NOTES ABOUT CHARACTERS CHARACTERISATION

The reader can understand and know more about a character through some information and elements:

* The **name**: it may anticipate some features of the character’s personality;
* The **background**: family and cultural background is important to understand the character’s behaviours and thoughts;
* How the reader gets to know about the character: there are many different **elements** that can introduce a character to the reader: actions, behaviour (what the character does, his/her attitude and interests, his/her like and dislikes); moreover, his/her vision of the world and interaction with other character are important to understand one’s personality and identity.

There are **flat characters** (that do not change through the novel) and **round characters** that have an evolution through their story.

ETHAN’S CHARACTERISATION

Ethan is a very complex character: this is the reason why he’s very suitable to be the protagonist of this story.

The reader wonders why his life was as desperate and unfortunate as it is, and why he does not manage to change it: is it his nature and personality or is it the environment’s fault? The reader knows he lives in a farm but he likes abstract reflection, especially science and engineering, but he has given up his idealist concept on the bases of the circumstances.

Ethan is halfway behind a round and a flat character: he tries to change his life but does not manage to do it. He feels he’s different from his wife’s character, he feels other desires but he is not brave enough to go over the boundaries: so, he decides to follow his needs and not his ambitions of knowledge and economic stability.   
He is part of a Puritan society: he is affected by people’s opinion and he’s afraid his reputation might be not well considered, he lacks the strength to go over the common sense.

He is also scared of the unknown: he does not want to go out the cycle of situations and relationships that he does not know, he can’t imagine his life far away from his farm and without Mattie. This is also the reason why he decides to marry Zenobia: he doesn’t want to be alone and he adapts himself to a known situation. He’s not a man of strong convictions: he always lived as a subjected character: during his whole life he helped others.

So, the reader understands that it is not only the environment and the society’s fault if Ethan was not able to change his condition: he’s weak by nature, he needs a justification to do anything and he’s not able to face the unknown: and he is a victim of these points of his life and personality that he could not change.

MATTIE’S CHARACTERISATION

The two women characters the reader gets to know in the novel are both seen and described from Ethan’s point of view, so the reader is highly influenced by Ethan’s opinion and feelings about them.

Mattie’s name is an important feature to consider: her name, the name Mattie was very common at that time and recalls her naïve, sweet and cheerful personality which makes Ethan fall in love. Her surname suggests the reader that she is a highly considered character, especially by the protagonist and it is also symbolical: it reminds the reader that Ethan is attracted by her.

As regards physical description, the reader imagines Mattie has an attractive, young and beautiful girls, once and again Ethan’s point of view is influencing the description of the character: the narrator often refers to Mattie’s beauty and appeal. She is the complete opposite of Zenobia, and this is why Ethan is attracted by her.

The reader knows about Mattie’s background: she was born in a rich family, but when her parents died, she was left alone without money, so, Zenobia (who is her cousin) decides to hire her as a nurse and servant. Unfortunately, she is not good at all at the housework: this is another reason why Ethan is attracted by her, he feels useful and increases Zenobia’s jealously.

Mattie is often linked to red colour, which symbolises passion and her lively personality.

Lastly, Mattie is free: she is young, she is not married. So, according to the Puritan society values, she can have fun. For example, she often attends balls at the church and is free to go to the city centre.

ZENOBIA’S CHARACTERISATION

The reader gets to know about Zeena from Ethan point of view, which is extremely negative: he considers her a selfish, old and oppressive woman. As a consequence, the reader is at first convinced that she is a negative character and does not like her at all.

The reader only knows Zeena’s name, which derives from Greek language: “Zeno” (which stands for Zeus) plus “bio” which represents life: it is a traditional and old name that represents her position and power in the house. The reader knows nothing about her surname: that is because she is married to Ethan so she is submitted to her husband, this element suggests the theme of the woman’s condition in the Puritan society.

Moreover, the reader knows nothing about Zenobia background, so he feels less empathic. The reader only knows she is a nurse and that she is very good at the housekeeping, differently from Mattie: this underlines the moral position and power that Zenobia has in her own house, however she is forced into that kind of lifestyle that makes her feel sad, lonely and oppressed: since she’s a married woman, her role is to take care of the house and maintain a modest attitude.

As to physical appearance, Zenobia is not largely described, but the reader, who’s influenced by Ethan’s point of view, imagines her as an old and ugly woman who is not attractive.

Whereas Mattie, as a nubile woman, is free and independent, Zenobia must act according to the stereotype of the married woman: her actions are always linked to the housekeeping and her sickness. She is jealous of the young girl’s freedom and feels shut and oppressed in a condition in which she does not recognise herself.

ANALYSIS OF THE FOURTH CHAPTER

Ethan is reassured by his wife’s absence: he feels different from his everyday mood. The whole atmosphere of the situation is characterised by the expression “to feel at ease” and “sweetness”. Since the narrator describes the events from Ethan’s point of view, the reader is able to enter in the protagonist’s mind.

Through the narrator words, the reader knows more about Ethan life and personality: when he was younger (“Old Ethe” and “Old stiff”) he had the possibility to socialise and talk with people, but since he left school and dedicated to his mother, he become more and more reserved and silent, when her mother died, in order to escape from loneliness, he married Zeena.

For Ethan expressing his feelings, thoughts and opinion is very difficult, he struggles to build relationship with other people and this is why he lives in a desperate solitude, even after his marriage, which is a failure, he admires other people’s outgoing personality and gayety. When he meets Mattie, he has another possibility to stop feeling alone and to give a meaning to his life, feeling useful and loved.

The grave atmosphere is well expressed and conveyed by the words “burden”, “solitude” and “chill”.

The word “chill” refers to the weather conditions: the cold and harsh winter symbolises Ethan life’s and personality. Plus, weather conditions are one of the main agents that define the characters actions and behaviour: they are a limit to their willing to change, nature forbids the character to evolve.