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Resistance through Entrepreneurship: A Rereading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*

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Abstract

In the Puritan setting of early America an act of adultery, one of the seven deadly sins, takes place with much shocking to the society and the religious authority. Between a married woman named Hester Prynne and a religious figure with influential personality called Arthur Dimmesdale there develops an illicit relation in the outskirts of the society. As an outcome of the sin Hester becomes pregnant and gives birth to a daughter which proves that in the extreme rigidity of the practice of Puritanism such an act of sin can take place which questions the validity of the religion. In the process of the trial scene, she vows not to reveal the name of her secret partner and decides to shoulder the punishment alone in a dramatic process of interrogation by the same man. Finally, Hester is given a 'compromised' punishment to carry an alphabet 'A' around her neck meaning adulteress. Just after the moment Hester's new struggle of life for survival has started defying the religion, the society and the male authority. As a single mother of a daughter, she practices her skill of embroidery that results into an eventual attempt of entrepreneurship. With a bespoke performance through the needlework skill Hester's actions are louder than her voice as women in the Puritan society are always voiceless with a binary (man/woman) interpretation where the second (woman) is deemed as inferior while the first (man) is superior. Drawing on the theories of entrepreneurship, identity, and the third space, this paper analyzes how Hester has resisted her position as a woman, a mother figure and a beloved and negotiated her evolving identities through the successful attempt of entrepreneurship, the impact of the Puritan punishment, and the ultimate transformation that shapes her new sense of the self.

Keywords: Puritan society, Identity, Resistance, Male dominated society, Sin and punishment, Entrepreneurship.

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Introduction

Nathaniel Hawthorne's novella *The Scarlet Letter* presents before the readers a question about the validity of religion in relation to sin in the early Puritan society in New England. These Puritans are “the founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project” (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 36) who have migrated from England to the Netherlands and finally to New England because of religious persecutions. Immediate after their settlement they have chosen “to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison” (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 36). Thus, their aim to perform religion and establish Puritanism socially is revealed here. Hawthorne has chosen the idea of a sin named adultery, a sin that involves the capital punishment if it is proved, according to the Puritan belief. The omniscient narrator has recorded in the chapter "The Prison Door"—"It may serve, let us hope, to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 37). Here the phrase ‘a tale of human frailty and sorrow’ refers to the committing of sin by Hester and Dimmesdale and their sufferings as an outcome of the sin as well as a delineation of Freudic idea of suppressed desire. But the narrator reminds us the fact that the Puritans possess a very negative attitude towards women considering the idea of the Original Sin and refers to “the sainted Anne Hutchinson” (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 37) who has been banished from Massachusetts for her attempt to do preaching against the law of Puritanism. In this land of Puritan extremity Hawthorne’s employment of a woman sinner in his novella is an outstanding attempt to show some human innate ideas. To our surprise the woman is the wife of an intellectual and as well as a doctor of high repute. Therefore, their marriage has failed to keep the sanctity of the heavenly bond. Here in the novel, the male representative of the sin is a young and unmarried minister of the church, a man of high sense of religiosity, who is with “a miracle of holiness” (Hawthorne, p. 94). Through the act of a sin the sinners have got a new identity of themselves of which they remain unaware. With this new identity through sin their struggle of life takes a new turn both individually and socially.

Research Methodology

The study employed here is a qualitative research methodology, which allows for a close reading, an in-depth exploration and analysis of the themes and issues encapsulated in the book, as well as a deeper understanding of the perspectives of the author.

Result and Discussion

Hester and Punishment

In the power nexus of the Puritan society women were considered inferior to men. In Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* the author puts Hester in the center as far as her role is concerned. On the other hand, the two male characters Roger and Arthur are presented in a way in the periphery and so Hester is the Subject and the men are the Other. Thus, when Hester flourishes as the central character, the other two male characters also develop. Therefore, Hawthorne redefines the Other in the sexual politics. In this perspective, Simon de Beauvoir's rejection of the psychoanalytic definition of the Other in the chapter, "The Psychoanalytic Point of View" of her book *The Second Sex* can be taken for consideration. To define 'woman' according to the traditional paradigm of power between a man and a woman, Beauvoir says in the Introduction of her book, "She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 16). In the novel Hawthorne puts Hester in the seat of the essential Subject or the One and both the male characters are put as the inessential Object or the Other by changing the position. Focusing on the reciprocity and relativity between man and woman, Beauvoir raises the question, "Why is it that women do not dispute male sovereignty?" (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 18) This question is convincingly answered by Hawthorne through the portrayal of Hester as Hester has made the choice between Roger and Arthur as her sexual partner. Thus, Hester is the Subject who has, as a human being, all the capacity to take up the position of the Subject.

The chapter entitled "The Market-Place" portrays the cruel reactions of women of different ages in the Boston society against Hester. To them Hester's committing the sin of adultery is an act of shame to their gender identity and they cannot accept it anyhow. Perhaps, this is the first time that they have become very much conscious about their own gender and identity and so, in this context, Hester plays the role of an eye-opener. In their criticism about the sin and punishment for Hester it is noticed that these women not only have prescribed a special punishment for Hester but also a strong sense of dissatisfaction about the role of the magistrates. The even have not hesitated to curse the magistrates. The comment goes, "At the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 39). This statement is followed by another cruel remark when another female cries out saying, "This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die. Is there not law for it? Truly there is, both in the Scripture and the statute-book. Then let the magistrates, who have made it of no effect,

thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray!" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 39) Actually, Hester's personality is shaped and reshaped continuously when she has to deal with the Puritan authority after her committing sin. She knows it very well that she will have to undergo a cruel punishment and she is mentally prepared. The chapter "The Recognition" focuses,

The penalty therefore is death. But in their great mercy and tenderness of heart, they have doomed Mistress Prynne to stand only a space of three hours on the platform of the pillory, and then and thereafter, for the remainder of her natural life, to wear a mark of shame upon her bosom (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 46).

Thus, Hester is given a life-long punishment to be recognized as a "living sermon against sin" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 46) by the Bostonian Puritan people.

The set-up of the Puritan society is, all in all, a male dominated society where a woman faces gender-oriented racism. Racism, as defined by Audre Lorde in "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference", is "the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over the others and thereby the right to dominate" (Lorde, 2004, p. 855). Hester, in her society which is characterized by inequality, is trapped in traumatic condition where the dominant class, that is the male gender spreads its ideology of superiority even in giving her punishment publicly.

Hester's Resistance as an Entrepreneur and Her attempt of Entrepreneurship

According to Oxford English Reference Dictionary, an entrepreneur is a person who undertakes an enterprise or business, with the chance of profit or loss. In order to contextualize the definition, we need to understand and analyze how Hester turns out to be an entrepreneur in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

Hester is, under the extreme course of punishment in the chapter "The Market-Place", presented before the readers with a new identity apart from being a mere sinner. She appears before all as a woman with ingenuity when we focus on the artistic transformation of the alphabet "A". It is important to note that the Puritan male dominated authority has imposed upon her a punishment of carrying an alphabet "A" denoting the act of adultery or adulteress. According to the narrator,

On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration in the apparel which she wore;

and which was of a splendor in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 40).

Therefore, Hester has transformed herself as an entrepreneur to give a new meaning to the letter A. In the book *Entrepreneurship* by Robert D. Hisrich and Michael P. Peters an entrepreneur is an 'innovator' (p. 9), and 'an individual developing something unique' (p. 9). The authors further illustrate:

The function of the entrepreneur is to reform or revolutionize the pattern of production by exploiting an invention or, more generally, a united technological method of producing a new commodity or producing an old one in a new way, opening a new source of supply of materials or a new outlet for products, by organizing a new industry (Hisrich & Peters, 2002, p. 9).

In this definition it is vivid to us that the idea of innovation and newness is an inalienable part of entrepreneurship. Truly, innovation, the act of introducing something new, is one of the most difficult tasks for the entrepreneur. As an entrepreneur one needs to have the ability to create and conceptualize and understand all the forces at work in the environment and Hester does that. Again, entrepreneurial behavior is a key component in defining the term 'entrepreneurship'. According to the book *Entrepreneurship*:

Entrepreneurship is the process of creating something new with value by devoting the necessary time and effort, assuming the accompanying financial, psychic, and social risks, and receiving the resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction and independence (Hisrich & Peters, 2002, p. 10).

In another book titled *Entrepreneurship* by David H. Holt the definition of entrepreneurship is as follows:

Entrepreneurship is the dynamic process of creating incremental wealth. This wealth is created by individuals who assume the major risks in terms of equity, time, and/or career commitment of providing value for some product or service. The product or service itself may or may not be new or unique but value must somehow be infused by the entrepreneur by securing and allocating the necessary skills and resources (Holt, 1992, p. 7).

In the life of Puritan women, needlework is not uncommon and Hester has the same ability but what makes her different from others is her capacity to transform an ordinary needlework into an extraordinary one which is highly appreciated and endorsed

by the same womenfolk who, on knowing Hester's committing sin, have unleashed a series of cruel remarks and have suggested for a far more befitting punishment for the sin than mere carrying an alphabet "A" around her neck. Thus, it is very evident here that as an entrepreneur Hester has revolutionized the art of embroidery work being in a hostile, unfavorable environment and she is successful to produce a new class of product that triggers the aesthetic values of the Puritan women in particular to have her products. Furthermore, Hester's entrepreneurship is proven with a success at a larger scale but very gradually because her psychic condition and the atmosphere of the work environment are not congenial enough to work in her favor. Nevertheless, her devotion to the work, employment of skills and resources have added to the value of the work remarkably. She had, actually, no other way but to do so for herself and her daughter Pearl as far as their existence or survival matters. Now, Hester is in a new world, newer than New England which is unlike for other Puritans who historically have migrated from their mother country England. Hester's existential crisis has a link in her failure in conjugal life with her husband Roger Chillingworth and an illicit relationship with the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. Also, she has received a double punishment — one physical and visible while the other psychological and invisible. For the visible punishment she has to carry the alphabet "A" and for the psychological she is in an exile to be out the of the town to live near the sea in the lap of nature so that she cannot have any communication with the common people. But despite the punishment she stands out as a fighting spirit with her extraordinary mind through which she has dismantled not only the male dominated authority but, to our surprise, also made the same authority, in a way, dependent on her through her skill of embroidery because in the later development of the plot of the novella the executioners of Hester's trial and its subsequent punishment are seen ordering embroidered products of daily use to her. Therefore, the heroine Hester Prynne, who suffers from an existential crisis has been successful to establish her identity in that hostile society.

For an entrepreneur "creating something new with value" (Hisrich & Peters, 2002, p. 10) is a must and Hester has done so very successfully. To quote the idea,

But the point which drew all eyes, and, as it were, transfigured the wearer,—so that both men and women, who had been familiarly acquainted with Hester Prynne, were now impressed as if they beheld her for the first time,—was that SCARLET LETTER, so fantastically embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom. It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 41).

With her high class of creativity this lady has received an immediate recognition that allows her to resist her position as a sinful woman and as a mother figure in a hostile environment of the Puritan society. In the following lines we will discover an ironical position of the womenfolk of the Puritan society— “She hath good skill at her needle, that's certain,” remarked one of her female spectators;” (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 41) and it implies the idea that despite Hester's committing sin she is recognized as a woman of good skill in embroidery work. Therefore, she speaks out what she is through her skill but not with the voice because in the Puritan society there is no room for women to voice their choice. With this tone of recognition, a woman of the Puritan society has urged all to allow Hester to be visible to all. To quote, “Open a passage; and, I.....! Come along, Madame Hester, and show your scarlet letter in the market-place!” (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 41) What the woman has not realized is that she unknowingly has given Hester a great opportunity to exhibit her work though the real aim is to present before the audience the shameful fate of a sinner. The woman does not know that Hester is not a typical common Puritan woman who, for her sin, will feel helpless enough to survive. Contrarily, Hester has got an opportunity to exhibit her innate quality of embroidery skill which she has applied in making the alphabet “A” more visible and attractive. In this turmoil moment of her life how she is to the common Bostonians is needed to address. To the narrator— “When the young woman—the mother of the child—stood fully revealed before the crowd..... with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile..... Neighbors” (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 40). Here the phrase ‘haughty smile’ suggests the rejection of the so-called trial arranged by the male dominated Puritan society. Her smile is too an expression of protest which connotes her rebellious mind as well as to establish her identity in the new context of her social denomination.

Hester’s Resistance as a Woman

The introduction of Hester by the narrator is somewhat eye-catching. In the chapter “The Market-Place” Hester is narrated as a tall young woman “with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale” (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 40). She has “dark and abundant hair” (p. 40) that can outshine the sunshine. With her “richness of complexion” (p. 40) and “the feminine gentility of those days” (p. 40) she has the capacity to draw the attention of anyone. Besides this physical appearance of Hester, the narrator equally focuses on the dress of Hester that speaks out her personality. To quote, “Her attire, which, indeed she had wrought for the occasion, in prison, and had modelled much after her own fancy, seemed to express the attitude of her spirit, the desperate recklessness of her mood, by its wild and picturesque peculiarity” (p. 40,41). Thus, we can interpret

Hester as a woman of boldness in her total exposure that has a message to the Puritan Bostonian community. She is not at all a woman of humbleness and surrendering mentality when she is aware of her rights and position that she holds and she is always ready to fight for that under any circumstances. The entity of Puritan authority has not been ready to face such a woman of uncommon boldness that Hester unfolds before all. Rather, the long-time practice of male superiority supported by Puritanism is challenged in an unprecedented manner by Hester through her uncompromising attitude. In the chapter "The Recognition" in the scaffold scene Hester is in interrogation about her secret partner and ironically the interrogation process is carried out by the same man named the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale, the most popular minister of all. The entire crowd, Governor Bellingham and the Reverend Mr. Wilson all are very much confident and ready to know the identity of Hester's secret partner and thus, the idea of justice to punish both the sinners will be established. To everyone's utter shock Hester denies to pronounce the name. To quote, "Hester shook her head" (p. 49). This modest act of denial is replied very angrily by the Puritan authority. According to the narrator, "Woman, transgress not beyond the limits of Heaven's Mercy!" cried the Reverend Mr. Wilson, more harshly than before" (p. 49). Then he continues, "Speak out the name! That, and thy repentance, may avail to take the scarlet letter off thy breast" (p. 49).

This time Hester responds to the authority far more shockingly and in her supreme sense of audacity with an emphatic tone of resistance she courageously pronounces "Never" (p. 49). This reply of a single word very meaningfully implies that she will not reveal her secret partner's name nor will she throw away the shameful token of the punishment. Very boldly she further says, "It is too deeply branded. Ye cannot take it off. And would that I might endure his agony, as well as mine!" (p. 49) Thus, before all, Hester reveals her strong sense of resistance concerning her love for Dimmesdale and the new identity through the token of punishment around her neck. Truly, this is not what the Puritan society is ready for because the male superiority is shaken terribly, for the first time ever, by a woman of sin named Hester.

At this moment of trial scene, another male voice in disguise from the crowd addresses the attention of Hester. He says, "Speak woman!" (p. 50) This voice goes on saying, "Speak; and give your child a father!" (p. 50) Hester says, "I will not speak!" (p. 50) To our surprise, this voice is the voice of Hester's husband Roger Chillingworth who has no connection with his wife for nearly two years. Hester has recognized this 'stranger' in the crowd despite his "a seemingly careless arrangement of his heterogeneous garb" (p. 44). Then she further speaks out with enormous confidence

saying, "And my child must seek a heavenly Father; she shall never know an earthly one!" (p. 50) This reply allows Dimmesdale to conclude the trial scene when he says, "Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman's heart! She will not speak!" (p. 50)

Therefore, here it is established about Hester that she is a woman of unparalleled 'strength' and she has successfully resisted her right to love for her secret partner as well as the identity of her daughter regarding its fatherhood and specifically as a mother figure. So, her sense of womanhood and motherhood is resisted and she herself is unique who stands out from the threshold of subjugated, unrepresented, and unvoiced Puritan women.

Hester's Resistance as a Mother

After returning to the prison in the chapter "The Interview" Hester is found to suffer from "a state of nervous excitement" (p. 50) and is provided with a doctor by the jailer so that nothing wrong can happen to her. It is true that the humiliation she receives in the trial is intolerable and she can do anything either to herself or to the baby and from this thought the jailer is very cautious to ensure a proper treatment for her well-being. According to the jailer, the doctor is "a man of skill in all Christian modes of physical science" (p. 50) who has also the knowledge of "medicinal herbs and roots" (p. 50). This doctor is, to our surprise, Hester's husband Roger Chillingworth who is thought to be dead by all. The narrator says that Roger is supposed to join Hester by the next ship after completing some important tasks but he cannot as he, after a shipwreck across the Atlantic, survives luckily and remains imprisoned in the hands of the Red Indians and later he gets freedom as he has been able to cure one of the chiefs of the savages. In his stint with the savage Red Indians, he enriches himself with the knowledge of herbs and thus he is a doubly qualified doctor. But psychologically Hester is not ready to welcome and accept Roger in any way because she loves only Arthur, the young minister. Moreover, we have seen how Roger, in disguise in the crowd of the market, behaves with Hester. The prison house meeting clarifies the nature of relationship between Hester and Roger as a married couple. To the readers they are, outwardly, exhibiting the doctor-patient relationship but, inwardly, they are husband and wife which is revealed in their conversation. When Hester is offered medicine as a part of treatment she says to Roger, "Wouldst thou avenge thyself on the innocent babe?" (p. 51) This question projects Hester's motherly concern and she resists her motherhood as she cares for the safety of the baby and she no longer trusts Roger whose reaction towards her motherhood in the chapter "The Market-Place" is revealed negatively.

Hester's motherhood is put into another threat in the chapter "The Elf-Child and the Minister" by the Puritan authority which thinks it not wise enough to allow her to grow up the child in her custody for she is an adulteress and her guidance will be "of one who hath stumbled and fallen, amid the pitfalls of this world." (p. 75) Even the authority questions about the mother's teaching to the child and Hester replies saying, "I can teach my little Pearl what I have learned from this!" (p. 75) Here 'this' refers to the alphabet A which is a 'badge of shame' to the authority. Hester further elongates her arguments in favor of possessing the child when she says, "this badge hath taught me,—it daily teaches me,—it is teaching me at this moment,—lessons whereof my child may be the wiser and better, albeit they can profit nothing to myself." (p. 75) At this point of Hester's motherly resistance for her rights to the child the Puritan authority questions the child to know her knowledge in Christianity. Finding the answers of the child shocking and contrary to their expectation, the Puritan officials finally asks Arthur Dimmesdale to settle the matter. In this connection, we can comment that Arthur is the father of the child and he has played an important role in favor of the child and its mother. Based on her relationship with the young minister, Hester boldly addresses the attention of Arthur who ends his rhetoric argument saying, "And, moreover, is there not a quality of awful sacredness in the relation between this mother and this child?" (p. 77) Thus, Hester's motherhood is resisted through Arthur successfully and this active role of the minister opens a new dimension in their secret relationship.

Hester and the Transformation of the Meaning of the Alphabet "A"

Hester's entrepreneurship skill, a tool of her resistance against the Puritan Bostonian authority, is revealed when she is imprisoned. In the chapter "The Governor's Hall" Hester is seen going to the mansion of Governor Bellingham to deliver a pair of gloves, which she has "fringed and embroidered to his order." (p. 68) She has traded her creativity in embroidery through entrepreneurship. It is important to note that the Governor who is one of the authorities who remains vocal to punish Hester is the same person who has ordered her to provide gloves. Through this incident the double standard of the Puritan authority is revealed. Furthermore, in the chapter "Hester at Her Needle" the skill of embroidery is revealed as her imprisonment has come to an end. For Hester, life in the prison has been of one type, unseen by the common people. Now, in her life out of the prison, she has to face "a more real torture" (p. 55) in the hands of the Bostonian Puritan people A new daily struggle of life for survival is waiting for her. She will be looked down upon by every corner of the society. To the narrator Hester can go back to her birth-place or Europe to hide her "character and identity under a new

exterior” (p. 55-56) but she is determined to fight for her new identity. The narrator says, “Hester Prynne, therefore, did not flee. On the outskirts of the town, within the verge of the peninsula, but not in close vicinity to any other habitation, there was a small thatched cottage.” (p. 56) In this abandoned cottage with her small means and the child Pearl, Hester’s life restarts. With no friend on earth to help her, Hester’s sense of self-reliance allows her to have no want of anything. How it is possible is replied by the narrator- “She possessed an art that sufficed, even in a land that afforded comparatively little scope for its existence, to supply food for her thriving infant and herself.” (p. 57) Now, very purposefully, she advertises her skill of embroidery through “the curiously embroidered letter, a specimen of her delicate and imaginative skill.” (p. 57) Her handiwork does not represent completely the Puritan codes of dressmaking but still she is successful to draw the attention of the young ladies. Gradually, she receives an overwhelming response for her work from the men in power or from the common people. Her produces cover “deep ruffs, painfully wrought bands, and gorgeously embroidered gloves” (p. 57) which are considered necessary to officials in power. Extravagances or gaudiness in dress is contrary to the Puritan ideology but Hester successfully creates the demand of that. Her customer base is widening day by day when the narrator remarks,

In the array of funerals, too,—whether for the apparel of the dead body, or to typify, by manifold emblematic devices of sable cloth and snowy lawn, the sorrow of the survivors,— there was a In frequent and characteristic demand for such labor as Hester Prynne could supply. Baby-linen—for babies then wore robes of state—afforded still another possibility of toil and emolument. (p. 57)

Hester’s success story continues in this way and her handiwork “became what would now be termed the fashion.” (p. 57) For a successful entrepreneur the necessity of innovation in production of goods is a must and Hester is able to introduce a new ‘fashion’ in this hostile Puritan society and we can call her a trend setter. The new position of Hester as an artisan is extraordinarily notable. “The garments that had been wrought by her sinful hands” (p. 58) are now “seen on the ruff of the Governor; military men wore it on their scarfs and the minister on his band.” (p. 58) Her skill is also displayed on “the baby’s little cap” (p. 58) and “in coffins of the dead” (p. 58) or on the white veil of a bride.

In the chapter “Another View of Hester” the narrator focuses on Hester with a new perspective. Contrary to the previous psychological situation Hester is now turned “from passion and feeling, to thought.” (p. 107) To her “the world’s law was no law for her mind.” (p. 107) With her lonely fights against the society the narrator attributes in her

character the force by which the “men of the sword had overthrown nobles and kings.” (p. 107) Hawthorne here probably hints to the spirit of the English Civil War where the English King Charles I has been overthrown and beheaded. He also allows us to see Hester as an American edition of such revolutionaries as Oliver Cromwell. Imbibing this spirit Hester has assumed “a freedom of speculation” which is “common enough on the other side of the Atlantic.” (p. 107) To Hawthorne, Hester is changed as she “has encountered, and lived through, an experience of peculiar severity.” (p. 107) “With the faithful labor of her hands” (p. 105) she has attained her sisterhood acknowledged by the townspeople. Now Hester is at everyone’s service in any kind of assistance. To quote, “None so self-devoted as Hester, when pestilence stalked through the town. In all seasons of calamity, indeed, whether general or of individuals, the outcast of society at once found her place.” (p. 105) In any kind of emergency of the Bostonian people “Hester’s nature showed itself warm and rich; a well-spring of human tenderness, unailing to every real demand, and inexhaustible by the largest. Her breast, with its badge of shame, was but the softer pillow for the head that needed one.” (p. 105) She has now become “a Sister of Mercy” (p. 105) and so “many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification.” (p. 106) To them “it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman’s strength.” (p. 106) Thus, the common people have changed their negative attitude toward Hester to the positive attributions but the rulers of the community take much time to acknowledge Hester with her creativity and “day by day, nevertheless, their sour and rigid wrinkles were relaxing into something which, in the due course of years, might grow to be an expression of almost benevolence.” (p. 106) Hester’s impact on the common people is further endorsed,

Individuals in private life, meanwhile, had quite forgiven Hester Prynne for her frailty; nay, more, they had begun to look upon the scarlet letter as the token, not of that one sin, for which she had borne so long and dreary a penance, but of her many good deeds since. “Do you see that woman with the embroidered badge?” they would say to strangers. “It is our Hester,—the town’s own Hester,—who is so kind to the poor, so helpful to the sick, so comfortable to the afflicted! (p. 106)

In this way, the town people believe that “the scarlet letter had the effect of the cross on a nun’s bosom.” (p. 106) The effect of the scarlet letter is talismanic to an extent as “it imparted to the wearer a kind of sacredness, which enabled her to walk securely amid all peril” (p. 106) and “had she fallen among thieves, it would have kept her safe.” (p. 106) Such is the transformation Hester has showcased through her extraordinary skill of embroidery. In the chapter “A Flood of Sunshine” the narrator remarks saying, “The

scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers,—stern and wild ones,—and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss.” (p. 128) With this strong spirit of resilience, now Hester has discovered a new challenge for her beloved Arthur who is, very dramatically, now under the treatment of Roger.

Hester's Displacement, Subalternity and the third Space

The historical migration of the Puritans from their mother country England to the Netherlands and finally to New England is due to religious persecutions they have experienced and it is a kind of displacement. This displacement puts them into a lot of challenges. As the Puritan society implements the strict ideologies of the Old Testament, it turns out to be very hostile and prejudiced against woman. Motivated by the idea of the Original Sin the Puritans look down upon women and Hester is presented as an adulteress for which death penalty is the punishment as prescribed in the Bible. Thus, Hester is double marginalized—one for her status as a woman and the other is for her committing sin. In the Puritan society the male ruling authority is the elite class and Hester is the voiceless agent. This voicelessness is an important trait of the subalterns. Gayatri Spivak, a leading postcolonial literary theorist, in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” opines that for the subalterns there is no listener and undergoing this situation throughout the life they become voiceless. But Hawthorne's heroine Hester has deconstructed the male elites' rigid power-paradigm when she has voiced out not to unfold her secret partner's name as well as her baby's father. She has, with her embroidery skill, put a strong wall of resistance to establish her identity not as a woman and a mother but as a human being as well.

Hester's internalization of Puritanism is questionable as she, despite her marital status, does not consider her relationship with Arthur as a sin. In the chapter “The Interview”, under the disguise of a doctor, Roger meets Hester and, in their conversation, it is very clear when she says, “I felt no love, nor feigned any.” (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 53) What she wants to convey is that without the feeling of love, a marriage loses its sanctity. Actually, she is caught between her European sense of renaissance and the status of a Puritan. Theorist Bhabha (2006) draws the in-between positioning thus, “These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining of the idea of society itself” (p. 2). Bhabha explores how being in between different spaces provides a stage for individuals to create new identities that redefine our understanding of society. With the space of in-betweenness

Bhabha (1994) also advocates the “Third Space of Enunciation” and says, “And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves. (p. 39) Therefore, the idea of the Third Space is significant to analyze Hester’s post punishment struggle of life. The idea of the third space puts importance on the fact that this space provides the opportunity to the marginalized individuals and communities to challenge and intervene in the dominant narratives and power structures that shapes the society. This third space is a site for resistance and transformation in the context of issues related to identity, culture, and nationality. In this way, Hester has negotiated her new identity successfully.

Conclusion

Nathaniel Hawthorne, a follower of Puritanism, presents in his novella *The Scarlet Letter* how Hester has gone through a rigorous process of trial and punishment for her sin of adultery. The punishment, according to the male dominated Puritan society, is public in nature as it is exhibited in the market-place for all the Bostonian to see and learn from it. In the objective goal of the punishment, it is effective as the Puritan society believes in this line of thought. But when Hester is released from the prison house a new form of punishment begins and it is psychological as well as traumatic. This continuity of the punishment shapes and reshapes the psyche of Hester in a constructive manner and we have seen how she has been successful to be an entrepreneur. This new identity of an entrepreneur, a tremendous metamorphosis being a sinner of a deadly sin, has challenged the authoritative power of the Puritan society and in course of time, she has attained a position in the society which has its footage on her mighty spirit. From the status of helplessness and public ignominy Hester is now a woman of high importance who is well accepted everywhere and treated with esteem. She is the icon of fashion that speaks of her skill through which she has transformed her vulnerable position to a powerful one and constructs a new independent identity free from all her previous societal strings. She has encountered all the harsh and inevitable walls of discriminations and repressions and with her strong feminine spirit she gives a new meaning to her life.

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