
Hawthorne's Retributive Justice in *The Scarlet Letter*

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze critically Hawthorne's concept of retributive justice in *The Scarlet Letter*. As a social moralizer, Hawthorne sets his action in the puritanic town of Salem where sinners are always met by that community, with a sense of superiority and arrogance. Thus, instead of showing understanding and love, the Puritans become intolerant of Hester's sin. Though a direct descendant of a Puritan family, Hawthorne shows compassion with his heroine; however, he denies her the chance to elope with her partner, Minister Arthur Dimmesdale. Sin according to Hawthorne is a reality that must be confronted; and once a sin is committed its consequences: alienation, remorse, despair, are inescapable. To cleanse the soul, he casts heavy reliance on confession for its redemptive force.

The paper falls into two sections. The first discusses Hawthorne's moral code along with his concept of sin and retribution. The second analyzes this code in the novel as reflected in the three major characters: Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, and Roger Chillingworth. This section is divided into two parts. The first part deals with Hester's iniquity and the punishment imposed on her by the society. The second part concerns itself with the other two characters as they come to live together. Their

retributions are consistent with their sins: Dimmesdale through bitter remorse and Chillingworth through his transformation into a fiend which is a sign of damnation.

I.I Hawthorne's Code of Morality

Hawthorne's life extended from 1804 to 1864. His decision to be a writer during that period was a difficult one. He had to subdue a number of obstacles to prove himself a prominent novelist.

The literary milieu of America was not congenial for a would-be novelist. Relatively, America had a short history as a nation and a shorter one as a literary heritage. Writers who were contemporaneous to Hawthorne, like James F. Cooper and Herman Melville, either resorted to the near American history depicting the struggle between the red Indians and the colonizer white man, as Cooper did in his masterpiece *The Last of the Mohicans*, or as Melville did in his *Moby Dick*, where he utilized his life experience as a sailor to allegorize man's epical quest for his goal.¹ After his graduation from college in 1825, Hawthorne turned into a kind of recluse. For twelve years, his sole companion was books. This period he once described as a "cursed habits of solitude"². This period sharpened his imaginative power and highlighted his sense of history. Hawthorne's retrospection might be the reason behind his deep obsession with Puritanism, for "he had been steeping himself in the history of Early New England, not only in its events but, more importantly, in its customs, values, and ideas"³

Hawthorne's writings are not merely fictional but have a moral depth as well. He has a deep penetrating insight into the people's mind. This unique insight enabled him to decipher the mysteries of the human psyche. For him, sin is a reality which should be outfaced. Thus he dedicated his

writings to reveal it and its devastating effect upon human beings. Through the psychological validity of his fiction, Hawthorne has kindled the dark, cold caverns of the human mind, where evil resides, and has touched the sore regions of the heart where corruption sustains.

Though a descendant of a Puritan family which had its deep roots in the early history of New England, Hawthorne felt disgraced for his ancestor's role played in persecuting many people for allegedly practicing witchcraft. One of the victims had cast a curse upon Judge John Hathorne, one of Hawthorne's ancestors, saying that God would give him blood to drink.⁴ He was ashamed for their cruelties and as a consequence he felt that a curse had stuck to his life forever. In "The Custom House" he says

[John Hathorne] inherited the persecuting spirit, and made himself so conspicuous in the martyrdom of the witches, that their blood may fairly be said to have left a stain upon him. So deep a stain, indeed, that his dry old bones, in the Charter-street burial-ground, must still retain it, if they have not crumbled utterly to dust I know not whether these ancestors of mine bethought themselves to repent, and ask pardon of Heaven for their cruelties; or whether they are now groaning under the heavy consequences of them in another state of being. At all events, I, the present writer, as their representative, hereby take shame upon myself for their sakes, and pray that any curse incurred by them—as I have heard, and as the dreary and unprosperous condition of the race, for many a long year back, would argue to exist—may be now and henceforth removed. (*TSL*, p. 10)⁵

Accordingly, his sense of morality and sin and its results are the outcome of a mind which spent its time in the history of the early colonies.

Hawthorne's major concern is what befalls a person after committing what they know is a transgression to a divine law. And how could they purge

their tainted souls to reach salvation. The juxtaposition between sin and punishment is inevitable, for Hawthorne believes that once a sin is committed; its price must be paid. However, the way of payment varies considerably. Hawthorne delineates sin as being relative, which means that it is related to the sinner's subjective judgment. So what seems to one as a sin might not be so to another. Moreover, the same sin might be considered by those involved in it as a violation to a divine law for one side, while the other side regards it an infringement to a natural one.

While Hester Prynne believes that her sin "had a consecration of its own" (*TSL*, p. 152), Arthur Dimmesdale as a result of the same sin feels that he has violated a sanctified divine law and thus isolated from God. But still whatever the considerations toward sin are, its bitter consequences: alienation, remorse, and agony are inescapable.

To soften the injuries of the soul, caused by the sin, Hawthorne casts heavy reliance upon confession; confession will do its office in healing a great part of the sinner's soul. It will also save the sinner from false pride and hypocrisy. Dimmesdale's agony is not only the symptom of the concealment of his sin, but also the result of the people's reverential look at him as a stainless pious man. Opposing the Puritans view of the futility of good works, Hawthorne emphasizes that due importance should be given to benevolence due to its redemptive force and as penance. However, good works alone are futile unless accompanied by penitence, the determination to sin no more. In his "Hawthorne's Psychology of the Head and the Heart", Donald A. Ringe affirms that sin in Hawthorne's works is of two effects. The first degrades or degenerates the sinner into a lower state of being, while the second elevates them into a higher one, at which they may achieve self-

recognition. But this wouldn't be achieved without equilibrium between the head and the heart.⁶

Undue attention shouldn't be given to the head; nevertheless the heart shouldn't overbalance the head, since Hawthorne often refers to the heart as a 'foul cavern'. The dangers of great reliance upon the heart and reducing the function of the head can best be seen in Hester's condition. Hester Prynne is a very passionate woman; her emotional side dominates her reason faculty; her philanthropic nature induced her to commit her adulterous act.

Yet to intellectualize the emotions and immobilize the feelings is only to dehumanize oneself. Chillingworth's intellectual indulgence and misanthropic nature has eventually reduced him to a fiend. Extending the idea, the Puritans can likely be looked at as merely heads divorced of hearts. In chapter III, "The Recognition", Hawthorne says about Minister John Wilson, a Puritan religious leader, the following: "[his genial spirit], however, had been less carefully developed than his intellectual gifts, and was, in truth, rather a matter of shame than self-congratulation with him." (*TSL*, p. 53). The Puritans have mechanized every aspect of their lives and strangely enough even those which are related to religious ceremonies which require spiritual awareness.

Hawthorne believes that man's position is among his fellow men. Man by nature is sociable, thus he must blend with whom the brotherhood is the bond. He experienced seclusion and knows how bitter its consequences are. Consequently, those who dedicate their whole life to one single purpose away from people will be unpardonable sinners, the worst type of sinners according to Hawthorne's morality. Those sinners have committed guilt unforgivable by God. They have violated part of human nature which

Hawthorne sanctifies. Those sinners are usually indulged in their intellects and have forgotten their hearts.

In “Ethan Brand”, one of Hawthorne’s short stories, Brand is the character who devotes his whole life in search for the unpardonable sin. However, in dedicating his whole life to a single purpose away from society, regardless of how horrible and detestable this purpose is, Brand finds at the end that the sin has always been inside his heart. He defines the unpardonable sin as “the sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God”.⁷

I.II. Hawthorne’s Retributive Justice

As a romance, *The Scarlet Letter* stands for the neutral ground between imagination and reality. The supernatural elements take it to the verge of unreasonableness, yet its thematic significance restores its authenticity as a story exploring the interior of the human heart.

The novel opens with a crowd of people with their eyes stared on a closed door of a prison, waiting for the prisoner to be exposed on the scaffold. In mentioning the utopia and the prison and the grave, an implicit irony is easily detected. The utopian new world the Puritans claimed to have established is doomed from its beginning by an inevitable end as real as that of the grave. The prison represents the reality that the hard-headed and frigid Puritans refused to see. Sin becomes as real and inescapable as death itself. Thus the need arises for the prison: “the black flower of civilized society” as opposed to the naturally-grown red rose bush which stands for moral

blossom. The chapter sets the tone of the rest of the story; it is a “darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow” (*TSL*, p. 40)

The discussion of Hawthorne’s retributive justice in the story will be in two parts. Part one will depict Hester’s iniquity and what befalls her. The second part will delineate the sin of both Arthur Dimmesdale, Hester’s partner, and Roger Chillingworth her revengeful husband, together with their retribution according to their sins.

I.II.I Hester’s Ignominy

Hester’s disgraceful exposure in front of her fellow citizens stands for her public punishment due to her adulterous affair. She has been sentenced to stand upon the scaffold, holding her infant, the fruit of her adultery, in her arms. She has been stigmatized with a scarlet ‘A’ upon her garment to be a token of her guilt and warning to prevent her from future temptations. She embroidered the letter in a very gorgeous way which reveals skillful hands. In such embroidery, Hester refuses to admit the meaning of the scarlet ‘A’ as a badge of shame. Rather, with such defiance in encountering the multitude, the badge turns to be an emblem of courage. This is a foreboding note which will be substantiated with another one in the course of events

One of the women in the crowd noticed the purpose of such embroidery: “Why, gossips,” she says “what is it but to laugh in the faces of our godly magistrate and a pride out of what they, worthy gentlemen, meant for a punishment.” (*TSL*, p. 44) The Puritans, “amongst whom religion and law were almost identical” (*TSL*, p. 41) are presented as cruel people, their rigidity is depicted in the conversation between women, being of the same sex with the prisoner, yet, their cruelty is intensified.

Hester's sin is that of passion which is in accordance with her reckless and passionate nature. Hawthorne compares her in her plight to the "Divine Maternity" to intensify her tribulation. She is asked by Minister Dimmesdale to reveal her seducer's name but in vain. Her refusal to uncover his identity tells how much she loves him and her readiness to sacrifice everything for him. After finishing her stigmatic demonstration on the platform, Hester is found to be in a nervous state which demands immediate medical intervention, lest she commit suicide or hurt her infant. Ironically, the physician summoned is her incognito husband, who refused to uncover his real identity. The conversation between the two reveals important reasons behind Hester's sin.

The marriage between them was unequal. He is an old misshapen man, devoted most of his life to cultivate his mental faculties. While she is a lively youth, full of energy and emotions. Apparently, he is not qualified to satisfy her passionate nature. Chillingworth is aware of the wrong done to Hester due to their marriage; he says: "I,—a man of thought,—the book-worm of great libraries,—a man already in decay, having given my best years to feed the hungry dream of knowledge,—what had I to do with youth and beauty like thine own!" (*TSL*, p. 59) Such confession gives new dimension to the whole situation which in turn arouses questions: has Hester sinned alone? Is she the sole blamable? Or whether her husband has to stand with her on the scaffold? However, these questions are not the main concern of Hawthorne. Rather, he believes that "man seems to have a choice with respect to a particular sin."⁸ Chillingworth was not obliged to marry Hester, but since a sin is committed, the retribution is inescapable. Chillingworth is aware of this fact; he says "Nay, from the moment when we came down the

old church-steps together, a married pair, I might have beheld the bale-fire of that scarlet letter blazing at the end of our path!” (*TSL*, p.60)

So far, because the revelation of her sin is corollary due to her pregnancy, Hester Prynne can be seen as a scapegoat who is, unwillingly, bearing her role, concealing her partner’s name out of love, and her husband’s out of fear.

After finishing her trial, Hester has been exiled from society like a plagued person. With the scarlet letter on her bosom, Hester felt completely estranged from the people around her. The letter “had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and inclosing her in a sphere by herself.” (*TSL*, p.44) Thus in all her communication with her fellow citizens, nothing made her feel that she belongs to them. Every word and gesture remind her of her punishment and hence strengthen it.

She becomes a living sermon against sin. Pearl, Hester’s outcome of her sin, is also a source of retribution. Watching her wild, elfish demeanor, the mother is reminded of her nature, which Pearl incarnates. Hawthorne says

The child could not be made amenable to rules. In giving her existence, a great law had been broken; and the result was a being, whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder; or with an order peculiar to themselves, amidst which the point of variety and arrangement was difficult or impossible to be discovered. (*TSL*, p. 72)

Pearl is the organic embodiment of the scarlet letter. Her mother, for “morbid purpose that may be better understood hereafter” (*TSL*, p. 71) dressed her a red tunic which reminds the viewer of Hester’s scarlet letter. This is the second foreboding note. The morbid purpose is her shunning

from the purpose of the letter. It was meant as a punishment and a living warning for the future; however, Hester only used that same letter to be a sign of her rebellion and nonconformity to the rules of her society. Her hatred to that society has been repressed deep in her heart and never revealed in words or deeds.

After seven years of social banishment and punishment, Hester emerges again as a new character. Her hair which stands for her passion and feelings and which was “luxuriant” and “abundant” when on the scaffold now seems as if has lost its bright color,

not a shining lock of it ever once gushed into the sunshine. .. there seemed to be no longer any thing in Hester’s face for Love to dwell upon; nothing in Hester’s form, though majestic and statue-like, that Passion would ever dream of clasping in its embrace; nothing in Hester’s bosom, to make it ever again the pillow of Affection. Some attribute had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman. ..If she be all tenderness, she will die. If she survive, the tenderness will either be crushed out of her, or—and the outward semblance is the same—crushed so deeply into her heart that it can never show itself more. The latter is perhaps the truest theory. She who has once been woman, and ceased to be so, might at any moment become a woman again, if there were only the magic touch to effect the transfiguration. We shall see whether Hester Prynne were ever afterwards so touched, and so transfigured. (TSL, p.128)

Hester’s old passion is imprisoned but never tamed. Her mind, though raised to equate her heart, has never worked systematically. Her sin has a warping effect. Hawthorne states “Hester Prynne, whose heart had lost its regular and healthy throb, wandered without a clue in the dark labyrinth of mind.” (TSL, p.130) Consequently, this “tenderness” has been crushed deeply inside her

heart, and it is a matter of time before the transfiguration happens again. The magic touch that would effect this transfiguration is Dimmesdale's deteriorating health and the meeting that occurs on the scaffold while he was practicing his secret penitence.

Considering Hester's predicament, one notices that she expressed no contriteness, simply because she never believed that her adulterous act is a sin. Hester considers her sin as a natural response to a compulsive desire of her passionate nature. Thus, the penalty of the community, to Hester's viewpoint, was an inhuman crime against her. Her submissiveness to the demands of the community was not out of conviction of a misdeed done by her, but out of helplessness. Though the community convicted her, God gave her Pearl, "God, as a direct consequence of the sin which man thus punished, had given her a lovely child...to connect her parent for ever with the race and descent of mortals" (*TSL*, p.71), which means that God can be kind with his sinners whom the people abhor. As a result, and in a defiant manner, Hester decides to meet Dimmesdale to reveal her husband's character and to plan to leave Boston.

Hester accompanied with Pearl are heading to the forest where she intends to meet the reverend Mr. Dimmesdale. The forest seems to Hester's mind like "the moral wilderness in which she had so long been wandering" (*TSL*, p.143). The forest for Hawthorne represents the "ambiguous setting of moral choice...[it] was the pivot in Hawthorne's grand recurring pattern of escape and return."⁹ In this meeting, Hester confesses her true attitude toward her sin, "What we did" she tells Dimmesdale, "had a consecration of its own. We felt it so! We said so to each other." (*TSL*, p.152)

Actually, though the scarlet letter is Hester's teacher, it has taught her amiss, "Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers, -- stern and wild ones, -- and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss." (*TSL*, p.155) In this light, the forest where the two sinners meet along with their fruit resembles the untamed nature of Hester herself. Again, Hawthorne brings us back to her hair:

she took off the formal cap that confined her hair; and down it fell upon her shoulders, dark and rich, with at once a shadow and a light in its abundance, and imparting the charm of softness to her features. There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood. .. All at once, as with a sudden smile of heaven, forth burst the sunshine, pouring a very flood into the obscure forest, gladdening each green leaf, transmuting the yellow fallen ones to gold (*TSL*, p.158)

Her suppressed nature has been revived, and evil has crept back to her heart. She has unshackled her passion the moment she took off the cap out of her head. Hester's previous sin is a sin of passion not principle, nor even purpose, but the forthcoming is a sin of purpose. Her plan to elope with Dimmesdale is a premeditated act that proves "The scarlet letter had not done its office." (*TSL*, p.130) However, her elopement scheme is the act Hawthorne will never let happen. Leslie A. Fiedler says "Hawthorne cannot grant these lovers even the mitigated bliss...for between them lies the taboo of adultery, as real to him as to his ancestors."¹⁰

Hester's intention behind her scheme is not only to find a better life where she can lead a happy life with her lover. The overall result will be the hard lesson she will be teaching to the community through Dimmesdale. She knows how reverend and loved the minister is by his people. She also knows

that such discovery will be devastating in terms of their religious faith and judicial system. It was a way to avenge herself on the society which persecuted her and treated her badly when she was a lonely woman.

I.II.II Dimmesdale's Remorse & Chillingworth's Vindictive Spirit

The first appearance of the two characters is on the scene of Hester's punishment upon the scaffold. Both of them have a mutual relationship with Hester. In concealing their real identities, Dimmesdale as Hester's lover and Chillingworth as her husband, the two have devoted themselves for their private quests: the former for his salvation and the latter for his revenge.

In living a lie of a hidden sin, the minister entangles himself with an ordeal of ever active remorse and agony. Additionally, false pride and hypocrisy begotten from people's respect and reverence as a pious man will devastate him to the verge of death.

While Hester is on the scaffold, Dimmesdale, who is introduced as one of the judges, urges her to reveal her lover's name. His speech illustrates his state

Be not silent from any mistaken pity and tenderness for him; for, believe me, Hester, though he were to step down from a high place, and stand there beside thee, on thy pedestal of shame, yet better were it so, than to hide a guilty heart through life. What can thy silence do for him, except it tempt him— yea, compel him, as it were—to add hypocrisy to sin? Heaven hath granted thee an open ignominy, that thereby thou mayest work out an open triumph over the evil within thee, and the sorrow without. (*TSL*, p. 54)

The minister knows that he cannot live with a hidden truth gnaws at his heart. He also knows, as the quotation shows that he almost envies her, that his redemption rests in his confession; yet he holds back. Confessing a sin

needs a real courage which the minister lacks. He may have wished Hester to tell the truth, thus doing him a favour. The respiration he takes after Hester's refusal to name her lover might be an indication of his heavy conscience.

The advent of the physician, Roger Chillingworth, to the city has been interpreted as being Providential. The people thought that the merciful act of God has prompted the leech to come to their city to cure their dear minister who is now suffering a state of health deterioration. Chillingworth has now established himself as a skillful leech who has a religious inclinations. The word leech, besides its meaning as a doctor, also denotes his preternatural side as a blood sucker. He will gradually drain Dimmesdale of life. His failing health is ascribed to his sheer religious devotion accompanied by long fasts and vigils. Meantime, the minister has gained a high religious position among people. They even declare "if Mr. Dimmesdale were really going to die, it was cause enough, that the world was not worthy to be any longer trodden by his feet" (*TSL*, p. 94) Thus his friends deem it very important to put the minister under the medical care of Roger Chillingworth to know his ailment.

Chillingworth is a man of intellect who is not only interested in the physical ailment of his patient but also in his personality. Noticing that the physical frame suffers no disease, the leech strives "to go deep into his patient's bosom, delving among his principles, prying into his recollections, and probing every thing with a cautious touch, like a treasure-seeker in a dark cavern." (*TSL*, p. 97) Failing to diagnose Dimmesdale's idiopathy, Chillingworth decides to live together under the same roof. The physician has released his malignant spirit to feed upon the minister's heart, to dig

“into the poor clergyman’s heart, like a miner searching for gold; or, rather, like a sexton delving into a grave, possibly in quest of a jewel that had been buried on the dead man’s bosom, but likely to find nothing save mortality and corruption.” (*TSL*, p. 102) In doing so, Chillingworth is violating the sanctity of the human heart, which Hawthorne esteems so high. Consequently, Chillingworth is the unpardonable sinner whose sin violently breaks Hawthorne’s code of morality, and so groups the physician with those doomed to fail and suffer the severest retribution.

As the minister’s health starts to degrade from bad to worse, the people of the town cease to consider Chillingworth a heavenly sent doctor. Rather, suspicion starts to arise around him. People start to notice inimical features on his face. They also remark that the poor minister is in a state of conflict between good and evil and the result is unpredictable.

Dimmesdale’s concealment of his sin doesn’t grant him an escape from its adverse consequences; on the contrary, it has intensified its effect. To escape the effect of a sin is either to endure it or to repress it deep inside the heart. Being a sensitive man, Dimmesdale is capable of neither. A further result to the concealment of the sin, he adds to his remorse false pride and hypocrisy. Finding his secret an increasing burden, Dimmesdale, from his pulpit, tells his parish that he is worst of the sinners. However, this confession is interpreted by the people as humiliation which but aggravates his situation and increases his suffering. He exercises different kinds of penance as self-punishments like extended fasts, night-long vigils, and even bloody scourging. However, these acts only inflict harm on his flesh while his tainted soul remains not purged.

One night he goes to the scaffold resolving to reveal his sin. It is the same scaffold where he should have stood along with Hester several years ago. Psychologically speaking, this can be interpreted as nemesis, or self-retribution. The minister knows that leaving Hester to stand alone on the scaffold was an act of cowardice and selfishness. Thus he intends to punish himself similarly. However, he can only go there at night, where no one can see him.

While he is there, he perchance meets Hester and Pearl on their way back home from a funeral. He calls them up and the three stand hand in hand making a human chain, so strong and yet so fragile. It would have been strong had the bond been blessed with Gods words. Failing to meet this condition, it has been rendered to be the weakest chain. Its fragility is manifested and assured by the appearance of Chillingworth at that same moment, which ended the momentarily relief that flooded Dimmesdale's heart. Dimmesdale is now growing antipathetic feelings toward Chillingworth. He asks Hester to protect him from the physician. Pearl asks him if he can walk with her and her mother at noontime. Upon his refusal, she says ““Thou wast not bold!—thou wast not true!” (TSL, p. 123). This is the predicament of the minister.

The minister's real suffering is not external, but obviously internal. His agony springs up from what he wants to be and he really is. He wants to be true, “he loved the truth, and loathed the lie” (TSL, p. 114), but his knowledge that he cannot be true for he is not courageous enough, makes him loath himself. F. C. Crews shows that Dimmesdale's agony is not simply caused by his refusal to admit his paternity publicly but by his refusal

to admit to himself that his own libidinous wishes rather than Satan are responsible for his sin.¹¹

Hester, astonished to see the miserable condition Dimmesdale is living, resolves to tell him the truth about Chillingworth. So in their meeting in the forest Hester reveals the secret and breaks the oath she took for Chillingworth. Near the shore, Hester meets Chillingworth and becomes astonished to the terrifying transformation he has undergone. Hawthorne sums up the change:

In a word, old Roger Chillingworth was a striking evidence of man's faculty of transforming himself into a devil, if he will only, for a reasonable space of time, undertake a devil's office. This unhappy person had effected such a transformation by devoting himself, for seven years, to the constant analysis of a heart full of torture, and deriving his enjoyment thence, and adding fuel to those fiery tortures which he analyzed and gloated over. (*TSL*, p. 133)

Like Ethan Brand, Chillingworth devoted seven years of his life for a single purpose, i.e. delving into the poor minister's heart. He is the perfect unpardonable sinner for he has "violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart" (*TSL*, p. 152), says Dimmesdale. To which he adds that he and Hester never did so and thus can be forgiven by God.

Hester's plan to elope with Dimmesdale is not of any help to the latter. Unlike Hester, Dimmesdale believes that what he did with Hester is a violation to a divine law. His real problem is not the torture inflicted by Chillingworth, for which elopement would be the best solution, but it is his sense of remorse for his guilt. According to Hawthorne, the consequences of sin are not bound by a certain place and/or time. These are as lively and freshly felt as anywhere and anytime. The plan suits Hester more for she

never believed that she committed a sin. It is her community who sinned against her, and thus must be punished for that.

On the proposed day, Dimmesdale prepares himself for the last sermon he is going to give before he flees with Hester. He engages the hearts and the minds of the audience with his eloquent and heavenly speech. Upon finishing, Dimmesdale is resolved to confess his sin now. At this moment Chillingworth intervenes to hold him back, but the minister replies:

“Ha, tempter! Methinks thou art too late!” answered the minister, encountering his eye, fearfully, but firmly. “Thy power is not what it was! With God’s help, I shall escape thee now!” (*TSL*, p. 196)

The three characters proceed toward the scaffold, holding Hester’s and Pearl’s hands. In confessing his sin in front of people, Dimmesdale becomes ‘bold’ and ‘true’, just like Pearl wanted him to be. She kisses him, and the tears gush from her eyes. Now she is transformed from an elf-like creature into a real human being whose father and mother are known. Soon after Dimmesdale’s death on the scaffold, Chillingworth’s energy withers away and he dies also. Hawthorne says

Nothing was more remarkable than the change which took place, almost immediately after Mr. Dimmesdale’s death, in the appearance and demeanour of the old man known as Roger Chillingworth. All his strength and energy—all his vital and intellectual force—seemed at once to desert him; insomuch that he positively withered up, shriveled away, and almost vanished from mortal sight, like an uprooted weed that lies wilting in the sun. This unhappy man had made the very principle of his life to consist in the pursuit and systematic exercise of revenge; and when, by its completest triumph and consummation, that evil principle was left with no further material to support it,—when, in short, there was no more devil’s work on earth for him to do, it only remained for the unhumanized mortal to betake himself whither his

Master would find him tasks enough, and pay him his wages duly.(
TSL, p. 201)

Dimmesdale's confession is not simple as Hester's. The minister has become a religious ideal in the eyes of his fellow citizen. In such a society where religion makes a crucial aspect of its life, the minister's case will make the people question again their fundamentals. He will be a living memory of an evidence of no matter how pious a man may want/seem to be, sin is as inevitable as the triangle of Utopia, prison, and grave mentioned in the first chapter. The Puritan community is given its retributive justice through the minister's growing image of a man of strict moral standards, a man fits to be an ideal Puritan citizen, a perfect worshiper and the most God-fearing minister, into its final phase in which this holy image comes into pieces with the truth being revealed.

Hawthorne's last moral message is to be true to oneself and to others: "Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!" (*TSL*, p. 201)

Notes

¹ George Dekker, *The American Historical Romance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 128.

² Quoted in Sarah Bird Wright, *Critical Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne*, New York: Facts on File Inc., 2007. p. 4.

³ Joseph Schwartz, "Puritanism" in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Scarlet Letter*, ed. J.G. Gerber (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968), p 37.

- ⁴ John C. Gerber, "Introduction", in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Scarlet Letter*, p. 1.
- ⁵ Henceforth, all quotations from the text will be based on Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, Oxford: OUP, 2007.
- ⁶ Donald A. Ringe, "Hawthorne's Psychology of the Head and the Heart", in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Scarlet Letter*, p. 68
- ⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Twice Told Tales*, (New York: A Washington Square press, 1962) p. 420.
- ⁸ John C. Gerber, "Introduction", in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Scarlet Letter*, p. 11.
- ⁹ R. W. B. Lewis, "The Return into Time: Hawthorne" in *Hawthorne: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. A. N. Kaul (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966) p. 72.
- ¹⁰ Leslie A. Fiedler, "Redemption Through Denial, in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Scarlet Letter*, p. 113
- ¹¹ Frederick C. Crews, "The Ruined Wall: Unconscious Motivation in *The Scarlet Letter*", *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Sep., 1965), pp. 312-330.

المستخلص

يهدف هذا البحث الى تحليل نقدي لفكرة العدالة الجزائية لدى الكاتب الأمريكي ناثانيل هوثورن والمتمثلة في روايته **الحرف القرمزي** . لقد اختار كاتبنا المجتمع البيوريتاني التطهوري ليكون مسرح لأحداث روايته ذات الطابع النفسي الاجتماعي. حيث غالبا ما يواجه المخطئون إذلالا و إقصاء على يد أفراد مجتمعهم. لذلك نرى أنهم عوضا عن إظهار التعاطف و التفهم مع هيبستر براين بطل الرواية بعد وقوعها في الخطيئة كانوا غير متسامحين. وعلى خلاف ذلك

نرى ان هوثورن ورغم انحداره من عائلة بيوريتانية يظهر تعاطفا مع بطلته إلا إن هذا التعاطف لا يعني انه يمنحها الإذن بالهروب مع شريكها في الخطيئة، المحترم أرثر ديمزدل. و مرد ذلك إعتقاد هوثورن ان الخطيئة أمر واقع ينبغي مواجهته لا الهروب منه، وان تبعاتها مثل الإبعاد عن المجتمع والندم والإحباط تعد نتائج حتمية. و يعتقد ان أنجع علاج لهذه التبعات هو الاعتراف بالخطيئة لما في ذلك من مزايا في تخفيف وطأة الخطيئة.

ينقسم البحث الى قسمين، يناقش الاول الضوابط الاخلاقية وفكرة الخطيئة والجزء لى هوثورن. اما الثاني فينقسم الى قسمين. يضم الاول تحليلا لحالة هيوستر بعد ارتكابها الخطيئة، ويناقش الثاني خطيئة كل من ديمزدل وزوج هيوستر روجر جيلنغورث حيث يسكنان معا. ويبين القسم الثاني كيف ان ديمزدل الذي يمنعه جنبه من الاعتراف بذنبه قد وقع فريسة الندم المرير وان جيلنغورث الذي ينتهك حرمة قلب ديمزدل قد مسخ و لعن في سعيه الى الانتقام.

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