

The Scarlet Letter – An Evidence of Puritanism by Nathaniel Hawthorne

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Abstract: This paper presents an overview on the scarlet letter.

Keywords: Evidence, Letter, Puritanism.

1. Introduction

The Scarlet Letter is one of the important romantic novels which clearly mirrored the rules of Puritan society in American. Puritanism, a striking event of history, had broken the relationship between the Church of England and the State. Gilbert K. Chesterton says 'A Puritan is a person who pours righteous indignation into the wrong things'. They firmly believed unmediated and profound relationship between people and God and never wished to have any intervention between them which had been done by the Government and the clergyman. As a result, they were persecuted and moved to America. They reached American and settled their colonies in various parts and started their life. Their colonies later laid their rules in an intense way and their reign ruled in the settler colony areas.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in 1804 who had a strong connection with their puritan ancestors. He was very much influenced by his ancestor's lifestyle which later influenced him to write novels and stories on the puritans. His works had shaded both the weaknesses and highlights of puritans based on their rigid and oppressive rules. He was also an expert in symbolism as he used various symbols to represent each and every portrayal of incidents and characters. With the help of the characters, he clearly described the different effects of public and private life under the same society. In each and every notion of this novel, the taste of Puritanism is fed. The early puritans who first came to America in 1620 settled in Massachusetts and many of them were dead in the following year. Later, another massive population of puritans came settled in the 1630s in the colony named Massachusetts Bay Colony which is today's Boston. Around the 1640s, there were at least twenty-five thousand English settlers and named their settled land as New England. The setting the author used in the novel was the same Massachusetts Bay Colony enriched by the respiration of Puritans.

Hawthorne, though he had written this novel as a mirror to reflect Puritanism to World, he often presented the irony of this same concept which had a lot of interpretations and criticisms. His creativeness on symbols like the letter A, the scaffold for punished people, the meteor streaking through the sky were all

defined as some causes of the novel which allegorically represent Puritanism. The strict regulations against adultery were never pardoned but the people involved in the crime and their position were much bothered. Hawthorne also put front the distinction of the internal conflict and the external conflict which it was further blended with the essence of revenge.

The characters that he employed were carrying the state like Reverend and Physician as they made themselves prey for evil power. As the plot started, there was no place for guess to refer Arthur Dimmesdale, the respected Reverend of the Boston city, as the actual culprit of committing the adultery. Hester Prynne, a punished adulteress was abandoned by the people along with her daughter Pearl. She had to stand on the scaffold for three hours on the day of the judgement by bearing a Scarlet Letter A on her bosom which was the symbol of her crime. Her obedience of unrevealing her partner was ever concealed unless it was being plundered by Roger Chillingworth, a husband of Hester Prynne. Later his formation of being an Old physician to Reverend Dimmesdale and his black arts to him boiled his blood with guiltiness. Pearl, an embodiment of love for Hester and identity for Arthur created a turning point for their secret revelation. "But she named the infant 'Pearl,' as being of great price- purchased with all she had- her mother's only pleasure" - this line made us understand Hester's untold pain filled life but with the only relief through the blessed child Pearl she possesses. A unique way of finding the culprit of a punished woman for adultery by a husband has increased the curiosity of the plot. Pearl's disobedience towards the rich children worried Hester as she became a prestigious seamstress yet her ignorance was not completely vanished.

Symbolism played a vital role in this novel. Even the novel raised with the symbol of scarlet A that had been found by the narrator (author) with the historical papers which were documented the age before 200 years. Though it is fiction and the characters are fictitious, the concept which he conveyed is real and it is well carried out. It is an interpretation told by many that the scarlet A that he got is need not to be a symbol of Adultery and in the history there was not any authentic witness given to prove the originality of scarlet A. But Hawthorne with his intense knowledge on Puritanism, his greatest try helped to really penetrate the society of puritan in the settled colony. The scarlet A ever maintained its dominance till the end of the novel. The novel was structured in an understandable way as it began

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with the scaffold scene where Hester was wearing the letter A on her bosom and carrying Baby Pearl on her hand standing and establishing her crime to the world. "One token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another" - a very symbolic line from chapter two 'The Market' consciously attempted to honour the ashamed Hester. People of high religious puritans had thrown her cheap look and the church and state people questioned her. Hawthorne well thoroughly merged the Church and the State with the help of Reverend and Governor. Their togetherness was ironically questioned and also represented their oppositeness in England. In that scene itself, readers were given enough ideas and hints about the plot as all the principal characters were introduced. The most mastermind person behind the miserable act of this novel was first established as an unknown person who was just standing in the crowd. "When he found the eyes of Hester Prynne fastened on his own, and saw that she appeared to recognize him, he slowly and calmly raised his finger, made a gesture with it in the air, and laid it on his lips" - a line from chapter three 'The Recognition' depicted the stress of the situation as Hester was cornered. He, an unpublished person to the people, was very careful in his security but his interest to tear the veil of the culprit behind the heinous action was the beginning point.

The plot developed as the character lived, their mentality was also changed. Hawthorne had included several gothic effects. The black magic, evil brain, midnight red streak on sky showing the letter A and the ever protecting conspiracy, the dark theme, the trauma of Reverend and the revengeful attitude of Roger were all these again helped the readers to view the novel in different perspectives. The imagination of Hawthorne was quite mesmerizing as he took the plot in the unpredictable way.

At one point of time, the novel couldn't move without the presence of scarlet A. When Hester stopped wearing the letter on her bosom and her status was quite improved in the society, Pearl couldn't accept Hester as her mother. She believed the symbol A as her mother's identity and eliminating that really created a strangeness in Pearl's heart. "The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude!" - this line from the chapter 'A Flood of Sunshine' deeply promised Hester's dependence or right of scarlet A. In the revealing part, Reverend out of his conscientious question and guilt mounted on the scaffold at night and shouted out his crime to the world. "No man for any considerable period can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true" - a line from 'The Minister in a Maze' showed the reality of every human being.

Though he was respectable and considered as God's messenger in the puritan society, his basic being as a human

ever had it's sense and it was highly alarmed him after witnessing the helpless situation of Hester when he himself evident her judgement long ago. Her struggle to zip her voice of never spill about Reverend shook his conscience. All his life, he suffered the agony abundantly yet he couldn't open it to the world. As the time riped, his trauma bursted. He became a normal human in the scaffold who just respect his voice of conscience. At that time, he was helped by Hester along with Pearl. But Pearl didn't accept him as her father as he was not having the symbol with him. These moments created a pity feel in the reader's heart yet Roger's vicious mind never stopped its work. His intention was meticulously taking care of his medicines which tortured Reverend's soul.

Colin Wilson said 'Your imagination should be used not to escape reality but to create it'. To make his words real, Nathaniel Hawthorne had included his all elements of imagination and the reality of Puritanism in the elevated way to fabulously screen play the esteemed religious rule of Puritans in America. The meeting point of Gothic romance, symbolism and allegory illuminated the plot as its twists and uncertain situations kept the secrecy till the last moment. The lives of upper and lower classes, the divergence of church and state, the mindset of crime committed people, the track of bloodshed and many more leads could be gotten which again dragged the reader to the next world. The mixture of fashion and puritan tradition were witnessed in this novel. This novel projected the puritan setting of the seventeenth century in Boston with the accounts of the author's ancestors and written in the nineteenth century by adding the effects of different risings of the author's contemporary period which everything just bloomed the essence of the concept to the readers completely.

2. Conclusion

This paper presented an overview on the scarlet letter, an evidence of puritanism by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

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