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# **A contrastive study of the female portrait in some of Nathaniel Hawthorn's and Edgar Allan Poe's short stories**

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*To Karinette. Thank you for your love and support. Thank you for your for inspiring me with new ideas.*





# INTRODUCTION

The object of this research project is to carry out a literary analysis of the contrast and similarities between the treatment of female portraits presented in some of Edgar Allan Poe's and Nathaniel Hawthorne's short stories, and further to illustrate the effect this treatment has on the whole thematic and socio-cultural articulation of these narratives. For this purpose the following short stories have been chosen: by Edgar Allan Poe; "Morella" (1835), "Eleonora" (1841), and "Ligeia" (1838), by Nathaniel Hawthorne; "Mrs Bullfrog" (1837) "The Wedding Knell" (1836), and "The Birthmark" (1843). Each of the selected stories has been a contribution to better understand the socio-cultural situation women during the time they were composed.

When reading short stories composed by these two monumental authors of nineteenth century North-American literature, we easily find that the treatment of women and their relation to their masculine counterparts and the male-dominated society is quite different from one another. Women in Hawthorne's works, at the first glance, have a stronger voice in that their participation in dialogue and their ability to create is more evident than the image Poe delivers in his stories. Poe tends to describe women from a peripheral view in the sense that they are not given a voice, the participation they have in dialogue is minimal, we get to know more about them through indirect dialogue in form of description made by their masculine counterparts. They never narrate, although they are, in many cases, the very essence of the story. The image we get when reading Poe's short stories are that women were fragile, wan, ethereal and ailing. An interesting theme that is current in several of Poe's works is the image of a woman who suffers a declining health and how this gets a hold on the male character of the story. Rather than

intercommunicating with the male characters in the stories, women exist in the male narrator's mind as objects that provoke desire and adoration, but also pain and grief. The impression given is that a woman, being a mystified, sensual and idolized, is a symbol of admiration and desire, an admiration that leads to misery, pain and yearning. The female symbol that Poe depicts is so perfect that it cannot be eternal, and must therefore fade away. This disappearing of the female character causes great harm to her partner, and he is the one who has to suffer her absence, she is his greatest reason for misery. The impression this depiction of the female character leaves upon the reader is that of an odd, strange and awkward creature that becomes an ethereal non-human life form, a ghost-like being. The fact that she is being represented as a symbol might lead the reader to think how female readers during the nineteenth century felt when their sex was being alienated.

In Hawthorne's work we find women who are physically and mentally healthy, for example, they take part in direct dialogue with men. Furthermore, they have a more active role since they have an active role in decision-making which shows they possess control of their lives. Hawthorne's description of women is wonderfully expressive in the fullness of its sensual imaginings. The female characters that beckon from within the pages of Hawthorne's writings are strong, powerful women not quite at home in the society to which they belong. They are forced to deal with prejudice and chauvinism in a puritan phallogocentric society. In his stories we find women who are human beings, blood and flesh, tears and laughter, joy and sorrow. By making his female characters more humane Hawthorne manages to convey the idea of a more natural and healthy relation between man and woman, husband and wife and their interrelation. Hawthorne also brings up obstacles females had to face during the time because of their gender. He gives them the power to deal with inequity, and by doing this, we feel that he encourages and supports the idea of women being not a property of man but a human-being with an own mind and will.

# HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis of this research project is that Nathaniel Hawthorne's handling of female portraits shows a more positive stance regarding women's right to self-expression than the handling of Edgar Allan Poe. With positive stance regarding women's right to self-expression I refer to the authors' ability to absorb and assimilate the transgressive attitudes present in the social environment of their time into his fiction. This analysis will hopefully generate a better understanding for the selected works as regards the treatment of the female characters and provide the reader with ideas of the role women played in literature during this period. I have chosen to analyze works written by two of the most well-known and appreciated authors of American literature during the nineteenth century, although there has been much investigation on this authors I intend to shed new light and new ideas that will hopefully lead to a deeper appreciation of the selected stories.



# METHODOLOGY

Six short stories (three selected short stories by each author) will be analyzed on the basis of dialogue, incident and description. These criteria have been chosen to give depth to the analysis and also show how the female portraits are treated in the different literary levels. Of course, a story is a living thing, all one and continuous, in each part there is something of the other parts, therefore there will be merging between the fictional levels. For instance, description of character is wonderfully expressed in dialogical passages and silent dialogue can be found in incidents. Henry James explains very clearly in his 1884 essay "The Art of Fiction" that a composition cannot exist in "a series of blocks", there is no passage of description that is not in its intention narrative, a passage of dialogue that is not in its intention descriptive. (James 7) Henry James had the novel in mind when describing the organic relationship between the different passages but the idea the composition being a living thing is also applicable in the case of the short story, because in them as well as the novel there is something of all the different parts present in each part.

The approaches that will be employed in this investigation project to closely analyze the short stories are New Criticism and New Historicism. New Criticism emphasizes explication, or "close reading," of "the work itself." It rejects old historicism's attention to biographical and sociological matters. Instead, the objective determination as to "how a piece work" can be found through close focus and analysis, rather than through extraneous and erudite special knowledge. New Criticism examines the relationships between a text's ideas and its form, between what a text says and the way it says it. New Critics "may find tension, irony, or paradox in this relation, but they usually resolve it into

unity and coherence of meaning" (Biddle 100) New Critics insist that the meaning of a text is intrinsic and should not be confused with the author's intentions nor the work's affective dimension (its impressionistic effects on the reader). The "intentional fallacy" is when one confuses the meaning of a work with the author's purported intention (expressed in letters, diaries, interviews, for example). The "affective fallacy" is the erroneous practice of interpreting texts according to the psychological or emotional responses of readers, confusing the text with its results.

When you do New Critical reading, it is important to look for complexities in the text: paradoxes, ironies, ambiguities. New Criticism attempted to systematize the study of literature, to develop an approach which was centered on the rigorous study of the text itself. However, it is also important to take into account the historical and social context whereat the works were composed. Therefore, I will not restrain the analysis to one single approach but also use New Historicism as an aid in order to emphasize the political perspective in the stories. New Historicism combines the urge to reconnect texts to their real-world referents and sources with the lessons of contemporary language-centered theories. This theory proposes that literary and non-literary texts are interrelated. They influence each other mutually and neither is separable from history. Greenblatt argues that selves, then and now are produced by "the cultural systems of meanings" in which they are necessarily embedded. That is, authors shape themselves not from nothing but from the values and views which their cultures provide. This is not to say that the individual is a purely passive reflection of these values and views. People can and do modify, rebel against and otherwise manipulate, cultural resources in order to fashion their unique identities.

The primary source that will be used to contextualize the short stories socially and culturally is Margaret Fuller's essay Women in the Nineteenth Century. Being remembered as America's first true feminist her accounts on these matters supply vital and well-founded information. Her friends include Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, as well as Nathaniel Hawthorne. Published in 1845, this text is a leading manuscript of its time promoting the idea of women's rights in the nineteenth century. Today, in our western Judaeo-Christian society, we might often take for granted that women have their own mind and will that must be respected. Margaret Fuller gives us a hint in her essay that woman's freedom was not evident: "*Many women are considering within themselves, what they need that they have not, and what they can have, if they find they need it. Many men are considering whether women are capable of being and having more than they are and have, and, whether, if so, it will be best to consent to improvement in their condition..*" (Fuller, 12)

## ON THE AUTHORS

Hawthorne is in the midst of the social and intellectual thought of his day and these cultural ideas are part of the realm in which he moves. (Hallenbeck 13) Characters struggle between societal modes and expectations along with their own personal attempts to reconcile their inner life with the concerns of the outer world.

Transgression and dissidence that women in the selected works stand for, i.e., women defying a phallogocentric society and claiming their right to interact, having right to express sexuality and to have access to education will be analyzed in order to comprehend and appreciate the authors' works in the historical and social context that they were composed. I intend to detect traces of 19<sup>th</sup> century transcendental ideas under the particular perspective of Margaret Fuller and other transcendental writers regarding woman's possibility to self-expression exposed or absent in Poe's and Hawthorne's works. Although the setting of several of Hawthorne's tales is the puritan 17<sup>th</sup> century and the setting of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories are often time-less gothic their audience was readers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an audience who had inherited the puritan values and conventions that were challenged by the transcendental thinkers. Questions such as woman's place in society, their right to integrate, and the issue of their sexual rights, arose and were ardently discussed by thinkers such as Fuller, Emerson and Sophia Ripley. Susan Bordo alleged that what it means to be a woman is largely decided by one's historical and cultural situation, my intention is to analyse how the female body in Poe's and Hawthorne's stories expresses the values of the society it participated in.

David Reinolds explains in his essay "Poe and popular irrationalism" that Poe

frequently expressed a feeling of kinship with a popular culture he regarded as wild, racy and vigorous. (227) In Poe's eyes the masses demanded agitation and sensationalism in literature. To this purpose, in his writings he developed a dual process of absorption of the sensational on the one hand, and on the other hand he studied a redirection of it. This process is the main source of his originality when compared with other American writers during that time who wrote horror stories whose vulgarization and inhumanity were disliked by Poe. Edgar Allan Poe was more concerned of creating stylistically well composed and original short stories or/and writing about his own tragic experience with women than to deal with moral dilemmas such as women's weak situation in society and their lack of power and self-expression. Poe was not in any way a social critic, nor was he even interested in an imaginative projection of the issue of his time. (Davidson, 149) Females during the 19<sup>th</sup> North-American society were seen as aberrant figures that continually advanced a threat to the rational and intellectual stability in the white Anglo-Saxon protestant male-dominant community. An exceptional case is Poe's character Ligeia that appears in the story with the same name. With her exotic beauty and mysticism Ligeia disturbs the logocentric order and challenges the rational order. Ligeia is expressive in the sense that she creates poetry and communicate with her bodily transformations but impassive in that she is restricted to interact, both physically and emotionally, only within a closed circle that consist of herself and her husband. Dialogue in "Ligeia" is not a conventional face to face contact, but mystified. To analyze the dialogue in Edgar Allan Poe's short stories is many times like finding a needle in a haystack; dialogue is not one of his most frequent fictional levels. In fact, they are explicitly absent in most of his short stories; however; dialogue is sometimes assimilated within descriptive passages. The narrator is most of the time a male. So we might ask ourselves for what reason Poe does not give women any voice in his short stories. We might answer the question with the premise that women, in the first place, are the ones who give the male narrator their voice. That is; what are the male narrators' main concerns? - their women. What are they talking about so fervently? – Their women.



# MORELLA

Terry Eagleton explains in Literary Theory the idea that has been proposed by many authors that woman is the opposite, the “other” of man: she is non-man, defective man, assigned a chiefly negative value in relation to the male first principle (115). And by all means, when reading Poe, the conception of a woman as “defective man” is difficult to miss. At the same token, man is what he is only by virtue of ceaselessly shutting out this other or opposite; defining himself in antithesis to it, and his whole identity is therefore caught up and put at risk in the very gesture by which he seeks to assert his unique, autonomous existence. “Morella” (1840) is the story of how a man’s obsession with his wife ruins his life. This story is an excellent example of where a man’s life is attached by and dependent on a woman.

The nameless narrator tells us how he accidentally was thrown into Morella’s society. He explains that it was not Eros that brought them to the altar, but something indefinable that tormented his spirit draw him to her. Man during the 19<sup>th</sup> century believed he was the head of the family, he represents the head and she the heart. (Fuller, 11) We are immediately given the impression of Morella having powers that are impossible for the rational male to comprehend. Man being head, the representation of intellect and rationality, becomes defenceless when the heart affects him in ways that go beyond his understanding.

At the beginning they lived happily together; she attached herself to him alone and rendered him happy. As most of Poe’s fiction, the world where the main characters move and spend their lives, that is, the “world” they create bears little resemblance to the

empirical world. No contact exists with outer elements; it is just the narrator and Morella living in a secluded idyllic universe. This leads to a particular circumstance where Morella becomes powerful, almighty and dangerous. The rest of the world stops existing for him and she becomes the core of his life. He is therefore treacherously vulnerable and each thing she says or does will have a great influence on him. He was amazed by her erudition. Her uncommon talents and powers made him her pupil. He entered completely into her world, accepting that her knowledge was greater than his own. We can make an analogy between this relation and the human body.

John Salisbury in Stately Bodies detailed how the state is a sort of body modeled on the human figure.(109) The prince is its head, the senate its heart, and the judges and governors its ears, eyes, and tongue; soldiers serve as its hands. The source of infection is increasingly located in the peripheral parts of the body politic, since it is clear that a metaphorical structure that emphasizes the central position of the head, in the monarchical model, will identify order and disorder (health and disease) with the obedience and disobedience of the various parts of the body to orders coming from the head.

John Salisbury stated that the head guides the entire body with the mind's judgment and reserves for itself a primary role, the head sits in the chief position, it is therefore important that this head must avoid swelling and crushing its members with its weight. (106) But sometimes there are powers that challenge and defeat the head's chief position; a weak head that is not on his guard might be forced to surrender to his strongest challenger - the heart. The fact that the narrator descends from being the head of the family and unknowingly becomes an organ of lower hierarchy is an unorthodox initiative taken by Poe: It is rebellious that he dares to portray his man as the defected and weak part of the matrimony, by doing this he breaks the image of man being in the head position. The narrator tells us how he deserted his male reason and let himself be emotionally controlled: "I abandoned myself implicitly to the guidance of my wife, and entered with an unflinching heart into the intricacies of her studies." (Poe 234)

D.H Lawrence alleged in his Studies in Classic American Literature that "unless a man believes in himself and his gods, genuinely: unless he fiercely obeys his own Holy Ghost, his woman will destroy him. (94) Woman is the fate of doubting man. Derived from what D.H Lawrence proposes, if a man makes a particular woman his all, his whole world will fall apart when that woman fades away. Having focused all his ideas on his wife, admiring her completely to the point where she becomes his god, he unknowingly ceded his power to her. His welfare has been directly dependant on her ruling, he accepts her as an omnipotent figure. The narrator becomes a puppy to Morella, lingering besides her enjoying the music of her voice. Everything is idyllic until the melody of Morella's voice was tainted with terror.

But what happens if the heart swallows and crushes the rest of the body; when the heart becomes ill will it be rejected by the head? The mystery of Morella's power oppressed her husband to the degree where he started to reject the touch of her wan fingers; he could not abide the tone of her musical language and nor could he stand the melancholy stare of her eyes. The husband rejects his wife as a consequence of her physical corruption.

Their universe now consists of both partners suffering a decline, Morella's is physical; his is a lack of courage and loyalty. We can say that he "lost heart" because he now longer feels confident with the sickening heart, in fact, it disgusts him. Although Morella is aware of her husband's disgust over her physical decay she does not reproach his weakness. Morella remains calm and secure although she knows that she will pass away. Why then is her husband so unnerved? Ironically her knowledge is making her powerful; as she transforms into a death symbol she gains strength. The heart is strong, dominating and consolidating. Morella controls her husband's fate, and in this sense, she is the phallogocentric force in this relation. As the heart's health is declining the head is being tortured. One autumnal evening, Morella called her husband to her bed-side and told him; "It is a day of days,"....."a day of all days either to live or die. It is a fair day for the sons of earth and life- ah, more fair for the daughters of heaven and death!"(Poe 236)

The sons are of earth, they are strong and healthy, they do not fall victims of lung-diseases, and they continue to exist on the surface, and with mortal life comes sorrow and pain. What is more painful to be a son of soil and life when your beloved pass away? What is the mind without its heart?

The female figure and her close symbolism to death and to the spiritual stands for the higher form of life, for death is just another form of life. Morella knows this; she informs her husband that she will "take another form": "*I am dying, yet shall I live.*"(Poe 236)

Morella knows what this means, she knows that this is not the end of her existence in her husband's life. Morella's death means nothing more than a physical translation. Although she is not physically present she will still have a hold on her man's psyche. She will still be alive in her husband's mind, consuming him, draining him of his energy, being unaware of what her death would mean to his furtherance, he exclaims like a scared child: "*Morella!*" (Poe 236)

Man's determination of having control, the insistence of knowing, leads to a sense of helplessness when his wife's effect on him goes beyond his understanding. This scrutinizing of the female declination and his intention to analyze and to understand her, to deal with the feelings she stirs in him, is what drains up most of his time and energy. Morella is not just "an other" in the sense of something beyond his understanding, but "an other" intimately related to him as the image of what he is not, and therefore as an essential reminder of what he is. He therefore needs Morella even as he spurns her, is constrained to give a positive identity to what he regards as no-thing. Not only is his own being parasitically dependant upon the woman, and upon the act of excluding and rejecting her, but one reason why such exclusion is necessary is because she may not be quite so other after all. When she was healthy he agreed on becoming her pupil, however, when she got corrupted by the disease, he no longer considered her worthy of his worship, she became an object causing disgust. The head has the ability to sometimes take cold-hearted decisions to restore and secure its welfare.

Although she sickened she is still essential to his existence, for this reason, he becomes desperate when he is on the brink of losing her. His uncertainty in the situation is what makes us know that it is Morella that is powerful, she tells her husband:

***"The days have never been when thou couldst love me- but her whom in life thou***

***didst abhor, in death thou shalt adore."***

Edgar Allan Poe knows what it means to lose his beloved ones, during his whole life he longed for women who passed away, he worshipped them, and he suffered in their absence. Morella was the cause of her husband's repugnance while she was declining, all the traits he had loved about her when she was strong and healthy had transformed into a decayed ugly opposite that he could not find in his heart to accept. In a state where Morella would have wanted her husband to be supportive, he failed to do so. Morella told her husband, when lying on her death-bed, that he will be remembered how much he adored her. His yearning will be her revenge. But while Morella is dying she tells her husband that there is also life, when she takes her last breath, her child will take her first breath:

***"I repeat that I am dying. But within me is a pledge of that affection – ah, how little! – which thou didst feel for me, Morella. And when my spirit departs shall the child live – thy child and mine, Morella's. But thy days shall be days of sorrow, that sorrow which is the most lasting of impressions, as the cypress is the most enduring of trees. For the hours of thy happiness are over; and joy is not gathered twice in a life, as the roses of Pæstum twice in a year. Thou shalt no longer, then, play the Teian with time, but, being ignorant of the myrtle and the vine, thou shalt bear about with thee thy shroud on earth, as do the Moslemin at Mecca."***(Poe236)

Morella can foresee that her husband's life will be sorrowful, she knows about the power she has over him and ability she has to destroy his life.

Edward H. Davidson stated in Poe: A Critical Study that " In an age when many women died young after their many miscarriages and child-bearing, death indeed became a kind of second dying to which marriage had been the first. " (p 111) From this we can derive that woman as a sacrificial emblem in the allurements and pieties of marriage reached the ultimate sacrifice in dying.

Morella died, but, like the Phoenix that rises from ashes, she gave birth to a baby-girl. The new-born grew at a strangely fast speed; she resembled her mother both in appearance and intellect. Morella, then, has reproduced herself, she has made a perfect copy out of herself and seduced her husband twice. Morella could be admired all over again through her reappearance in her daughter's body; the daughter was Morella in the flesh, reborn to seduce her husband all over again. She continues having a strong control on her husband's psyche.

We can compare "Morella" with "Ligeia" where again Poe uses death as a seducer; in "Ligeia" his ideal woman overtook the body of the classical beauty and revived. Ligeia seduced her husband again by repapering in her new body. Important to keep in mind is that the psychical body itself is not relevant, it may not even exist, what is important is that there is a daughter or a "new shape", a shape that is a creation that has emerged as a result of the sufferers yearning. His child that he has to take care of after his wife's death is his own frightened and unnerved psyche that is subject to an endless quest for peace of mind.

We can say that the way in which Poe uses the body and the reincarnation of the body in this short story is transgressive and unique, his originality, specifically the use of

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the supernatural, is a consistent example of the innovation projected throughout Romantic literature.

Death was very close to love; one could love into death and die into love. According to Edward H. Davidson, the governing symbol in most of the nineteenth-century versions of love unto death and dying into love was the dead young woman.

During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the middle class found a titillating theme in “death as seduction”, in other words, if a woman could not be presented seductively in life, she could be displayed in erotic postures and in seductive disguises in death. Death became a means of enticement: death was the great seducer; and the “ruined” girl was laid out for burial in the landscape of ruin and decay.

To understand why the theme of dying women appears so frequently in Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories, we ought to take a look at his own life. On 8 December 1811 Edgar Allan Poe’s mother Elizabeth, aged twenty-four, died of pneumonia; this was the first death he knew. Poe had not even reached the age of three years when his mother died but he was extremely observant and immensely impressionable when Elizabeth passed away (Mankowitz 17).

Thus love and death came together in the childish experience of Edgar Poe, never to separate. Behind the women in Poe’s life and those he created in his stories glows always Elizabeth Poe’s pale beauty idealized; and the terrible sickness which infused it became the thrilling and dangerous, but romantic and essential, companion of love.

Just like Edgar Allan Poe himself, the narrator of “Morella” is doomed by fate to live in constant mourning. Although man loves his wife, he rejects her, because he knows she will cause him great harm. The narrator loses his Morella not only once, but twice! Marie Bonaparte states in Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe that “A fixation of a dead mother was to bar him (Edgar Allan Poe) forever from earthly love, and make him shun health and vitality in his loved ones.” (83)

It is odd to believe that this emotionally disturbing situation did not affect Poe for the rest of his life. Supposedly, his mother’s death contained images which were to haunt his life and works. In other words, there must be some relation between this experience and Morella’s depiction; hence, the death experience would be reflected in this literary work (as well as several others), either intentionally or unintentionally. Taking into account what can be derived from Poe’s explanation of how he created his poem “The Raven” in his 1846 essay “The Philosophy of Composition” : that he rejected inspiration and declared that aesthetic creation proceed from pure intelligence, we may believe that he wanted to negate the relation between his own life experiences and his works.

Poetry was, according to Poe, an act of discovery and penetration; from Coleridge he had obtained the view that man’s perceptive powers can transcend this world of space and time and give him insights as profound and earth-disturbing as the great discoveries in the physical science. And just as Shelly he thought that poets were “the unacknowledged legislators of the universe”. This refusal to accept the effect supposedly caused by his death experiences might be a way of distance himself from pain; he might have wanted to create a space between his real life experience and his literary works. He, in some sense denies being an object of his experiences; he is an artist who creates from

pure imagination. In Romantic idealism, the mind is not a mere reflector of the world, but is itself a creator and knower. But need imagination be such a terrifying confrontation with the idea of experience? Must the act of poetic imagination entail a removal from the world of experience? We might suspect that his imagination was pure transformation of experience; hence: each of his works would reveal something of himself.

Perhaps Morella stands as a sign of something in the husband himself which he needs to repress, expel beyond his own being, and relegate to a securely alien region beyond his own definite limits. Margaret Fuller explains that by Man she means both man and woman, she says that they are the two halves of one thought; the development of the one cannot be effected without that of the other. (p. 1) Weakness and poor health had a name – Woman. However, the welfare of one depends on the other; there is a symbiosis between them two. When woman is not the strong and solid support she needs to be in order to make her husband be a strong and solid man, his world falls apart. If the heart is the centre of courage, what would then man be without it? He knows he is strong when woman is supportive.

Fuller compares women's situation with the black slaves'. The white man feels threatened every time the white male-chauvinistic order is endangered. Regarding female emancipation man says:

***"Is it not enough...that you have done all you could to break up the national union, and thus destroy the prosperity of our country (by suggesting emancipation of the slaves), but know you must be trying to break up family union, to take my wife away from the cradle and the kitchen hearth to vote at polls, and preach from a pulpit?" (p. 11)***

Man fears that his power will be challenged; he does not know how to behave when his body parts rebel. If woman represented the heart, the African-American slaves during the 19<sup>th</sup> century may well have represented the arms of a ruthless undemocratic capitalist economy. Margaret Fuller stated that in the mind of white men there existed a tone of feeling towards women as towards slaves, such as was expressed in the common phrase; "Tell that to women and children" (Fuller. P. 14) – Meaning that with them you cannot reason.

Fuller explains that the infinite soul can only work through them in already ascertained limits; that the gift of reason, man's highest prerogative, is allotted in them in much lower degree, that they must be kept from mischief and melancholy by being constantly engaged in active labour, which is to be furnished and directed by those better able to think. White man ruled, he guided woman, child and slave in their labour, he did the thinking and they acted as his obedient body parts.

Although the puritan male chauvinistic society left little room for women to express thought and take part in decision-making, Poe was brave enough to illustrate his unconventional hierarchy. Despite of the fact that she is the one who suffers illness and dies, Morella is, paradoxically, the powerful figure in this story. Morella as an outside force is in this story not relevant; it is her ability to affect the inside, i.e., the mind and the spirit of her mourning husband that is her real strength. At the same time, Morella is also a weak character. What does she achieve in this story except her husband's misery? Morella is powerful in the sense that she has great affect on her husband's life, but at the same time

she is a weak character because she herself cannot stay alive, she cannot create her own happiness. She is only a destructive force whose power can only affect her husband's fate, not her own. So this treatment of "Morella" gives the impression that eternal happiness between man and wife on earth is impossible, and that the relationship will only end up in one long process of misery and mourning.

Not all short stories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century end with an unhappy relation. "The idea of a uniform and harmonious culture is a myth imposed on history". (Spikes, p 67) There is no time or era that represents a homogenous society; there has always been cultural variety. Let us take a look at one of Hawthorne's cheerful tales.





## MRS BULLFROG

Hawthorne's "Mrs Bullfrog" is a twisted, yet humorous story of how a stuffy, prissy little man goes about choosing a wife. The first impression I first got when reading Mrs Bullfrog was that Mrs Bullfrog would be an outspoken woman even if she lived in our days. The main impression you get of the story is that woman was not only able to stand up against man, but also "put him in his place", that is, tell him sharply when she thinks he is acting wrongly.

The incident that triggered Mrs Bullfrog's shrewd self-proclamation was when the newly wedded couple travelled in their coach when Mr Bullfrog accidentally found a report of a trial for breach of promise of marriage on the coach-floor. He reads that his wife had earlier been the plaintiff of a cause where she had borne energetic evidence to her ex-lover's perfidy. Of course, a woman demanding justice and charging her ex-husband for breach of promise must be taken as an example of strength in the nineteenth century.

Margaret Fuller gave us indications in her essay Woman in the Nineteenth Century that women had no protection from male oppression. She proposes that Men must soon see that, on their own ground, that woman is the weaker party, and that she ought to have legal protection, which would make oppression impossible. (p. 13) In a time when women's rights were fervently advocated among the intellectuals of the transcendental movement, but hardly being praxis in the 19<sup>th</sup> century society, this idea of woman standing up for herself was nothing more than a prediction of what was about to come in a later century. Women issuing a divorce decree is nothing uncommon today, but during Mrs Bullfrog's days this act would be less likely to happen, woman as a defender of her

own rights was uncommon. Fuller let us know that women did not hold property on equal terms with men; if a husband died without making a will, the wife, instead of taking at once his place as head of the family, inherited only a part of his fortune, often brought him by herself, as if she were a child, or ward only, not an equal partner.

Fuller goes on suggesting if principles could be established, particulars would adjust themselves aright. She thought that marriage and all other relations would by degrees be harmonized if woman was given legitimate hopes. (Fuller, 13) Mrs Bullfrog was a pioneering individual; she indeed believed she had legitimate rights, rights that she was ready to defend:

***"Is it possible that you view that affair in an objectionable light?"... "Is it an objection that I have triumphantly defended myself against slander and vindicated my purity in a court of justice? Or do you complain because your wife has shown the proper spirit of a woman, and punished the villain who trifled with her affections?" (Hawthorne p. 1070)***

Mrs Bullfrog can be seen as a figurative symbol of a forerunner of female emancipation. There are no hints in the story whether or not she is an Anglo-Saxon protestant; however; the potential readers during the time this work was published were, if not puritans themselves, at least living in a white Anglo-Saxon protestant society. She is not only being brave because of her ability to stand up against man, but she is also able to stand up against the image women had been indoctrinated to obey. Fuller meant that woman does not only have to assert herself against man but also against woman. Mrs Bullfrog dared to not be "lady-like".

How are we supposed to understand lady-like behaviour? - If it is to be understood as convention that a lady should behave accordingly to a fixed pattern, i.e., that her behaviour would be predictable due to the fact that she is acting like "a lady", a role that she has been indoctrinated to follow from early age, it is much preferable, in my opinion, to come across an impulsive and spontaneous woman such as Mrs Bullfrog. A woman who will not permit herself to be submissive represents a more challenging counterpart to man, and is also more equal in the relation between man and wife.

When Mr Bullfrog started to scandalize over his wife's having committed such a dreadful deed as charging her ex-husband for breach of promise, Mrs Bullfrog replied:

***Women are not angels. If they were, they would go to heaven for husbands; or, at least, be more difficult in their choice on earth."*(1069)**

Being a human, woman has the right to be imperfect; she does not need to be all that her husband wants her to be. Fuller explains how men had overlooked what women's indulgence was about, man thought that woman was happy by being under his protection, serving him in his home. (Fuller 11) Margaret thought that man was not the head of his wife; God had given her a mind of her own. And Mrs Bullfrog's mind permits her to critically conventions

Hawthorne might indeed be considered sympathetic to "female emancipation". Zenobia in Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance (1852) displays an ambiguous blend of Transcendentalist self-will and powerful eroticism Coverdale is afraid of Zenobia's power and his choice to stay with the virginal, native New Englander Priscilla appears rather negative than positive. Zenobia, who is in her passion usually associated to Margaret

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Fuller, stands for an uncomfortable surplus of vitality that the Puritan man does not know how to handle. Zenobia's comment that Pricilla "is the type of womanhood, such as man has spent centuries in making it", tells us about Hawthorne's awareness of puritan female repression.

Hawthorne was an inspiration to authors such as Henry James and his novel Daisy Miller (1879) and Henrik Ibsen and his play A Doll's House (1879).

Daisy Miller as well as Mrs Bullfrog represents an example of unexpected female conduct that prompts people to scandalize her "eccentric and disobedient" behaviour that is accordingly to the upper strata certainly to ruin her image as a lady. Daisy refuses to listen to society's recommendations of evading flirting with so many young gentlemen and behave less promiscuous. Daisy defends herself by saying that she sees nothing wrong with enjoying the company of a nice gentleman, and if people consider this wrong, it is there problem, not hers.

Nora from Henrik Ibsen's celebrated play A Doll's House surprises her governing alpha male husband by leaving him in order to liberate herself from his repression. Nora refused to act as her husband's "little squirrel", she chooses to be herself, and if this self does not fit into her husband's expectations, she will release herself from her husband.

By decorating Mrs Bullfrog with a strong-willed and self-aware character, Hawthorne projects the image of a woman having the ability of creating her own destiny by the choices she is taking and by the limits she draws. Margaret Fuller has said that what a woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely, and unimpeded to unfold such powers as were given her when we left our common home. (Brooks 178) Mr Bullfrog, with his pitiable wining intends, (with his best intent of sounding fearful and authoritative), to suppress his wife under his male dominance. This was an intent to follow, what he must have thought to be, the rules of his society

Mrs Bullfrog manages to purge her husband from female-repressive thoughts and to convince him of an alternative connubial relation with an open dialogue instead of basing their communication on condescending and patronizing codes that existed between Nora and her husband in Ibsen's A Doll's House. Nora decided to eventually leave her husband because she felt that she was smouldered by her husband's patronizing attitude, especially after that he scolded her for having earned money without telling him about it. Mrs Bullfrog, in contrast with Nora, chose to change her husband's ideals in lieu of leaving him. This may be a proof that Mrs Bullfrog is even a stronger character than Nora, because she has the power to forgive her husband's mistakes.

Philip Rahv states in his essay "The Dark Lady of Salem" that the most resplendent and erotically forceful women in Hawthorne's works "personify the incarnations of hidden longings and desires, a temptress offering the ascetic sons of the puritans the treasure-trove of great sin". (338) He explains that we can find this "dark lady" under four different names - as Beatrice in the story *Rappaccini's Daughter*, Hester in *The Scarlet Letter*, Zenobia in the *Blithedale Romance*, and Miriam in *The Marble Faun*. I believe that we could add Mrs Bullfrog to this list of dark ladies in the sense that she is articulate, erotically forceful and indeed released Thomas Bullfrog from his previous sexual and

moral restrictions. We can draw an analogy between Thomas's release from his strain of snobbery and impotence that we find at the very end of the story to a great orgasm. Mrs Bullfrog with her uncomfortable surplus of vitality represents model of womanhood than the puritan model of womanhood that was predestined and restrained to morality. In opposition to the dark ladies Philip Rahv describes, Mrs Bullfrog differs from them at one point; Mrs Bullfrog is, unlike the others, not subjected to firmer measures of control due to the fact that she exerts great sexual power, and also, she does not come to a bad end as the others did

However, we still have to discuss the effect Thomas Bullfrog's feminine personality has on the articulation on this story. He is indeed not the typical authoritative dominating male that we associate with the puritan society. Nathaniel had many ancestors that could more than well be categorized according to these characteristics.

Hawthorne was a descendant of several Puritan authorities. The first of the Hawthorne family in America was William Hathorne who arrived in 1630. He became a colonial magistrate and was famous for his persecution of Quakers. His son John Hathorne won notoriety as one of the Puritan judges who tried and condemned the Salem witches in 1692. Where John Hathorne saw the devil in disguise, posterity would see innocent human beings. (Conway, 14)

Of one accused woman brought before Judge John Hathorne, the husband of the accused wrote: "She was forced to stand with her arms stretched out. I requested that I might hold one of her hands, but it was declined me; then she desired me to wipe the tears from her eyes, which I did; then she desired that she might lean herself on me, saying she would faint. Justice Hathorne replied she had strength enough to torture these persons, and she should have strength enough to stand. I repeating something against their cruel proceedings, they commanded me to be silent, or else I should be turned out of the room." (Conway, 24)

Nathaniel grew up as a solitary child who listened to stories of early Salem, read deeply in colonial history, and developed an intense awareness of his Puritan ancestors, knowing about the witch-persecution his ancestor John Hathorne had sadistically been guilty of surely made Hawthorne grow a strong repugnance towards maltreatment of women. "Strong traits of their nature", he later observed "have intertwined themselves with mine." Each author constructs himself in his text by adopting one set of values and views, produced by his culture, and rebelling against another, also culturally generated.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's literary imagination was strongly shaped by his early life in Salem, Massachusetts. The history of Salem and American Puritanism provided a background against which he later presented his ideas about human nature, about sin and guilt, and about the perils of the intellect and the pleasures of the heart.

Hawthorne who was a member of the transcendental movement believed in the enfranchisement of women, and the enlargement of her sphere of duty and privilege." (Brooks 175) In the belief of the transcendentalist, souls were of no sex. Men and women were alike human beings, with human capacities, longings, and destinies.

And it was, perhaps, a way of breaking of from his past that Hawthorne made Mrs Bullfrog, pursuant to transcendental values, a strong and self-expressing woman. In many

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ways Hawthorne was, as Mrs. Q...D. Levis says the unwilling heir of the puritans. (Kaul, 303) But this is far from being true with regard to the tradition of idealism which was part of his inheritance. On the contrary, he affirmed it in the only serious way in which an artist can affirm tradition: by becoming its critic.

However, most likely, it would have been more difficult for Hawthorne to question and criticize the puritan male-chauvinistic society in John Hathorne's 17<sup>th</sup> century than in his own 19<sup>th</sup> century. The transcendental movement and the ideas that were popular during that time permitted Nathaniel to write and express his thoughts. Nathaniel did indeed rebel against his puritan heritage by exposing dissident and transgressive ideas, but it is important to bear in mind that his era made it possible for him to do so. By making Mrs Bullfrog the stronger part in the relation with her husband, Nathaniel projects a positive and groundbreaking idea that was shared by many intellectuals during that time.

The self obviously bears the impression of the posture it consciously seeks to take on, but it also winds up, against will, exhibiting traits of the stance from which it vigorously attempts to disassociate. "The influence of deconstruction, such as that practised by Paul de Man, is apparent: the meaning an author intends is joined with and undermined by an opposite, contradictory meaning he does not intend". (Spikes, 69)

The great paradox in "Mrs Bullfrog" is that although Mrs Bullfrog rebelled against her husband it would not have been possible had he not been so puny and feeble of a man. Comically, Mr Bullfrog himself was aware that "the ladies themselves are hardly so lady-like as Thomas Bullfrog" (1067). As Fuller attempts to explain in her book, men and women share characteristics of the opposite sex. Men have feminine characteristics as well as male characteristics. Known as the anima, this femininity is not welcome in a male-dominated society. Females have male characteristics, referred to as the animus, as well as feminine characteristics. Edward Whitmont writes in his book Return of the Goddess, "[...] we must deal with a repression of femininity in women and men" (127). Thus, the virtues of the archetypal feminine are repressed. This phenomenon affects the cultures in which it occurs. It is important to understand that, according to Whitmont: Male and femaleness are archetypal forces. They constitute different ways of relating to life, to the world, and to the opposite sex. The repression of femininity, therefore, affects mankind's relation to the cosmos no less than the relation of individual men and women to each other. (123) Hawthorne is conscious of these forces at work in human nature. In his writing, he explores the individual's relations to natural instincts and rhythms while one continues to live and work in a particular society. This society enforces rules that may not be conducive to the growth of the individual.

Mr Bullfrog's femininity gives a humorous articulation to the story that threatens to undermine its value as a transcendental socio-critical tale and being more of a comedy that larks with a lady-like man. Once more, we can apply Terry Eagleton's idea that your partner enables you to be what you are because it is in the relationship to him or her that you find yourself. Mr Bullfrog's frailty permits his wife's strength. It would not been likely that Mrs Bullfrog had asserted herself as she did if Thomas Bullfrog had been anything like Judge John Hathorne. Had Hawthorne made Mr Bullfrog a more severe and stern man Mrs Bullfrog's self-assertion would have appeared more valid from a socio-cultural perspective. It would have left a more genuine taste of female victory if Mrs Bullfrog would

have faced a man with more animus. Hawthorne would have made her the impeccable heroine if Thomas Bullfrog weren't such a blurry mix between animus and anima. In fact, as he is described in the short story, he is more female than male; this leads to the belief that Mrs Bullfrog has defeated a woman instead of a man. The reader may choose to laugh at the whole incident and think that "Mrs Bullfrog" is a farce about a sissy being dominated by his newly wedded wife. However, the informed reader, the reader who understands and appreciates the feminine and masculine sides of an individual will see that she is an admirable woman in her fully bloomed sensuality and outspokenness. Margaret Fuller, in her book Woman in the Nineteenth Century, wrote "Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman" (69). Fuller's concept of the individual is one in which the two parts, masculine and feminine, are no longer separate but integral parts of the whole. By questioning conventional thought she is a threat to the male chauvinistic puritan social order; any reader during the 19<sup>th</sup> century may as well reflect over her dialogue and appreciate and assimilate her thought-provoking ideas. At the same time she is thought-provoking she is also a woman who renders joy to her husband. This gives the relieving impression that a woman does not necessarily have to be a man hater in order to be self-expressive. She is a refreshing and arduous character that not only symbolizes female assertion but also romance and love, and in this sense, she is a whole person that has achieved a balance between animus and anima.

## THE WEDDING KNELL

Feminists have pointed out that through such sympathetic characters as Beatrice Rappaccini and Hester Prynne, Hawthorne indicted patriarchal society by showing how it victimized women. They noted that he expressed greater respect for women's individuality and autonomy than most male writers, and thought marriage should be an equal partnership. (The Heath Anthology of American Literature p. 2068) Hester Prynne, Zenobia, Miriam, Beatrice and Mrs. Bullfrog are all examples of Hawthorne's "black ladies". These women are the most resplendent and erotically forceful women in American fiction. The dark lady is according to Philip Rahv essentially a mythic being, the incarnation of hidden longings and desires, as beautiful, a temptress offering the ascetic sons of the puritans the "the treasure-trove of a great sin." (338) But it was not only sexuality that was seen as a sin by the puritans. It is not always female who have their sexual awakening that is the subject matter of his stories. "The Wedding Knell" (1836) is the story of an old woman who gets married for the third time in her life. In this story we do not witness the woman's sexual bloom, but we witness the consequences of this bloom when she reaches days when she starts to wither. A childless mature woman was also a sinner in the eyes of a judging society that believed that females were revered only as child-bearers. The black ladies were all in their sexual peak; it is therefore interesting to see what happens when the woman is old and physically decayed. An old woman could not be a bride; she was begrudged of her happiness.

The marriage that takes place in "The Wedding Knell" is a result of an early engagement that was deferred for forty years, the lady had had two intermediate weddings, and the gentleman had lived forty years of celibacy. The ladies and gentlemen

that were composing the bridal party were unlike the bridegroom and the bride; all young and gay. The superficial observers wondered why Mr Ellenwood, a man who lacked worldly wisdom and possessed an agonizing consciousness of ridicule, could have been induced to take a measure, at once so prudent and so laughable to wed a woman that had rendered him a life of grief. People supposed that the sage but also unlovely Mrs Dabney had to have seduced the unworldly Mr Ellenwood to agree on such an affair as entering wedlock. People thought it was foolish for an elderly woman to enter a union with an early lover when she had lost her true feelings among the accidents of life. The wedding guests thought she was too experienced to have any pure feelings left, and poor Mr Ellenwood was surely going to be deceived. The observers believed it was not appropriate for an old woman to get married, and that she did not deserve happiness and romance in elder days. A revealing comment was given by a gentleman who observed the deep knell that sounded when the old bride made her entrance to the church. He tells a young woman that sits besides him: *"I believe the bell has the good taste to toll of its own accord. What has she to do with weddings? If you, dearest Julia, were approaching the altar, the bell would ring out its merriest peal. It has only a funeral knell for her."*(Hawthorne, 354) Mrs Dabney's previous romantic experiences and her physical decay made people believe that she was unworthy of love. Women, often seen as emotional and intuitive, were not part of the economic wellbeing of the society, and were therefore separated from the world of men and viewed as mothers, not as sexual companions to men.

In *Disorderly Conduct*, feminist historian Carroll writes, "Nineteenth-century American society provided but one socially respectable, non-deviant role for women—that of loving wife and mother" (Smith-Rosenberg, 213). Attitudes toward women were changing from the previous century. Medical writers of the early 1800s acknowledge women's sexual vibrancy but "By the 1860s and 1870s, however, their professional counterparts counselled husbands that frigidity was rooted in women's very nature. Women's only sexual desire, these doctors argued, was reproductive" (Smith-Rosenberg, 213). Women were considered the moral and spiritual guides of the home. Medical writers perpetuate the idea of women as mothers and not as possessing sexual desires or fleshly appetites. (Hallenbeck, 7) Society's critical view of a mature woman being child-less is issued by the nameless narrator of the story when he tells us that:

***"Sage in most matters, the widow was perhaps the more amiable, for the one frailty that made her ridiculous. Being childless, she could not remain beautiful of proxy, in the person of a daughter; she therefore refused to grow old and ugly, on any consideration; she struggled with Time and held fast her roses in spite of him, till the venerable thief appeared to have relinquished the spoil, as not worth the trouble of acquiring it". (Hawthorne, 353)***

Women are now pushed into the role of motherhood exclusively of other feminine desires. The male desire to dictate and restrict the acceptable roles for women is prominent. Women who did not reproduce "endangered society—and herself" (23). This is the view of the male patriarchal culture toward women and it is significantly different than that held in the previous century. Ideas toward sexuality in general are undergoing tremendous change during this time. Women's roles in the nineteenth century were defined by family more than they had been in the past.



The witnesses of the wedding thought that it was inappropriate for Mrs Dabney to enter wedlock in elderly days was they thought than an old woman who had been married twice already did not need to get married again, she was economically independent due to an inheritance her first husband had left her. Marrying out of love was not always an obvious element in marriage during the setting of Hawthorne's works.

Anyone who has read The Scarlet Letter (1850) can tell what the Puritans thought of romantic love outside marriage, or at least what Nathaniel Hawthorne, writing in the 19th century, thought they thought. When reading this masterpiece it stands clear that romance for the puritans was one thing, marriage another. Hester Prynne's marriage to the elderly Roger Chillingworth had been arranged by her parents back in England out of economic necessity. Hawthorne's masterpiece is an indictment of Puritan America, but also of his own society. In Hawthorne's monumental work we have the case of Hester Prynne's failure of being chaste, which led to her being ostracized from the puritan society. She was also obliged to wear a scarlet "A" standing for adultery. Although Mrs Dabney never committed adultery her many marriages were still not appreciated by neither the community nor her future husband.

Males endow females with virtues that relate to spiritual matters such as patience, kindness, loyalty, and piety. The fact that Mrs Dabney had remarried several times was a proof of lack of both loyalty and piety because a widow was expected to mourn her husband rather than continuing seeking worldly happiness.

Sexual feelings were repressed and women were disdained if they admitted to experiencing these feelings. Mrs Dabney's second husband had been a much younger man, something that suggests a sexually active relation. Mrs Dabney therefore represents sexual experience in contrast with Mr Ellenwood that stands for virginity; this disturbs the convention of woman as a virginal bride and man as the powerful individual. Mrs Dabney sexual experience gives her an advantage over her husband because she possesses knowledge in this area that he lacks. This knowledge leads to his uneasiness and discomfort and he will have to find a way to overcome it.

The patriarchal culture repressed those characteristics associated with the feminine such as emotion, intuition, and sexuality in favour of the more masculine characteristics such as logic, order, and control. In essence, the head is valued over the heart. It is therefore essential that Mr Ellenwood finds a way to recover some kind of control in order to not be left in ridicule.

Mr Ellenwood enters the church in a manner that resembles more a funeral than a wedding. Dressed in his shroud he asks his wife to marry him and then to get buried together and enter an everlasting relation. "*Cruel! Cruel!*", groaned the bride that was traumatized by this unexpected incident. "*Cruel!*" repeated the groom; he confesses his bitterness that in their youth she deprived him of his happiness, his hops, and his aims and he has walked wearily on the surface of the earth only to be called to the alter forty years later, when other men have her youth, her beauty and warmth of heart. The sacrifice he bids her to make is that she follows him to his tomb where they will be married for eternity. Mr Ellenwood argues that although his beloved Mrs Dabney has spent her youth on other men, he is the one who takes home the greatest price because he will spend an

eternity with his enamoured. The impression given by this final act is that Mrs Dabney's persona gains redemption due to the fact that Mr Ellenwood finds it in his noble heart to forgive her sinful acts and accept her as his corpse-bride. Hawthorne, again, does not leave a flawless impression regarding female liberation, but leaves the reader with the doubt whether or not his stories manifest pure transcendental ideas. However, "The Wedding-Knell" does manifest a determination on behalf of the author to discuss issues regarding the intercommunication between woman and society; there is no intention of restricting her participation with the "real world" to an enclosed idyllic paradise for two as is the case of Edgar Allan Poe's 1841 "Eleonora".

# ELEONORA

“Eleonora” is the story about the narrator and his cousin growing up in the isolated “Valley of Many-Coloured grass” where they fall in love and experience an idyllic romance. The narrator speaks of two distinct conditions of his mental existence, the condition of a lucid reason, and belonging to the memory of events forming the first epoch of his life when senses were being heightened by Eleonora’s very existence – “the softer, greener grass, purple violet, ruby-red asphodel as being more brilliant as before”.(196) After several years of happiness, Eleonora dies and the narrator experiences a deadening of his senses: “the tints of the green carpet faded: and, one by one, the ruby-red asphodels withered away.” (198)

Once again, the beautiful maiden withers away and leaves her husband, the son of earth, alone. However, “Eleonora” is different from “Morella” that is a tragic love story that brings about feelings of horror, “Eleonora”, on the contrary, ends with an idyllic atmosphere and peacefulness. Nonetheless, there are several similarities between these stories; the narrator again withdraws from the world of reality into remote valleys wherein they develop “as a direct outcome of this detachment” an extra-perception and acuteness of vision; in addition, the idyllic bride, just like in “Morella” perishes; “*She had been made perfect in loveliness only to die*”. (197)

The important thing is to figure out why Edgar Allan Poe insisted on depicting his female figures as ethereal and why they had absolutely no contact with the outer world. Were they condemned to be subjects who pursued their course through life aimless, tossed upon the waves of their tragic fate, intoxicated by love, doomed to always be

peripheral? Sophia Ripley wrote in the article "Woman" that was published in "The Dial" January 1841 that the poet of her time had the vision of a woman as a lovely ethereal being, an idealized Eve or Ophelia; she was an exquisite picture for the eye described with the sweetest verse. Ripley stated that this idealization was not a woman, she was only the spiritualized image of that tender class of women he loves the best, - one whom no true woman could or would become. (www.vcu.edu)

What Poe failed to do was to assimilate the transgressive attitudes present in the social environment during the time when he wrote "Eleonora", Poe never achieved to tell the world what new things he had discovered of his time, or what old truth he had brought to light of older times. From Poe we hear the same oft-repeated things said upon women, he, consciously or unconsciously, did not deal with the difficulties of the subject. He flattered "the feebler sex" with his beautiful verse and diminished her with a restrictive and schematic character plot as can be read in the following line from "Eleonora"; *"The loveliness of Eleonora was that of the Seraphim; but she was a maiden artless and innocent as the brief life she had led among the flowers"*. (197)

Eleonora was a young innocent girl with no knowledge of the "real world" that surrounded the isolated paradise that she was trapped in; this entrapment led to her restrained experience and unawareness of other realities. By shutting her out from the rest of the world it was impossible for Eleonora to create an independent personality; she was shaped to be an appendage. She was one just an element or a device that was needed to create the atmosphere that Poe appreciated, an atmosphere completely desynchronized with the Transcendental movement, his narratives were so disconnected with the American 19<sup>th</sup> century that the setting of his narratives might as well been the 16<sup>th</sup> century Germany where he often turned to for his inspiration" .

Sophia Ripley continues her article by commenting that man does not wish to ridicule nor expose to suffering the woman who aspires, he wishes not for blind reverence, but intelligent affection; not for supremacy, but to be understood; not for obedience, but companionship. According to Sophia Ripley it is the weak and ignorant of woman's own sex who brand her, and she wondered why there were so many of the sex allowed to remain weak and frivolous. (www.vcu.edu)

My belief is that Poe never intended oppressing women by preventing them from developing an self-governing character, he simply followed a tradition that he never transgressed. He, unlike Nathaniel Hawthorne, did not reflect on women's lack of possibility to independently express their opinions. Sophia Ripley wrote that woman was educated with the tacit understanding, that she was only half a being, and an appendage. First, she was so to her parents, whose opinions, perhaps prejudices, were engrafted into her before she knew what an opinion was. Eleonora was born into an isolated environment; her possibilities to shape independent opinions were denied with her restricted exposure to situations where her proper thinking was demanded, in a place where you live all alone with you mother and cousin and "knowing nothing of the world without the valley" your possibility to gain your proper opinions are deprived. Unknowingly she was selected as the life-companion of her cousin; because selected, she fixed her affections upon him, and hardly ventures to exercise upon him even her powers of observation, there is no conversation nor is discussion between them, Eleonora trapped in

a universe where plans, ideas and thoughts are unnecessary. The narrator created for her a home, which should be constructed by their mutual taste and efforts, but was rather imposed on her due to her denial of exploration. Eleonora never had to face life, she never had to deal with the confusion of how to form her existence, she blindly trusts her man to look through it all, and his sound judgment will decide her destiny.

Ripley alleged that once married, woman adopted her husband's prejudice and defended them with his arguments; where she differed from him in taste and habits, she believed herself in the wrong and him in the right, and spent life in conforming to him, transforming into the woman he wants her to be, in lieu of forming herself to her own ideal. As a result of this compliance, she loosed her individuality, and never gained his respect as an independent thinking woman.

The relationship Eleonora and her unnamed husband had were a closely tied relationship built on idolatry. One must suppose that idolatry is to no one a pleasing subject of contemplation. The act of worshipping weakens and narrows down the partners of a relation; they lock the gate against all the glories of the universe, so that they may live in a cell together. Poe never created love stories where women would find themselves in a situation where intercommunication with other individuals beside her partner was needed. In fact, she had no social life apart from him, she has no friends, no relation to relatives, to books; she does not make any observations that are not directly connected to her male counterpart. She possessed nothing, she was possessed, and her world was narrowed down to be an appendage to him. Where thought should be her atmosphere; books her food; friends her occasional solace, Poe denies her everything. She is powerless, except in the extreme hours of mental or physical crisis of life, afraid of loosing her, he needs her protection. The male narrator forms Eleonora to be the ideal that he needs her to be. In exchange of complete loyalty he gives her nothing but an illusion. He quenches all her possibilities to be an entity, he can soothe her, he can make her promises, but he cannot assist her in the quest of self-proclamation, where he is most needed he remains impotent. Typical for Poe's short stories is the incapacity of creating equilibrium between the feminine and masculine power within duality; the emotional attachments and idolatry are weaknesses that consequence an unharmonious and dissymmetric unity between man and woman. This impotence prevents both parts development and leads to their destruction. The theme of impotence is also frequently encountered in Hawthorne's writing; the difference is that Hawthorne relates this impotence into culturally and socially temporal events while Poe touches emotional and atemporal impotence. While Poe made his women objects of idolatry and worship, Hawthorne made his women targets for denigration and unfair criticism directed from a cold-hearted and moralistic male-chauvinistic puritan society.



# THE BIRTHMARK

Impotence of appreciating one's wife in her natural unobstructed and wild form is an issue that Hawthorne did not hesitate to bring to fore in his 1843 "Birthmark". In the second paragraph of this story, Hawthorne wrote that the story of Aylmar and Georgiana has a "deeply impressive moral." (764) "The Birthmark" is the story about the scientist Aylmar and his beautiful young wife Georgiana whose only defect is a crimson colored birthmark shaped like a little hand on her left cheek. Just as Thomas Bullfrog, Aylmar finds an imperfection in his wife very soon after they married. To Georgiana's surprise, Aylmar becomes obsessed with removing this birthmark from his wife's cheek. The urge to remove this birthmark emerges from the fact that it remains the only possible blemish upon otherwise perfect beauty. The crimson hand became a symbol "of his wife's liability to sin, sorrow, decay, and death", and tragically, the birthmark came to cause Aylmer's somber imagination more trouble and horror than Georgiana's beauty (whether soul or sense) had ever given him delight. His wife, who had paid no attention to her birthmark, soon begun to become conscious about it, she soon learned to shudder at the cold gaze Aylmar fixed on it, and finally the mark became something hateful to her. Like the slaves imprisoned on the plantation or prisoners in the prison, Georgiana is locked up in an enclosure and becomes the object of the empowered male gaze.

Aylmer locks her up in her separate sphere, the boudoir, and appears to have the power of the ubiquitous gaze. When she transgresses and enters the library of Aylmer's laboratory, she is scolded mightily for crossing boundaries and she becomes the stereotypical "prying woman" (776) of mythology, a sexualized and demonic Eve or Pandora. Georgiana learns to hate her blemish to the point where the only thing that

matters to her is its removal, even if it causes her own death. Aylmar is unaware of the harm he causes his wife by paying so much attention to her sole defect that he gets enthusiastic when she agrees on him removing it; he sees the operation as "rapture". It would be wrong to think Hawthorne meant for Aylmar to be presented as a cold self-conceived monster, but rather as a man too fascinated by his science and his quest to gain control over nature and to achieve perfection. Aminadab, Aylmer's assistant, is not bothered at all by the crimson hand, and he says, with a shrewd and solid common sense, "If she were my wife I'd never part with that birthmark" (770) So we have two representations of men, the former who seeks perfection by manipulation, and the latter who appreciates beauty in its natural and imperfect shape.

The birthmark is finally removed and Aylmer has his immaculate bride in entire perfection, but only for a short moment. The birthmark that stands for a symbol of the earthy, the mortal, can be eradicated only at the price of life itself. Aylmer has not realized that perfection is never achieved on earth and in terms of mortality. Once Georgiana is flawless she withers away as the perfect rose that foreshadowed Georgiana's death earlier in the story. The "deeply impressive moral" that we were told the story would contain in the opening paragraph is the immorality of controlling and transforming the natural and harmonious beauty on the expense of achieving flawlessness. The birthmark was part of Georgiana's body, yet Aylmer treated her as though she were an object, dehumanizing Georgiana for his own desires for control. Hawthorne illustrates man's inability to accept the beauty of nature and how he urges to play God. The natural flaw must be eradicated, nature's work improved upon. Aylmer prioritized logic before emotion and the patriarchal culture he represents was responsible for the death of woman due to the insistence of having power over nature. Georgiana's changing view of herself is typical for many women whose vision of themselves changes as the surrounding society projects an ideal image which must be aspired. Desperate to find a place in this patriarchal culture, women join in the devaluing of certain feminine or natural characteristics while at the same time claiming power where they were allowed. Women learned living by male rules, and they also know how to gain benefits from them. But unfortunately, by accepting male rules, she is the worst enemy of her own sex.

The "Birthmark" is a story that shows how a man's manipulation can make a woman feel unsatisfied with her physical appearance. By continually making remarks on her imperfections Aylmer makes Georgiana feel she needs to be arranged in order to fulfil the requirements of his ideal of how a beautiful woman should look like. Men have created a list of necessities women feel that they need to adapt to in order to be admired. Many women feel that they need to get plastic surgery to live up to the standards of the beauty ideal that has been culturally generated. Woman, in many cases, has submitted to becoming man's desire rather than being satisfied by the way nature created her. Her greatest wish is to be admired and appreciated, and she is willing to abandon being herself in order to obtain this admiration. When Georgiana achieves perfect beauty, she does this on the expense of her own persona. The cold intellect, a masculine property possesses control over the body, which has often been associated with women. Susan Bordo wrote that "The body is the negative term in the body/soul dualism, and if woman is the body, then women are that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge,



seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death” (Spikes, 161). Women are tragically the enemies they contest; she has learnt to accept the ideals men has formed and she competes with her own sex in order to be the most appreciated. Culture has promoted debilitating images of the female body, images that women often slavishly adopt, sometimes actively promote, and almost always are subject to. Some women have learnt how to use these images in their favour; a woman who masters to satisfy men’s desire of how a perfect woman should be like may surly gain power, but at the same time she is, tragically, submitting to male dominance. The body becomes an expression of the soul, a reflection of one’s inner life; if you are capable of shaping your body according to your own desire you have proven to possess willpower, energy, and control, but if you have been subdued to shape your body according to others will your soul will also suffer. Aylmer showed how his willpower to change his wife’s physical appearance came to destroy her. Georgiana perceived Aylmer’s message too accurately, and all too sensibly, she understood that the only way she would be accepted by her husband was to meet his requirements of perfection. She agreed on the transformation despite of the fact that she knew she would be erased after it had been done. As perfection is impossible in an earthly life she passed away when achieving it.

This query of what beauty is and how society conceives it is still today a polemical and controversial topic that is continuously being discussed. Cleanth Brooks writes in his book Understanding Fiction that after a close reading of the story we do not know whether Hawthorne would have men settle down into a supine and passive acceptance of what nature gives. (105) He does not take his own moral in these terms. Instead, he offers two male representations; Aminadad, “the man of clay” who lacks the imagination (or will) for the noble enterprise of daring to surpass nature stands for the earthy, gross side of man’s nature; Aylmer, for the aspiring and imaginative element in man. One cannot range these two characters into two absolute categories; the good and the bad, the right and the wrong. Even today there is an open debate towards the implications of plastic surgery and its moral values. There are people who favor it and oppose it. The body, Susan Bordo states, expresses the values of the society it participates in, but a society is not a uniform entity and vast varieties of values are expressed. If media and entertainment business encourage the image of a disproportionately voluptuous body does not imply that the whole society supports this ideal. Hawthorne is not interested in having us apply a rule; he is not interested merely in trying to win our assent to a particular generalization, or in trying to make us adopt a certain course of action. His intention is wider than trying to convince the reader to take a particular stance, but he does indeed stimulate us to take one. By exposing the reader to argumentative topics typical to the social and cultural context whereat they were composed, Hawthorne encourages the reader to reflect on the society he lives. Poe could not front his age in any truly critical terms, as did Hawthorne; his tales were excursions into a philosophy of knowledge; they were attempted rationalizations of what Poe regarded the central question of the relation of the mind to ultimate reality. They were aspects of the haunting question: what does man know and how does he represent to himself what he believes he knows? (Davidson, 222) “Ligeia” (1838), which Poe once asserted to be his best tale, is an inquiry into the iniquitous illusion that humankind think is real. It is an inquiry into a man who philosophically

proceeds through a set of stages by which he comes to understand something he has never entertained before.

# LIGEIA

“Ligeia” is the story where Poe portrays his method of rejecting the “ordinary” in favour of the exotic, unknown and mysterious. Lady Ligeia, whose beauty “*was not of that regular mould which we have been falsely taught to worship in the classical labours of the heathen*”, and with her eloquence and erudition that was “*such as had never been known in woman*” is Poe’s greatest and most complete female character. Just as in “Eleonora” and “Berenice”, “Ligeia” is a story of a woman’s hold on a man, even after death. The narrator tells us how his idolatry of Ligeia made rely on her utterly; “*I was aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a childlike confidence, to her guidance through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation...Without Ligeia I was but as a child groping benighted.*” (67)

The reader is let known that Ligeia is an unusual woman, extraordinary and challenging, she is an exotic sophisticated jewel deserving full admiration. The fact that Poe writes that her learning is immense – such as *never known in woman*, implies that she not only posses an extraordinary beauty with a touch of *strangeness in the proportion*, just as Lord Bacon Verulam liked women, but also posses a male characteristic – the intellect, which makes her the perfect companion for any man who knows how to appreciate an equal relationship. The idyllic dualism is unfortunately broken when Ligeia falls ill, impotent of soothing her and reasoning with her when observing that she suffers in the battle against the dark shadows, the narrator tragically witnesses how Ligeia yearns “for life – *but for life*”.

Although Ligeia dies, Poe foreshadows her revival by repeatedly quoting Joseph

Glanvill emphasizing spiritualistic manifestations of the immortality of the soul: *"Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will."*

Despite that she is physically absent, Ligeia has an even stronger impact on her husband after her death, and he learns to fully appreciate the strength of her affection. Although the narrator gets remarried to the classical beauty, the fair haired and blue eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion.

Theodore Parker stated in his sermon "Of the Ideal Public Function of Woman" that there were three classes of women during his time: First, he explained, there were the domestic Drudges, who were getting less every year, who are wholly taken up in the material details of their housekeeping, husband-keeping, child-keeping. They saw housekeeping as a trade, and nothing more; and after they had done that, there was no more which they could do. Secondly, Theodore Parker mentioned the domestic Dolls, who were wholly taken up with the vain show which delights the eye and the ear. (www.vcu.edu) They were ornaments of the estate. Those women asked nothing beyond their function as dolls, and hated all attempts to elevate womankind. It is under this category that Lady Rowena most accurately belongs. Showing now other preoccupation than decorating the house, the male narrator gets bored in her company and feels how the absence of Lady Ligeia grows steadily. According to Parker's definition of women, Ligeia would most definitely fall under the third, which he regarded as the whole and superb woman. She was a woman who could conjoin the useful of the drudge and the beautiful of the doll into one Womanhood, and have a great deal left besides. These women were, Parker explained, not wholly taken up with their function as housekeeper, wife and mother. And Ligeia was indeed a woman who did not let herself be restricted to the image society had devoted to her sex, she wanted to be a whole woman who desired for life, *but for life!* Robert Parker stated in his sermon that: *Womankind is advancing from that period when every woman was a slave, and marriage of some sort was guaranteed to every woman, because she was dependent on man,--I say, woman is advancing from that, to a state of independence, where woman shall not be subordinated to man, but the two coordinated together. The evil that I deplore is transient in its nature, and God grant it may soon pass away!*" (American Transcendental Page)

Ligeia is most extraordinary woman, both emotionally, spiritually and intellectually, that Poe ever created. She with her fully-bloomed character is just the type of woman that the transcendentalists celebrated, a woman who denied every limit and restriction condemned to her sex, she is a woman who will not let anything detain her from being independent and self-expressive. Ligeia is the type of woman who would never be subordinated to man. Her husband appreciated her for all that she was, he especially admired her desire to live, and it is here where the foreshadowing quotation of Joseph Glanvill comes in. Rowena, the classical beauty, is characterized as a quite plain and dull woman, and it is therefore no surprise that Poe makes her relinquish herself so that Ligeia can reappear. The preference of the mysterious Ligeia before the classical beauty Rowena shows that Poe's ideal of woman is that of a strong and independent woman rather than the domesticated and dollish figure Rowena represents. Ligeia is with her poetry writing an expressive and creative woman that shows that Poe appreciated female

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strength. Poe tells us that we cannot explain everything we see, he replaced rationality with the irregular and unexplained. "Ligeia" is, then, the story where female erudition astonishes male rationality, and where woman is appreciated for everything that she can be.



## CONCLUSIONS

This investigation project deals with the treatment of female portraits by two of the most appreciated authors in North America during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The aim was to see how the authors differed in their handling of women in their works in order to find out to what extent they revealed the socio-cultural and political context of the time they lived. My hypothesis was that Hawthorne was more concerned of dealing with the moral issues that were being discussed by the great transcendental thinkers of his time and incorporating these ideas into his fiction, while Poe was less attached with these morals issues and composed works that did not deal with American women's fight for independency and emancipation.

After having carried out the analysis the results have shown that the greatest difference between the stories of these great authors is Hawthorne's stories involve more of the social-cultural and political context of mid 19<sup>th</sup> century North America than Poe's composition do. The settings of Hawthorne's work are easily identified to a particular time and location. Hawthorne's stories often mention moral issues concerning women's place in society that were discussed during the time these works were composed. Hawthorne struggles with nineteenth century ideals of women as well as all things feminine, relationships between men and women, and man's dilemma with guilt and the culture's definition of sin. His writing reflects the times in which he lived by bringing the chaotic and rocky foundation of the New World to the level of the always rocky foundation of the individual as he or she seeks an identity.

Poe's texts, as well as Hawthorne's, should be mined for their wonder as well as for

their resonance. Despite of the fact that the settings of Poe's stories are atemporal, not situated to any geographical location, but rather being an isolate universe without any contact with external links, he did give women an important role in literature. The sensation that Poe caused by his works is that he worshiped women; he appreciated them for their beauty, their intellect and for their mysterious and awe-inspiring character.

Strong, eloquent, and self-secure women are found in both Hawthorne's and Poe's works. Ligeia with her deep and wide knowledge, affection for her husband, and passion for life is Poe's most splendid female portrait. Ligeia's character is timeless and can be appreciated in any century. Mrs Bullfrog shows an example of a woman who, in her time, contributed to an important advancement in claiming female civil right. With her outspokenness she refuses to be subordinated to male-domination and by drawing limits she protects female integrity.

Both authors have created sensual and beautiful women who share relationships with men; however, sexuality is treated quite differently. Sexuality in Hawthorne's short stories arises from the close interaction between male protagonist and female heroine while in Poe's short stories sexuality is a private matter. Hawthorne dealt with the moral implications female sexuality had in the eyes of a puritan Anglo-Saxon society. Hawthorne wrote about the sin society associated with sexuality, and the punishment and prejudice women who had been sexual active had to suffer. Poe deals with the theme of eroticism in a more discreet way, not revealing any moral implications about the subject, both rather highlighting the emotional and ethereal feelings mutual admiration implied. The close and interdependent relationship between men and women in Poe's short-stories are based on mutual idolatry and their closed universe suggests a high level of sensuality.

It is quite stimulating working with female characters when dealing with short stories composed by these stupendous authors, because the ingenuity and diversity in which they appear allows for a vast possibility of interpretations.



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