not in an arbitrary way. He is mys-
terious when the thought is mysterious, subtle when the thought is subtle, 
solid when it is solid.

What conclusions should be drawn from such a book? Let us listen to 
Hawthorne himself. He describes his impressions while watching the mag-
netic séance:

I heard, from a pale man in blue spectacles, some stranger stories than 
ever were written in a romance; told, too, with a simple, unimaginative 
steadfastness, which was terribly efficacious in compelling the auditor to 
receive them into the category of established facts. He cited instances of the 
miraculous power of one human being over the will and passions of another; 
insomuch that settled grief was but a shadow beneath the influence of a 
man possessing this potency, and the strong love of years melted away like 
a vapor. At the bidding of one of these wizards, the maiden, with her lover’s 
kiss still burning on her lips, would turn from him with icy indifference; 
the newly made widow would dig up her buried heart out of her young 
husband’s grave before the sods had taken root upon it; a mother with her 
babe’s milk in her bosom would thrust away her child. Human character 
was but soft wax in his hands; and guilt, or virtue, only the forms into which 
he should see fit to mould it. The religious sentiment was a flame which he 
could blow up with his breath, or a spark that he could utterly extinguish. 
It is unutterable, the horror and disgust with which I listened, and saw that, 
if these things were to be believed, the individual soul was virtually annihi-
lated, and all that is sweet and pure in our present life debased, and that the 
idea of man’s eternal responsibility was made ridiculous, and immortality 
rendered at once impossible, and not worth acceptance. But I would have 
perished on the spot sooner than believe it.

The epoch of rapping spirits, and all the wonders that have followed 
in their train—such as tables upset by invisible agencies, bells self-tolled at 
funerals, and ghostly music performed on jew’s-harps—had not yet arrived. 
Alas, my countrymen, methinks we have fallen on an evil age! If these 
phenomena have not humbug at the bottom, so much the worse for us. 
What can they indicate, in a spiritual way, except that the soul of man is 
descending to a lower point than it has ever before reached while incarnate? 
We are pursuing a downward course in the eternal march, and thus bring 
ourselves into the same range with beings whom death, in requital of their 
gross and evil lives, has degraded below humanity! To hold intercourse with 
spirits of this order, we must stoop and grovel in some element more vile
than earthly dust. These goblins, if they exist at all, are but the shadows of past mortality, outcasts, mere refuse stuff, adjudged unworthy of the eternal world, and, on the most favorable supposition, dwindling gradually into nothingness. The less we have to say to them the better, lest we share their fate!

(BR 198–99)

Here, I share Hawthorne’s opinion entirely: his book’s characters are the clearest evidence of the fears he expresses. Yes, the human soul is turning perverse. Human life, in all countries, tends to regress. The clearest proof of this fact is that man’s actions are no longer judged according to everlasting rules of what is just and what is unjust, nor weighed in the eternal balance: and there can be no going back. Human actions have a vague and equivocal character that defies precise and simple understanding. In which times, in what era, did beings like Hollingsworth and Zenobia exist? How should one understand their acts? Are they criminal? No one wants or dares to say this. Are they honest people in the strictest sense of the word and according to long-standing morals? Certainly not. What are they, then? Human tongues have not yet found a word to express what they are, but they must find one because the family to which these characters belong is becoming more numerous every day. In the absence of a better word, we will say that they are ambiguous characters. They possess virtues, but these are ineffectual and remain in a state of abstraction; and they entertain thoughts such as the truly guilty have never imagined. They are neither perverted nor virtuous, neither corrupt nor innocent. They defy men’s judgment. They are beyond God’s laws, yet they are not ruled by the Devil’s laws. Today, the number of men who are like Dante’s damned—rejected by Heaven and refused by Hell—is large. Their affections, their feelings, their thoughts, even their superstitions—all of these lack humanity. They are feelings, affections, and superstitions that are outside of nature and that demand other conditions for existence, other moral rules, another atmosphere, another planet. All of this is not simply extra-human, but, as Hawthorne aptly puts it, it is beneath humanity. We cannot do any better in explaining our thoughts than to cite the famous Muslim legend that our favorite philosopher has employed with such eloquence.36 Once upon a time, on the edge of the Dead Sea, there were a singularly impious and corrupt people. God sent Moses to convert them. God’s envoy lost his nerve. The impious laughed at him and his sermons. So, to punish them, Moses transformed all of them into simian creatures. Ever since, this unhappy lot leap about, run, climb trees, grimace, and screech like monkeys. Only from time to time do they remember that they were...
once human beings. When they do, they interrupt their lascivious acts, their obscene gesturing, and, for several moments, become dreamy and sad. Let us meditate on this legend. It holds a terrible meaning, from which we can benefit.

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Notes

3. The line is spoken by Sganarelle in Act I, Scene 1, of Le médecin malgré lui (1666), by Molière (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin [1622–73]).
5. Perhaps the most memorable being John Balfour o’Burley in Old Mortality (1816).
6. Montégut loosely paraphrases this passage from the “Custom-House” Introduction to The Scarlet Letter: “It is now nearly two centuries and a quarter since the original Briton, the earliest emigrant of my name, made his appearance in the wild and forest-bordered settlement, which has since become a city. And here his descendants have been born and died, and have mingled their earthy substance with the soil; until no small portion of it must necessarily be akin to the mortal frame wherewith, for a little while, I walk the streets” (Centenary Edition, vol. I, 8–9). For the author’s genealogy, see chapter VI, note 1.
7. Altogether, twenty men and women were executed at Salem: nineteen were hanged and one pressed to death—none was burned alive.
8. For the correct attribution of this phrase, see chapter IV, note 6.
9. The correct quotation from The Pilgrim’s Progress is “Then I saw that there was a way to Hell, even from the Gates of Heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction” ([1678; rpt. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965], 205).
11. Montégut paraphrases from a series of passages at the novel’s conclusion as Coverdale reflects, “I have made but a poor and dim figure in my own narrative, establishing no separate interest, and suffering my colorless life to take its hue from other lives... my own life has been all an emptiness... Life, however, it must be owned, has come to rather an idle pass with me” (BR 245, 246, 247).
14. “Ethan Brand,” first collected in The Snow-Image, and Other Twice-told Tales (1851). Montégut alludes to the chariot festival at the Indian temple of Jagannath—from which we get the English word juggernaut.
15. Various species of flowering plants (Helichrysum, Xeranthemum, and Erythrina)—immortelles in French—that keep their shape and color when dried. In France, a wreath of immortelles was customary at funerals.

16. Montégut’s concise paraphrase of Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” does not correspond to any particular passage from that essay, but the following excerpt may be taken as representative:

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemer, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos and the Dark.

(Complied Works 2: 28)

17. First published in The Snow-Image, and Other Twice-told Tales (1851).

18. Montégut refers, of course, to the monumental granite outcropping known as the “Old Man of the Mountains,” which has long been the state symbol of New Hampshire, but which collapsed in May 2003 owing to the eroding powers of snow, wind, and rain.

19. “Hard upon this happy augury came another strange event, which seemed to foretell the grandeur of our empire: a man’s head with the features intact was discovered by the workmen who were digging the foundations of the temple. This meant without any doubt that on this spot would stand the imperial citadel of the capital city of the world.” Livy, The Early History of Rome: Books I–V of the History of Rome from its Foundations, translated by Aubrey de Sélincourt (Baltimore: Penguin, 1960), book 1:55.79.

20. First published in Twice-told Tales, 2nd ed. (1842).

21. The women most often remembered for their activities at Brook Farm include Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Peabody (1804–94), a pioneer in children’s education who was soon to become Hawthorne’s sister-in-law.

22. Montégut refers to the 1848 gatherings of women’s rights advocates at Seneca Falls, New York (and other upstate cities), where the now famous Declaration of Sentiments, listing the many discriminations against women, was first read. William Henry Seward (1801–72), a zealous Whig politician and future Secretary of State under Lincoln, threw down the gauntlet in a famous speech of 11 March 1850, in which he attacked the slave system as being contrary to “a higher law than the Constitution.” John Parker Hale (1806–73) was a Democratic legislator from Maine who was exiled from his own party because of his antislavery views. He ran as the Free Soil Party candidate for the presidency in 1852. Gerrit Smith (1797–1874) was a reformer and philanthropist, later notorious for his support of John Brown and the use of force against proslavery adherents in Kansas.

23. This legislation eventually was enacted in 1862.

24. Nicolas Boileau (1636–1711) published his mock-epic, Le lutrin, in 1674. With sustained humor and literary parody, the story details a furious ecclesiastical quarrel over the placing of a lectern.

25. Perhaps somewhat freely, Montégut draws this inference from Descartes’ Dis-
course on Method, Part Three (1637), in which the philosopher attempts to justify a system of morality based upon reason, not faith.

26. Montégut may be thinking of a text from Jesus' sermon on the shores of the Sea of Galilee (John 6:27): “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.”

27. Using a technique common to French literary criticism of this period, Montégut puts into quotation marks phrases that do not literally appear in The Blithedale Romance. He has accurately paraphrased a scene from chapter II of the novel, however. Compare the Centenary Edition, vol. III, 12.

28. Montégut's note: “A name that applies generally to poor writers—hacks—who eke out their living in garrets.”

29. While Montégut advises his readers that State Street is “undoubtedly a rich neighborhood in Boston,” the phrase more accurately serves as a metonym for the city’s financial district.

30. Founded in 1815, the North American Review deliberately modeled itself after the great British journals of the period and was long associated with the scholarly traditions of Harvard and Boston Unitarianism.

31. In the original text, Hawthorne writes: “I felt as if the whole man were a moral and physical humbug; his wonderful beauty of face, for aught I knew, might be removable like a mask; and, tall and comely as his figure looked, he was perhaps but a wizened little elf, gray and decrepit, with nothing genuine about him, save the wicked expression of his grin. The fantasy of his spectral character so wrought upon me, together with the contagion of his strange mirth on my sympathies, that I soon began to laugh as loudly as himself” (Centenary Edition, vol. III, 95).

32. La Gazette des Tribunaux documented important changes and decisions in legislation and jurisprudence in France and also covered important, or at least sensational, trials.

33. Montégut's note: “Jim Crow, an emblematic term for the negro race, used in the same way that John Bull is to refer to the English nation and Brother Jonathan in reference to the American.”


35. Hawthorne’s shorter tales were an object of fascination for Montégut, as this and his later articles confirm.

36. Montégut paraphrases the concluding paragraphs of Book III, chapter 3, from Carlyle’s Past and Present (1843), ostensibly drawn from the Koran.