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## ***‘Travelling far beyond the strike of city clocks’: Boredom and time in Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance****

This paper investigates the articulation between boredom and time in Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*. Chronicling the disastrous tale of a proto-socialist utopian community inspired by Fourierism, this semi-autobiographical novel weaves together contradictory views on this affect. Constantly brooding over idleness and dissatisfaction, topics that were generally branded as effeminate and un-American by optimistic contemporaries such as Emerson or Whitman, Hawthorne holds a peculiar spot in the panorama of nineteenth-century male American writers. My contention will be that unlike his peers, Hawthorne sees boredom as a fact of life that is not to be battled, but rather accepted, performed and even valued because of its subversive potential of re-arranging our relationship with the passing of time.

In quest of a “better life,” the characters are in part impelled by the desire of escaping from the boredom of organized society. They “[speak] of earthly happiness” and flee “the weary tread-mill of the established system:” boredom here appears surprisingly ubiquitous in the young Republic. Their “adventurous enterprise” sets them apart from society’s “entrepreneurs,” reframing the distinction made by Jankélévitch between two types of so-called “adventurers” - “aventuriers” and “aventureux” - in his attempt at a phenomenology of consciousness’ relationship with time (L’aventure, l’ennui, le sérieux). Furthermore, it soon appears that boredom finds the characters again in Utopia much as it found Hawthorne during his own utopian venture at Brook Farm, even though political action is supposed to be the best, manliest remedy to boredom in the view of Hollingsworth the philanthropist. Boredom as a result keeps unmooring certainties, and we shall study to what extent such a view maintains the political status quo.

One of the forms of boredom that persists in the community is gendered. The narrator indeed comments on the lot of women at Blithedale, who cannot escape monotonous housework: “Eve had no dinner-pot, and no clothes to mend, and no washing-day.” Zenobia, the founder of the community, later makes the claim that she doesn’t understand “how [a woman] can be happy, after discovering that fate has assigned her but one single event, which she must contrive to make the substance of her whole life,” while “a man has his choice of innumerable events.” Echoing Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, such words foreshadow the resounding failure of the “paradisiacal system.”

Finally, Hawthorne’s narrator confers some merit to boredom in a literary sense. According to Coverdale, it is all very well and good for a book to have “a sort of sluggish flow” and such literature can “serve as an unobtrusive accompaniment to the life within me and about me.” In its refusal to immerse and absorb, such an artistic ideal might very well be a way to do justice both to the complex entanglement of life, but also to respect the reader’s freedom, and trust that their experience of boredom will end up far more transformative than any preaching.