

THE SCARLET LETTER IS NOT A PURITAN NOVEL BUT A NOVEL ABOUT THE PURITANS

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ABSTRACT

The Historical-Romance of Hawthorne draws a continuum of subversive female sexuality in Quaker-Catherine, Mary Dyer and Hester Prynne as a Radical challenge to the Monochromic Puritanical worldview

KEYWORDS: *Puritan Novel*

INTRODUCTION

As Hester issues forward from the Prison-Door, she embodies the “Wild Rose Bush” along the “the darkening tale of human frailty sorrow.” Hawthorne’s narrative liberation to Hester is within the plot of Puritanism like the structure of the text in ‘The Custom House.’

The embedded Irony overwhelms the crowds’ reaction towards Hester as the harsh maidens demand an Iron ensemble of branding on her forehead or a death-sentence for the adulteress. The old Matrons as the “Man like Elizabeth” in their physiognomy literally spearhead the patriarchal and rocentric ostracism of Hester towards a grimmer level of self-indulgent moralism-sadism. However the text always produces counter-narratives in the forms of a young mother and a man who question the pathetic moral-interdependence on penalisation and not interiorised-individualistic acceptance of the Puritanical-Moral code.

The Foucau Idian-structures-of-Power in the Prison, Church and Burial-grounds, forcibly narratives and ensemble Hester into the Puritanical-Ideology. The puritanical ministers have no individuated subjectivity and thereby force Hester’s forced assimilation into the collectively by ironically incarcerating her. The psychological interiority on the scaffold marks a generic shift in Hester’s reverie of the past. The Public confession is narrowed down to a private drama as Hester faces her past memories and later Chillingworth-Dimmesdale.

The fictional world imbibes both social-historical and internal-artistic realities. Hawthorne overcomes the tensions within his own creative vision. Hester’s “A” replicates the Custom-House experience of Moonlit dreamlike interconnectedness with the distinctness of Individual outline, the consistent literal and metaphorical replications.

Hawthorne’s ambivalence towards Hester’s intellectual-freedom as he forces what Nancy Chodorow calls the “Institution of Mothering” on her in our first-Novelistitic-encounter with her. Pearl’s initial response with her “vacant gaze” is however later revisited by her revolutionary subjectivity.

Nina Baym attributes to Hester, a consistent-social-power to undermine the Narrator's ambivalences and continuous references to the Suspicious-Catholic-Symbols.

The theme of bastardy-illegitimacy of Hutchinsonian-Antinomian-faith and Nathaniel Hawthorne's revisiting of his own Puritanical legacy is literally presented in the text. Hester on the scaffold is a visual tableau analogues with Ann Hutchinson's Courtroom-defiance. John Wilson's anthologising of Hester's sin is akin to his repudiation of Hutchinson.(1.)

The text dramatizes the Puritan practice of Public confession and while abetting the Modern-Individualism of Hester, it ironically boosts the same. Hester's Sin of nonconformity and social disharmony envelops the apparent Sin of Adultery, she is the pariah-scapegoat and due to her sin of transgression, the agent for public-purgation. Hers is not the Sin of Passion but Sin of Principle in her "weary indifference" towards her ritualistic-excommunication in the Public-Market-Space. Hawthorne's "Subaltern-Imagination" creates a plethora of micro-narratives in the form of communal-ideologically divergent responses to Hester's humiliation, enveloping the Multiple-Bakhtinian-chronotopes.

The Puritan-lens reduces her to a fallen Eve by allegorizing her Sin to be universal, like a living emblem in a morality-play, a replication of the Original-sin. However Hawthorne Historically-contextualises Hester's anarchic-sexual-spiritual freedom to the seventeenth-century by imbibing the Scaffold-scene with multiple interpretations. Modern incongruence between interior doctrine of Old-English-personal freedom and the outward conformity is Hester's generic transgression.

Frederic Newberry calls the Scaffold scene of Hester's humiliation a conflict between the dominant-American Heritage and recessive-English Heritage, as primarily the structural device and characteristic of Puritanism. The Scaffold scene enacts an English-aestheticism as Hester's dress transgressions are paralleled by authorial disobedience of comparing the Papal Divine Mother with the adultress-prophetess Hester Prynne. The narratorial-defiance of Puritanical creed by representing the Scaffold-scene as a tableau-vivant, a work of Art, considered idolatry by Puritans like the Renaissance sensibilities present in Hester's Romantic-art.

The scene tries to create a cultural-ancestry retrospectively in the seventeenth-century for the nineteenth-century.

Hester recognises the letter as an aesthetic-self-expression and not as the embodiment of her communally-afflicted-shame. The Scarlet Letter, like her "haughty demeanour," is an agential ornament. Hawthorne constructs Hester as his fictional replication-alter-ego, as in the custom house, both are victims of customs. The excess in Hester's character makes her not fitting-in Puritanical-ideals.

She fails the Traditional-Rhetorical-Discipline. The scene imbibes what Seymour Gross calls the tragic-design as her initial response is at loggerheads with the Puritanical-civilisational ideology.(2.)

Through the Scaffold Scene, Hawthorne represents the ultimately Historically Determined character of Hester Prynne. The scenic wild rose is emblematic of what Frederic C. Crews calls the "Humanistic Naturalism" and Hester's "Positive-Individualism" and Ideological-refashioning causing a Modern-Identity-dialectic. While the Puritans perverted Modern-liberty as a fearful expression of Freedom against Hester who stands as a system of Trans-valuation. She, like Hawthorne, embodies the critical-perspective on Puritans after the communal gaze of ignominy on her and her later voluntary-self-alienation. (3.)

The Puritan officials including Governor Bellingham, Wilson and Dimmesdale “looking down upon the platform” symbolize the inherent double-talk-equivocation of Dimmesdale assuming a blatantly dubious platform to condescend Hester and his own Sin-of-hypocrisy. The sermonizing centres on Hester’s sin. However the sacredness of her pollution in her Transcendental-rebellion finds an agential claim in Dimmesdale’s sermonizing. Dimmesdale’s “half-frightened look” characterises his yet unrevealed guilt as opposed to the socially inflicted shame on Hester. Dimmesdale’s speech is paradigmatic of Puritanical-hypocrisy in persuading and dissuading Hester’s confession. He is the epicentre of New-England civilisation as opposed to the marginal-excommunicated Hester.

The de-pedestralisation of Hester’s sin of both intellectual and sexual freedom is juxtaposed with her psychodrama-interiority of recollecting her revolutionary legacy from the Old world outgrowing Puritanical-Religious-Fundamentalism. “—cast away...broken chain;” the promised-land has failed her and Hawthorne, just like the American-Dream has failed.

Hester’s indifferent-response also subverts the nineteenth-century characterisation of female-fragility as she refuses to “swoon” like them; she isn’t the Damsel-in-distress.

CONCLUSIONS

The cyclical text starts and ends with the Scaffold scene. Hester’s response envelops her latent-rebellious-spirit to envision a Utopian-American-Landscape recuperating the “American Exceptionalism” in its tangential indulgence with the societal issues. However she is historically determined-contextualized although Pearl later inherits the agential-anachronism. (4.)

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