Hester and Zenobia: The Dark Heroines of Hawthorne's Gender Wars

Heidi Hagler

Tennessee Scholars Senior Project

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In contrast to his era, in which literature characteristically presented a misogynistic, stereotypical view of women, Hawthorne has created heroines who seem remarkably three-dimensional, even at times revolutionary. These heroines, or "dark ladies," as they are often called, contrast sharply with the idealized and shallow heroines of that literary period. Hester Prynne and Zenobia defy the traditional image of the wholesome,submissive and dependent heroine, and emerge as passionate, strong-willed and self-reliant women. These dark heroines ate often quite problematic, and experience a complex struggle between the conventions pressed upon them by society and their own desire for self-expression and independence. For each of these women, this conflict develops as a result of her interaction with male characters in the text. It is of critical importance that in The Scarlet Letter and The Blithedale Romance each of the major male characters attempts in some degree to mold the dark heroine into a character consistent with his own definition of womanhood. The men's refusal to accept the dark heroine's definition of herself and their subsequent efforts to undercut her individuality and reshape her ideas prove detrimental to everyone by the conclusion of the texts. As a result, we see that the principal conflict in these two narratives lies in the struggle of the dark heroine to remain true to her natural identity, even as this identity is challenged by her relationships with men who misunderstand her and attempt to redefine her according to their own conception of the female character.

Of Hawthorne's creations, Hester Prynne has unquestionably emerged as the most memorable, exemplifying the passion, mystery and independence which characterize his dark heroines. Schriber has stated that "Hawthorne imagined in Hester Prynne a complexity that defies the conventional understandings of woman in his time."[1] In The Scarlet Letter, Hester appears as a convicted adulteress who is quite literally cast out of society for her crime. In a sharp departure from the traditional image of the fallen, broken woman seen in most literature, Hester attains a fierce independence. Though she is "standing alone in the world...and with little Pearl to be guided and protected--alone, and hopeless of regaining her position" (p. 158), Hester manages to support herself, maintain custody of Pearl, and eventually regain a kind of place in society through her charitable work. However, Hester is not portrayed simply as an otherwise perfect woman tainted by one act of sin. She is deeply embittered by her forced isolation, and Hawthorne admits that "the world's law was no law for her mind" (p.158).

Although to the public eye Hester is repentant and accepting of her punishment, her inner rebellion does not subside. We are told that in her humiliation she forbears to pray for the people who revile her, "lest, in spite of her forgiving aspirations, the words of the blessing should stubbornly twist themselves into a curse" (p.88). In spite of what it has cost her, Hester refuses to supress the passion so fundamental to her nature. Instead she channels this "rich, voluptuous,

Oriental characteristic" (p. 87) into the art of her needlework, which ironically adorns the clothing of respected members of the community. Hester's refusal to yield up the expressive quality so crucial to her sense of identity is hardly surprising in light of her defiant bearing when she is first brought out of prison to stand in the market place. Fryer states,

> "She is a woman who acts, not a woman who is acted upon. Hester's emergence from prison into the open air 'as if by her own free will' is an act of self reliance both literally and synbolically."[2]

Fryer's assessment of her character is in perfect keeping with Hester's deviation from the expectations of society.

Societal expectations assume a concrete significance in Hester's relationships with Chillingworth and Dimmesdale. Though in many ways these two men are diametrically opposed, they both attempt to reshape Hester's sense of self. Because of her strong character, their actions set in motion a gridlocked conflict of wills and passions.

On discovering the truth that Chillingworth is Hester's former husband, he can be viewed as a rather sympathetic character. When he comes to treat her baby while she is still in prison, his response to her infidelity seems remarkably understanding. He admits that "Mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my dacay...between thee and me, the scale hangs fairly balanced" (p. 79). Unlike any other male character associated with a dark heroine, Chillingworth admits his partial responsibility

for the detrimental circumstances of her life. Marrying her without love, Chillingworth assumed that Hester would eventually grow to love him, reshaping her passionate nature to accomadate his "lonely and chill" (p. 79) personality. However, not only did Chillingworth misunderstand the immutability of Hester's passion, but he also now condemns her for her following it. In his eyes, she has "ascended to the pedestal of infamy" (p.78) for her failure to become a dutiful wife. From his shifting attitude, we begin to see that Chillingworth is not a sympathetic character, but that instead he gives only a perfunctory confession of his role in Hester's downfall. He then proceeds to question her character as a result of her failure to love him.

Chillingworth belittles Hester's emotional depth by commenting bitterly "How could I delude myself with the idea that intellectual gifts might veil physical deformity in a young girl's fantasy?" (p. 78) His insinuation that Hester's passion lies merely in physical attraction only shows us that he does not understand that Hester possesses the emotions of a mature woman. He even believes that she is shallow enough to have been fulfilled by the fact that he "drew thee into my heart... and sought to warm thee by the warmth which thy presence made there" (p. 79). Chillingworth, who is essentially incapable of love, expected a woman of Hester's vitality and capacity for love to be satisfied by a pale reflection of her dutiful affection for her husband. In light of her unhappy marriage to Chillingworth, Hester's passionate affair seems a natural rebellion against her long emotional stagnation.

Chillingworth's manipulation of Hester continues following their bitter reunion in the prison. Although he says earlier that "we have wronged each other" (p. 79) and that justice has been served between him and Hester, he uses her sense of obligation to him to extract from her a vow that she will keep his identity a secret. When he sees that she will not disclose the name of her lover to him, he takes advantage of her deep remorse, commanding her "Thou hast kept the secret of thy paramour. Keep likewise mine!" (p. 80) Schriber maintains that "Hester's act of adultery transgressed against the system, but Hester does not challenge the values on which the system stands."[3] The qualities of truth and duty are of great importance to Hester's self-esteem. As a result, Hester is shamed by his suggesting that her loyalty to her lover exceeds that which she owes her legal husband, and therefore swears to keep his secret. His skillful coercion of Hester sets up the means for his later torment of Dimmesdale, and later places Hester in her terrible dilemma of remaining true to either Dimmesdale or her oath. According to Gerber, "By natural inclination, Hester scorns deception. Consequently, to have become a partner to a plot which surrenders her lover to his worst enemy is for her to commit an act which ultimately she regards as an inexcusable violation of her nature."[4]

Chillingworth feels no remorse over exploiting Hester's values. Threatened by her strongwilled refusal to reveal Dimmesdale's identity, he feels he must regain power over her. He grimly tells her "No matter whether of love or hate;

no matter whether of of right or wrong! Thou and thine, Hester Prynne, belong to me" (p. 80). His chilling statement reveals his need to curtail Hester's independent nature, and because he will not acknowledge her as his wife, his alternative is to bind her to an oath that destroys her freedom to reveal the truth.

Chillingworth's dominance of Hester is ultimately challenged when seven years later she confronts him with her knowledge of his revenge on Dimmesdale and renounces her oath of scerecy. Her troubled conscience can no longer bear the deception to which "it was not without heavy misgivings that I thus bound myself" (p. 164). When she pleads with Chillingworth to end his torment of Dimmesdale, he has come to identify himself so fully through his revenge that her request becomes no less to him than a personal attack on him. He lashes out at her, attempting to shift his guilt onto her by reason of her past infidelity. He asks contemptuously "Was I not, though you might deem me cold, nevertheless a man thoughtful for others, craving little for himself--kind, true, just and of constant if not warm affections?" (p. 166), then adding accusingly, "I have already told thee who I am! A fiend! Who made me so?" (p. 166) However, Hester, driven to near-despair by her dilemma, can no longer be manipulated by Chillingworth's insinuations of her guilt and duty to him. He has betrayed his duty to her through his malicious revenge and thereby undercut the obligation which has bound Hester to keep his secret for seven years. As a result, she is able to challenge him, declaring that

her conscience frees her to reveal his secret.

Realizing that Hester is achieving freedon from his dominance of her, Chillingworth futilely attempts to wound her by further accusations of her guilt, declaring "By thy first step awry thou didst plant a germ of evil; but since that moment it has all been a dark necessity" (p. 167). He has rejected her urgings to pardon Dimmesdale, to give up "the hatred that has transformed a wise and just man into a fiend" (p. 167). By raising the issue of Chillingworth's perogative to forgive, Hester forces him to accept responsibility for the "dismal maze" (p. 167) in which his vengeance has entagled their lives. Chillingworth can no longer blame their miserable fate on Hester's failure to repress her passions and behave as a dutiful wife to him. In a twist of irony, Chillingworth has shown through his demonic revenge that he is in fact capable of heated passion equal to Hester's. Pushed beyond redemption by the same intensity of passion he sought to subdue in Hester, he is eventually left a shattered and dacaying man, "like an uprooted weed that lies wilting in the sun" (p. 242). Chillingworth expected the passionate and independent Hester to renounce her nature in order to become his compatible wife. In doing so, he sets in motion the events that ultimately result in his own moral destruction and Hester's permanent isolation.

Hester's relationship with Dimmesdale assumes a greatly allegorical significance in The Scarlet Letter. It becomes the juxtaposition of two completely opposite individuals, who reflect the figures of Adam and Eve. Hester, in Dimmesdale's

perception, becomes a sinful temptress who has led him from his previous state of grace into irrevocable sin. Dimmesdale, before his adultery, believes sincerely in his public image of being "simple and childlike... with a freshness and fragrnace and dewy purity of thought, which as many people said, affected them like the speech of an angel" (p. 72). He is truly Adam, the beloved and sinless work of his creator. However, Dust tells us that "the very fact that the terms 'godly,' 'good,' 'angel,' 'heaven-ordained apostle,' and 'miracle of holiness' suggest to the alert reader that like 'honest' Iago, this man probably has a feigned degree of sacnctity."[5] After he commits adultery with Hester, this holy self-image shatters. He is forced to admit to himself that he not only has the capacity for sin, but also that he lacks the moral courage to confess his sin and obtain forgiveness. Baym states that as a result of his fall, "Dimmesdale must now recognize and deal with previously hidden, subversive and disobedient parts of himself."[6] Dimmesdale is then driven into misery, "concious that the poison of one morbid spot was infecting his heart's entire substance" (p. 137). In his attempts to escape his guilt, Dimmesdale must try to reject the passion and rebellion which led to his sin, qualities which he sees embodied in Hester. The scaffold scene reflects Dimmesdale's refusal to acknowledge his connection to Hester and Pearl, as he tells Pearl "before the judgement seat, thy mother and thou, and I must stand together. But the daylight of the world shall not see our meeting!" (p. 149) Hester represents to Dimmesdale the passion and

defiance that he will not admit exists in himself, and he slyly avoids sharing her burden of guilt by offering the weak excuse that he will answer to his guilt in the next world, while in this one, Hester must bear this guilt alone.

Hester, unlike Dimmesdale, does not perceive her natural passions to be inherently sinful. Instead she accepts them as a part of herself, and because she is not afraid of them, can continue to love and protect Dimmesdale. As a result, "Ironically, all these years Hester has held herself to a standard to which she has not held Dimmesdale, the man who has, after all, hidden his truth, his sin, for seven years, leaving Hester to suffer alone."[7] She remains true to her emotions, insisting that their act "had a consecration of its own" (P. 186) because of their love. Dimmesdale, however, is so dominated by his feelings of guilt over their adultery that he can no longer love Hester, who in his mind has become synonymous with his sin. Motivated always by the "wondrous strength and generosity of a woman's heart " (p. 74), Hester endures her humiliating punishment to remain near her lover. Dimmesdale, however, obscures his former love through his obsession with the sinful aspect of their relationship. His self-image as a sanctified and spiritual man is of far greater importance to him than his connection to Hester, evidenced by his belief that "to the highest peaks of faith and sanctity he would have climbed, had not the tendency been thwarted by the burden, whatever it might be, of crime or anguish, beneath which it was his doom to totter" (p. 139). In forfeiting his love for Hester

in favor of his own self-righteousness, he ensures their continual misery of seperation and guilt.

Dimmesdale's weakness of character becomes clear in the first appearance he makes in The Scarlet Letter. When faced with the dilemma of asking Hester to name her co-sinner before the crowd, he balks at the prospect of having his guilt revealed. Hiding behind his skillful rhetoric, Dimmesdale manipulates Hester so that it is she who is faced with the responsibility of confession rather than he. As he exhorts her to name her lover, he qualifies the meaning of his words for her alone by charging her to do so "if thou feelest it to be for thy soul's peace" (p. 73). Of course, Dimmesdale knows that it is he, not Hester, who feels the need for inner peace through confession. Her guilt is known, and she feels it is her duty to protect Dimmesdale. Therefore, Hester's conscience would be burdened, not relieved, if she revealed his identity. Dimmesdale is fully aware of this and cruelly uses Hester's love for him to manipulate her into silence. He then adds the question "What can thy silence do for him--except it tempt him--yea, compel him, as it were--to add hypocrisy to sin?" (p. 73). His insinuation that by refusing to expose him, Hester will be to blame for his tortured conscience shows his extreme hypocrisy. Not only does he coerce Hester into concealing his guilt from the community, but he also tries to shift his guilt over his concealment of his sin onto her, telling her "take heed how thou deniest to him--who perchance hath not the courage to

grasp it for himself--the bitter but wholesome cup that is now presented to thy lips!" (p. 73) This attempt to displace his guilt, however, does not relieve his conscience whatsoever, and he decays morally and physically until he is no longer capable of love or loyalty to Hester, but only self-pity and despair.

Hester's and Dimmesdale's meeting in the forest serves as a dramatic climax to their relationship, contrasting the "pale, weak sinful and sorrow-stricken" (p. 185) Dimmesdale with the strong, resourceful and still compassionate Hester. Realizing how her oath of silence to Chillingworth has placed the man she loves in torment, Hester renounces her oath and confesses, begging "O Arthur... forgive me! In all things else I have striven to be true! I might have held fast, and did hold fast, through all extremity, save when thy good-thy life--thy fame--were put in question!" (p. 184) In response to Hester's confession, Dimmesdale shows his total lack of compassion by refusing to forgive Hester for her deception, even when he knows she acted to protect him. He sincerely believes that Hester's offense is worse than his own abandonment of her for seven years, and viciously accuses her, "thou little, little knowest all the horror of this thing! And the shame! The indelicacy... Woman, woman, thou art accountable for this! I cannot forgive thee!" (p. 185) By dwelling upon Hester's small trangression, Dimmesdale tries to deemphasize his much greater sin of deception for seven years. Using her great love for him to manipulate her, he forces her to degrade herself and beg for his forgiveness, which he then sanctimoniously

grants. Once he has forgiven Hester, however, he connot continue to project his guilt onto her. Therefore, he brings Chillingworth into the equation, stating that "the old man's revenge has been blacker than my sin" (p.186). His line of reasoning is that his guilt can be negated by another's worse guilt, whether it be Hester's or Chillingworth's. Subconciously, however, Dimmesdale cannot explain away his guilt so easily. As a result, he has reached a point of moral despair from which not even Hester's exceptional love and strength can save him.

Dimmesdale, although he professes to be deeply tortured by his guilt, will not take action to expiate it. He has become a spiritual cripple, incapable of acting for himself. Hester berates for his stagnation, stating "Alas, what a ruin has befallen thee! Wilt thou die for very weakness? There is no other cause!" (p. 187) Still, Dimmesdale stubbornly clings to his despair, forcing Hester to decide upon a course of action for him. In this way, Dimmesdale once more seems to manipulate Hester so that she must assume the principal responsibility for their sin. His plaintive request for her to "Be thou strong for me! Advise me what to do" (p. 187) places her in the role of the evil temptress, leading the reluctant Dimmesdale to participate in the sin of their escape together. In his prayer to heaven, he attributes his participation in the escape to his temptation by Hester, stating, "neither can I any longer live without her companionship; so powerful she is to sustain--so tender to soothe!" (p. 191) Fryer has

commented on Dimmesdale's dependence, "he dares defy the universe only in Hester's presence. Away from her, he is afraid. Where he once loved her, he is now threatened by her sexuality."[8] For Dimmesdale, Hester represents all the defiance of their original sin. Because he cannot acknowledge these qualities in himself, he must define Hester as his source of temptation and corruption, both in the act of adultery and their criminal flight from Boston. Because Hester "has arrived at her own norms of conduct and definitions of sin and guilt,"[9] she willingly accepts the full responsibility for the escape, relieving Dimmesdale once again from the spiritual consequences of his own actions.

Although Dimmesdale seems to be reconciled to Hester through their plan to escape, we see that both of their characters have endured too much to make a renewal of their past relationship possible. This fact is symbolically conveyed to us by Hester's attempt to return to a state of purity by removing her scarlet letter. It is in vain that Dimmesdale declares that he has "risen up all made anew" (p.192) and that Hester insists as she casts away the letter "The past is gone! ...with this symbol I undo it all, and make it as it had never been!" (p. 192) Hester is forced by Pearl's tantrum to repin the letter on her bosom, causing them to realize that the grim consequences of their suffering cannot be so easily dismissed. Dimmesdale's prolonged rejection of Hester, coupled with the extreme self-hatred brought on by his hypocrisy, has damaged him to the

point that even Hester's love can only bring him temporary redemption.

Throughout the text, Dimmesdale has failed to be true to his own nature, as Hester has. Baym maintains that Dimmesdale is "unable to identify his 'self' with the passionate core he regards as sinful, (and) he is even less able to admit that this sinful core can produce great sermons."[10] Such a sermon borne of his repressed passions is presented by Dimmesdale on ElectionDay,and it becomes his cathartic masterpiece. Before his astonished parishoners, he declares himself "the one sinner of the world" (p. 237) and confesses his long-hidden adultery. However, because to finally admit his passion and sin is to contradict his self-image as a holy man, the strain of his admission quite literally kills him. His death is the final abandonment of Hester, who had always been true to him. Caught up in a self-righteous frenzy in which he celebrates his nwqfound salvation, Dimmesdale selfishly denies her even the small comfort of anticipating their "immortal life together " (p. 239), saying that "it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion" (p. 239). His statement cruelly negates Hester's faithful love and role in his salvation, and he revels in the glory of penitent confession knowing fully that he will escape the earthly retribution such as she has borne. He has allowed her to suffer alone for seven years, yet when it is to his benefit as a martyr, he wrests their guilt from her and plays it for dramatic effect on the scaffold,

crying out "So let me make haste to take my shame upon me!" (p. 236) His self-aggrandizing confession is a mockery of the suffering Hester has endured for him. Because of the conflicting natures of Hester and Dimmesdale, their relationship is doomed to end in such a tragedy. Even in the face of her humiliation, Hester could never deny the passion and independence so crucial to her values, but remained true to her character. Dimmesdale, torn between this passion in his own nature and his desire for complete spirituality, attempts to manipulate and supress Hester, the symbol of his inner conflict. As a result, not only does he contribute to his own destruction by refusing to recognize his own nature, but he also undercuts Hester's identity by rejecting her and all she represents, comdemning her to perpetual isolation.

Like Hester, Zenobia in The Blithedale Romance is set apart from other women by her vitality and passion, appropriately symbolized by the exotic flower she wears. She possesses not only an "overflow" of "bloom, health and vigor" (p. 15), but also "pride and pomp" (p. 15). However, the same passion and strength which makes Zenobia such a "radiant presence" and "nature's fairest handiwork" (p. 225)is a continual source of conflict in her relationships with the male characters in the text. Fryer says that "Zenobia's physical beauty, her threatening sexuality, are emblematic of the threatening philosophy she espouses."[11] An unusually independent woman, Zenobia flatly refuses to submit herself to the authority

of any man, even Hollingsworth, whom she both respects and loves. As a result, this woman who dares to "swerve one hair's breadth out of the beaten track" (p. 206) and defy convention is scorned by the man she loves and excluded from a place in society, in a chain of events leading up to her problematic suicide.

It seems reasonable enough at first that Zenobia would fall in love with Hollingsworth, becauselike her, he possesses a strong will and magnetic personality. However, we soon discover that unlike Zenobia, whose sense of identity is autonomous, Hollingsworth's identity demands that he completely control others. According to Baym, "Hollingsworth is a jailer who admires nothing in individuals and desires nothing but their submission. He must dominate, and his morality serves his tyranny."[12] His philanthropic purposes are a mask for the basis of his character, which is his "all-consuming egotism" (p. 66). This egotism provides us with an understanding of Hollingsworth's incredible misogyny, because he sincerely believes that anyone unlike himself must be inferior and therefore subject to his unquestionable authority. His attitudes are made clear in his bombastic speech in Eliot's Pulpit, when he says of independent women, "I would call upon my own sex to use its physical force, that unmistakable evidence of sovereignty, to scourge them back within their proper bounds! ...the heart of true womanhood knows where its own sphere is, and never seeks to stray beyond it!" (p. 114) This speech, of course, is a direct attack on the revolutionary Zenobia, yet

her only response is her bitter agreement that "let man be manly and godlike, and woman is only too ready to become what you say" (p. 115).

At first it might seem that in her love for him, Zenobia has swallowed her pride and surrendered to his authority. However, in keeping with her independent character, her response assumes a deeply sarcastic tone. Her implication, then, is that as Hollingsworth has been neither manly or godlike, she is not about to surrender her sense of identity to his ego. As she later observes, Hollingsworth is truly her "judge, jury and accuser" (p. 198), condemning her for, in his eyes, the unpardonable sin of self-expression. So great is his need to control others that he even competes with Zenobia for the loyalties of Coverdale and Priscilla. In attempting to enlist Coverdale's support for his philanthropy, Hollingsworth tells him darkly, "Be with me...or be against me! There is no third choice for you" (p. 125). This absolute statement reveals much about Hollingsworth's character. He has such a great need to dominate others that he connot believe Priscilla's and Coverdale's loyalties for him may be qualified by doubts or loyalties to Zenobia. His conception of the world is a black-and-white one. Either Zenobia must completely yield her individual will to him, or she must become his bitter enemy, a "petticoated monstrosity" (p. 114) who threatens all he stands for. Because of his near-pathological need for control, Hollingsworth is "a travesty of a reformer and a worse travesty as a lover."[13] He is truly, as Zenobia aptly

states, "A cold, heartless, self-beginning and self-ending piece of mechanism... Nothing else, nothing but self, self, self!" (p.201) At the root of his egotism, Hollingsworth is possessed by a need to eradicate ideas which challenge what he sees as the absolute truth of his being. As a result, it is inevitable that he must clash with Zenobia, whose rebellion against convention is interpreted by him as a direct attack on the principles which constitute his identity as a man.

It is hardly suprising that in their battle of wills, the end result is the destruction of both Hollingsworth and Zenobia. Schriber argues that

> "Zenobia has in fact been 'tried' by Hollingsworth, as all women are tried by men in a patriarchical society such as she inhabits... a woman judged guilty of ambitions beyond her proper domestic sphere was metaphorically sentenced to death in Zenobia's society."[14]

In Zenobia's case, the death sentence proves to be a literal one. Her suicide is problematic, because as a self-defined and independent woman, Zenobia makes it very clear that she has rejected the philosophy that a woman "has assigned her but one single event, which she must contrive to make the substance of her whole life" (p. 55), which in her case, would be her love for Hollingsworth. In their climactic parting scene, Zenobia says that she is now "awake, disenchanted, disenthralled" (p. 201), indicating to us that as she has become aware of his despicable nature, it is unlikely that

she would drown herself because he rejects her. Instead, she tells Coverdale "I am weary of this place, and sick to death of playing at philanthropy and progress. Of all varieties of mock-life, we have surely blundered into the very emptiest mockery...It was indeed a foolish dream!" (p. 209) Zenobia has not been brought to despair by love, but by her failed attempts to create a life in which she could achieve the full measure of her independence and self-expression. Her "miserable, bruised and battered heart" (p. 207), the product of her lifelong betrayal and manipulation by men such as Hollingsworth, is tired of fighting, and because she will never surrender, Zenobia chooses the escape of death.

Ironically, in her death Zenobia achieves a victory over Hollingsworth which she never could have gained while she lived. She foreshadows Hollingsworth's recognition of her true value to him when she defiantly cries out "Ten years hence, let Hollingsworth look at my face and Priscilla's, and then choose betwixt them" (p. 208). Her words are prophetic, because Hollingsworth "has ultimately derived his powers from Zenobia... casting out Zenobia, Hollingsworth inadvertently casts out his own vitality and thus ruins himself."[15] Years after her death, the once proud Hollingsworth shows "a self-distrustful weakness, and a childish tendency to press close, and closer still" (p. 223) to the insubstantial Priscilla whom he has chosen over Zenobia. Zenobia does indeed "haunt him" (p. 208), because after her death, he has been paralyzed by her memory. This does not mean that Hollingsworth loved

Zenobia, because his intense narcissism barred him from anything but self-love. However, it was through their test of wills that Hollingsworth derived his energy and intensity of purpose. Weary of this constant struggle, Zenobia kills herself. However, her suicide ends the conflict, thereby stripping Hollingsworth of his chance to ever subdue her, the hope of which has been the driving force in his life. As a result, in a tragic twist of irony, their unwinnable war destroys both Zenobia and Hollingsworth, but appropriately enough to their characters, in completely opposite ways.

Unlike that in her tempestuous relationship with Hollingsworth, the conflict in Zenobia's relationship with Coverdale seems more subtle. This is largely due to the fact that Coverdale's personality is much less forceful than Hollingsworth's, and he seems less eager to control Zenobia than theorize about her. He lacks her vitality, describing himself as a "frosty bachelor" (p. 9) who has come to Blithedale in search of the inspriation that will convert him into a true poet. Baym says of Coverdale, "he wants to tap the soul's reservoir of energy, to make contact with its passionate, creative, active principle... consequently, Zenobia, who unites in her person sex, art and nature is its perfect symbol."[16] Coverdale's fascination with the exotic, mysterious Zenobia becomes apparent early in the text, through his incessant speculation on her sexual nature. On first meeting her, he fantasizes about "her perfectly developed figure, in Eve's earliest

garment" (p. 17), and from his sickbed, he agonizes about whether Zenobia is "a woman to whom wedlock had thrown wide the gates of mystery" (p. 44). Although Coverdale is clearly obsessed with the passionate Zenobia, his idealistic nature will not allow him to admit his sexual attraction to her, a quality he sees as "masculine grossness--a sin of wicked interpretation, of which man is often guilty towards the other sex" (p. 44). He steadfastly denies this attraction throughout the text, claiming instead at the end that he loves the pure and innocent Priscilla. According to Rahv, "This convenient self-deception permits him to covet Zenobia and to pry into her affairs without in any way committing himself to her."[17] Coverdale is threatened and awed by this woman who defies his romantic notions of true womanhood, and in defense of his wounded masculinity, often magnifies her flaws even as he sings her praises. Calling on her in her fashionable town residence, he marvels at her gorgeous adornment and calls her "a work of art" (p. 151). Yet, he then goes on to denounce her "redundance of personal ornament," which reveals her "true character" as "passionate, luxurious, lacking simplicity, not deeply refined, incapable of pure and perfect taste" (p. 152). Coverdale is both repulsed and intrigued by Zenobia, who exemplifies the passionate excess which this aspiring artist may admire, but which his conventional personality deeply mistrusts and fears.

Coverdale's denial of his sexual attraction to Zenobia

also appears in the form of his idealization and romantization of her as "womanliness incarnated" (p. 41). He rhapsodizes that "the image of her form and face shoud have been multipled all over the earth. It was wronging the rest of mankind to retain her as the spectacle of only a few" (p. 41). By his mythologizing Zenobia into a legendary, Helen of Troy figure, he denies her true individuality, converting her into a flat symbol of his masculine ideal. When Zenobia refuses to conform to this ideal, he is "amused and puzzled" (p. 112) that she finds her pedestal too confining. Coverdale truly believes that he is sympathetic to the cause of women, yet in an incredible display of doublethink, he dismisses Zenobia's feminist convictions with the statement that women "seldom disquiet themselves about the rights and wrongs of their sex, unless their own individual affections chance to lie in idleness, or be ill at ease" (p. 112). His insinuation is that women such as Zenobia stir up radical ideas only because they are not kept properly occupied with their role in "the sphere of ordinary womanhood" (p. 175). This aspect of his character is confirmed by his response to Hollingsworth's malevolent tirade against women at Eliot's Pulpit. Although he claims that Hollingsworht's speech has stirred "the indignant ebullition of my own blood" (p. 114), he makes no argument against it. Rather, he expects Zenobia "to be the champion of her sex" (p. 115) and argue instead of him. When she will not, Coverdale seems content to drop the subject of women's rights entirely, preferring

to brood on his ever-present sexual jealousy.

Coverdale's jealousy of Hollingsworth's and Zenobia's relationship leads to his most overt manipulation of Zenobia's passionate character. The conventional Coverdale realizes he is no match for Zenobia in her forceful self-expression, and although he denies his love for her, his strong infatuation with her sexuality unleashes an intense jealousy which is the closest approach to passion he achieves in the text. He baits Zenobia shamelessly about Hollingsworth, telling her "Hollingsworth could hardly give his affections to a person capable of taking an independent stand, but only to one whom he mightabsorb into himself. He has certainly shown great tenderness for Priscilla" (p. 154). His desire to hurt Zenobia is the pathetic result of his failure to obtain her love or respect. He cannot bear to think that this passionate, independent woman has held him in complete thrall without even intending to do so, in a startling upset of the traditional male-female roles he holds so dear. Therefore, he must attack her source of power, her deep passions, and avenge his wounded pride by chipping away at her self-esteem by manipulating those passions with his cruel remarks. His attempt to "tamper thus with earnest human passions" (p. 157) not only inflames Zenobia's anger against Coverdale, but creates a breach between them that can never be healed.

From Coverdale's reaction to her death, we see that he has never understood the mystery that is Zenobia. Looking

upon her rigidly twisted body, he can only romanticize her death, speculating that she must have "deemed it well and decorous to die as so many village maidens have, wronged in their first love, and seeking peace in the bosom of the old, familiar stream" (p. 218). Considering how little Zenobia cared for convention during her lifetime, it is absurd for Coverdale to assume that she would wish to emulate traditional romance heroines through her death. Even more absurd is his notion that Zenobia's vanity could have prevented her suicide had she only known how aesthetically ugly she would become in death. Fryer states that "Coverdale's hope that her clenched hands represent an attidude of prayer suggest their hope of her submission, and also their fear that Zenobia has defied them all."[18] Clearly, Zenobia has escaped the men who sought to manipulate and repress the passion and will essential to her nature. Coverdale, in his sentimental interpretation of her death, attempts to trivialize the significance of her action, as he tries to transform her into a broken woman who kills herself for love. However, we as readers are able to see that just as "any passion would become her well" (p. 95), the stark realism of Zenobia's death is well-suited to her, a woman who shunned romanticism and dwelt in the vitally real world of passion and action.

Zenobia, like Hester Prynne, is set apart from conventional heroines through her unwavering sense of self and her quest for personal independence and expression. However, in both

The Blithedale Romance and The Scarlet Letter, the passionate and complex nature of these dark heroines bring them into irresolveable conflict with the principal male characters in the texts. Whether they be overt misogynists such as Hollingsworth, or subtle manipulators such as Dimmesdale, the male characters are all threatened and confused by the unconventional personas of Zenobia and Hester. In their relationships with revolutionary heroines, the men attempt not only to control and manipulate them, but also to undermine the principles of self-definition and independence that are central to each of these heroine's identity. Although these attempts to reshape the essential identities of Hawthorne's dark heroines are generally unsuccessful in their original purposes, they do prove emotionally devastating. The bitter conflicts between Hester and Zenobia and the men who challenge their right to self-definition inevitably lead to the moral, if not literal, destruction of all involved. As a result, through The Scarlet Letter and The Blithedale Romance we see that there can be no winners in Hawthorne's gender wars.

NOTES

[1]Mary S. Schriber, Gender and the Writer's Imagination, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1978), p. 48.

[2]Judith Fryer, The Faces of Eve: Women in the Nineteenth Century American Novel, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 79.

[3]Schriber, p.51.

[4]John C. Gerber, "Form and Content in The Scarlet Letter," in Critical Essays on Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, ed. David P. Kesterson, (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1988), p. 75.

[5]Richard D. Dust, "'Take Shame' and 'Be True': Hawthorne and His Characters in The Scarlet Letter," in Critical Essays on Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, ed. David P. Kesterson, (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1988), p.215.

[6]Nina Baym, "The Major Phase I, 1850: The Scarlet Letter," in Critical Essays on Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, ed. David P. Kesterson, (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1988), p. 135.

[7]SChriber, p. 52.

[8]Fryer, p. 80.

[9]Schriber, p. 55.

[10]Baym, p. 141.

[11]Fryer, p. 211.

[12]Nina Baym, "The Blithedale Romance: A Radical Reading," in The Blithedale Romance (A Norton Critical Edition), eds. S. Gross and Rosalie Murphy, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), p. 357.

[13]Phillip Rahv, "The Dark Lady of Salem," in The Blithedale Romance (A Norton Critical Edition), eds. S. Gross and Rosalie Murphy, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), p. 339.

[14]Schriber, p. 78.

[15]Baym, Blithedale, p. 367.

[16]Ibid., p. 353.

[17]Rahv, p. 339.

[18]Fryer, p. 219.

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