Alexandra MĂRGINEAN
Romanian-American University, Bucharest, Romania

LINGUISTIC AND CONCEPTUAL ASPECTS IN CONSTRUING BROTHERHOOD IN NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S *BLITHEDALE ROMANCE*

Abstract: Această lucrare îşi propune să analizeze maniera în care noțiunea de frăție este construită pe parcursul romanului *Blithedale Romance* de Nathaniel Hawthorne, în contextual unei comunități utopice care se doreşte a fi un exemplu contra mercantilismului şi ordinarului ce caracterizează existența urbană obişnuită. Atmosfera care determină personajele să se revolte este a celei de a doua faze a revoluției industriale din America, context care le mână să părăsească Bostonul şi să se mute la periferia oraşului, într-o încercare de a găsi, în modul în care decid să îşi trăiască aici viețile, valorile nobile ale unei existențe simple şi pure în mijlocul naturii. În articolul de față ne concentrăm pe îmbinarea aspectelor lingvistice cu referințele culturale, care înfățişează conceptul de *frăție* ca pe o caracteristică a nou-stabilitei comunități. Încercăm să alegem contexte relevante din roman pentru a ilustra o progresie de la o viziune optimistă, plină de speranță asupra proiectului Blithedale, văzut inițial ca o comunitate agrară autosuficientă, spre una de-a dreptul pesimistă, de deziluzionare nu doar față de proiect în sine, ci şi față de rasa umană şi viață în general. Metoda de analiză este o combinație între lingvistică, pragmatică şi studii culturale şi identitare.

Key words: utopie, limbă, ironie, umor, utopia,

1. Introduction

Against the background of the beginnings of the second phase of the industrial revolution in America, acrowd of different characters and personalities take up the self-imposed task of living together as a community at the periphery of Boston, in the countryside. The idea is to try and survive on what they can cultivate and on the yield of the domestic animals they bring there –crops which they need to plant and gather and, respectively,animals that they have to rear on themselves, without external aid, despite the fact that their previous existences are unconnected to life on a farm, which they know nothing about. Among the characters that try to find their place here, there is the pragmatic narrator Coverdale, the philanthropic lecturer Hollingsworth (a blacksmith), the voluptuous feminist Zenobia, and the innocent Priscilla, as well as Silas Foster, the only one who actually seems tailored for farm life.

This paper attempts to investigate the language used to render the main ideas in the novel regarding the concept of such a community. First and foremost, we are looking at the way in which this kind of society is defined – both linguistically, with terms and tropes, and conceptually and culturally, through the various analogies with other representative communities with which it shares certain features. Then, we specifically analyze the irony and humor resorted to in the discussion of this project, and the manner and rationale of doing so.

We consider that this endeavor is interesting against the background of the modern world, for more than one reason. First, the return to simplicity in the way we live and closeness to nature – two attributes to be found in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance* community – constitute a strain present in various discourses nowadays: child rearing, eating healthily, fighting gadget dependency, and spiritual evolution through a temporary retreat from the hassle of everyday existence. And these are just a few of a multitude of possible examples. The notion of a utopian world or community hits a nostalgic nerve in contemporary people, who feel, in the twenty-first century, just as the characters do in the novel in the nineteenth, only perhaps more acutely or justifiably, that their existence needs naturalness, authenticity, a breath of fresh air and a return to the roots and to innocence. The socialist agrarian society of Blithedale has been replaced in modern times by spiritual retreats, the great number of which, along with the fact that they come in all shapes and sizes show a need for *cleansing*from the "regular" "ways of the world" – whatever those may mean themselves, in various contexts. Tiresomeness with technology becomes a controversial matter in this context, and we need to see the attitude and conclusion displayed in connection with it in the novel, which may perhaps find a mirror and correspondent in reality nowadays as well.

2. Defining the Blithedalecommunity and "brotherhood"

2.1 A conversation with Old Moodie – an early outline

The first aspect that draws our attention is the actual words or terms invoked to describe the community that is about to be born. This operation, ofdefining and outlining the profile of this group,is first very clearly performed in Moodie's conversation with Coverdale in the first chapter, and then sporadically kept up in the following pages of the novel. Old Moodie wants to ask Coverdale for a "great favor", and, in doing so, he conjures his interlocutor's "alacrity of beneficence" and "kindness" (mentioned twice) (Hawthorne, 1958: 35). Even another acquaintance of theirs, i.e. Hollingsworth, is evoked as a "solid character" and "philanthropist", and as a potential alternative to resort to for help, in case the deed could not be concluded and solved between them. We notice the

insistence on nouns that have as common features generosity and noblesse of heart. Also, phrases like "be of service" or "do […] a very great favor" accompany them, having the role of highlighting – since they contain a verb and thus introduce the notion of dynamics – the taking of action towards a desired effect, along the more static, and descriptive rather than prescriptive, nouns, which serve as background to create the atmosphere of benevolence and idealism. By combining the static nouns with the forcefulness and active, verb-centered phrases, a balance is reached in impressing on the other person both the idea of existence of desirable features relative to humans in general, and that of the need for action in conformity with them. The phrases "with your good leave" and "beg pardon"(*ibidem*: 36) further politeness into instances of praise performed towards the other person, being eulogizing up to the point of flattery and at the expense of self-humbling and face loss. They exaggerate the other's standing and status, propelling him into an obvious power position, and onto a superior plane, granting him the upper hand over oneself.The "good leave" refers to obtaining the other's permission for something (to visit him), whereas begging pardon is asking him for forgiveness for the intrusion, and thus presupposes the existence of a fault. Both entail a position of inferiority or disadvantage for the utterer. They take politeness a step further from the phrasing on the previous page, passing a responsibility to Moodie.

This conversation is relevant not only for the introduction of the idea of brotherhood (which will be later developed in great detail). It indirectly hints at the narrator's attitude towards it, which is one of disbelief, irony and even downright denial. The latter stance is subtly visible only if we look at the whole context, which contains clues and references to it – linguistic and otherwise. Let us spot them.

We willmention the more concrete and obvious ones first.They are linguistic and can be found in Coverdale's words. The narrator admits to himself that he is ready to grant any favor that is "no special trouble", and retorts aloud "My time is brief", while still offering to help (*ibidem*: 35). Then, Coverdale describes his state of mind as follows: "It begins to *interest* me; especially since your hint that a *lady's influence* might be found desirable. Come, I am really *anxious* to be of service to you." (*ibidem*) (my Italics). The key words in his answer are "interest", "(lady's) influence" and "anxious", and they connote: selfishness and impenetrability instead of generosity and availability, watching out for gaining potential advantages for oneself, sheer curiosity instead of a genuine desire to help, perhaps attention being piqued by the prospect of gossip on women or their romantic involvement(s) (the first sentence in the quote), and, last but not least, impatience when it comes to extending help (suggested by the

adjective "anxious"). Moreover, at the mention of Zenobia, Coverdale replies with something that reveals that, even though he is pressed for time, he nevertheless can allow for a delay if it is to badmouth a woman and to be ironical and mean towards his interlocutor. He inquires if Moodie's own interest in the lady can be a "literary turn" or if he has "taken up the advocacy of women's rights", proving, with his manner and tone, that he intends to humiliate the old man; also, he characterizes the said Zenobia as wearing a "mask", so of being hypocritical, resorting to a "contrivance", as if she were the "Veiled Lady" (a very relevant metaphor that we shall come back to immediately) (*ibidem*: 36). In his reply, Coverdale is found lacking in genteelness, honor and respect, not to mention deprived of the very quality of brotherliness that he wants to display as having by association, in joining the idealist community of Blithedale. So, at the linguistic level, we have some clear oppositions already marked between real fellow feeling and what the narrator manifests, despite wanting to pose otherwise. The words that come out of his mouth are negatively connoted. If we look at what he really speaks of, it isrevelatory of two things: selfishness and pretense.

Moreover, this happens in the context in which someone makes an appeal to his fellow feeling. Moodie is an obscure, modest, old man, whose shyness and meekness seem to stir our pity and sympathy, but which – and this is relevant and worth mentioning – fail to stir the narrator's. The man's humility is met with a dry and even hostile tone – acknowledged as such by Coverdale himself, who is aware that he is not on his best behavior, sharing this realization with the readers. The narrator's obnoxiousness is so obvious to Moodie that the latter actually does not manage to mention the favor that he intends to ask, being forced, at the other's grumpiness, and since he *does* have respect and common sense, to retreat. This situation subtly questions the very brotherly feeling theoretically extant in human beings, on which the whole project of the agrarian self-sufficient but selfless enterprise relies on. It seconds the effect created by Coverdale's harsh words, so the construction of opposition at the linguistic level gets reinforcedby one at the situational level, in terms of action.

Thirdly, the mention of the Veiled Lady in the narrator's conversation with Moodie is a key element in the overall interpretation of the utopian community. Apparently unconnected with it, it actually stands to characterize it, being an allegory for the Blithedale settlement.

2.2 Mesmer and the Veiled Lady

Coverdale is on his way back from an exhibition on this theme when Moodie approaches him, so he is under the impression of what he has witnessed. Perhaps this is the reason why he mentions it casually at the end

of their discussion, and why it proves a handy analogy in his mind for Zenobia. But, in fact, there is more to it than this, and it is the text which tells us so.

The presence of this phenomenon in the novel is not surprising, given the impact that it had in the eighteenth, and, in America, well into the nineteenth centuries. But the narrator does not just mention it, hesubsequently practically begins his account by describing his impressions of it, in a philosophical overture, only to then abandon it abruptly, saying that it has "little to do with the present narrative" (*ibidem*: 34). Which is actually not true, of course. The interlude cannot be there just so, out of a whim, in the story of a teller who chooses his words so carefully. The first chapter actually begins and ends with a mention of the Lady, in a symmetry that again leaves us skeptical to its reference being accidental. The hunch given by these two indications – the explanation that begins the book and the symmetry of the Lady's mentions in the initial chapter – is proved right when a more descriptive, explanatory reference to mesmerism is made in Chapter VI, *Coverdale's Sick-Chamber*.

As the narrator lies in his sickbed (after having caught a nasty cold trying to work outdoors) and as Zenobia attends to him, bringing him food and chatting to him to ease his sufferance and isolation, Coverdale notices a strange phenomenon. He feels somewhat enthralled by the woman, which he finds awkward as he deems himself generally immune to her charm. Since he does not particularly like the woman, but, on the contrary, is rather annoyed by her and her progressive ideas, he considers his sudden attraction intriguing. Even though he admitted that she was feminine and attractive before, he also said that he was repelled by her because of the way she thinks, and was thus out of the danger of really being drawn to her, even physically. Thus, he feels the need to look for an explanation for his unexpected vulnerability. What results is, at the same time, a basic interpretation of mesmerism. He speaks of the possibility of getting information out of people's bio fields, or "spheres", directly, as well as of influencing them, generally speaking, through their energy fields (*ibidem*: 70). The comic of the situation arises as he actually finds an additional pseudo-logical explanation for this influence: either the victim is ill and thus weakened, which makes him/her prone to being preyed on energetically, or the victim has, as a result of a "vegetarian diet", "too much ether in the blood"; a healthy individual has a "repellent and self-defensive energy", which therefore acts like a barrier against the attack (*ibidem*). He is convinced that "Zenobia's sphere" "impressed itself powerfully" on his, transforming him into "something like a mesmerical clairvoyant" (*ibidem*: 71). Consequently, to sum up, he is influenced by Zenobia against his will, because of his vulnerable health state, through energetic manipulation.

Someone's life energy appears to be a permeable means through which information can be extracted and transmitted, sometimes without the person's consent or knowledge.

In her *Credulity:A Cultural History of US Mesmerism*, Ogden makes reference to *Blithedale Romance* and, more precisely, the character of Priscilla, to explain mesmerism through her qualities. Priscilla can allegedly travel without moving her body, i.e. in spirit somehow; she can embody other people's personalities, as she does Margaret Fuller's when she brings Coverdale a letter from the reformer (Ogden, 2018: 179), and thus also has the gift of "prophecy" and of the "knowledge of a hidden world" (*ibidem*: 180). Hence, mesmerism seems to also presuppose things like teleportation and/or telekinesis, possession by spirit, the ability to foresee the future, and a connection with other planes of existence.

The vocabulary that regards mesmerism points to magic as its main ingredient. Mesmerism is best described as a form of enchantment, and the women who practice it are enchantresses. Ogden duly notices two aspects: firstly, the ambivalence of the verb "to enchant", which contains both the notion of delight and that of fraud: "it means to delight, and also to delude; to enrapture, and also to rape; to spellbind figuratively, and also to spellbind literally" (*ibidem*: 3), and, secondly, the implicit mindset of disenchantment, in Max Weber's terms, witnessed in the passage from pre-modern to modern times, which the terms allude to. Since Mesmerism, as a topic brought up in the novel, is merely a mirror for a wondrous state of mind that characterizes the initiators of the Blithedale project, as well as for the suspicion in the heart of the individual who craves a change of society(i.e. a break from its rules), the ambivalence offered by this key term,which characterizes these needsperfectly,illustrates the fusion between doubt and a desire to believe. Skepticism and the need for magic and beauty intermingle in the characters' minds. That is why they undertake the agrarian community project half-heartedly. In this sense, the enterprise is a nostalgia for a desire to be in awe of something, a desire for something noble and pure. It is their enchantment that the characters seek, which is why the topic of Mesmerism becomes recurrent, and why the vocabulary used in relation with it is telling of a generalized state of mind. "Enchantment" is also used with a main focus on its pejorative connotations, of deceit, when the veil of the lady is brought into discussion. It is described as a "spell" (Hawthorne, 1958: 133) and is meant to both alleviate Zenobia of the alleged ill fortune brought on her by Priscilla, and to "protect" the latter by putting her in the magician's power, ostensibly for her own sake, to prevent her from harming herself by harming others and by experiencing strange things. Of course, this shelter is illusory, and it mirrors the figurative veil of the Blithedale community under which they

all live.Blithedale becomes an idol or fetish and Coverdale is a nostalgic debunker of it, sorry to have to give it up as disingenuine, while at the same time considering it as also necessary, investing it with power (Ogden, 2018: 44-8).

Enchantment can be seen as positive as well, an "enlightened" form, of joythrough artistic manifestation; it requires an exercise of imagination, and it may mean inhabiting fictional worlds with the awareness of enacted conventionality, i.e. of never leaving the real one; besides being creative, it has an "ethical" component, according to Jane Bennett, as it makes one pay attention to his fellow people (Ogden, 2018: 10). It can be traced in the community's play at "tableaux vivants", i.e. a type of theatre or acted narratives that they immerse in as a pastime (Hawthorne, 1958: 124), one of which is precisely "The Silvery Veil", involving Priscilla and the concept of mesmerism (*ibidem*: 126). Along this positive vein, we may interpret the Blithedale way of life as progressive and avant-garde, both despite, and due to, being a return to simpler, natural existence.

Besides the term pointed out above, the novel puts forth some words taken from spirituality and advanced physics, which express, in rudimentary language, some realities into which discoveries have been made and the knowledge of which is nowadays more advanced. The "spheres" refer to the bio field surrounding living creatures.In specialized dedicated literature, it is also called (bio)energy field, "life force", electromagnetism, biophotons, "subtle body" (McKusick, 2014). For example, Eileen Day McKusick describes the bio field and the curing effects of sounds on the body through it in her book *Tuning the Human Biofield: Healing with Vibrational Sound Therapy*. The same book introduces various definitions of aether, seeing it as the fifth essential element of creation (besides fire, earth, air and water), namely the one that is all-pervasive in the universe and creates itself into vortexes or spirals that engender plasma, giving birth to matter (*ibidem*).Since this element is ubiquitous, it facilitates distance interactions, logically explaining telepathy, as well as remote healing; McKusick clearly states that the changes that one creates in either have physical effects, changing matter and the body (*ibidem*). This is in fact anticipated in the novel when the narrator speaks of Zenobia's influence on him on his sickbed.

2.3. The good characteristics of the Blithedale community– starting on a positive note

The story is written in the context of a utopian approach to existence that prompts a variety of characters forming an impromptu community to start a bucolic initiative. They make a settlement in the middle of wilderness soas to be close to nature, attempting to lead a simpler existence

than the one in the city, wishing it to be deemed as purer, deprived of the artifice and sophistication of the old one.

This ambitious task is called "socialist" by the pragmatic narrator Coverdale, as participants are supposed to be equal, endeavoring to strip their new existence of the injustice and preconceptions that bound their minds before. Hence, the first descriptions of the community rely heavily on a romantic, positive outlook on the project. There is no negativity involved in the portrayals. Moreover, these draw on parallels with historic past occurrences and on metaphors meant to depict the experience as being positive in the superlative. The endeavor is a "scheme for beginning the life of Paradise anew" (Hawthorne, 1958: 37), and the space that they have found resembles "Eve's bower"(*ibidem*: 38) or the hut of "an Esquimaux" (*ibidem*). As they press on to organize themselves, they look like a "family of the old Pilgrims" (*ibidem*: 40).

Conceptually, the space is likened to the biblical Paradise, which is meant to make it connote purity (as opposed to the sinfulness of city life), closeness to nature – which becomes a virtue, and is meant to oppose the complexity of the city, of technology and mercantilism, offering, instead of these, a type of life that relies on simple means, frugality and modesty. Complexity is associated with complication, greed, arrogance, whereas what they are trying to accomplish is the paradisiacal existence before knowledge and the fall, which was innocent, unselfish, and uncomplicated.Individualism did not exist back then, which is why a sense of communitarianism and equality is the underlying assumption that gives rise to the socialist interpretations. The mention of Eve and her bower is meant to add the connotation of the Blithedale community being a nurturing place that can create different, evolvedbeings, change mentalities and produce a reformed, better world. It is like a nexus yielding a new set of people, superior to the ones that exist in reality at that moment. The character of Eve is meant to suggest, through her being the mother of the world, this quality of creation and nurture in association with the space of the community. Blithedale becomes an axis mundi and a core or hub for a new Genesis. Both Paradise and Eve also suggest a double protection – divine and maternal – that this site will provide.

The Eskimo population culturally connotes kindness and generosity. Having a "good mind" is a local value for the Eskimo, it is linked with personal well-being, as well as a healthy existence – both in the concrete and figurative sense – combining with the notions of ethic and morality; a "good mind" and thinking means a "Christian mind", "good conduct", "positive thinking and being in harmony with and loving others" (Reimer, 1999: 11).Stephen Pax Leonard notices the crucial place held by the notion of belonging, and by communitarian and collectivistic thinking for an Inuit

sub-group living in the north-west of Greenland (Leonard, 2015: 58). Reimer explains – in Chapter 9 of her book on the Eskimo lifestyle and mentalities,*Beliefs About the Environment* – that closeness to nature regenerates, stimulating qualities (such as well-being, sharing and cooperating) and their manifestation in human beings; also, nature itself possesses an awareness of its own, providing shelter, aid and comfort, and functioning as a sort of interface of God; hence, the environment should be valued and treated with deference, as it is not in a position of inferiority with respect to the human being, but of equality; believing in God and manifesting Christian values, as well as living by tradition and conservative views are virtues (Reimer, 1999: 101-123).Leonard also describes the relationship with the habitat, or "*nuna*", as "primordial" (Leonard, 2015: 59). Sharing is discussed by Reimer not only as a natural part of the Christian way, but as a special separate awareness and lifestyle; it refers not only to food, but also services, stories, experiences and "being friendly" (Reimer, 1999: 126), and, interestingly, it is linked with the notion of reciprocation, or a kind of law of attraction in the universe, as sharing will reward the person with plenitude; it also involves organizing gatherings and festivities in order to feel integrated and create a sense of belonging (*ibidem*: 127).

The mention of the Pilgrims refers us back to the historical Founding Fathers, who left England to go to America in search of a better life. The nature and motivations of the old settlers illustrate those of the Blithedale community members. The Pilgrims landing on the Mayflower ship in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620, were called Puritans or Separatists because they disagreed with the emphasis on hierarchy and attention on worldly aspects placed by the Church of England, which, in their views, had consequently strayed from the values of the Bible and the real meaning and purpose of religious faith (Owens, 2014: 13). They wanted to live differently, in the right to build their own church, which they attributed to all communities, and Puritans followed hard rules strictly and led an austere life (*ibidem*). Some of the Pilgrims also pursued a better life standard (*ibidem*: 14). Leaving their homes and significant possessions and starting from scratch, as well as working together to build a home from nothing, i.e. a simple life full of hardships at the beginning, is an undeniable reality when it comes to what occurred with the Forefathers (*ibidem*: 16). The Blithedale founders seek a purer way of life close to the biblical value of brotherhood as well. They run from what they have come to perceive as a degradation of existence, not unlike their ancestors. The impression that work in the countryside, managing livestock and crops would ensure means of subsistence more easily is present in the mindsets of the characters in the novel, just as it probably was in the settlers'.

If we analyze the content of the cultural parallels drawn above, we understand the core values of the Blithedale community. In closeness to, and reliance on nature resides a purer, spiritually superior manner of leading one's life. Altruism, sharing, helping one another, i.e. a communitarian approach to life, is the key to happiness. Sticking to conservative world views explains why Zenobia's feminism is perceived as errant, despite the group's declared penchant towards equity and equality between community members. The parallel with Paradise sanctions this way of life as of divine origin, as undeniably the best version of existence there is. Besides making it the "right" way, this connotation comes with the burden of observing Christian values in the shared existence. Moreover, the announced similarity with the Pilgrims is a bold claim – to the community being the foundation of a living style that has universal relevance and should/will become the norm. It also additionally suggests that the initiative is justified, as it is similar to the other, having therefore the legitimation provided by historical precedent in palpable reality, not only in divine mythology.

The vocabulary accompanying this mode of life is filled with positive terms. Among the travelers, there is a "blithe tone of brotherhood", a "cordial sympathy" of the "unflagging spirits", "companionship" and "present warmth"; Mrs. Foster, their host, bids them a "hearty welcome", smiling "hospitably" (Hawthorne, 1958: 40) and behaving "affectionately", nurturing the "blessed state of brotherhood and sisterhood" (*ibidem*: 41). Their life is envisaged as "true, strong, natural, and sweet" (*ibidem*: 42), one of "spiritual health" (*ibidem*: 54) and "pure influences" (*ibidem*), "of love and free-heartedness" (*ibidem*: 55), and they are to one another "brethren and sisters" (*ibidem*: 43).We notice an insistence on the term "brother"/ "brethren"/ "brotherhood" and "sister"/ "sisterhood", showing that the spiritual fellow feeling is as strong as a blood relation or family tie. Also, derivatives from the noun "heart" ("hearty', "free-heartedness") are meant to point to the existence of fellow-feeling and sentiment, as well as the heartfelt, or honest quality of the feeling, which also makes it profound and, consequently, perhaps, able to withstand the test of time, i.e. immutable. Most of the nouns characterizing the relationship between the community members – "brotherhood", "sympathy", "companionship", "love" – presuppose reciprocation of feeling; all of them, along with the adverbs showing manners of being – "hospitably", "affectionately" – rely on empathy and a capacity and willingness to give, cater for another person's needs, and selflessness. All the characterizations of the kind of living that is involved on the farm share the semantic feature [+warm], in the figurative sense, and [+caring]. The core attitude is, in other words, the opposite of indifference and selfishness.

The construal of the warm manner of interaction at Blithedale is achieved by resort to antithesis with the old way of life as well, which represents the "system of society that shackled us" (*ibidem*: 40). The society that they have run away from had a "rusty iron frame-work", a "weary treadmill" system filled with "hindrances", "irksomeness", and thus "intolerable"; fleeing it feels like having "stept down from the pulpit", as having "flung aside the pen" and "shut up the ledger"; the city life was full of "enervating indolence", "absurd" and based on "false and cruel principles", as opposed to their "generous" new purpose; it was characterized by "pride", whereas now their guiding principle is "familiar love"; they are learning to earn their living by "mutual aid" instead of "wresting" it or "filching" it from another who is "less shrewd" (*ibidem*: 46), by "earnest toil" (*ibidem*: 47) instead of "selfish competition" (*ibidem*: 46). Most antitheses also contain metaphors, mainly of obsolete machines that work with difficulty and/or requiring effort or strain of nerves – namely, a metal (iron) skeletal framework and a treadmill. Besides being outdated, these pieces of machinery also connote slowness – iron is a massive and heavy metal, and the treadmill performs repeated, slow moves. The same [+slow] feature is reinforced by the presence of the nouns "hindrances" and "irksomeness", which connote the slowing down of an activity because of obstacles that need to be overcome (the first), and irritation, which also prevents or reduces the pace of an activity (the second), opposing, for instance, a boost that one may receive or feel in relation with performing an activity.

The first metaphors are achieved by comparing old life with a device. The second series of metaphors are accomplished by comparing it to various jobs and actions. Living the old life, the more modern one, was like being a priest and preaching to the masses from the literally and symbolically high place of the lectern. This status and activity are meant to connote the guise of superiority and artificiality, of didacticism by all means. It is also a position of authority or preeminence that is socially and officially acknowledged, just as that of an author (resorted to for the second metaphor using occupations) or an accountant juggling numbers, capable of calculating one's profit and (financial) fate. This position of power and knowledgeability that exceeds that of everyman somehow deprives the person of modesty and thus distances him/her from what is really important, making him/her lose sight of the real values in life. It so happens that these jobs – priest, writer, clerk/businessperson – come along with a better financial standing as well, which comes in opposition to the frugality of life in the middle of nature, and to being close to the divine and to the spiritual. Worldliness is contrasted with the spiritual within these same metaphors. This last strain, of spirituality, is mirrored by the

antagonism between the nouns "pride" or "competition", on one side, and "love", "aid" and "toil", on the other. Thewords in the first series have in view self-aggrandizement, antagonism, and gain at the expense of another's loss, whereas those in the second rely on mutuality, fellow-feeling and all-inclusiveness, i.e. the benefit of all through everybody's input and efforts. The nouns "aid" and "love" presuppose a giving move, whereas the verbs "wrest" and "filch" refer to a pulling move, a snatching from the other. Besides the semantics, the opposition is suggested at a purely grammatical level through that between the parts of speech used for the contrasted modes of existence – nouns are softer than verbs, because they are more static, passive, designated rounded and finished realities and items, in comparison with the verbs which are more aggressive because dynamic. Moreover, the verbs are used in an "-ing" form, which enhances the sensation of dynamism, transforming it into violence, which is actually associated with life in the characters' modern times, the life that they run from.

All the parallels drawn above between the community and other realities and contexts – it being like Paradise, like the American Plymouth settlement, and like an Eskimo society – rely on a sense of new beginnings, the opening up of a new, pure perspective on human beings and their existence together. The instances chosen as mirrors are meant to have an aura of nobility to them, and raise the claim of exemplarity. They are models to be heeded and followed. What they have in common is the concept of missionarism. Priscilla is called, because of her apparent innocence and vulnerability, the "first fruits of the world", of this universe that they are trying to establish and make endure (*ibidem*: 56). They choose to see the young woman as an omen, thinking that "Providence has sent her", and as a mirror of how well (or badly) they will be doing on this mission: "As we do by this friendless girl, so shall we prosper." (*ibidem*) Besides showing the messianic tinge in their reformative endeavor, this attitude points to a tendency to look for answers and guidance from the spiritual world, with such intent that they find in another human being a fortune-teller element, a prop and aid for prophesizing – if she thrives, they will too. This situation and their positioning with respect to the context indicates, on the one hand, the existence of a good intention, a belief in the fact that what they are doing is special. On the other, it also suggest aloofness and arrogance, hinting very subtly at the ironic stance that the narrator is about to take with respect to the Blithedale project.

What we have presented above is just the surface imagery, furthering the good qualities of the settlement. As we have seen, these are extracted from associations with other famous communities and beginnings – the Pilgrims or Founding Fathers of the American nation, the Eskimos, and, as

a chief metaphor, the biblical Paradise. However, as we read on, we realize that these parallels are progressively subverted by the narrator's irony and disbelief, which later on culminates in sarcasm and derogatory comments. Humor becomes biting, and, every now and then, downright mockery. Let us see this other, dark side of the narrator's outlook on Blithedale.

3. Irony and humor in viewing brotherhood and the community

3.1 The analogy with fire

Fire is used from the beginning as a complex metaphor for the Blithedale project. The first wood fire at Blithedale is particularly "cheery", as no other fire has ever been, but it burns "on an April afternoon" in the vicinity of "fitful gusts of a wintry snow-storm roaring in the chimney" (*ibidem*: 37). This remark is meant to suggest that, even though the hearth is warm and provides the protection and hope that it is meant to, and at a heightened intensity in comparison with the way the narrator has ever had this feeling before, it does so in the proximity of coldness and harsh weather, i.e. that the fire is in danger of being extinguished by the winter lurking outside. Figuratively speaking, this announces the disenchantment with the prospect of Blithedale, the way in which it will soon cease to cater for the hopes and dreams of those involved in it. That is precisely the idea that the next comment – "The stanch oaken logs were long ago burnt out." – is meant to put forward, the fact that the experiment is doomed to fail (*ibidem*).

The fires at Blithedale are made of "crooked and unmanageable boughs" that "could never be measured into merchantable cords for the market" (*ibidem*: 40). In other words, they are kindled using branches that would be refused because of their inconformity of shape and pattern, which stand for the incompatibility of the people forming the community with the society which they left behind. Like the incongruous branches, the community members are misfits, elements that could not integrate and be like the others and the norm. The fire made up with such aberrant branches is in fact a mirror for the project initialized by outcasts and self-exiles. It is special in the same way in which Blithedale is special, different and unconventional.

On another occasion when a fire is made, the narrator's words point again to its metaphoric quality: "'I hope […] that our blazing windows will be visible a great way off. There is nothing so pleasant and encouraging to a solitary traveller […]'" (*ibidem*: 51). Coverdale's words betray pride and aloofness, as he wants their abode to be visible from afar in order to be admired and even desired, as well as obviously considers it to be the equivalent of a lighthouse for lost souls, which can guide and save all those who are outside it. The character raises the claim that Blithedale is a sort of

landmark and reference point for all, an example to be followed, a directing line. The voice of reason is at this point embodied by Silas Foster, the farmer, who duly – and at the same time ominously – notices that "'The blaze of that brush-wood will only last a minute or two longer'" (*ibidem*: 51-2), which makes the narrator think to himself: "but whether he meant to insinuate that our moral illumination would have as brief a term, I cannot say" (*ibidem*: 52). Coverdale intentionally draws our attention to the symbolic nature of fire, as well as overtly introduces doubt in relation to the project at this point. With the line above, Silas becomes the voice of his dark presumptions, and continues to be that with what he says next: "Our firelight will draw stragglers, just as a candle draws dor-bugs, on a summer night." (*ibidem*) The image invoked here by the farmer, of insects drawn to light and flames only to come too close and die as a result of the fatal attraction has also yielded the metaphor (and the idiom) of the moth-to-the-flame effect.It figuratively refers to any uncontrollable desire that ultimately turns out to be destructive, more precisely to alluring situations that end up representing deadly traps for the victim. A beautiful appearance may hide disaster, and one may be ensnared by something attractive that is ultimately his/her demise. Blithedale may represent such an instance of a wonderful thing that eventually proves itself a mirage. Hence, it is not only that, like the fire, the project will die out, but also that this fire is deceiving: instead of being a genuinely authentically positive reality, it hides imperfections and pretense itself, as it will soon be revealed openly.

3.2 Irony made visible

As pointed out at the beginning of the novel and in section 2.3above, aggressiveness and antagonism are initially deemed to characterize the world that the Blithedale dwellers have left behind, which is considered, to begin with, in antithesis to the calm and harmonious bliss of the newly-found life. Nevertheless, this antithesis does no longer stand as we advance with the reading. As the food reserves are thinning out, the settlers surprise themselves thinking of ways to beat the city customers to the market in order to get the best products (pigs and vegetables). Hence, they end up competing with gardeners, entrepreneurs and customers around Boston, trying to wake up earlier in the morning to get to the market before them, to more or less race them there and gain an advantage. This situation of trying to outrun competition comes in strike contrast with the fact that this attitude is one of the main that got discarded and looked down on in the first place. Paradoxically, they come to embody the very things that they hated and took it upon themselves to avoid:

> "It struck me as rather odd, that one of the first questions raised, after our separation from the greedy, struggling, self-seeking world, should relate to the possibility of getting the advantage over the outside barbarians in their own field of labor. But, to own the truth, I very soon became sensible that, as regarded society at large, we stood in a position of new hostility, rather than new brotherhood."[1]

Situational paradox and irony triggers the use of irony at the linguistic level.The words in the quote above, all negative and containing the semantic features [+aggressive] and [+confrontational], be them verbs ("struck"), adjectives ("greedy", "struggling", "self-seeking") or nouns ("barbarians"), which were supposed to characterize those on theexterior, end up mirroring their own attitudes, themselves instead of the others. The antithesis ourselves-the outsiders is lost, and the evidence of not only its invalidity, but also of the reversal of announced valuesand of hypocrisy is humorous as well as ironic.

Humor is more marked in the instance in which Coverdale, falling sick because of cold and the lack of comfortable living conditions, revolts to himself, in an inner monologue, against his own involvement in the project as well as the others', becoming more honest and ironical overall. Instead of seeing everything as surrounded by the aura of positivity, he takes distance from the situation and analyzes the whole context with a critical eye. He is obviously marked by the upset of having allowed himself to get ill over this Spartan way of life, whichdetermines his criticism. Stepping down from the pulpit of saving appearances himself, he calls a spade a spade and shows a less spiritual side and interpretation of facts, proving the point of pretense in the Blithedale endeavor. His much more down-to-earth approach makes room for colorful language and humor.

To exemplify, he wishes that this

> "reformation of society had been postponed about half a century, or, at all events, to such a date as should have put my intermeddling with it entirely out of the question"[2].

We notice that he wishes for his life span and the time of the Blithedale project to be anachronistic because he wants to avoid the responsibility and shame of admitting that the conditions of the project are too hard for him. He would like to appear as a hero, enduring hardships to make a statement, but without actually having to endure anything. He wonders what had gotten into him to leave the comfort of his previous life: "What, in the name of common sense, had I to do with any better society than I had always lived in? It had satisfied me well enough." (*ibidem*), statement followed by a description of the material comfort of his previous home and of an un-extraordinary, modest, (petty?), but peacefulexistence, ended with the concluding quip "what could be better than all this?"

(*ibidem*: 65). He indirectly acknowledges the fact that he is perhaps not made for grand things, that he is not heroic, noble and as spiritual as he meant to seem, and that the desire to appear as such might have been inflated ego. He is perhaps not cut for the new life of sacrifice, and may not have what it takes to be more than a regular individual.

Nevertheless, self-irony quickly turns to irony towards the others, to an attack at the Blithedale dwellers. He cannot stand self-deprecation for too long, turning again towards the exterior, attacking the rest: "Was it better to hoe, to mow, to toil and moil amidst the accumulations of a barn-yard; to be the chamber-maid of two yoke of oxen and a dozen cows […]?" (*ibidem*). The alliteration, the onomatopoeic quality of the terms and the rhyming serve the creation of irony here; they have a derogatory function, of minimizing life on a farm, of making it appear coarseand ridiculous, as unserious as a child's limerick. Rhyming is used right next to oxymoron, achieved through the alternation of hotness and coldness used as metaphors for the narrator's states: he feels as if having

> "a furnace in my heart, and another in my head, by the heat of which I was kept constantly at the boiling point, yet shivering at the bare idea of extruding so much as a finger into the icy atmosphere of the room"[3].

The heat and cold are, in the concrete sense, referring to high and low temperature, respectively symptoms of the character's illness and bodily perceptions through the senses(having a fever and at the same time feeling cold and quivery), and the ambiance, i.e. the warmth of the hearth fire and the low temperature in the room, but also, figuratively, metaphors for anger and the taking of distance (or disenchantment with) the whole concept of Blithedale.The furnace in his head is a swirl of ideas, and the one his heart a turmoil of emotions, the most prominent of which is anger, and the boiling point is anger reaching its peak. Oxymoron and metaphor increase both dramatism and humor in this context.

Coverdale continues by mixing self-irony with satire at people in general. As Hollingsworth nurses him, he thinks that there is a tenderness to the other that is uncharacteristic of the "natural indifference" or even "absolutely hostile feeling" of men towards the ill, which, given the fact that compassion is more present in women than in the "brute brethren" who "really have no tenderness" in their "selfish existence", transforms Hollingsworth into a somewhat odd character (*ibidem*: 66). Mockery is multi-directional: Coverdale indirectly mocks himself for disbelieving that mankind is good-natured, men in general for being brutes and selfish, Hollingsworth for having "something of the woman" in him, then people in general again for the fact that Hollingsworth's kindness is a rarity and, since the chance of finding a deathbed nursing companion such as him is

extremely slim, one "had better make up his mind to die alone" (*ibidem*). Coverdale insists on this idea and takes is to the extreme with his further comments on when and how one should die. Given the rare chance that he had in enjoying Hollingsworth's care at a moment when he was close to death, and the belief that he will never encounter such a good friend in a similar time of need, Coverdale declares: "It still impresses me as almost a matter of regret, that I did not die then, when I had tolerably made up my mind to it", while, due to the male nurse's bedside manners, he was "in the mood" (*ibidem*: 67). The picture painted here has, of course, rich humorous overtones, besides the dramatic and ironical ones: the narrator is not nearing his death, this is just an exaggeration caused by his revolt, just as he exaggerates, because of his irritable state, the gloomy outlook on mankind; hyperbolizing is a source of the comic; also, one can't, of course, decide upon one's time of death.

The narrator performs a strategy in first praising Hollingsworth, only to subsequently start criticizing him, firstly in a subdued manner, which can be interpreted as ambivalent, as half-irony/joke half-serious/sincere admiration, to then make it clear that Hollingsworth's personality is undermined. This latter stance, in its turn, prepares the terrain for further biting irony towards the whole group of villagers, as we shall see in the following section.

4. Taking it a step further – sarcasm and satire

4.1 Disparaging Hollingsworth

The passage from irony to sarcasm is achieved through the mocking that Coverdale directs, firstly, at the character of Hollingsworth. The narrator chooses this manner, of picking on – so-to-speak –one individual at the beginning, before he openly picks on the others, as the introduction of doubt regarding character is easier to digest and more believable when directed at only one individual, and thus the questioning of all may be insidiously and more effectively done afterwards, once suspicion over one person who belongs to the community has already been cast, supported with arguments and, potentially, accepted.

Hollingsworth's intentions and motivations are taken into consideration and debated. First, the very reason why he retired from society is made to look petty and unlike the others'. If the rest of the community may have been tired of the ways of the world because these were found base, in Hollingsworth's case – Coverdale suggests – the reason behind his retreat may have been an incapacity to integrate. In his particular case, it was not that society was found faulty, but Hollingsworth was the faulty one, i.e. "at odds" with the world (*ibidem*: 78).

Moreover, Hollingsworth's dedication to his philanthropic theory, at the expense of leaving no room for other manifestations of benevolence towards human beings, is seen as a "spectral monster" (*ibidem*) and as "terrible egotism which he mistook for an angel of God" (*ibidem*: 78-9). Hollingsworth is preoccupied with a particular project, which takes up all his attention and energy: he wants to build an institution for the reformation of criminals, called by the narrator a "castle in the air" (*ibidem*: 79). Pascal Tréguerdraws an analogy between this metaphoric phrase and that of building "castles in Spain", and traces the latter to the French *chansons de geste* (i.e. historical verse romances from the Middle Ages), more precisely to a situation depicted in one of these, when Charlemagne's knights refused to attack a stronghold in Spain, despite being promised to own it as a fief in case of success, as they were too tired and harassed by the enemy to deem it feasible; therefore, the building of such a castle or domain was an unlikely prospect, and the corresponding idiom came to refer to something unconquerable or impossible to accomplish (Tréguer, 2017). The first mention of the phrase "castles in the air" is dated later, in the sixteenth-century work of an English author and translator, who mentions it in the context of a pair of lovers' dreams and fantasies, and points out the similarity in meaning with the other idiom, along with providing as a reason for its emergence the loss of the cultural reference of Spanish castles (*ibidem*). Coverdale's intimation on Hollingsworth is that, on the one hand, he is pursuing an objective unrealistically, and, on the other hand, thathad the man been genuinely caring, he would have paid attention to other, equally or even more stringent needs of his friends, and would have manifested his interest in more than one aspect of welfare.

Coverdale carefully constructs his argument against Hollingsworth, taking the seriousness of his accusations progressively further, by making increasingly weighty allegations. Hence, Hollingsworth's penchant to stick to an idea the way he does is not seen as generosity for the sake of the people, but rather as an obsession, a hobby horse or fixation that thus becomes a sign of mental illness: "It is my private opinion that […]Hollingsworth was fast going mad" (Hawthorne, 1958: 79).

What is more, besides being mentally unstable, Hollingsworth may also be a manipulative maniac. His dedication to his cause is interpreted as a scheme for conversion to his views, a matter of ego rather than one of selflessness, an attempt to fuel proselytism, form proselytes and gain followers – the intentions of a narcissist: all his effort is an "ulterior purpose of making me a proselyte to his views" (*ibidem*: 80). We have come a long way from the initial apparent admiration for Hollingsworth's nursing qualities and tender character.

4.2 Group characterizations

After analyzing Hollingsworth, first in the ambivalent manner pointed out above, which then made room for disapproval and belittlement, Coverdale passes on to perform the same task in reference to the whole community of Blithedale.

He begins by softer characterizations, veiled under the appearance of appreciation, calling them "our little army of saints and martyrs" (*ibidem*: 84). The presence of the possessive adjective in the first person plural, "our", denotes self-inclusion and availability towards considering the cause his own. In other words, Coverdale appears to rally himself to the community's ideas and mentality. Nevertheless, we also notice the oxymoronic coexistence of the notions of "army" and "saints", which are nonsensical together through their connotations. An army connotes conflict and antagonism, whereas saints are supposedly peaceful and non-conflictual. The reunion of the semantic traits of [+conflict] and [+sacred] is achieved in the term "martyrs", which indeed fight, violently even, for their faith, and preserve, at the same time, their sacred nature in doing so. However, the mention of the term "martyr" in connection to the members of the Blithedale community seems farfetched and exaggerated, and its quality of being ill-suited makes it ironical, tipping the scale towards mockery at the respective people.

The fact that negativity characterizes the group is spelled out further by Coverdale: "Our bond […] was not affirmative, but negative. We had individually found one thing or another to quarrel with in our past life" (*ibidem*: 85). For a new society which claims to leave behind antagonism and meanness, and which supposedly relies on a newly-forged sense of alliance and brotherhood that deems itself ideal or perfect, the fact that its foundation is negativism and a conflictual state seems inappropriate and hypocritical.

The narrator does not leave things at this level, of soft reproach. He embraces forthright rebuke that takes the complexity of a satire. They form a "gang of beggars, or banditti" rather than "either a company of honest laboring men, or a conclave of philosophers" (*ibidem*). So, they have neither the practice, action skills, nor the pool of necessary ideas to constitute a cohesive system. They fail to be a system because they lack both proper ideologyand action. Know-how is absent, which denounces the randomness of the gathering. The true nature of the community members is revealed, as they are retired from the world not because the world was not enough for them, but because they were not enough for it. Like Hollingsworth, they were misfits due to something missing from them, rather than for a fullness or abundance of talent that would have determined them to seek more (in conjunction with them being "more")

elsewhere. The term "beggars" unveils the very reason why they are at Blithedale: they are in search of making a livingeasily, and found city life too harsh; i.e., they ran away from real work, and believed that earning a living in the countryside would be facile. The naming of the people as "banditti" is not accidental. Drawing on David Punter, Wendy Fall contends that the archaism referring to "robbers and outlaws" is a popular word in eighteenth-century Gothic novels, given their obsession with the law, and illustrates the respective writings' penchant for placing "sensitive subjects" and the "anxieties of the law-abiding British reader" in some distant realm (Fall, n.d.). The peculiarity of the noun is two-fold: firstly, it is of foreign origin, coming along with the connotations mentioned above, and having an irregular plural, formed along the suffix rule *–o* (for the singular form) becoming *–i*(in the plural), i.e.: *bandito*, *banditti*; secondly, it is archaic. It is, most importantly, negatively connoted, just as the collective "gang of", which opposes the more positively-connoted collectives "company of" or "conclave of" used to refer to workmen or philosophers. This artifice concerning the antithesis made through the choice of collective nouns comes to support and further the pejorative connotations associated with the group of people living at Blithedale.

The series of humorous characterizations for the group that follows constitute a harshly ironical outlookon them, and is filled with cultural references and puns. Given their poverty, they are "a living epitome of defunct fashions" and "gentility in tatters" (Hawthorne, 1958: 86), i.e. wearing outdated and ragged clothes. Their appearance is not the only aspect that is being mocked at, just the first. They are also like the "denizens of Grub-Street" (*ibidem*). The named street is one that designated the poor areas of London at an early time in the nineteenth century, filled with dosshouses (providing cheap accommodation), and establishments where one could get inexpensive food, as well as brothels (Grub Street, n.d., *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grub_Street); since writers and artists at the early stages of their craft sought abode in these surroundings, yet hoping for a full-fledged career, their less-than-worthy, "mean" productions came to be known as "grubstreet", as Samuel Johnson states in his *Dictionary*,an image and reputation put forth by Alexander Pope as well, in his famous mock-heroic poem *Dunciad*(*ibidem*). Hence, a proper noun,a street name formed by two lexical units, becomes a compound term and a countable noun, or even an adjective, depending on the case, to refer to an artistic piece of low value. Hence, it metonymically points to the society taking refuge at Blithedale, which contains artists or writers *manqués*, who pretend to be discovering the virtues of living close to nature, either allegedly filled with disgust for the mercantilism that is incongruous with their spiritual artists' natures, or in search of inspiration

from this proximity with nature and innocence. The richness of the metaphor that the name Grub Street brings to the forefront derives from the other meanings of "grub": an insect in a larvastage of development, and food (as a noun); "to search for something by digging or turning over earth" (as a verb) (Grub, *Cambridge Dictionary*, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/grub). The people's similarity with worms may come from their lesser status or character; their search for food and their agrarian profile would illustrate the other two meanings of the word. From any angle, the term is a perfect metaphorical mirror for who these people are.

"Coleridge's projected Pantisocracy" (Hawthorne, 1958: 86) is a cultural reference to a utopian social arrangement, devised at the end of the eighteenth century by a group of thinkers among whom the romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in which governmentis performed by all people, and which therefore relies on the idea of equality (Pantisocracy, n.d., *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantisocracy). Since the English Romantic Lake Poets had, among their obsessions, the idea of closeness to nature as a kind of return to innocence and authenticity (Goldberg, 2007), the Blithedale project bears similarities with this type of mentality purported in the respective poetry. Also, the field dwellers resemble "Candide and his motley associates, at work in their cabbage-garden" (Hawthorne, 1958: 86). Described as both a "satire on Optimism" and a "satire on systems" (Pearson, 2006: XVII), the philosophical eighteenth-century story *Candide* by Voltaire satirizes the preservation of optimism in the face of "inexhaustible" "atrocities and disasters" (*ibidem*: XIX) – "Rape, pillage, murder, massacre, butchery, religious intolerance and abuse, torture, hanging, storm, shipwreck, earthquake, disease, prostitution: all is well." (*ibidem*) – as well as depicts the rejection, by Candide, of both Manichaeism, which focused on the manifestation of evil, andoptimism(manifested in the story by the characters Martin and, respectively, Pangloss) (*ibidem*: XX).*Blithedale Romance* may also be seen as satirizing both optimism and systems, just like *Candide*. Like Voltaire's innocent character (whose name, which means "white" in Latin (*ibidem*: IX) is telling for his impartiality and *tabula rasa*, empirical approach to existence), the entrepreneurs at Blithedale mean to find an alternative way of leading their lives, which is both different from all existing, disappointing ones, and better than these. The other obvious aspect in common is the closeness to nature and the concept of methodizing nature – farming or gardening being deemed as suitable activities for this new way of life, as well as a metaphorfor: a return to simplicity and, through it, to innocence; the notion of harmony (with the environment and with other people); honest work and toil – in both earning one's living, and

chiselingoneself, in order to evolve; the concept of building something in a proper, adequate manner, and from scratch. Pearson draws our attention to the symbolical character of the journey in *Candide*, as one of attaining some sort of enlightenment as far as human nature and the human condition are concerned; also, the newly-established community is a sham: "The castle of Thunder-ten-tronckh, supposed microcosm of the best of all possible worlds, is, of course, a fool's paradise." (*ibidem*: XXI). The journey of the characters in *Blithedale Romance* is a spiritual one as well, just as their agrarian paradise is imbued with hypocrisy, like the one in the *novella*.

We notice that the cultural references resorted to in order to clarify and enrich the conceptual content associated with the society ofBlithedale presuppose both general knowledge, i.e. an erudite, knowledgeable and well-read audience, and awareness of etymologies, as both terms – Pantisocracy and Candide – require etymological decoding relying on the dead languages – Greek and, respectively, Latin. Hence, it is not only culture that bears an important role in, and contributes to,the understanding of the references used, but also linguistics and terminology as such. Awareness of the meaning borne by the words, even outside their context, backs up comprehension and supports completeness and accuracy of depth in decoding and interpretation. Also, we can add the fact that these two characterizations mark the line towards sarcastic humor, a biting level of depiction, which has advanced towards a new type of harshness.

That is why, in what follows, derision is the chief stance, and it is that in an open manner. Indirectness is replaced by directness, the chuckle becomes a cascade of loud laughter. The members of the group at Blithedale are next likened to scarecrows, because of the state of their ragged clothes – but also, more subtly, because of character and situation, meaning that they are fools unconvincingly posing into something that they are not. A scarecrow is also something that wants to be taken more seriously than it really is. The similitude functions at both the level of appearance and that of essence. The community of false gardeners becomes the laughing stock of the real farmers, who invent fable-like stories that mock at the pseudo-countrymen. For instance, the people at Blithedale have intentionally grown burdock, thinking that it is cabbage; also, cutting off two or three fingers while handling farming tools is "an ordinary occurrence" (Hawthorne, 1958: 87); also, the real villagers

> „circulated a report that we communitarians were exterminated, to the last man, by severing ourselves asunder with the sweep of our own scythes! – and that the world had lost nothing by this little accident"[4].

Another form of mockery bears on the romantic images related to the logic of living in the middle of nature for the sake of the inspiration and

illumination that it may produce. Coverdale is the one to put forth such imagery of the allegedly mystically-inspired field worker. He speaks of the "spiritualization of labor", manual work becoming a "form of prayer and ceremonial of worship" (*ibidem*). We notice the use of words pertaining to the field of the spiritual, i.e. "prayer" and "worship", accompanied by the nouns "ceremonial" and "spiritualization" which add the extra semantic feature [+serious], in an attempt to give weight to the action. However, the next images subvert this seriousness, revealing it as a sham. They use it in further allegedly serious pictures of what supposedly happens when man gets inspired through labor, images that nevertheless become absurd and comic precisely because of their excessive claim to seriousness and spiritualization against the background of the previous humorous portrayals of decay: "Each stroke of the hoe was to uncover some aromatic root of wisdom" (*ibidem*); "we were to look upward, and catch glimpses into the far-off soul of truth" (*ibidem*: 87-8). The deterioration of life in its material form, represented by the rags and the horticultural mistakes, comes in stark contrast with the metaphors of long-lost spirituality (which is yet still sough-for, despite its increasingly obvious elusiveness) "root of wisdom" and "soul of truth". These show the aim of reaching a core of some kind that would bring illumination. "Root" connotes [+core] and [+hidden], and "soul" connotes [+core], [+spiritual], [+immaterial]; what the immaterial and the hidden have in common and mean to further express is the key feature of something that is inaccessible or accessible only with great pains and difficulty. The decline on the physical or material plane does not favor illumination; on the contrary, it turns out that it is contagious for a decline of spirituality as well, rather accompanying a parallel degeneration on the plane of the invisible:

> „The clods of earth […] were never etherealized into thought. Our thoughts, on the contrary, were fast becoming cloddish. Our labor symbolized nothing, and left us mentally sluggish" [5].

Distance from the corporeal does not enhance spiritual perception and evolution, and this is yet another idea that the portrait of the Blithedale dwellers satirizes. Zenobia pinpoints this fact with a sarcastic comment on the semblance of Silas' brain in comparison with Coverdale's: "I don't know what his brain is made of, unless it be a Savoy cabbage; but yours may be cauliflower, as a rather more delicate variety" (*ibidem*: 89). The metaphor relies, of course, on the physical similarity between the white and convoluted appearance of the respective vegetables and the brain, but also on the process of reasoning having become of a lesser quality, inferior, and, hence, of the writer's (Coverdale's) incapacity to produce any literature since he moved to Blithedale. In other words, what Zenobia is hinting at is

a brutalization of man, at the fact that human beings have become besotted under the circumstances of their new lives.

Mockery is at its peak whenthe romantic imagery combines with implicit dreams of grandeur and monomania, as the pseudo-farmers apparently want to be considered as almost fabulous, legendary characters, who have put themselves in harm's way and sacrificed to be avenue openers for the generations to come; they seem to want to make history, to be remembered. This hyperbolized outlook is ridiculed in humorous images like: "they will call us uncles, or fathers, – Father Hollingsworth and Uncle Coverdale" (*ibidem*: 145) (i.e. a pair of mock-founding fathers); they will be "mythical personages, or exceedingly picturesque and poetical ones"; the future generations will have a "public hall" with their portraits, and Coverdale says of himself "I will be painted in my shirt-sleeves, and with the sleeves rolled up, to show my muscular development" (*ibidem*).

In August, the dryness of the climate symbolizes the lack of vitality and faded enthusiasm with the Blithedale project:

> „The sun-burnt and arid aspect of our woods and pastures, beneath the August sky, did but imperfectly symbolize that lack of dew and moisture that […] had blighted my fields of thought" [6].

A metaphor involving the environment closes the circle marked at the beginning by the analogy of the Blithedale endeavor with the hearth fire. Signs in the surroundings point to the evolution of things and significations at the level of ideas. This late summer period is also the one announcing the first departures from Blithedale, or abandonments of the project, as the chapter in which the above-mentioned imagery appears is called Leave-Takings. The vanishing magic from nature is paralleled with the acknowledgment of disenchantment with the agrarian community. Gradually, the so-called pioneers or "colonists" (*ibidem*: 155) go back to their city lives. Life in the countryside makes them so bitter in the end, that they consider themselves more wretched than the pigs that they have reared, and feel that they would be better off eaten by these:

> „they alone are happy, [the pigs] – and you mean to cut their throats and eat them! It would be more for the general comfort to let them eat us; and bitter and sour morsels we should be!"[7]

Considering oneself as unworthy even for pig food is coming a long way from the bliss claimed at the beginning, and represents an instance of dire cynicism.

5. Conclusions

Like any utopia, *Blithedale Romance* ends up in absurdity. It starts from a feeling of utter hope, bliss and grand plans, only to reach an equally

powerful negative and grim perspective.

This paper has followed the progression from one extreme to the other, focusing on the way in which it has been constructed at the linguistic and conceptual levels, looking at the fusion of language and cultural references. We have tried to trace the progression achieved in the portrayal of brotherhood, pinpointing all its aspects: humor, irony and sarcasm, and revealing the workings of language and terminology in connection with these. We have picked what we have considered as pertinent examples for the stages involved in this process, so as to mirror this evolution. We consider that the author addressed, in the construction of his ideas, a learned readership, given the abundance of cultural references that the reader needs to decode in order to get the full extent of his meaning and to interpret completely the parallels that the author makes.

NOTE:

[1]. Nathaniel Hawthorne,*Blithedale Romance,* p.47-8.

[2]. Nathaniel Hawthorne,*Blithedale Romance,* p.64.

[3]. Nathaniel Hawthorne,*Blithedale Romance,* p.65.

[4]. Nathaniel Hawthorne,*Blithedale Romance,* p.87.

[5]. Nathaniel Hawthorne,*Blithedale Romance,* p.88.

[6]. Nathaniel Hawthorne,*Blithedale Romance,* p.153.

[7]. Nathaniel Hawthorne,*Blithedale Romance,* p.159.

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