

## **The Question of Philanthropy: Social Reform in Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance***

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Nathaniel Hawthorne presents three types of philanthropy in his novel *The Blithedale Romance*: the socialist community, feminism, and social reform. He does this so he can strike down each in turn and tell why they fail. Social problems do not have easy solutions, but Hawthorne advocates for the "circle of community." This is the idea that those in need should be taken care of by their extended family or by those in the church. These people have a moral or religious obligation to those around them, and, through this Christian brotherhood, problems can be solved. The larger-scale reforms do not improve the situation, but actually lead to tragedy and sadness. This end is seen in *The Blithedale Romance* as the Blithedale experiment falls apart, Zenobia commits suicide, and Hollingsworth's dream is crushed. This negative light is shed on large-scale philanthropy by Hawthorne to encourage individual philanthropy or more personal forms of aid. This is still important today because many people decide to participate in philanthropy and need to make an informed decision about which type of philanthropy to support. If everyone helped the people around them, the larger-scale projects, which he claims fail, would be unnecessary.

### *Information about the Author:*

Ashley Gilbert is from Angola, Indiana. She is an English and criminology double major with a Spanish minor who plans to go on to law school after graduation in May. She has been interested in philanthropy since she served on the board of a nonprofit organization in high school and realized that learning about how and why people participate in philanthropy is important.

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