CHARACTERIZATION OF WOMEN IN THE FICTION
OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

While his Transcendentalist contemporaries were expounding their optimistic philosophy of natural goodness, progress, and perfectibility, Hawthorne probed into the human heart, recording the darkest motives of his characters and writing bitter criticism of life. Around him men were declaring that scientific inventions, political organizations, and religious reforms were ushering in a new era; but Hawthorne viewed the new society as a probable continuation of old evils and a manufacturer of new ones. His fiction has been called "an elaborate study of the centrifugal, ... a dramatization of all those social and psychological forces that lead to disunion, fragmentation, dispersion, incoherence."  

Critics generally comment on Hawthorne's obsession with guilt. His pessimistic analysis of the mind, his somber outlook on living, and his personal tendency to solitude are frequently credited to his Puritan ancestry; yet as Arvin points out, "He had no more Puritan blood than Emerson and

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1 Newton Arvin, Hawthorne (Boston, 1929), p. 186.
hundreds of other New Englanders of his time: and who will say that they were obsessed with the spectral presence of guilt?  

One must go beyond Calvinist theology to comprehend the source of guilt that hovers over the pages of his fiction. His religious, moral, educational, and economic background was so typical of his time and locality that one can hardly believe that the nature of his writing or thinking could have been determined by these factors. Indeed, his imperviousness to contemporary influences causes one to look intensely at his personal life in searching for the explanation of the Hawthorne enigma.

An important influence on his writing was his prolonged association with women. From his life in a feminine world and his reaction to that world, he devised the major part of his style, themes, and feminine character types. A review of the facts of his biography will establish the nature of the influence that dominated him as a man and as a writer. And an analysis of his fiction will indicate the extent of that influence on his writing.

Although this study will necessarily begin with a review of his life, this thesis is not another biography; for

\(^{2}\text{Ibid.}, p. 59.\)
Hawthorne already has a large number of biographers. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the literary influence of his mother, sisters, wife, daughters, and women acquaintances, with particular emphasis on their relation to his themes, style, and character types.
CHAPTER II

WOMEN IN HIS LIFE

Nathaniel Hawthorne vacillated for almost sixty years between seclusion and participation in the current of New England life. At first he locked himself in a room at his mother's home, living almost as a monk; "he sat down by the wayside, as he himself said, and remained sitting there, growing more and more apart from ordinary humanity." In his solitary life he gradually lost the capacity for warm, easy relations with people, and became a cold, analytical spectator to nineteenth-century American life. Through public office and occasional social intercourse, he waded into the current only to withdraw again to his tower. The last years of his life were restless ones in which he wandered from home to home and finally from country to country; but the gypsy, like the monk, failed to find his place in the world. Marriage, children, and literary fame failed to bridge the abyss of the lonely years that began long ago in Salem.

The old Hawthorne house stood in the middle of the block on Union Street in a neighborhood that was good but not distinguished. "The house was remarkable for a complete absence of decorations; sturdy and somewhat blunt, yet too

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\(^{1}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 184-186.}\)
businesslike and too darksome to be snug." Its inhabitants and their ancestors had been prominent in colonial life as leaders in law, war, religion, and maritime ventures. They "had come to terms easily, or at least decisively, with the life about them." Recently their fortunes had declined; but like the house, they continued to exist in an austere, harsh, and somewhat arrogant manner. "In every generation but one the story had been repeated; a conviction of superiority; an ambition for distinction, the bitterness of essential failure."

In the house behind the Hawthornes lived the family of Richard Manning. Blacksmiths and stagecoach drivers, they were outdoor people, ambitious and willing to take chances in a new company or to share a voyage to the East, but there was also within them a gentle quality—a love of books, solitude, flowers, and fruit trees. They were not wealthy, but they did hold titles to a large tract of land in Maine.

One of their eight children, Elizabeth Clarke Manning, married young Captain Nathaniel Hawthorne and became the mother of the writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne. Betsy, as she was frequently called, was an attractive girl with

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3 Arvin, op. cit., pp. 6-9.

extraordinary grey eyes. Quiet and reserved, she possessed in maidenhood the intelligence and sensitivity that later characterized her three children. She disliked all the Hawthornes except her husband. Mather points out that she certainly had not fallen in love with the rest of the family. "They were hard, stern and bad-mannered;" and she "was without doubt a cultured woman."5

Her marriage to Captain Hawthorne, which was spent largely in awaiting his return from long sea voyages, ended on April 19, 1808, when word was received in Salem that Captain Hawthorne had died in Surinam of yellow fever. The tragic news was related to four-year-old Nathaniel by his mother, who said simply, "Natty, your father is dead," an announcement that never lost its sharpness in the boy's memory. The atmosphere of the home changed at once to gloom, and the mother became engrossed in a morbid obsession that was to dominate the remainder of her life and leave its mark on all three of the children. 6

Soon after learning of her husband's death, Madame Hawthorne and the children returned to the home of her parents. For almost forty years she maintained a solitary

5Edward Mather, Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1940), pp. 24-25.

6Morris, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

7Cantwell, op. cit., p. 25.
existence while the household and the town changed and grew older. From time to time her brothers disrupted her reveries to secure her signature on the deeds for the land they sold in Maine. The only proof of her life is in the land records of Cumberland County in Portland.

Nathaniel reflected later that she found no consolation in the fact that Salem women of all generations had faced the same grief and had continued in useful existence. What had begun as the expression of violent grief had settled into the dreary rite of a monotonous sorrow. "A forlorn widow" Hawthorne was to describe, many years later, as a fiction, "whose grief outlasted even its vitality, and grew to be a torpid habit, and was saddest then." 8

"For despite death, his father seemed to live, a ghostly lover in the chamber where his mother had shut herself away and to which she admitted no visitors."

An enduring melancholy pervaded the Manning house, for the uncles were often away and Elizabeth maintained a rigorous seclusion. She left the house scarcely ever, and passed her days in the darkened solitude of her room. The house seemed to be inhabited by a gravely beautiful ghost, whose insubstantial existence, although remote from the routine of domestic life, dominated the household by an unacknowledged tyranny. It seemed as if in that comfortable New England dwelling, there were being celebrated a secret rite of perpetual vigil and lamentation. The children saw their mother only briefly, when she came to them in their rooms; for into her room, where she sat engrossed by her memories and her pieties, they were never permitted to penetrate. Her meals were served to her there, and the dining room, because of her invariable absence from the family table, echoed with the silent obstinacy of her grief.

8 Arvin, op. cit., p. 12.
As time passed, her intercourse with her children and the members of her family slackened. Her contact with the world outside her home gradually diminished and finally ceased. She was content, at last, in her isolation. In this desolate anti-life her rebellious heart achieved an austere, comfortless peace. 9

Nathaniel and his sisters played, quarreled, and listened to tales of their Puritan ancestors. Sometimes, he would interrupt their play to announce, "I'm going away to see... and I'll never come back again!" Still he delighted in the feminine attention that he had enjoyed since birth and which was intensified after he suffered a foot injury at the age of nine. For over three years, he spent his time reading, playing with cats, and accepting the kindnesses of his sisters and his four unmarried aunts.

When he was twelve, they moved to Raymond, Maine, where he fished, tramped the woods and read. An entry in his first diary reveals his attitude toward maternal solicitude:

This morning the bucket got off the chain and dropped back into the well. I wanted to go down on the stones and get it. Mother would not consent, for fear the wall might cave in, but hired Samuel Shane to go down. In the goodness of her heart, she thought the son of old Mrs. Shane not quite so valuable as the son of the widow Hawthorne. God bless her for all her love for me, though it may be some selfish. 11

On several occasions he reported that he longed to go swimming but would not disobey his mother, and that he

10Ibid., p. 10.
11S. T. Pickard, Hawthorne's First Diary (Boston, 1897), p. 11.
regretted that his day of fishing would cause her one of anxiety. Nevertheless he recalled his days spent under her domination at Raymond as "the happiest days of my life. . . . Why was I not a girl that I might have pinned all my life to my mother's apron."12

Although many of the biographers have insisted, with some justification, that Hawthorne's relationship with his mother was devoid of any emotional warmth, Stewart quotes a letter written by Nathaniel to her when he had been chastised for playing cards at Bowdoin that suggests a remarkable confidence in her understanding:

I have nothing in particular to inform you of except that all the Card Players in College have been found out, and my unfortunate self among the number. . . . When the President asked what we played for, I thought proper to inform him it was 50 cts. although it happened to be a Quart of Wine, but if I had told him of that he would probably have fined me for having a blow. There was no untruth in the case, as the wine cost 50 cts. I have not played at all this term.13

That he perhaps resented her proud ambition for him is indicated in a letter he wrote his sister before leaving college:

The family had before conceived much too high an opinion of my talents, and had probably formed expectations which I shall never realize. . . . I do not say this for the purpose of drawing any

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flattery from you, but merely to set mother and the rest of you right upon a point where your partiality has led you astray. 14

Morris believes that her stubborn pride led her to consider him a genius; her "pride centered in her children whom she hoped might yet prove her superiority to the people of Salem whom she regarded with silent contempt." Having nothing better to do, Nathaniel returned to the house on Herbert Street and locked his door against casual interruption while he contemplated and wrote. The members of his household met by appointment only, each maintaining a seclusion. His meals were left at the door so that he would have no distractions to his literary pursuits. Later he wrote, "We did not even live at my house."15

In a letter to Longfellow, he complained:

I have secluded myself from society; and yet I never meant any such thing, nor dreamed what sort of life I was going to lead... there has been no warmth of approbation so that I have always written with benumbed fingers.

I have another great difficulty in the lack of materials; for I have seen so little of the world that I have nothing but thin air to convert my stories of, and it is not easy to give a life-like semblance to such shadowy stuff. Sometimes through a peephole I have caught a glimpse of the real world, and the two or three articles in which I have portrayed these glimpses please me better than the others. 16

An important insight into the years of complete seclusion was destroyed when Bridge obeyed a request from the

\[14\text{Morris, op. cit., p. 42.}\]
\[15\text{Ibid., pp. 46-47.}\]
\[16\text{Ibid., p. 76.}\]
young author and burned all the letters written during this period. A partial picture, constructed from Bridge's replies, indicates that Nathaniel had threatened suicide on several occasions in 1836-7. He seems to have worried about poverty, literary failure, but most of all about the turn his personal life had taken.

Among all the elements of human happiness that he had renounced, it is probable that he regretted none more than love. He was technically chaste; his code of sexual morality was exceedingly strict; his desires had been aggravated by prolonged asceticism. The frustration of his sexual life must have played a large part in giving his mood of despondency a morbid, almost hysterical turn. 17

Anyone who studied his life cannot fail to observe the prolonged dependence on his mother and sisters. At thirty-four when he became engaged to Sophia Peabody, he lacked the courage to announce the engagement to either family. One of the reasons for his reticence in this matter was that his sister Elizabeth warned him that his mother would not approve of his marriage to anybody, especially Sophia. It was hinted that the revelation might be fatal for his mother's health.

It is interesting to find that when Nathaniel finally acquainted his mother of his intentions, she replied, "What you have to tell me is not a surprise to me. . . . and Sophia Peabody is the wife of all others whom I would have

17 Ibid., p. 79.
chosen for you." Morris speaks of his preoccupation during the years of courtship with "the image of Sophia so like his mother in her tender sensuality, her semi-invalidism, her seclusion from the world's activities." Madame Hawthorne's later treatment of Sophia suggests that the union did not please her so much as she had tried to persuade her son, and that her conversation with him was a deliberate effort to keep his love and affection.

When Sophia and Nathaniel came for their first visit after the wedding, Madame Hawthorne refused to break her solitude to welcome Sophia, and Elizabeth was extremely hostile toward her. It seems likely that she must have been aware of Sophia's letters asking for a temporary residence when the young Hawthornes had to vacate the Old Manse. Sophia's second letter, written in a state of anxiety, was answered tersely by Louisa stating that Sophia might have the parlor and Nathaniel could have his old boyhood room. During the time that they occupied the same house Madame Hawthorne remained in her dark chamber, visiting them for a short time on occasions. Then she spoke very little but sat in her ancient gown and stared at Nathaniel.


19 Morris, op. cit., p. 98.
Although her pride made her appear imperturbable, Madame Hawthorne was upset by Nathaniel's removal as Surveyor and Inspector. The subsequent gossip proved to be the final misfortune for the proud lady. By the end of June, 1849, she was bedfast, and by July the family knew that her death was inevitable.

Now she was dying and Hawthorne entered her room to experience what he called "the darkest hour I ever lived." The account of that visit is one of the most moving passages he ever wrote.

I love my mother; but there has been, ever since my boyhood, a sort of coldness of intercourse between us, such as is apt to come between persons of strong feelings, if they are not managed rightly. I did not expect to be much moved at the time—that is to say, not to feel any overpowering emotion struggling, just then—though I knew that I should deeply remember and regret her. . . . Louisa pointed to a chair near the bed; but I was moved to kneel down close by my mother, and take her hand. She knew me, but could only murmur a few indistinct words among which I understood an injunction to take care of my sisters. Mrs. Dike left the chamber, and then I found the tears slowly gathering in my eyes. I tried to keep them down; but it would not be—I kept filling up, till, for a few moments, I shook with sobs. For a long time, I knelt there holding her hand; and surely it is the darkest hour I ever lived. Afterwards, I stood by the open window, and looked through the crevice of the curtain. The shouts, laughter, and cries of the two children had come up into the chamber, from the open air, making a strange contrast with the death-bed scene. And now, through the crevice of the curtain, I saw my little Una of the golden locks, looking very beautiful; and so full of spirit and life that she was life itself. And then I looked at my poor dying mother; and seemed to see the whole of human existence at once, standing in the dusty midst of it. 20

20 Stewart, op. cit., p. 90.
As Nathaniel brooded over the uselessness of his mother's life, he must have thought of the twelve years that he had followed her example and of the rebellion he had suffered for not having known the profound experience of sexual love. His life is divided into two parts, the first part centered around his mother and the second around Sophia Peabody.

Sophia was a slight, graceful girl with small features and a turned-up nose. She was described on occasion as beautiful but more often she was remembered as being "cute" and having "a wit like a kitten playing on a string." Her mother assured her that she was a person of sensitive nature, vivid imagination, delicate nerves and precarious health. Her father was a physician and dentist whose career had "an undefined dubious atmosphere." Her mother, a cultivated and sentimental woman, considered her children to be perfect. Both parents were ambitious and somewhat impractical in advising their children. "The Peabodys were poor. The poorer they grew the more resolutely high-minded and impractical they became." 

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21 Cantwell, op. cit., p. 236.
22 Ibid., p. 237.
23 Ibid.
After having difficulty with teething, Sophia was made before her tenth year a semi-invalid by the medical practices of the time. Constant headaches made her unable to tolerate the noise of knives and forks; consequently, she ate her meals alone in her room while her mother kept all doors from being slammed. She was, despite her invalid's temperament, unusually cheerful when the headaches abated and entertained a number of visitors in her chamber. Before she was seventeen, her mother had warned her that she might never marry, but had urged her to "open your warm affectionate heart to receive the kindness and love of the excellent of the earth, to whom your kindred nature attaches you." 24

Sophia was a prig and an intellectual snob who had tried to learn too much. "She would draw the leg of a horse and then, as the headaches came on, throw herself into the hammock and read Hebrew." 25 She was a tender-hearted stoic who could become ecstatic over a lovely flower or a child.

A hero-worshiper, she was during this period especially fond of Ralph Waldo Emerson, a friend of the family, and Washington Allston, a painter whom she had copied. At one time she may have had a faint hope of making herself

24 Ibid., p. 241.

25 Mather, op. cit., p. 105.
acceptable to Allston. At any rate, she returned home in a complete breakdown soon after the announcement of his second marriage. The reason for her despondency is not clear, for she had enjoyed an unusually active social life while visiting in Boston and records only insignificant frustrations.

For two years she and her sister Mary lived in Cuba. Cantwell surmises that "a tropical strain was woven into the plain fabric of her New England experience and never left it, something vivid and exotic... a zest for life, and a frankness and freedom in enjoying it. After her return she lived in seclusion but continued her aesthetic pursuits and her platonic friendships with the intellectuals of the vicinity.

There must have been something not quite earthly in her fragile, white-wrapped, soft-voiced presence on that afternoon when Hawthorne first saw her and with an impulsive emphasis unaccustomed in him, urged her to accompany Elizabeth and himself that evening to Miss Burley's. Within a few months they were lovers, only just unacknowledged to each other, and within a year they were secretly engaged. 27

Sophia gave Hawthorne her Cuban diaries, which he studied carefully, finding passages that revealed her impractical idealism. Cantwell describes her concept of life:

26 Cantwell, op. cit., p. 243.

27 Arvin, op. cit., p. 78.
The beliefs she held led her to seek constantly for a higher type of being and a better kind of life than she could find, to find people better and more beautiful than they were; to transform the blunt everyday world into a masquelike pageant on an enchanted island. And yet she knew not exactly, but with a half-sense of awareness, and an occasional mockery and when reality broke the vision of the world, she went to bed in an agony of vexation, or lay in her darkened room in the old house in Salem, her spirit fluttering like an injured bird against the transparent barrier of her vision. 28

Hawthorne entered her dream world and led her at least partially to the world of reality where she experienced a magical physical recovery. Her correspondence to him suggests an urgent need for love. Few of her letters survive, but in one that has been preserved she declares, "Thou art a necessity of my nature as well as its crown of perfection and voluntary grace. It is astonishing how much I love thee every day." 29

Nathaniel's letters during their engagement describe in some seventy thousand words the thoughts of a man profoundly and happily in love. His mind dwelt constantly upon their union which he felt had already been approved, as when he wrote:

I am tired this evening, as usual, with my day's toil; and my soul yearns for the friend whom God has given it. . . . whose soul He has married to my soul. . . . We are married! . . . . I felt it long

28 Cantwell, op. cit., p. 254.

29 Van Doren, op. cit., p. 100.
ago, it has been on my lips to call you Wife! Mine
own dove. . . . Are we not married? God knows we are. . . . God himself has joined us. 30

Often his letters contrasted his new happiness with the
cold emptiness of the past:

Now I begin to understand why I was imprisoned so
many years in this lonely chamber, and why I could
never break the viewless bolts and bar; for if I
had sooner made my escape into the world, I should
have grown hard and rough, and been covered with
earthly dust, and my heart would have become callous
by rude encounters with the multitude; so that I
should have been unfit to shelter a heavenly Dove
in my arms. . . . Thou only has taught me I have a
heart. 31

In another letter he credits her with his awakening:

Indeed, we are but shadows—we are not endowed with
real life, and all that seems most real about us is
but the thinnest substance of a dream—till the
heart is touched. That touch created us—then
we begin to be—thence we are beings of reality,
and inheritors of eternity. Now, dearest, dost
thou comprehend what thou hast done for me? 32

Arvin remarks that Nathaniel’s letters have an un-
healthy interpretation of the most profound emotional
attachment that he was to accept willingly. Instead of
finding through his experience with love a new grasp of
reality, Nathaniel praised the solitude that kept him pure
for "his Dove." Even though he credited their love with

30 Morris, op. cit., p. 30.

31 Ibid., p. 111.

32 Arvin, op. cit., p. 91.
lending a new substantiality to his personal life, he never spoke of their walking hand in hand toward the main current of American life. Because she was waiting for him at night, he found that the toil of the day had become tolerable, but not significant. She did not share his "grosser life" but was kept in a "sphere apart for their irrelevant relations." 33

An observer wrote later that there was something humorous in the pathetic manner he turned to her when ordinary life bewildered him and in the "bright gentleness with which she served as his shield and shelter." Arvin asserts:

It is disconcerting to find him exulting, not over the expansion and enrichment of his world, but over the "protection" and "repose" his marriage is to bring him... freedom from disturbance, insulation from experience. The work wrought by the years in the dismal chamber was not, then by this agency to be undone... 34

The nature of his relationship with his wife brought him, no doubt, a tremendous personal happiness; but through this continued withdrawal from society he was to fail in his highest purpose as a literary artist.

In another letter to her, he described a dream in which he slept a whole year "in the open air" and awaked to find a charred space on the ground beneath him. Yet

33 Ibid., p. 90. 34 Ibid., p. 94.
scattered over the burnt place was a bit of grass and herbage "looking as fresh and bright and dewy as if the summer rain and sun had been cherishing them all the time."

Morris interprets the sleep to be his hermitage interrupted by Sophia. The fire, repressed sexuality, had prevented any large amount of growth although it had enhanced the final product with a delicate freshness. If Sophia became the source of a rich inner life for Nathaniel, she distracted his preoccupation with that life. Marriage provoked such a radical change in his inward experience that for a time he was unable to continue his creative expression.

It must have seemed to him that he had been moving not in one world, but in two; that one of these worlds was warm, gross, sweaty, muscular, unillumined, crass; that the other was a thin-aired upland, strewn with tenuous and evanescent growths, blown upon by faint and chilly breezes, and shimmering in a tepid sunlight. Somehow not quite at home in either, he observed that his experience had been divided between the two. In one dwelt Franklin Pierce and Bridge and Jonathan Cilley, the yeomen at North Adams, the shipmasters at Long Wharf, and the cattle dealers at Brighton Fair; in the other dwelt Sophia Peabody and her sisters, Miss Burley, Jones Very, the cranks and theorists at Brook Farm and Waldo Emerson. He had felt himself drawn strongly, by every impulse to his under-nourished imagination, to the brisk and noisy facts of the coarser world. How thoroughly it filled in all outlines! How rich it was in stimuli to a mind bent on comprehending all aspects of conduct, all gradations of character! Yet certainly something had been amiss in his contact with that world. He had turned from it in impatience or weariness again and again--turned from it precisely to find refuge in the cooler and purer

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air of Sophia Peabody's world. And here he was at last in the half-Emersonian Manse, surrounded by Sophia's taste in decorations, living on vegetables, and blessed with poets and philosophers for neighbors! But did he "belong" in this any more than in that other setting? 36

In the Old Manse, Nathaniel and Sophia achieved "the solitude of a united two." During the three years that they lived there, "he was not seen, probably by no more than a dozen villagers," wrote George William Curtis. Nathaniel wrote in his journal:

My wife is in the strictest sense, my sole companion, and I need no other; there is no vacancy in my mind any more than in my heart. In truth, I have spent so many years in total seclusion from all human society, that it is no wonder if I now feel all my desires satisfied by this sole intercourse. 38

He was ecstatic in his rapture with her. "Nobody but we ever knew what it is to be married." 39 Their home was Eden and they were Adam and Eve. She danced the Cuban "Cach a Cha" for him; and with its conclusion, he observed "she deserved John the Baptist's head." She decorated their home to her taste, striving always to be unique. The bed appeared too drab; so she painted copies of Flaxman designs upon the head and foot boards and varnished the wood.

36 Ibid., p. 72. 37 Ibid., p. 110.
38 Ibid., p. 111.
39 Van Doren, op. cit., p. 119.
to a lustrous finish. On the wall of his study she hung pictures that she had copied during their engagement, and on the bookcase she placed Margaret Fuller's wedding gift, a handsome bronze vase.

Sophia could not deny the poverty of their early married life, but she continued to strive for the dream-world idealism of her youth. Anticipating his literary success, she banished him to the study every morning, but try as he might the writing would not come to him. His thoughts were as the portraits of the old clergy which Sophia had replaced with golden-tinted wallpaper.

The position of Surveyor and Inspector in Salem alleviated his financial distress for a time; however, a Whig victory in 1848 caused the removal of Democratic appointees; and Nathaniel, then the father of two children, was left desolate and unemployed. When he informed Sophia of his discharge, which had been achieved in an ignoble manner, she is reported to have said, "Oh, then you can write your book." She produced savings which she had withheld from her household allowances, and sold to their friends decrated lamp shades and hand screens which she had made. Nathaniel worked feverishly on his book, and by February, 1850, he had completed his masterpiece, The Scarlet Letter. Cantwell remarks that after completing the novel, Nathaniel

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40 Arvin, op. cit., p. 156.
"worried about his health, yet would not confess it to Sophia—-he never owned up to not feeling perfectly well to her, for she sermonized him too much on the subject."  

Many of the neighbors, including Emerson and Thoreau, visited them in their early married life; but they made their visits less frequent because of Sophia's obvious discomfort when Nathaniel entered and discovered company present. Even before their marriage, Sophia had attempted to weld a friendship between Hawthorne and Emerson; yet Hawthorne found little pleasure in Emerson's company, and Emerson confessed that he could not read Hawthorne's fiction. Sophia accepted defeat with her usual buoyancy. In a letter written to her mother during their early marriage, she declared:

Mr. Emerson delights in him; he talks to him all the time and Mr. Hawthorne looks answers. He seems to fascinate Mr. Emerson. ... Miss Hoar says that persons about Mr. Emerson so generally echo him, that it is refreshing to him to find this perfect individual, all himself and nobody else.  

Had Emerson seen Hawthorne at his center he would have been amazed and pained. Hawthorne very seldom exposed this center--too seldom, in fact. Sophia seems not to have suspected its existence until The Scarlet Letter revealed

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41 Cantwell, op. cit., p. 439.

42 Van Doren, op. cit., p. 123.
it to her with all of its intensity and power. After hearing the story, she retired to her bed with a dreadful headache.

In another letter to her mother, she praised Melville, wondering if he might not become a "very great man." Sometimes, she remarked of "his strange hypnotic glance" but described his visits to the Hawthorne home as "very agreeable and entertaining." Nevertheless, Sophia could not have approved of their cigars, liquor, or of all the wild talk that the two men enjoyed. Nathaniel confessed in "Twenty Days" that once when she was absent at West Newton, they "smoked cigars even within the sacred precincts of the sitting room." 43

Attending church was important to her and she encouraged Nathaniel to follow her example, but he left no evidence of accepting any dogma. It might be assumed that she had tried to convert him to her religious beliefs, for through her family and her friends he was well indoctrinated with Concord Transcendentalism. Nevertheless, Hawthorne's realistic concept of man's moral nature led him away from the shrine where man's "bright and comfortable situation in the universe" was lauded, and he remained at home while Unitarians and Transcendentalists

43 Stewart, op. cit., p. 108.
expounded their religious philosophies. Earlier, in the "Celestial Railroad," he had declared there was no easy way to Heaven.

Certainly, Nathaniel respected his wife's religious views even though he had no intention of accepting them. Generally he was content to spend his days writing, reading, and romping with the children. The devoted mother saw the children as "unfallen angels," while Nathaniel found them equally lovable but recorded their antics with a "strong sense of fact and a strong sense of humor." Sophia "often blinked at fact" and found no humor in some of his descriptions of their behavior. After his death "she inked out many passages in his letters and journals which dealt honestly and humorously with Una and Julian. 44

Letters written during separation from Sophia and the children are wistful. In September after his marriage he took a two-day walking trip with Emerson and returned with one dominant impression: "The first time that I ever came home in my life; for I never had a home before." 45 When Sophia took the children for extended visits, he wrote:

"Never did I miss thee so much... at bed and board, and in all other incidents of daily and night life, as during this separation... But for the idea of"

44 Ibid., p. 81.

thee, my existence would be as cold and wintry as the weather is now, and with a cloudy gloom besides, instead of the dazzling sunshine. 46

During another separation he wrote, "I cannot bear the loneliness of the house. I need the sunshine of the children. . . I need thee, above all, and find myself, at every absence, so much the less able to endure it." 47

Sophia loved parties and reached her greatest social success in England. The dinners given by the Brights, Heywoods, Hollands, and other wealthy families were quite elaborate, and the Hawthornes attended a number of them. Sophia, indeed, was impressed by social entertainments, and wrote animated descriptions of appointments and costumes in letters to her relatives. Formal dinners were almost always painful to Nathaniel; and his discomfort in company with social peers or superiors, another scar from his early home life, was so obvious that other guests often remarked of it. On one occasion he described his ordeal, "I felt like the hippopotamus, or to use a more modest illustration, like some strange bug imprisoned under a tumbler, with a dozen eyes watching whatever I did." 48

Sophia's health was a major problem. Before the first child was born, her physical condition was so precarious that

46 Stewart, op. cit., p. 82.

Nathaniel performed all the household tasks. He would not permit Sophia to exert herself, and she marveled that a "seraph" could perform such mundane tasks as chopping wood and cooking breakfast. During their residence in England, the climate became so oppressive to her that she was ordered to spend eight months in Portugal while Nathaniel and Julian stayed at Mrs. Blodgett's boarding house on Duke Street.

The boarding house was as much an American Island in the midst of Liverpool as was the Consulate. Nathaniel wrote long descriptions of his loneliness for Sophia; still for the first time in many years he was without the dominance of women and could do as he pleased. The atmosphere of the boarding house was stimulating, and he was enchanted by its simplicity and complete lack of social pretentions, associating happily and familiarly with Mrs. Blodgett's boarders who regarded him with respect and fondness. One can picture him blinking his eyes and suddenly coming to life without having to pretend social gaiety. Even though his temperance may be regarded as a fact, he enjoyed smoking tobacco and drinking intoxicating liquor. To be sure, Sophia approved of neither practice and took pains to remove all references to tobacco and alcohol in the note-books.

The residence on Duke Street allowed him to associate freely with ordinary people, an experience which he had been denied by his marriage; for Sophia had concluded that
"his genius enforced its special asceticism; her function was to serve that genius." But at Mrs. Blodgett's house in the evening he pulled up a chair and joined the conversations which were filled with the loud harsh words of maritime officers.

The smoking room, an apartment barely twenty feet square, was by nine o'clock every evening enveloped in a blue cloud smelling of strong tobacco. The men played cards and laughed at their luck. Genial and good-humored, Nathaniel made the Yankee captains laugh and probably wonder where the gloomy tales of his books came from. The conversation was not entirely of ships; one might have heard tales from ports all over the world. Hawthorne observed:

The smell of tar and bilge-water is somewhat strongly perceptible in all conversation. ... and yet these men are alive and talk of real matters, and matters which they know. It would do John Bull good to sit at our table and adjourn to our smoking room, but he would be apt to go away a little crest-fallen.

Christmas day was celebrated at Mrs. Blodgett's with branches of mistletoe hung everywhere. The Yankee captains approached the holiday with exuberance and mischief, organizing a plot to force the American consul into observing the tradition of the mistletoe. Henry Bright wrote a poem

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50 Stewart, op. cit., p. 164.
describing the festivities which pictures Hawthorne as being congenial with all the guests and observing the "kissing pleas" under the mistletoe. Writing about Christmas day of 1854, which he had celebrated with his family, he asserted, "My early life was perhaps a good preparation for the declining half of life; it having been such a blank that any thereafter would compare favorably with it." 51

His reunion with Sophia was a joyous one, and they resumed their customary seclusion. Altogether the English years were pleasant ones; but as soon as he could be relieved of his duties at the consulate, they proceeded to Italy. Nathaniel spoke of his pleasure in roaming about the world and of his desire to continue his late education in art. However, the Italian residence was more than anything a concession to Sophia. The frigid temperature of the Italian winter made Nathaniel miserable, but his wife was surprisingly tireless in their excursions. He approached her sacred culture with gloom and annoyance, sharing none of her ecstatic devotion to the artistic splendor that surrounded them. Along with the Brownings they experimented briefly with spiritualism. When Sophia reported messages from her dead parents and brother, he attributed the phenomena to her sentimental fancies and preconceived ideas.

51 Morris, op. cit., p. 327.
Their return to America was blighted by the tremendous expense of remodeling Wayside. He remarked to Ticknor, "What will be the use of having a house if it costs me all my means of living in it. . . . It is folly for a mortal man to do anything more than pitch a tent." 52

Sophia was disturbed when the old alienation disrupted his easy association with their Concord neighbors; and during the last months of his life she tried to arouse him from lethargy by sending him on short journeys with Ticknor and Pierce. Her expression was placid when she received news of his death on the trip with Pierce. She was sustained by the same mystical religious faith she had expressed years before at the death of his mother. Her husband's funeral became for her "a festival of life."

She said:

Do not fear for me dark hours, henceforth. . . I have no more to ask but that I may be able to comfort all who mourn as I am comforted. . . God has turned for me the silver lining and for me the darkest cloud has broken into ten thousand singing birds. 53

Because of financial difficulty and partly because of encouragement from Fields and his wife, Sophia agreed to publish her husband's notebooks. In editing these books, she imposed her own insipid style and gave the world, not

52 Stewart, op. cit., p. 215.  
53 Ibid., p. 238.
Hawthorne, but her idealistic impression of him. By her revisions, she accomplished after his death what she had never quite achieved in his life, and Nathaniel was made to conform to the pattern of their age that demanded literary elegance and social artificiality of all supposed gentility. In all sincerity, she misrepresented his character and genius by her own mistaken conceptions of grammar, her prudishness, her lack of feeling for certain types of people and her view of life.

In a number of grammatical revisions, she replaced an adjective with an adverb in the predicate when the adjective was more idiomatic than the adverb: "A peal of thunder sounds strange" was changed to "A peal of thunder sounds strangely." "The northeast wind which blew very sharp" was altered to read "the northeast wind, which blew very sharply."

Another type of revision suggests a false delicacy such as changing "bellies" to "bodies," "dung" to "excrement," "backsides" to "rear." Hawthorne wrote what people said; his wife wrote what they should have said.

Sexual matters were treated delicately or not at all. She substituted "temperament" for "animal desires," and deleted the description of the seventeen-year-old seamstress romping with the boys, a comparison of blighted lilies to virgins of tainted fame, and a reference to a
girl who had forfeited her chastity. Even "male" and "female" were omitted.

Sophia is given credit for helping Nathaniel attain a small degree of social elegance. To preserve and perhaps magnify this elegance, she revised words like "pantaloon," "intended" (for betrothed), "swap", "plague" (for tease).

Perhaps more serious than erasing the vivid improprieties were her alterations concerning his personal habits. She took great care to remove any suggestions of excessive use of wine, changing such phrases as "came into the bar-room" to "went into the bar-room," thereby transforming the narrator from a participant on the inside to a spectator on the outside. Sophia had written to her mother, "I have made it a law to myself never to ask him a word concerning what he is writing," but the story of his life is quite different because of his marriage to her. To what extent she affected his choice of subjects and his philosophy of life, one cannot be sure. This influence was perhaps understood less by him than by his biographers who might view objectively the sixty years of his life.

Certainly, it was Sophia who rescued him from the solitary chamber of his mother's house; who united him, at least briefly, with his own age; and very likely kept him from

54 Morris, op. cit., p. 186.
suicide or insanity. Through her efforts the dreary gloom of his early life was displaced with a social intercourse that was acceptable if not remarkable. Together they found the joy of parenthood and the delight of European travel. She had made arrangements for the trip on which he died, but this cannot be held against her any more than can his literary failures. For she was a person of limited capacity utterly devoted to her husband and her children. She could not have known that his peculiar genius thrived in his solitary communion with ancient spirits and early history. And had she perceived that his literary artistry would decline with his personal pleasure, she would, no doubt, have insisted on his pleasure; for like some of the other intellectual women of her age, she preferred her own intuition to historical and social insight. Nathaniel's mother and wife were the primary feminine influences that directed his peculiar genius, but a number of other women are discernible in his biography and later in his fiction. His daughters were at once a source of delight and responsibility. He wrote, "When a man has taken upon himself to beget children, he has no longer any right to a life of his own."\(^5^5\) His notebooks abound in his comments and observations of Una, Julian, and Rose. The laughter of the children probably struck a chord within the dark regions of his heart which faintly

\(^{55}\) Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
cheered the bleakness of his soul and brought a joy he was
to know for the remainder of his life.

The first child, Una, was especially fascinating to
him. The journal, begun in her fourth year, reveals his
talent for recording the ludicrous as well as the enchant-
ing activities of children. He wrote, "Una's auburn curls
come down over her shoulders with extreme grace; and as to
her delicate little phiz, its spirit, grace, and sensibility
elude the pen that would describe them." On another
occasion he captures the absurd nature of childhood:

I went to take a walk, leaving Una preparing for
bed, and running about the room in her chemise,
which does not come down far enough to serve the
purpose of fig-leaf. Never were seen such con-
tortions and attitudinizing—prostrating herself
on all-fours, and thrusting up her little bum as
a spectacle to men and angels, being among the
least grotesque. 57

His relations with his sisters were affectionate but
restrained. Throughout his life he respected the judgment
of Elizabeth, who was two years his senior. Because of
Madame Hawthorne's seclusion, the children relied on each
other for love and companionship. Because of her age,
Elizabeth assumed the role of guardian. Along with the
maiden aunts, she pampered him when he injured his foot;

56 Ibid.

57 Randall Stewart, The American Notebooks by Nathaniel
Hawthorne (New Haven, 1932), p. 82.
and it was she who helped him edit the little family paper, the Spectator.

When Nathaniel returned from Bowdoin College, both his sisters had followed the example of Madame Hawthorne and had partially secluded themselves from society. Elizabeth kept to her room during daylight hours beginning her day at dusk and making midnight her noontime. She read widely and on rare occasions took long walks in the country. Salem gossips supposed that Elizabeth's seclusion was the result of a disappointment in love. Nathaniel watched her discipline her routine and became intolerant of all contacts.

As editor of *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, he solicited her articles for publication. Cantwell observes that when "they collaborated it was impossible to say where her writing left off and his began. The difference was that she had a quick wit, not the humor of Hawthorne." 58

That the Brook Farm experiment did not meet with Elizabeth's approval is evident in the satire and criticism of her letters written to him while he was there. Perhaps she knew that he had rejected their cloistered life; at any rate she had no faith in the project. Mother and sisters resented Nathaniel's working so hard, but most of all they

58 Cantwell, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
regretted his absence from home; "not then or at any time... could his sisters and his mother see enough of him." 59

The knowledge that the three of them would find it difficult to live without him caused him to postpone his marriage for nearly three years; and Van Doren asserts, "the three of them never did solve the problem of how to live without him." 60 His courtship was conducted in secrecy because he knew they were averse to seeing him slip away from the milieu wherein he had lived for so many years. The thought of his marriage was intolerable to Elizabeth. She said when informed of the wedding, "He will never marry... he will never do anything; he is an ideal person." 61 She told her mother that Sophia's health would not permit her to become a good wife. The dominating influence of his mother and sisters is nowhere so clear as in his delayed wedding plans; indeed it is pathetic to think of a man over thirty-five years of age postponing the happiness that he so desired because of family disapproval. Certainly the question of Sophia's health and finances were vital considerations; but had the women on Herbert Street approved of Miss Peabody, the wedding would very likely have occurred

59 Van Doren, op. cit., p. 112.

60 Ibid., p. 117.

61 Morris, op. cit., p. 98.
at an earlier date. In the spring following their wedding he visited his family and wrote Sophia that Elizabeth was still "not quite thawed." Her behavior to Sophia appears less spiteful when one considers that Nathaniel was the center of her world and the object of all her future plans. She dreamed of collaborating with him on books and articles for the remainder of their lives.

Louisa, his younger sister, did not possess the cold, unyielding disposition of Elizabeth and her mother. Morris observes that she was "amiable and affectionate; fun loving, and perhaps in a shy way eager for life." Nevertheless, she followed the pattern of seclusion and remained hidden from the world except for her occasional visits with relatives and her transactions with tradesmen. Hawthorne admired her gaiety and preferred her company to that of Elizabeth. Her letters to him are filled with expressions of love and concern for his welfare. While he was at Brook Farm, she wrote:

If only you knew how we anticipated your coming home, and how impatient we are when you do not come at the usual time, you would not think you could be spared. It is a comfort to look at the picture to be sure; but I am tempted to speak to it sometimes, and it answers never a word; and when

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62 Van Doren, op. cit., p. 98.

63 Morris, op. cit., p. 44.
mother looks at it, she takes up a lamentation because you stay away so long and work so hard. 64

The letters continued all summer in much the same tone:

I should think your clothes were in a very dilapidated condition by this time, and I am glad of it; for then you will have to come home. . . . I am writing in your chamber. Do come very soon. . . . I have waited for a letter from you till I am tired and cannot wait any longer. And I have been to the post-office and received the same answer so often, that I am shamed to go any more. . . . We do not like it at all. . . . Mother is very vehement about it. . . . I hope you will come home very soon; we do want to see you. . . . But if you are not coming home immediately, you must write and let us hear from you at least. Mother takes up such a lamentation for you, and then she scolds about you; . . . and Ebe is troubled about your working; so you must pacify us all. 65

Louisa was the first to accept Sophia; ultimately she became a favorite with the Hawthorne children. She made dresses and bestowed them with apologies. After the death of Madame Hawthorne, Louisa lived with an uncle in Salem. In June, 1852, Nathaniel wrote to her, "We wish you very much to come immediately! We can make you comfortable and if you do not come something may intervene." Something did intervene; and Louisa was drowned trying to escape from a burning boat while accompanying a relative on a journey to Saratoga Springs. The news of her death was distressing to Nathaniel.

64 Van Doren, op. cit., p. 111.
65 Ibid., p. 112. 66 Ibid., p. 193.
The story of attempted feminine domination is repeated again in his relationship with Elizabeth Peabody. When they met, she was preparing a siege against his home where she was to battle two female defenders and lose her sister Sophia as a prize. Elizabeth Peabody pursued all intellectual people and entwined herself with all the reformers of her age. Soon after her meeting with Nathaniel, she and her mother opened a bookshop and lending library called the West Street Bookshop. In the back room she placed a printing press which was used to publish several of Hawthorne's stories. The Transcendental Club which met in her lecture room was the headquarters for the intellectual leaders of New England. Nathaniel attended some of these meetings but always left depressed by the nature of the reform, the important people, and the idea of women leaders. He alluded to the store as the "Babel of Talkers." 

Elizabeth Peabody was responsible for Nathaniel's appointment to the Custom House, and he considered her a valuable friend. Nevertheless her overbearing personality angered him several times after his marriage to Sophia. In a letter to Bridge written in 1855, he admitted that his feelings toward his wife's family were not very "admirable." He wrote her from Liverpool:

I sometimes feel as if I ought to endeavor to enlighten you as to the relation between husband and wife. . . but the conjugal relation is one which God never meant you to share, and which therefore He apparently did not give you the instinct to understand; so there my labor would be lost. 68

When she became involved in the abolitionist movement, she sent him pamphlets which he returned from England unread. When she returned the pamphlets a second time, he wrote back:

I read your manuscript abolition pamphlet, supposing it to be a new production, and only discovered afterwards that it was the one I had sent back. Upon my word, it is not very good; not worthy of being sent three times across the ocean. 69

The admiration Hawthorne felt for Elizabeth Peabody might have blossomed into friendship had he not feared overbearing women, and had she not flaunted reform ideas and rights of women before him.

Another woman entered Nathaniel's life without fanfare; yet their relationship was the source of bitter controversy after they both had died. Margaret Fuller was one of the foremost Transcendentalists and women of the early nineteenth century. It is almost impossible to read the biographies of Hawthorne and Miss Fuller without observing a striking parallel in their backgrounds and temperaments.

68 Van Doren, op. cit., p. 106.

69 Tharp, op. cit., p. 106.
They were both deeply idealistic, conscience-ridden, self-torturing, and introspective. The Gothic residue of Calvinism was strong in them; and neither accepted another's word for anything; both could only by personal experience attach value to anything. Her childhood, like his, was characterized by isolation and an emphasis on superior achievement.

At Brook Farm he had ample opportunity to observe Margaret, for she was one of the leaders in the movement and made frequent and extended visits while he was there. He wrote a facetious description of her to Sophia.

I went to see our cows foddered yesterday afternoon. We have eight of our own, and the number is now increased by a transcendental heifer belonging to Miss Margaret Fuller. She is very fractious, I believe, and apt to kick over the pail. Thou knowest best whether in these traits of character she resembles her mistress. 71

Some critics think that his dislike for her bordered on hatred, but he left records of occasional pleasure in her company. Once when he was returning from Emerson's house, he found her in the woods, reclining on the grass. Nathaniel stopped and they talked for a long time about "autumn, crows, the experiences of early childhood, the

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70 Mason Wade, *Margaret Fuller* (New York, 1940), p. 113.

71 Van Doren, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

mountains, the view from the mountains, and matters of high and low philosophy."^73

When Hawthorne was in Italy he made inquiries concerning her life and came to some rather unflattering conclusions. She married an ignorant Italian named Ossoli and gave birth to a child which was kept a secret until she decided to return to America. Her return was probably necessitated because she had become involved in the Italian revolution. Hawthorne found a sculptor to whom Margaret had sent her husband to develop his artistic talents. Ossoli was so stupid, he was told, that in working for four months on a foot he placed the great toe on the wrong side. Hawthorne wrote his impressions in his journal:

The wonder is, what attraction she found in this boor, this man without the intellectual spark,—she that had always shown such a cruel and bitter scorn of intellectual deficiency. . . . as from him towards her I can understand as little, for she had not the charm of womanhood. But she was a person anxious to try all things, and fill up her experience in all directions; she had a strong and coarse nature, which she had done her utmost to refine, with infinite pains; but of course it could only be superficially changed. . . . She was a great humbug,—of course, with much talent and much moral reality, or else she could never have been so great a humbug. ^75

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^73 Cantwell, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

^74 Mather, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

What Hawthorne really thought about Margaret Fuller, it is impossible to say. He probably disliked her; but believing her to be a dangerous woman, he did not betray his feelings. As Morris points out, "he ridiculed her to Sophia, conceded her scholarship; and enjoyed her talent for satire." 76 Wade suggests that Hawthorne was envious of the early fame and the complete personal happiness that Margaret Fuller experienced.

Hawthorne was more fortunate in his relationship with Fanny Kemble, one of the great actresses of the day. Beautiful and daring, she won the affection of the author as easily as she captivated her audiences. He was fascinated by her exuberance and her self-confidence and by the little regard she had for the opinion of others.

That he was not oblivious to feminine beauty is evidenced in the descriptions he wrote in his journal before his marriage. Cantwell states that he might have fallen in love with a girl named Susan; "his dream was of marrying her, becoming a fisherman... and living out his life with her." 77 He was attracted to a little servant girl, Nancy, who was "pretty, black-eyed, intelligent, with a piquant

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76 Morris, op. cit., p. 161.

77 Cantwell, op. cit., p. 168.
countenance." He wrote of "A frank, free mirthful daughter of the landlady, about twenty-four years old, between whom and myself there immediately sprang up a flirtation, which made us both feel rather melancholy." At Brook Farm he was delighted with his observations of a little seamstress from Boston who played with the other members of the farm enterprise.

As son, husband, father, brother, and friend, Hawthorne associated to a large extent with women who had a profound influence in shaping his personality and ultimately in coloring the literature that was an expression of that personality. During the residence at his mother's house, he cultivated pride, solitude, and imagination. From his life with Sophia, he achieved a vigor that is not distinguishable in his early tales. The children warmed his heart and enriched his understanding of human nature. He declared that he did not like intellectual women; yet he met them at every turn in his life. His sisters, sisters-in-law, and Miss Margaret Fuller were all to bring him both pleasure and distress; by studying their frustrations, he probed into woman's new relationship to society.

78 Stewart, American Notebooks, op. cit., p. 18.

79 Ibid., p. 22.
In his personal beauty and in his passive approach to life he mirrored the feminine influence; yet he desired more than anything else to be a man among men.
CHAPTER III

WOMEN IN HIS FICTION

To a large extent, Nathaniel Hawthorne's life was spent in a feminine world, dominated by a feminine point of view. In his youth a mother, two sisters, and two aunts smothered him with adoration. He was told that he was a genius, that he was different from ordinary people, that the world of the common man was not to be his lot. Except for the Manning uncles, whose temperaments were not congenial with his, his only opportunities for masculine association in early life occurred at Bowdoin College, on the nocturnal trips he made into Salem proper, and on his summer travels about New England. Although he longed to escape feminine domination, his peculiar disposition, which had been enhanced by his early environment, appeared to thwart his social relations with men, for his intimate male associates were only Bridge, Cilley, Pierce, and Thoreau. Evidence is conclusive that during his temporary emancipations one finds a robust young man vastly different from the timid recluse who spent hours brooding over his image in the mirror of his room on Herbert Street. From his own accounts, one learns of gay drinking parties, extravagant conversations, and intriguing flirtations.
Because he lacked a more definite goal, he remained in the isolated household where he worked alone but always under the shadow of his mother and his spinster sisters, whose affections and ambitions centered on him. In his lonely chamber he found the only escape which he had the courage to pursue, a dream world fashioned by his pen, his vivid imagination, and his profound insight. He created stories that told over and over again the plight of a sensitive young man struggling for individuality in a feminine household obsessed with grief and the grandeur of the past. His recurring themes emphasize the injustice of one person dominating another, the peril of an individual who isolates himself from society, the virulence of intellectual and spiritual pride. And permeating all that he wrote was a contemplation of sin and guilt.

Hawthorne wrote that anyone who dominated another person's life was the vilest sinner in the eyes of God. This concept, which can be traced to his relationship with his mother, appears in various forms in the tales and novels. It is the sin which he felt his mother had committed by attempting to use him as a force to exalt her pride to the people of Salem; it is the sin of Ethan Brand, Rappaccini, and Chillingworth. When Dimmesdale is informed of the machinations of the physician, he remarks to Hester:

We are not, Hester, the worst sinners in the world. There is one worse than even the polluted priest!
That old man's revenge has been blacker than my sin. He has violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart. 1

The violation of the sanctity of a human heart presupposes one person's possession of a special power over another and the exercise of that power with a deliberate intent; yet most of the characters who committed this sin felt that their ultimate purpose justified the subjugation of individuals. This cannot be said of the Satanic characters such as Westervelt who wielded his power without proposing to accomplish a lofty aim. In the repetition of his themes, Hawthorne expresses his resentment of his mother's domination of his spirit and his contempt for her reaction to society.

Even though his was an isolated existence, Nathaniel deplored isolation and wrote of its damning effect. Unlike Thoreau, solitude was to him more of a necessity than a pleasure; and through his characters he described the anguish of an individual who could find no easy intercourse with society. Throughout his life he contrived plots that depicted the personal misfortunes of men and women; and the most distraught of his characters are those who have been isolated from the main current of life by heredity or

environment or circumstance. It was not unusual for Hawthorne to create a character like Wakefield who seemed compelled to "dissever himself from the world... to vanish... to give up his place and privileges with... men."

There is, of course, a striking parallel between the fictional characters and Madame Hawthorne, who, like Beatrice, was richly endowed but unable to integrate into society because of a toxic condition that isolated her from the world and brought destruction to all who associated with her. Possibly, he saw his mother as a Beatrice, young and beautiful, with a life to live, but so filled with the poison of grief that she was isolated from society, a predicament that could be solved only by her death.

The unfortunate consequences of his mother's isolation and prolonged immolation is dramatized in one of his early tales, "The Gentle Boy." Katherine, also, isolated herself after her husband's death. She allowed her son to be adopted by a Puritan family while she sought to find happiness in her martyrdom. When her son lay gravely ill, she returned; but he died after recognizing her only briefly. Hawthorne seems to stand aside from the story and direct a penetrating dart at his own mother who had allowed grief for the past to rob

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her of present and future happiness. Katherine condemns both herself and Madame Hawthorne when she says:

Son, son, I have borne thee in my arms when my limbs were tottering. . . I have ill performed a mother's part by thee in life, and I leave thee no inheritance but woe and shame. . . . My child, how many a pang awaits thy gentle spirit and I the cause of all! 3

The conclusion of the story is a poignant description of his own childhood, "Ilbrahim's mother was to wander on a mistaken errand, neglectful of the holiest trust which can be committed to a woman." 4

Madame Hawthorne saw her brothers prosper in business and live in considerable luxury. Several of her relatives belonged to the aristocracy of Salem, but her only possessions were pride and memories. Thus, her life was spent in contemplation of the past, a fact that evoked both pity and wrath in her son and supplied him with another theme that recurred in his stories and novels.

Nathaniel's attitude toward ancestor worship is recorded in his notebook in 1837. After seeing portraits of an old family he wrote: "Nothing gives a stronger idea of old worm eaten aristocracy. . . of a family being crazy with age, and of its being time that it was extinct. . . . than these


4 Ibid., p. 126.
black, dusty, faded antique-dressed portraits." In his fiction he repeatedly chronicles the decline of family fortunes, the frustrations of a progenitor attempting to secure an estate for his posterity, and the folly of descendants whose sustenance is pride in ancestry. One of the early stories, "Peter Goldwaite's Treasure," is a candid portrait of exaggerated family pride in a degenerate descendant.

As he drew back, ashamed of his outward poverty, yet proud of the secret wealth within his grasp, a haughty smile shone out on Peter's visage... He endeavored to assume such a mien as his ancestor had probably worn, when he glared in the building of a strong house for many generations of his posterity. 6

Nathaniel had been told many times of his ancestral curse as well as of his aristocratic heritage. As he brooded over the history of his family, he saw men who had been set apart not by the witch's curse but by their common temperament.

They found comfort in solitude and their native town had become, for them, a little more than a familiar but alien asylum in which to await death... In their melancholy they sought to overcome adversity by pride or indifference... Nathaniel saw his ancestors always alienated from


the common fortunes of men, as though to be a Hawthorne were a kind of doom. 7

He felt that the great injustices his ancestors had committed against society had outlasted their good deeds; yet he was taught by his mother the necessity for preserving the last thing which the family had upon earth, pride. One can perceive a wistfulness in his denunciation of isolation and pride.

In The House of Seven Gables Hawthorne's attitude toward his ancestors finds complete expression. The Pyncheon family is Hawthorne's own family with comparatively little change. The evil machinery of the story is set in motion by the greed and pride of the earliest Pyncheon who desired to establish a family at any price of cruelty or fraud. Upon each generation falls the curse of the man whom he injured; and the Pyncheons decline generation after generation to final extinction.

Actually, Hawthorne's major themes are reflections of his own family life; the violation of the sanctity of a human heart, the dangers of an individual isolating himself from society, and the folly of dwelling on past grandeur. An astute young author might well perceive the futility of his mother's life, but a sensitive and affectionate son would be overwhelmed by his own audacity. Apparently, this was

Nathaniel's dilemma, for he, whose morals were almost above reproach, was deeply engrossed in the universal depravity of man and in hidden guilt. In "Fancy's Show Box" the doctrine of universal depravity is present with enough exactitude to satisfy the most rigorous believer of the puritanical school. The old man suffers mortal pain for all the sins committed by desire. "Man must not disclaim his brotherhood, even with the guiltiest, since, though his hand be clean, his heart has surely been polluted by flitting phantoms of iniquity."  

Like the Reverend Mr. Hooper, a number of Hawthorne's characters wear the black veil of unconfessed sin, and many like young Goodman Brown are alienated from society because of hidden guilt. Hawthorne's major work on this theme is The Scarlet Letter. Sin, Hawthorne seems to say, having been committed is destined to have endless reverberations. To Hawthorne, there is no absolution; and the characters suffer a continuous penalty, the most unbearable of which is Dimmesdale's unconfessed guilt. It seems plausible that Nathaniel, perceiving the futility of his mother's life and the failure of her motherhood, hated her, then scourged his own breast for filial irreverence.

8 Hawthorne, Works, II, "Fancy's Show Box," Twice-Told Tales, 146.
When Nathaniel rebelled from his seclusion and sought to find a place in the outside world with the help of Sophia, he was encountered, through some inexplicable working of fate, by three of the foremost women reformers of the age—Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, and Fanny Kemble who were products of the Transcendental movement and champions of women's rights. He continually met women who were greater successes than he. This was a galling fact which perhaps caused him to destroy in his novels the women who had abundant sexual experience or who championed the rights of women. The luxuriant natures of Zenobia, Hester, and Miriam find in his novels only an ignominious existence.

On the other hand, one is impressed with the triumphs enjoyed by the women who were more or less characterizations of Sophia, for example, Phoebe, Hilda, and Priscilla. There is a strong temptation to consider Hollingsworth's appraisal of women as an autobiographical revelation, for the picture of Priscilla at the feet of the reformer—"The gentle parasite, the soft reflection of a more powerful existence"—has a striking resemblance to his relationship with Sophia. While this is an interesting assumption, it must be recalled that the major part of Hollingsworth's philosophy is incongruous with Nathaniel's concept of life.

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If Hollingsworth's outburst is to be considered as autobiographical, the interpretation will have to rely for substantiation on Nathaniel's general attitude toward women as found in his notebooks and in his other fiction rather than on any similarity between the author and the perverted reformer. In this event, the declaration will have to speak for itself; and it begins by acknowledging that woman is the most admirable handiwork of God in her true place and character.

Her place is at man's side. Her office, that of the sympathizer; the unreserved, unquestioning believer; the recognition, withheld in every other manner, but given, in pity, through woman's heart, lest man should utterly lose faith in himself; the echo of God's own voice, pronouncing, "It is well done!"

All the separate action of woman is, and ever has been, and always shall be, false, foolish, vain, destructive of her own best and holiest qualities, void of every good effect, and productive of intolerable mischiefs! Man is a wretch without woman; but woman is a monster—and, thank Heaven, an almost impossible and hitherto imaginary monster—without man as her acknowledged principal! As true as I had once a mother whom I loved, were there any possible prospect of woman's taking the social stand which some of them—poor miserable, abortive creatures, who only dream of such things because they have missed woman's peculiar happiness, or because nature made them really neither man nor woman!

If there were a chance of their attaining the end which these petticoated monstrosities have in view, I would call upon my own sex to use its physical force that unmistakable evidence of sovereignty, to scourge them back within their proper bounds. But it will not be needful. The heart of true womanhood knows where its own sphere is, and never seeks to stray beyond it! 10

Ibid., pp. 174-175.
That Nathaniel was concerned with woman's relationship to man and to society is evident from the prominence of women characters in his fiction. Since these characters were almost always replicas of the women in his life, to classify and analyze these fictional women may help to reveal his artistic technique through the relationship which exists between source and product in art.

For the convenience of this study, his women characters will be classified in a slightly different grouping from the three general types given by Randall Stewart in his editing of the *American Notebooks*. The first division will include women who are victims of their environment and heredity, a grouping not used by Stewart. Second is the normal New England girl. Actually, there are two subdivisions of this second group: the wholesome, bright sensible, self-reliant girl; and the frail, sylph-like creature, easily swayed by a stronger personality. Even though Stewart treats the latter subdivisions as two separate groups, they will be considered together for this study since Sophia was used as a model for both types. The third group is the intellectually superior woman with an exotic richness in her nature.

In the characterizations of women whose lives were dominated by heredity and environment, he used his mother

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and sisters as models. And in creating Pearl, he described his daughter Una. Because of a strong resemblance between Elizabeth Hawthorne and her mother, one cannot always distinguish which of the two women he was describing, and at times it seems likely that he combined qualities of both women in one character.

In the tale "The White Old Maid," the woman who rejects the world at the death of her lover and resorts to the life of a spinster is a projection of Madame Hawthorne. Her prolonged immolation is described:

Years, many years, rolled on; the world seemed new again. . . a lonely woman had passed from youth to extreme old age. . . so quiet, sad, and gentle, so utterly free from violence that she was suffered to pursue her harmless fantasies, unmolested by the world, with whose business or pleasures she had naught to do. . . She dwelt alone, and never came into the daylight, . . . she took no place among the kindred friends. 12

Madame Hawthorne appears again in the story "Chippings with a Chisel" as the woman who enters the shop of the grave-stone cutter to purchase a monument for the memory of her first love. Hawthorne is not so brutal in his condemnation of her protracted mourning as in his other characterizations. A feeling of warmth and tenderness is present in his description and treatment of this character.

An elderly lady came into the shop to bespeak a monument for her first love... who had been killed by a whale in the Pacific Ocean forty years before. Reflecting within myself, it appeared to me that this lifelong sorrow, as in all good faith she deemed it, had kept her purer and less earthly than she would otherwise have been by drawing a portion of her sympathies apart from earth. Amid the throng of enjoyments and the pressure of worldly care, and all the warm materialism of this life, she had communed with a vision, and had been the better for such intercourse. Faithful to the husband of her maturity, and loving him with a far more real affection than she ever could have felt for this dream of her girlhood, there had still been an imaginative faith to the ocean buried so that an ordinary character had thus been elevated and refined. 13

Hawthorne was, no doubt, opposed to the placing of so much emphasis upon the dead and their resting place. At the conclusion of the story "Chippings with a Chisel", he clearly states his view:

Every gravestone that you ever made is the visible symbol of a mistaken system. Our thoughts should soar upward with the butterfly... not linger with the exuviae that confines. In truth and reason, neither those whom we call the living, and still less the departed, have anything to do with the grave. 14

The futility of living in the past is nowhere so poignantly described as when Governor Handcock addressed Esther Dudley in the tale "Old Esther Dudley." She is another projection of Madame Hawthorne.

Your life has been prolonged until the world has changed around you. You have treasured up all that

13 Ibid., pp. 251-252.
14 Ibid., p. 254.
time has rendered worthless... the principles, feelings, manners, modes of being and acting which another generation has flung aside... you are a symbol of the past. 15

Hepzibah Pyncheon is a triumph of portraiture. No one knew better than Nathaniel the curious fright of solitary people suddenly thrust into contemporary existence, and with vivid realism he depicted the withered retired old maid blinking furiously in the light of day and long ago diverted from the problem of living. It is possible that Hepzibah is a combination of three women in Hawthorne's life--Madame Hawthorne, Elizabeth Hawthorne, and Elizabeth Peabody.

In Hepzibah, as in Madame Hawthorne, the old, empty pride of the family has developed into a dry, sterile gentility. Through long years of seclusion Hepzibah had fallen out of pace with the ordinary march of existence, losing all the vitality and suppleness that might have been latent in her until she almost completely forgot the methods of communication with the outside world. Hawthorne described her at the beginning of The House of Seven Gables as:

Our miserable old Hepzibah! It is a heavy annoyance to a writer, who endeavors to represent nature, its various attitudes and circumstance, in a reasonably correct outline and true coloring, that so much of the mean and ludicrous should be hopelessly mixed up with the purest pathos which life anywhere supplies him. How can we elevate our history of retribution

15 Ibid., p. 89.
for the sin of long ago, when, as one of the most prominent figures, we are compelled to introduce. . . not a young and lovely woman, nor even the stately remains of beauty, storm-shattered by affliction. . . but a gaunt, sallow, rusty-jointed maiden, in a long-waisted silk gown, and with the strange horror of a turban on her head! Her visage is not even ugly. It is redeemed from insignificance only by the contraction of her eyebrows into a near-sighted scowl! And finally, her great life trial seems to be, that, after sixty years of idleness, she finds it convenient to earn a comfortable bread by setting up a shop in a small way. 16

This description is comparable to the description of Madame Hawthorne given by Cantwell:

Around her the household changed, her sisters and brothers grew older, her children grew older, the town of Salem changed. The ships disappeared, the stagecoaches no longer ran, and one after another of the great families that had dominated the town left it forever. . . . She was twenty-eight when her husband died, though the seclusion had probably begun before. . . . in the countless Salem mornings . . . she busied herself in her room, in which the even temperature of her life remained the same. 17

Hawthorne says of Hepzibah:

In her grief and wounded pride, Hepzibah had spent her life in divesting herself of friends; she had willfully cast off the support which God has ordained his creatures to need from one another and it was her punishment that Clifford and herself would fall the easier victims to their kindred enemy.18

Hepzibah can also be seen as a picture of Elizabeth Hawthorne who had followed her mother into seclusion from

16Hawthorne, Works, VII, The House of Seven Gables, 52.


18Hawthorne, Works, VII, The House of Seven Gables, 211.
the world. Elizabeth was a spinster, as was Hepzibah, very humble at heart, but rigidly conscious of her pedigree. Van Doren believes Elizabeth to have been Hawthorne's model for the old spinster. "Hepzibah Pyncheon might have been the result of Hawthorne's imagining what Elizabeth would be like when she was old, assuming that her family was rich and had lived forever in a great house of her own." Elizabeth did not remain in the old ancestral home, but she did live alone on a farm in Montserrat near Salem.

It seems likely that Nathaniel may have used Elizabeth Peabody as a source for Hepzibah, since Miss Peabody operated a small bookshop in her home on West Roxbury Street to help support her family. "It was Miss Peabody's joy to tend shop with her air of gentility which family pride imposed upon her, but with a fine ear for gossip all the same." It is not difficult to imagine Elizabeth Peabody sharing Hepzibah's emotion when she succeeded in making her first sale, for the Peabodys were proud and conscious of their gentility. Hepzibah felt that when she sold the first gingerbread cake "she was no lady, now, but simply Hepzibah Pyncheon, a forlorn old maid, and keeper of a cent shop." Hepzibah is

described so subtly that she enters into the reader's heart as he sees her behind her abominable little counter, a composite picture of Madame Hawthorne, Elizabeth Hawthorne, and Elizabeth Peabody.

Pearl is a contrasting personality in the group of characters who are victims of circumstance. Pearl's nature has its foundation in Hawthorne's observation of his own daughter Una. Pearl is never depicted as, in herself, hateful but only as brimming over with lawless impulse, which may have a beauty of its own. She has no regrets nor compunction; a sinless infant, she is yet Sin's very self walking the earth in her own right. As such, in dark moments, she is seen by her own mother; more terrible than the scarlet letter fixed on Hester's garment, the roots of Pearl are in her soul. The physical perfection of Pearl, her native grace, the flightiness of her temper, her dramatic impersonations, her isolations from other children are all qualities suggested by Hawthorne's observation of Una.

Hester sometimes doubted "whether Pearl were a human child. She seemed rather an airy spirit, which after playing fantastic sports for a little while upon the cottage floor, would flit away with a mocking smile." Similarly,

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Hawthorne had written concerning his own daughter; "I now and then catch an aspect of her, in which I cannot believe her to be my own child, but a spirit strangely mingled with good and evil, haunting the house where I dwell." 24

In the notebook he says,"Una is tired... having been in pretty constant motion since sunrise."25 In The Scarlet Letter he describes Pearl as, "She was now of an age to run lightly along by her mother's side, and, constantly in motion from morn till sunset, could have accomplished a much longer journey than that before her." 26 In an entry he made a note that "Una played with anything that might be used to make a doll... a rolling pin, or a nine pin, or any casual thing, seems to answer the purpose of a doll better than the nicest little wax figure that the art of man can contrive." 27 In The Scarlet Letter this idea is transferred to Pearl when Hawthorne says that she made a doll of "The unlikeliest materials, ... stick, a bunch of rags, a flower ... were the puppets, of Pearl's witchcraft, and, without undergoing any outward change, became spiritually adapted to whatever drama occupied the stage of her inner world." 28

24Stewart, op. cit., p. xxiv. 25Ibid., p. 96.
26Hawthorne, Works, VI, The Scarlet Letter, 126.
27Stewart, op. cit., p. 199.
He saw Una as a character who was "oftentimes full of acerbity as an unripe apple that may be perfected to a mellow deliciousness hereafter." Here again can be seen the use of Una as he describes Pearl as "possessed of affections... though... acrid and disagreeable as the richest flavors of unripe fruit." In the notebooks he says of Una, "ever and anon, without giving us the slightest notice, she is apt to take a flight into the said unknown, and when we go to seek her, we find her surrounded by a knot of children with whom she has made acquaintance, and who gaze at her with a kind of wonder—recognizing that she is not altogether like themselves." This same description is given of Pearl in The Scarlet Letter as,

"Nothing was more remarkable than the instinct, as it seemed with which the child comprehended her loneliness; the destiny that had drawn an inviolable circle round her; the whole peculiarity, in short, of her position in respect to other children."

Out of the observation that Una rushed "from corner to corner of the room... as if the devil were in her,"

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29 Stewart, op. cit., p. 206.


31 Stewart, op. cit., p. 208.


33 Stewart, op. cit., p. 296.
evolved the suggestion that "the laughing image of a fiend could be seen peeping out of little Pearl's eye." 34

Even in the novel of his juvenilia, Nathaniel portrays his fondness for the normal New England girl who was bright, sensible, and self-reliant. Although Ellen Langton, heroine of Fanshawe, cannot be traced to any girl whom he loved or knew, she is an interesting study, for she anticipates Sophia and the heroines who were apparently fashioned after his wife. Ellen is portrayed as having "pure and pleasant thoughts, . . . the gayety and simple happiness, the innocence of a child." 35 After she had become a member of Dr. Melmoth's household, "the sunny days seemed brighter and the cloudy ones less gloomy." 36 She possessed both "a large fund of plain sense, and an esthetic faculty which was expressed in the daily decoration of her room with wild flowers." 37

Sophia, whose acquaintance he had not yet made, delighted him years later with these same qualities; and he wrote in his journal from the Old Manse that she decorated his study with wild flowers and green spray. However, Sophia read Latin, Greek, and Hebrew while Ellen preferred reading an old romance to pursuing a rigid comprehension of languages.

34 Hawthorne, Works, VI, The Scarlet Letter, 211.
35 Hawthorne, Works, X, Fanshawe, 134.
36 Ibid., p. 135. 37 Ibid.
Hawthorne's readers meet Sophia for the first time as Alice Vane in "Edward Randolph's Portrait." Alice was, as Sophia Peabody, "an ethereal girl, always dressed in white, a girl with something wayward and childlike about her." Also like Sophia, she possessed artistic qualities; "It was said that the early productions of her own pencil exhibited no inferior genius. Sophia was always to Hawthorne the woman he portrayed in this story, a sylph-like creature in a long, white dress, sketching her haunting, shadowless drawings, living in an ideal world."  

The story was written soon after Nathaniel's first meeting with Sophia. She had given him her Cuban diaries, and he had promised to write a story for her based on some of the information he found in them. Probably without intending to, the realistic Hawthorne skipped over the poetic passages and selected the incident which described Sophia's attempt to sketch Don Fernando, whom she had admired so much.

Don Fernando came in this morning in a brilliant mood. . . I drew him while he was in animated conversation. . . . I caught the inspired look in his eye so well. . . . It was the most beautiful and soul-beaming face. . . but a touch of the pencil is omnipotent and a false one banished the living soul from the features and changed a high noble look into an expression of utter stupidity and ordinariness. 40

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38 Cantwell, op. cit., p. 255.
39 Ibid., p. 254.
40 Ibid., p. 252.
The painting of the portrait to almost perfection, then spoiling it, was significant to Hawthorne. He saw the mistake; the revelation of utter stupidity and ordinariness was the truth, which was a harsh contrast to Sophia's romantic idealization of the man. He viewed Sophia's impractical idealization as a wrong concept of life that he later attempted to change. The story has more pain than tenderness, and Alice remains aloof and innocent of the fierce projects being debated in her presence; yet not wholly ignorant of their meaning. She still had a part in life "contradicting its hardness by her very presence."

The House of Seven Gables is the first extended literary treatment of Sophia, for she is, without doubt, the Phoebe who brightens the drab edifice of his ancestors. The name Phoebe was one which Nathaniel had used as a pet name in writing to his wife. Phoebe's "slightly piquant" nose recalls "that whimsical little" nose of Sophia's. He remarks in his letters that Sophia is "birdlike in many things;" similarly, Phoebe is "as graceful as a bird" and

41 Ibid., p. 255.
42 Hawthorne, Works, VII, The House of Seven Gables, 103.
43 Nathaniel Hawthorne, Love Letters of Nathaniel Hawthorne, preface by Roswell Field (Chicago, 1907), pp. 134-135. Hereafter this volume will be referred to as Letters.
44 Ibid., p. 7.
45 Hawthorne, Works, VII, The House of Seven Gables, 103.
possesses a "natural tunefulness... like a bird." Sophia is compared to a "bright sunshine and himself to a dark cloud;" Phoebe, "a ray of sunshine in a dismal place." And just as Sophia with happy skill transformed the Old Manse, a musty edifice, into a "comfortable modern residence." So Phoebe by "a kind of natural magic effected an equally remarkable transformation in the interior arrangements of the house of the seven gables." Both women are of a religious nature; Sophia attended church, leaving her husband at home; Phoebe possesses, likewise, a "church going conscience."

The character of Sophia, which is obvious in the descriptions of Phoebe, is given even more extended treatment in the creation of Hilda in The Marble Faun. Although this novel was written after the Hawthornes had grown old, Sophia is the unmistakable model for Hilda, a young New England artist living in Italy. In the account of Hilda's artistic career, one recalls the encouragement Sophia received from Washington Allston and her drawing of the gentle

46 Ibid., p. 99.
48 Hawthorne, Works, VII, The House of Seven Gables, 90.
49 Hawthorne, Letters, p. 194.
50 Stewart, op. cit., p. lvii.
51 Hawthorne, Works, VII, The House of Seven Gables, 186.
boy. Hilda's artistry gave one the feeling of "looking at humanity with angel's eyes." 

Even in her school-days... she had produced sketches that were seized upon by men of taste, and hoarded as among the choicest treasures of their portfolios; scenes delicately imagined, lacking perhaps the reality which comes only from a close acquaintance with life, but so softly touched with feeling and fancy, that you seemed to be looking at humanity with angel eyes.

Like Sophia, Hilda was an excellent copyist. Julian Hawthorne has remarked that when Sophia's copy of a landscape was placed beside the original, everybody guessed the copy to be the original.

Sophia Hawthorne was described as "cute, pretty, and playful." Similarly, Hilda is described as "pretty at all times in our native New England style." Hilda is the apotheosis of the virginal in the tower with her doves, "the symbol of the human soul, with its choice of Innocence or Evil close at hand." She instinctively revolts at the

52 Julian Hawthorne, Hawthorne and His Wife, I (New York, 1903), 21.
54 Julian Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 65.
55 Cantwell, op. cit., p. 236.
57 Stewart, op. cit., p. 280.
mere knowledge of evil, and refuses it in the incident of
the confessional where she frees herself from the sin and
dismay that the knowledge of sin has given her. Hilda,
with all her sensitiveness to the shock within her own
nature, shows a hardness of virtue. This religious ortho-
dodoxy and absence of worldliness is a dominant character-
istic of Sophia Hawthorne. Although there is no parallel
for the plot in Sophia's life, the reaction is in harmony
with the moral character described by her sister Elizabeth:

For though Sophia had the strength of a martyr under
the infliction of those wounds which necessarily
come to individuals by the providential vicissi-
tudes of life, there was one kind of thing she could
not bear, and that was, moral evil. 58

In reading The Marble Faun one is reminded of Sophia's
exuberant delight in Italian art and architecture and of
the long hours she spent sketching the masterpieces. Nor
can one fail to be impressed by the physical and spiritual
resemblance of Hilda to Sophia.

One can be almost certain that Sophia was the prin-
cipal model for the second division of heroines of the New
England type--the frail, sylph-like creatures who were easily
swayed by a stronger personality. Sophia's delicate physical
condition had left an impression on her personality, and she
was at the time of her meeting with Nathaniel a fragile girl

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Julian Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 248.
who had been shielded from all responsibility by a solicitous mother. Sophia's unusual combination of strength and weakness is described in the account of Priscilla at Blithedale. Priscilla's stamina is as remarkable as Sophia's:

Thus, while we see that such a being responds to every breeze with tremulous vibration, and imagine that she must be shattered by the first rude blast, we find her retaining her equilibrium amid shocks that might have overthrown many a sturdier frame. 59

Included in this group of wholesome New England girls are Faith Brown of "Young Goodman Brown," the nameless girl of "David Swan," Faith Egerton of "The Three Fold Destiny," Edith of "The White Old Maid," "Annie of "The Artist of the Beautiful," Alice Doane of "Alice Doane's Appeal," Elizabeth of "The Minister's Black Veil," Margaret and Mary of "The Wives of the Dead," and Rose Grafton of "Edward Fane's Rosebud," all lightly sketched as being pretty and possessing a simple-minded domesticity. The character of Priscilla has another prototype in the young seamstress who stayed at Brook Farm for a short time while Hawthorne lived there. Lindsay Swift says there is a "faint" hint of Priscilla in the little seamstress, but this seems to be an understatement. 60 On October 9, 1841, Hawthorne recorded his impression of the seamstress who had arrived at Brook Farm:

59 Stewart, op. cit., p. lix.

60 Lindsay Swift, Brook Farm, Its Members, Scholars, and Visitors (New York, 1908), p. 179.
For the past week we have been gladdened with a little seamstress from Boston, about seventeen years old. . . . She is very vivacious and smart, laughing, singing, and talking, all the time. . . . She never walks but bounds and dances along; and this motion, in her small person, does not give the idea of violence. . . . On continued observation you discover that she is not a girl but really a young woman. . . . She romps with the boys, runs races with them in the yard, and up and down the stairs, and is heard scolding laughingly at their rough play. 61

Priscilla in the *Blithedale Romance* is a small, youthful girl who romps about the farm in a light-hearted manner. It is not difficult to see that some of these characteristics were taken from his observations of the little seamstress. Two incidents in the novel revealing the playfulness of Priscilla, her riding the ox and her climbing upon a load of hay, are so close to similar incidents described in Hawthorne's letters about the seamstress as to make it appear almost certain that the author wrote with the original image before him.

She asks William Allen to place her "on top of the horse," whereupon he puts his large brown hands about her waist, and, swinging to and fro, finally depositing her on one side of the oxen, to take her first lessons in riding. . . . William threatened to rivet two horseshoes round her neck for having clambered, with the other girls and boys, upon a load of hay; whereby the said load lost its balance, and slid off the cart. 62


The sentence in Hawthorne's notebook that "William threatens to rivet two horseshoes around her neck" appears also in The Blithedale Romance:

For example, I once heard Silas Foster, in a very gruff voice, threatening to rivet three horseshoes round Priscilla's neck and chain her to a post, because she, with some other young people, had clambered upon a load of hay and caused it to slide off the cart. 63

It may be concluded that Priscilla blends qualities taken from both Sophia and the little seamstress of Boston. The conditions of her health and her tenacious hold on life were from Sophia and the gaiety and playfulness from the seamstress.

Included in this group of frail women are, Sylph Etherege in the story of the same name and Lilas Fay in "The Lily's Quest." Sylph Etherege was a "shy, sensitive, and fanciful girl, with a slender and sylph-like figure and a nervous organization so delicate that every vibration of her spirit was visible in her frame." Lilas Fay was a being so delicate that "she looked as if the summer breeze should snatch her up and waft her heavenward." Her death, like that of Sylph Etherege, results from internal, not external causes. Other characters of this type are, the vision

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63 Hawthorne, Works, VIII, The Blithedale Romance, 103.
64 Stewart, op. cit., p. lix.

The most unusual type of woman in his fiction is described as having a "certain richness." 66 They are women of "bloom, health, and vigor," with a "spacious plan of physical development." 67 Of this type of woman Van Doren says,

Hawthorne went to the center of woman's secret, her sexual power, and stayed there. For him it was not intellectual power. The women he considered... he never could praise if their minds got the better of them. 68

The most prominent woman in New England with a great intellectual capacity was Margaret Fuller. She was one of the most powerful voices for women's rights in the New England area and it is very probable that Hawthorne had her in mind when he created the character of Zenobia in The Blithedale Romance. Each was precocious as a child, and each was reared in an unusual environment without a mother. Zenobia resembles Margaret in disposition, talents, and interests. Hawthorne ascribes to Zenobia the conversational and

66 Stewart, op. cit., p. lix.

67 Ibid.

68 Van Doren, op. cit., p. 55.
oratorical powers for which Margaret was famous. The two reformers, the fictional and the real, maintained an almost fanatical interest in the rights of women; and for this cause they used their talents as writers and speakers. Margaret Fuller had written a popular, unsigned article on women's rights entitled "The Great Lawsuit" which was published in The Dial, July, 1843. Hawthorne mentions in his story that Zenobia had written stories and tracts in defense of her sex and that she was determined to continue advocating women's rights. One can easily picture Miss Fuller making Zenobia's declaration, "I will lift up my voice in behalf of woman's wider liberty! It is with the living voice alone that we can compel the world to recognize the light of her intellect and the depth of her heart."

Zenobia is referred to as a lady of eminence, proud, passionate, and eloquent. Margaret Fuller was acclaimed throughout New England as a leader of Transcendentalism and was known to have made several extended visits to Brook Farm, which is clearly the setting for The Blithedale Romance. One can hardly accept Hawthorne's denials that Zenobia was based on no living person, especially when one has read in his letters and journals his caustic observations on Margaret Fuller.

Mason Wade declares, "The heroine, Zenobia, is as clearly drawn from Margaret as Blithedale is from Brook Farm." In the preface to The Blithedale Romance Hawthorne disclaims any intent to criticize the Brook Farm experiment and deliberately seeks to avoid the comparison of his characters with living mortals, claiming the poetic license permitted to the romancer in Europe. Later in the story Hawthorne tries to deceive the reader for a moment by a reference to the resemblance of Priscilla to Margaret Fuller, "one of the most gifted women of the age, in a certain curve of the shoulders and in a partial closing of the eyes, which seemed to look more penetrating than if they had been open full width." However, memories of his life at the farm were still lively and were much invoked in the writing of the tale. Moncure Conway says in his biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Of course it was Margaret Fuller's fate to be Zenobia, although she was homely and Zenobia beautiful, and without the warm voluptuous 'aura' of Zenobia."

70 Mason Wade, Margaret Fuller, Whetstone of Genius (New York, 1940), p. 115.


72 Moncure D. Conway, Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne (London, 1940), p. 76.
When the waif Priscilla joins the community, she has eyes only for Zenobia and begs to be always near her. Noting this slavish adoration, Coverdale, who represents Hawthorne in the narrative, remarks that "a brilliant woman is often the object of devoted admiration. It might almost be termed worship or idolatry." This same personal magnetism is observed in Margaret Fuller during her student days at Cambridge. All of the girls who met her while she was enrolled in school were attracted to her in a most unusual manner. She became known as "Queen Margaret at Cambridge."

Hawthorne no doubt had Margaret’s lectures in mind when he discussed Zenobia’s little stories and speeches. He had attended some of her early lectures at Elizabeth Peabody’s West Roxbury Bookshop which he referred to as the "Babel of Talkers." Her poor little stories and tracts never did justice to her intellect. It was only the lack of a fitter avenue that drove her to seek development in literature. She was made (among a thousand other things she might have been) for a stump oratress. I recognized severe culture in Zenobia; her mind was full of weeds. She made no scruple of oversetting all human institutions, and scattering them as with a


75 Hawthorne, Works, VIII, The Blithedale Romance, 58.
breeze of her fan. A female reformer in her attacks upon society, has an instinctive sense of where the life lies, and is inclined to aim directly at that spot. Especially the relations between the sexes is naturally among the earliest to attract her notice.76

Zenobia is described as having "noble courage... she was conscious of no harm; and scorned the petty restraints which take the life and color out of other women's conversations." 77 Hawthorne says of her, "We seldom meet with women nowadays and in this country, who impress us as being women at all... their sex fades away, and goes for nothing. Not so with Zenobia. One felt an influence breathing out of her such as we might suppose to come from Eve when she was just made." 78

Hawthorne's old hatred of pride and bitter resentment of a woman who takes satisfaction not in her peculiar powers as a woman but in powers with which she makes herself a competitor with men is present in his treatment of Zenobia. If a man can err as Ethan Brand did, Hawthorne seems to say, so much the more terrible is it when a woman, whose intellect is not her finest faculty, lays claim to superiority on intellectual ground. Zenobia's tragedy is the story of estrangement and its penalty. Hawthorne has Zenobia express her perception of this truth when she says,

The whole universe, her own sex... Providence or Destiny... make common cause against the woman

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77 Ibid., p. 20. 78 Ibid.
who swerves one hair's breadth out of the beaten track. Yes; and add... with one hair's breadth, she goes all astray and never sees the world in its true aspect afterwards. 79

It would have been almost impossible for Hawthorne in any event to keep all characteristics of Margaret Fuller from appearing as the exotic woman Zenobia. If his work necessitated, as indeed it did, a female character who was a feminist, then Margaret was the one who would serve as the model. If Zenobia was to be very clearly feminine in order that the inequalities of sex and then love might bring her disaster, Hawthorne had seen the same tragedies in Margaret Fuller. Her marriage to Count Ossoli before her child was born, her actions in Europe, plus the identical methods of death by drowning make it seem impossible that Zenobia could be any one but Margaret Fuller.

Even though the case for Margaret Fuller as Zenobia is substantiated by considerable evidence and opinion, one is confronted with the expansion of the literary woman beyond the human prototype. Either by the writer's imagination or by the fusion of another model, the fictional reformer acquired a beauty and charm beyond that attributed to Margaret Fuller. The rich, picturesque temperament of Zenobia appears to exceed the impressive nature of Margaret. It is possible that Hawthorne used

79 Ibid., p. 330.
also his friend Fanny Kemble in the creation of this exotic woman, for Fanny Kemble, who was notorious for her wealth and beauty, had been separated from her husband and had an enviable reputation as an actress, all of which is asserted or implied of Zenobia. The supposition is even more arresting when one recalls that Fanhy Kemble was eminent in proclaiming the rights of women.

Attributes of beauty and personality are repeated in the characterization of Miriam in *The Marble Faun*. Miriam is described as,

A beautiful and attractive woman, but based, as it were, upon a cloud, and all surrounded with misty substance, so that the result was to render her spirit-like, in her most ordinary manifestations. . . . A beautiful woman, such as one sees only two or three, if even so many times in a lifetime; so beautiful, that she seemed to get into your consciousness and memory, and could never afterwards be shut out, . . . . very youthful, a complexion in which there was no roseate bloom, yet neither pale; dark eyes, into which you might look as deeply as your glance would go, and still be conscious of a depth that you had not sounded. . . . She had black abundant hair, with none of the vulgar glossiness of other women's sable locks; if she had Jewish blood, then this was Jewish hair, and a dark glory such as crowns no Christian maiden's head. 80

In searching for an original source for this character, Hawthorne found the only woman eligible by background and experience to be Margaret Fuller. Miriam is an artist living in Rome unchaperoned by a fellow American. She copies the

masterpieces hanging in the art galleries. Similarly Margaret Fuller "settled in rooms in Rome, a spinster unprotected." Miriam falls in love with an Italian named Donatello and thus becomes Italian in spirit. In the same manner Margaret Fuller secretly married an Italian, Ossoli, and more secretly had a child by him. Because of Margaret's reform beliefs and the manner in which she lived in Rome, she was an exile before she began her journey back to America. Miriam, because of her part in the murder committed in *The Marble Faun* and her theories of the fortunate fall of man, ends in exile from her friends, Hilda and Kenyon. As has been shown, the character of Miriam could have had its origin in the life of Margaret Fuller.

Hawthorne poured his every feeling and idea about women into the character of Hester Prynne. He allows Hester to become almost a goddess into whom the character of every other woman in his works flows. Hester Prynne, whose passion and beauty dominate every other person in *The Scarlet Letter*, is as strong as the feeling with which Hawthorne conceived his scenes of New England. She is a passionate woman whom Hawthorne need not call passionate. Hester is not only beautiful but is possessed of fantastic moral strength. When she throws her arms about Dimmesdale in the forest, she symbolically shows her ability to overcome a life of even public shame.

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Mark Van Doren says that she is typical of all of
Hawthorne's women.

She has more courage than the man with whom her lot
is joined. This was typical of Dorcas Bourne, of
Faith Brown, of Dorothy Pearson, of Martha Pierson,
of Beatrice Rappaccini; it was even true, in Fan-
shawe, of Mrs. Melmoth and Ellen Langston; it was
true of Phoebe, Zenobia, and Miriam. Somewhere,
if not in the New England of his time, Hawthorne
unearthed the image of a goddess supreme in beauty
and power. 82

Hester Prynne was most certainly the goddess of all
Hawthorne's heroines. Apparently, she had no biographical
counterpart; yet she is a combination of all the women he
met in life and in fiction. He wrote of her:

The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect
elegance on a large scale. She had dark and abun-
dant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine
with a gleam, and a face which, besides being beauti-
ful from regularity of feature and richness of com-
plexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked
brow and deep black eyes. She was ladylike, too,
after the manner of the feminine gentility of those
days. 83

Hester threatens to become a reformer, but Hawthorne
saves her from that fate. Van Doren says that she was not
deficient in the "mysterious powers belonging to her
sex." 84 D. H. Lawrence found the powers terrible in Hester
and supposed them so destructive of Dimmesdale that he
died hating her. 85

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82 Van Doren, op. cit., p. 154.
84 Van Doren, op. cit., p. 55.
85 Ibid.
Hester was a character experience in which Hawthorne ventured away from the "blonde ideal woman of purity." The dark heroine sins, and Hawthorne seems to imply that she had not sinned at all, but the loveless marriage was the cause of her actions. At the end of the story, Hawthorne returned to the letter of the Puritan laws; repudiated the logic of his plot, and declared that Hester felt her act to be unholy. Hester was a new heroine, and Hawthorne seemed to choose her as his ideal feminine character even though in his later novels he returned to the old medieval concept of feminine purity. Hester was an escape from the old dislike of the dominance of women. Her appearance was brief, but her effect upon the author made *The Scarlet Letter* a masterpiece, "powerful everywhere and all the time."  

Included in the group of exotic women of extreme beauty are Georgiana of "The Birthmark," the image of "Drowne's Wooden Image," and Beatrice of "Rappaccini's Daughter." Invariably, the women of superior intellect, exotic appearance, and physical exuberance destroy themselves or else are destroyed by their environment in

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87 Van Doren, *op. cit.* , p. 165.
Hawthorne's fiction. Most of these women, made in the image of Margaret Fuller and Fanny Kemble, are destroyed by a series of events precipitated by their own actions.

A group of women not included in Randall Stewart's classification and having no apparent physical models are the witches. Although these women are not used frequently by Hawthorne, they can be found in several of his short stories and in his most important novel, The Scarlet Letter. Mistress Hibbins, the witch of the Salem novel, is an ill-omened character who casts a shadow over the entire community. Like Mother Digby in "Feathertop," Goody Cloyse and Martha Carrier in "Young Goodman Brown," she engages in supernatural activities and makes nightly excursions into the forest.

Apparently, Nathaniel Hawthorne was endowed with all the normal attributes of a man, but with few opportunities to participate in masculine activities. Because he was sensitive and intelligent, he found an escape from feminine domination through reading books and finally through writing them.

Because so much of his life was spent with women, his style of writing and his treatment of women characters are interesting insights into his personality. He wrote with a realism that was shocking in his age, but with a gentleness uncolored by sentimentality. Looking into the heart of
his characters he recorded all the horror and beauty that he saw, and sat with quiet dignity while his men and women learned that on his pages they would find no absolution.
Hawthorne resented his mother's preoccupation with memories of his father and her obsession with ancestry. He regretted that he had followed his mother's pattern of isolation, for it seemed to him that any man erred who left the common path. So he hated, then hated himself for hating. In rebellion, frustration, and guilt, he developed the themes that recur most frequently in his writing: isolation, ancestral curse, love of the past, and secret guilt.

Each of his early heroines, Ellen in *Fanshawe*, Faith Brown in "Young Goodman Brown," the nameless girl in "David Swan," was a frail woman whose role was to adore and encourage a weaker masculine being who became capable of a larger development because of her faith in him. After his meeting with Sophia, he created Alice Vane in "Edward Randolph's Portrait." Alice was frail, talented and idealistic—so much so that she lived in a dream world where she worshiped superior men, or men she convinced herself were superior.

To some extent, both fictitious heroines and the sylph-like Alice resemble his future wife. It may be surmised that Sophia Peabody was his ideal woman—cheerful, pliable
and talented. Three of his later women characters, Phoebe in *The House of Seven Gables*, Priscilla in *The Blithedale Romance*, and Hilda in *The Marble Faun*, are copies from Sophia. They are innocent, optimistic, and humble, and they enjoy love and success in the novels.

He created only four intellectual women of importance in all his fiction: Beatrice Rappaccini, Hester Prynne, Zenobia, and Miriam. These he endowed with physical attributes similar to those of Margaret Fuller and Fanny Kemble. Each of these fictional women was given a brief vision of happiness, then allowed to destroy herself by obeying a natural impulse. The consistency of this treatment causes one to suspect that the destruction of these superior women is an expression of Hawthorne's philosophy of life or of his rebellion from feminine domination or perhaps of both. One cannot be sure whether Beatrice fails because she is too perfect, because she represents the spiritual aspect of humanity in conflict with materialism, or because the author found a sadistic pleasure in the defeat of strong, beautiful women. Whatever his reasons for destroying exotic, intellectual women, one can be sure that Hawthorne follows the conclusion with grim determination, not once lifting his pen to permit the women an escape.

Most of the characters based on his mother, such as Katherine in "The Gentle Boy" and the old maid in "The White
Old Maid," are pathetic women who have missed their great happiness because of obsession with grief. Like Madame Hawthorne, these women have wandered on a mistaken errand of self-immolation.

Throughout his writing one finds evidences of feminine influences. The women in his life were the primary models for the women in his fiction. In his portrayal of these women, he adds life and color to plots that would command little sustained interest in themselves.

In the handling of these characters, he showed his likes and dislikes for certain types of women and his attitude toward woman's new relationship to society. Zenobia is a study of the new American woman, and she fails as a woman because of her own strength and independence. Her zealous efforts to secure equal rights allow her a short moment of glory before she plunges into an ignominious death. Her intrusion into the masculine world left her barren in that she lost the only earthly immortality a woman can be sure of: motherhood. Furthermore, she proves herself willing to reject the new independence, even life itself, for a man who demanded more than he was willing to give. In the denouement of the plot Hawthorne seems to say that woman subconsciously desires the life she is trying to reject.

One cannot censure Hawthorne for Zenobia's failure, but his detached attitude toward her death is almost
frightening. The ruthlessness with which he portrays the defeat of his strong women causes one to reflect that in his fiction he achieved what he had not achieved in life: complete domination of women.

From the analysis of his biographies one is led to conclude that his mother was the most singular influence on his writing. She first separated him from the common path and taught him to live in solitude. Even though his imagination flourished in gloom, he was never able to adjust himself to the sunlight which life with Sophia offered to him later. His life with Sophia was idyllic; however, she could not transport him into the social existence she longed for, nor could she enter the dark abyss of his dream world. Of more concern to the students of his literature, he was rarely ever able to succeed in giving complete substance to the people in his fiction; therefore, his lack of experience in life became a literary problem.

The only convictions he ever had were reactions against his early life and the feminine domination that characterized it. These convictions he repeated throughout his writing, and they became progressively less effective. As a result of personal insecurity, he was never able to develop the literary robustness that was latent in him. Many of his critics are inclined to agree with Emerson that he never revealed the full extent of his greatness, for he could not
get beyond the wall that he had reached as a young writer when he brooded in gloomy silence.

Women made him what he was; yet thwarted what he might have been.
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