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## Zenobia the queen of the Blithedale romance

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### Abstract

The Blithedale romance is set against a utopian background and is a novel that is sympathetic to the issues of women's rights. This novel also documents the social conditions, especially of women of nineteenth century America. The novel deals with two archetypal images of women one submissive and the other competitive.

**Keywords:** Feminism, women's rights, America, queen

### Introduction

The Blithedale Romance was written by Hawthorne and published in 1852. The novel deals about feminism which is explored by the novelist through the bold characterisation of its protagonist Zenobia and Priscilla. The novel is set against a Utopian background and gives an account of Hawthorne's sojourn at the Brook Farm Community founded by Orestes Brownson. In the novel, the Brook Farm Community is called the Blithedale Community, and the characters in it represent many friends involved in the Brook Farm Experiment. Hawthorne effectively documents the special conditions of the nineteenth century America in the novel and sympathises with the conditions of the underprivileged sections of society comprising of women, prisoners and farmers of those days. He portrays various social conditions and emphasises the problem of the rights of women. This novel also treats contemporary social issues.

The protagonist of the novel Zenobia is the daughter of Old Moody and has a younger sister Priscilla. Zenobia is a beautiful, brilliant girl devoid of love by her father. At one point of time, Zenobia loses her mother and is sent to her rich uncle where she spends her major time of the childhood. She grows in effluence and as she progresses to womanhood she is adorned with all the societal feminine accomplishment and after her uncles death, she inherits all the property and becomes a rich heiress with no restraints. She becomes free and independent in nature. She is a magnificent woman and is also called "Queen Zenobia" (The Blithedale Romance page 211) because of her regal appearance and defiant nature. Sketched extraordinarily beautiful and intelligent lady who is an admirable figure of a woman in the society. She is depicted as a woman of extraordinary physical attributes such as dark glossy hair, sober and dressed simply yet pristine in beauty.

Zenobia dresses up modestly to escape the undue male attention towards herself. She wears a white lily flower a fresh everyday which is like an ornament and shines like 'A great diamond' (TBR, 15). This flower is a personification of Zenobia's self and signifies not only her beauty but her rebellious and defiant spirit. By wearing a costly flower everyday she exhibits her pride and her desire to be different from other conventional women. Her name and beauty have many connotations. She is referred to the mythological Arab queen Zenobia who dared to defy the Roman Empire and was later punished for her disobedience against patriarchy. Matheson writes about her courage:

"She was noted for her feminism, to the point of assuming the distinctly masculine title of "Augustus" for herself, in brash defiance 'of Roman authority.'" (217).

Waggoner in one of his articles writes: "Zenobia bears the name of queen both splendid and tragic and she herself is regal in appearance and manner and comes to her tragic end. She is described in terms of her natural vitality and her luxuriant womanhood and her name carries the significance of, one having life from Zeus."(191).

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Zenobia is endowed with intellectual brilliance and faith in the feminist ideals. Observing the sad plight of women she is determined to fight for them because, from her early childhood, she had sympathised with her mother who had been left alone by her father to fend for herself and her daughter. At Blithedale she assumes the role of a reformer and possesses and speaks about strong views on women's rights. She attacks society and questions the relation between the sexes because she feels that the patriarchal society constantly subjugates women and denies them equal rights. So she advocates and demands freedom for women by fighting against the restrictiveness of women's roles. Zenobia had herself been subjected to male misogyny and had seen how the working girls were exploited at the workplace. Being a feminist she was accused of being a morally depraved woman. But in spite of all these social prejudices, Zenobia continues to work hard for women's rights. Coverdale, in the novel, sees her as "The Champion of Her Sex" (TBR 123). So she represents Hawthorne's concept of feminism. Her rebellion is a vocal one as she delivers bold and inspiring speeches which exhibit her understanding of the pain and suffering of women. Her speeches threaten the very foundations of the society in which she lives. The men of her society fear her beauty, sensuality, brilliance and her burning feminist zeal. Her energy, strength and courage are actually her major traits.

Zenobia is confident that the day would soon dawn when women would become more independent and successful in winning their rightful place in society. Her poems and essays which she herself composes reflect her optimism and firm faith in a better future for women. She discusses on the subject of women's rights with the other characters of the novel, Coverdale, Hollingsworth and Priscilla and her father. She articulates her feminist position and gives an Ernest and passionate speech about the injustice of not allowing women to raise their natural voice in public. She vocally rebels and says: "Thus far, no woman in the world has ever once spoken out her whole heart and her whole mind. It is with the living voice, alone, that she can compel the world to recognise the light of her intellect and the depth of her heart" (TBR 120).

It was not easy for Zenobia to deliver feminist lectures to an antagonistic audience. She was often misunderstood and laughed at by the people who criticised her for her strong views and defiance. It was her militant feminism which made Hollingsworth reject her word. Yet Zenobia continues her social work in spite of Hollingsworth's betrayal but one day she suddenly disappears mysteriously. And one day her body is recovered from the river. Her death by suicide seems a little improper in the novel because Zenobia was a person of tremendous strength and confidence and would have not ended her life for the sake of love. But her tragic death could be modelled on the death of Margaret Fuller who was a great feminist and advocate of women's rights and who died by drowning in 1849. Thus Zenobia as an advocate of women's rights is a mouthpiece of Hawthorne, and she has been equally praised by the novelist for being a strong woman who fought for sexual equality and women's rights in a male dominated world. Hawthorne no doubt is Zenobia's champion.

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