

## **The Feminist as Embodied by Hester Prynne in Nathaniel**

**Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter**

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### **Abstract:**

The scarlet letter is one of literary gems of the famous American writer Nathaniel Hawthorn. This paper discusses the feminism theory through the strife and struggle of the main character of the novel after her banishment in her society and her efforts to start a new life. The events of this novel takes place in Boston in the 17th century during the puritan era. The story in brief, is the suffering of a young lady who is called Hester Prynne facing a severe punishment for the crime of adultery. Hester was sent by her husband to Boston in hope of joining her later on, but he didn't come. It was rumored that he was lost at sea. During this period, she has an illegal relationship with a young priest and gives birth to a baby girl from him, because this priest has a reputation and great position among people, so Hester refuses to reveal his name. The priest who is called Dimmesdale flogs himself as punishment for his sin. Her missing husband appears and learns the story of her sin and decides to avenge for his honor. Hester Prynne who works a seamstress and lives with her daughter in a small cottage in one of the outskirts of the city, she plans to escape with her partner, but her husband thwarts this attempt and finally the priest is forced to climb onto the platform to confess his guilt and purify himself of sin and then he dies in Hester's arms. In the beginning, the reader may see in this novel just a story of an adulterous woman being punished by society but he soon realizes the value of the struggle of this

woman embodied in challenging strict religious laws and confronting an ungrateful society that underestimates women's rights.

Key words: (feminism, gem, punishment).

## 1-Nathaniel Hawthorne's Life

Nathaniel Hawthorne's fame stems from his creativity in writing novels and short stories which closely related to his home town and religious and historical events that preceded and accompanied his life (Mendez: 2020/2021,8).

Nathaniel Hawthorne came from a strict puritan family. One of his grandfathers named William Hathorne was a member of the first family that bailed up to England and he was known by his commitment to harsh puritan customs and traditions(Ascl:2019,1790).

Nathaniel was careful not to give any information about his life and he had fired all the letters and the written texts which his colleagues and companions sent to him (Horvart:2021,2). At another stage of his life, he decided to add the letter "w" to his name because one of his relatives known for his strict decisions against witches' cases, so he wanted to evade the reputation of violence that accompanied puritanism (Ascl:2019,1790).

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in New England. He belongs to a simple aristocratic family. His father died in 1808 (Xiaohan:2022,2). The cause of his father's death was the infection with yellow fever which prompted his mother Elizabeth Manning to move him and his brothers to her father's crowded house in the city of Salim. Nathaniel was accustomed to the life of isolation that he gained from his mother, who used to cry for her husband alone, away from others. This isolated life he lived was reflected in many of his works. He injured his foot while he was playing football as a child which led him to direct his interest in reading books (Anggraeni:2008, 46,47).

Although his mother had a high culture, she was dependent on her relatives to support her children after the death of her husband. And this harsh reality showed Hawthorne that women had no legal rights to inheritance and that they must languish under the control of men (Guanghua:2019,1647).

Hawthorne enrolled at Bowdoin university in Maine city in 1821. Through his academic career he proved that he was an outstanding student, however, he was not always diligent and researcher. During his studies at the above university, he got to know Franklin pierce, who later became the fourteenth president of United States of America. And among the studies friends was also the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who became one of the most famous poets in America. Towards the end of his study at Bowdoin, he wrote to his mother telling her that he did not have the enthusiasm to study medicine or law, and inspired to be a writer. He also added that she would feel proud when she saw her son's name printed on literary books(Milne:2000,201).

Hawthorne gained a lot of knowledge by going to the Boston library throughout his twelve years of living in his hometown, where he read many historical and religious books(Xiaohan:2022,2). Nathaniel, who lived and was raised in puritan society that reinforced in him the fear related to man and his relationship with society on one hand and man and his relationship with god on other hand. In any case he had to commit to the moral responsibility in his literary works(Rowshanzamir:2014,243).

Hawthorne wrote many works. The most important of which are a collection of stories such as The Hollow of the Three Hills, an Old Woman's Tale, My Kinsman, Major Molineux and Roger Malvin's Burial, also among his works which was published in 1828 a novel about his years of study at the university which is called Fanshawe. Later, he worked at Boston Custom House to improve his income because he did not earn much money from his published works(Ascl:2019,1790).

Hawthorne travelled many times throughout his life but something called him to return to his homeland, he didn't even know what caused this homesickness. At this part of his life was explained in the introduction of his most famous novel "the Scarlet Letter" in the chapter called "The Custom-House" Hawthorne wrote:

*" My doom was on me. It was not the first time, nor the second, that I had gone away – as it seemed, permanently, – but yet returned, [...] as if Salem were for me the inevitable centre of the universe".* (Mendez:2020/2021, 8).

In 1838, Nathaniel met Sophia Peabody and made a romance relationship with her for a three and half year. During these years, Hawthorne wrote 109 letters for her and this ensure not only his true love for her but also his wish to be a husband and an author. On July 1842, Hawthorne and Sophia got married(Person:2007,3) and they moved to Concord and lived in Old Manse (Gollin: 2).

Sophia was one of the pioneers who broke the tradition prevailing in America at a time that women were nothing more than housewives. She was a sensitive artist who practiced the craft of drawing and writing, she was traveler, she visited a lot of foreign countries and she was also one of the first American independent women who gain their living from their work. (Valenti: 2015).

one of his most important fictional works was the scarlet letter which reflected his personal experiences, ideas and writing style(Chen:2020,62). Before his death due to a serious illness, he published many valuable works like The Blithedale Romance, The House of the Seven Gables, The Marble Faun and others. Finally, he left this world peacefully on 18<sup>th</sup> of May 1864 leaving behind three children Una, Rose and the only son Julian and a sad widow suffering from the loss of her lover and her beloved husband, Sophia (Horvat:2021,3).



## 2- The Puritanism

The puritans were a set of English protestants who determined to refine the church of England from the Catholicism because they were disgruntled with the religious rehabilitations which executed through the dominion of queen Elizabeth. The aim of this movement is to eliminate the papacy, the religious clothes and the various church rituals which were connected with Rome. This movement which emerged in the 17th century believed in pure Christianity and the age of this movement is called the puritan age (Tiwari:1).

The ideas of this movement spread quickly and it led to start a dispute between the protestants and the Catholics which transformed into a struggle between the government and the people who supported the new radical religious movement and rejected the Anglican. This struggle led to outbreak the civil war which made this movement controlled on England for ten years (1649-1660) by General Oliver Gromwell. The movement was distinguished by rigid religious prejudice and moral rules of behavior which led to close all the amusing places and the gloomy picture shaded the country (Al-Doori:2019,1).

The puritans believed that all people inherited the same guilty individuality and in order to save people from committing sins, God determined to punish the guilty person and sends him to hell after death. The puritans relate the sins of people to the original sin of Adam and Eve when they decided to eat the forbidden fruit and disregarded the God's will and this is mentioned in the Bible (Sitohang& Others: 2020,384).

The social system of the puritan society made the women's life miserable. This system doesn't allow the woman to be independent (Jahan & Abidi:2016,103). The woman should depend on her husband even if she doesn't love him. The woman should forbid her instinctive love and not announce it in order not to become spoil (Wang:2010,896).

### 3-The Feminism

Woman suffered from many troubles and holdbacks in order to be an active element in the society. Woman did not have any rights. She was disregarded, abused and hurt by man. she was no more than a toy in the hand of man but woman's life has changed after the emerging of feminism. She began to contribute in every field of society(Gupta:2018,129).

Feminism has a lot of definitions. The first one by Merriam Webster Dictionary as " the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities —" or" organized activity in support of women's rights and interests"<sup>1</sup>. One can realize that the aim of feminism is to attain equality between man and woman in all fields of life., for instance achieving the equality in salary(Loubna:2015/2016,38). Another definition of Feminism by the American historiographer Estelle Freedman who was an expert in feminist researches and women's history "Feminism is a belief that although women and men are inherently of equal worth, most societies privilege men as a group. As a result, social movements are necessary to achieve political equality between women and men, with the understanding that gender always intersects with other social hierarchies."<sup>2</sup> (Ibid:2015/2016, 38 & 39).

Feminism movement appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, and one of the most important pioneers of this movement was Virginia Woolf, as it is clear in her book A Room of One's Own (1929). The word feminist is derived from the Latin word femme, which means a woman who seeks to defend women's rights and dignity as an important segment of society, and feminist means equality in rights between the sexes. Its broader meaning is the rejection of everything that marginalizes women or reduces their value in all political, economic, and social fields and in life in general (Sholihah:2019 8 & 9).

## **Kinds of Feminism**

### **3.1-Radical Feminism**

It is a feminist movement that believes that the concept of sex is an idea that has deep roots in the folds of society, and that work to eradicate this idea became signs at the end of the sixties. The most prominent activists in this field are: T. Grace Atkinson and Shulamith Firestone (Ghorfati & MEDINI:2014/2015,9).

### **3.2-Liberal Feminism**

Liberal feminism is the principles that believe in equality between men and women in the social, political and legal structure and also emphasizes the value and importance of individuality(Gupta:2018,130).

### **3.3-Socialist Feminism**

Socialist feminism sometimes called materialist feminism or Marxist feminism, is a feminist movement that calls for curbing capitalist greed by implementing radical economic reforms. Socialist feminism believes that gender inequality is a fundamental factor that the capitalist system exploits to reap huge profits by exploiting the low wages of working women (Ghorfati & MEDINI:2014/2015,11).

## **4-The Scarlet Letter**

What Hawthorne excelled at most was writing short stories, and this writing skill grew gradually after he spent about twenty years in this field and built a unique style of his own. In 1850, Hawthorne published the Scarlet Letter when he was 46 years old. (Chen:2020,62). The scarlet letter which is a gloomy romance, receives a great success (Mahini & Barth:2018,474).

The writing of the scarlet letter was coincided with the emergence of the feminist movement in the united states of America which was moving at rapid pace. Hawthorne inspired the ideas of this movement from the calls

and claims of feminist activists, at that time, most notably Margaret Fuller whose progressive thoughts motivated Hawthorne to adopt women issues in his literary works, defends them and lifts the injustice due to strict religious restrictions and the backward view of women by society (Guanghua:2019,1647).

The scarlet letter is one of the masterpieces of 19th century in America. Many features were combined in this novel including, the strangeness of the form and ambiguity of idea in addition to the author's genius which made it a literary topic prevailed for a long period. The topic presented in this story was not focusing on the incidence of an illegal relationship between man and women, but rather extending far to include feminist thought that believes in radically changing the unfortunate reality of woman. in addition, the subject of the story is a loud cry against the religious and social values prevailing in the era of woman's oppression. The author avoided direct references and confined himself to symbolism to avoid clashing with the religious establishment and the beliefs of many individuals at that time (Gao: 2018,1725).

The events of this story revolve around a beautiful young woman named Hester Prynne, who is forced to wear a scarlet letter badge as a punishment, due to her committing the sin of adultery, and the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, a young man known for his distinguished religious and authoritarian position in society, and he is also Hester's unknown accomplice in her sin. (Yuliati: 2015,27).

Hester Prynne 's husband is called Chillingworth. He is old and weak but despite his weakness, he made great attempts to travel to New England to join his wife because he loves her so much (Bao-cang:2020,580).

No one knows why Chillingworth wanted to send his wife before him to the United States of America to settle in Boston, was that a test to his wife's faith and loyalty or for other goals within himself he did not disclose? Hester



came a lone, and he did not follow her until after a long period of nearly two years (Gao: 2018,1726).

The reason behind his delay may have been the difficulty and danger of the journey, especially with the existence of Indians who were dissatisfied with the immigrants, it was believed that Chillingworth was kidnapped and tortured by the Indians and through his staying, he tried to learn the science of herbs and medicine (Bao-cang:2020 ,580). While Hester Prynne was waiting for her husband, Chillingworth in Boston, she met a young priest called Dimmesdale, fell in love with him, and committed the sin of adultery with him. As a result of their illicit relationship, she gave birth to a baby girl from him named pearl. The prevailing religious custom at that time regarding the punishment of an adulterous woman was that she should wear a red badge bearing the letter "A" on her chest and ascend a platform in a public square to be presented before people. But the priest did not confess his sin to the people and left Hester to face her fate alone. After that, Hester took a house in an isolated part of the city and took up a job as a seamstress to support herself and her daughter. When her husband arrived to Boston and learned of his wife's scandal, he decided to take revenge on that who disgraced him. He disguised himself as a doctor and came to treat the priest. He managed to identify Dimmesdale as the wanted person and planned to kill him. The priest suffers from torment of conscience for seven years and conceals the pain that caused his illness. Finally, he had the courage to admit that he was Hester's partner in sin during the inauguration ceremony of a new mayor of the city, after which he falls dead, wrapped in Hester's arms. In the end, Hester took her daughter a way from this city. (Gao:2018,1726).

## 5-The Characters

### 5.1-Hester Prynne as a Feminist

The character of Hester Prynne, Hawthorne's heroine in The Scarlet Letter, is worthy of study and analysis, as she is able to challenge the culture of an

entire society and break its restrictions. It is a unique struggle of its kind between an individual and an entire society. (Gupta: 2016, 55).

The puritan society punished Hester by forcing her to stand on the scaffold in front of the people of her city for hours. People looked at her with disgusting and humiliating. They considered her guilt as violating the Ten Testament-adultery and her punishment as cleaning the society and make it "Pure" society (Yasmin:2011,139).

At the first hearing, Hester did not appear servile or weak; on the contrary, she was elegant and full of confidence. Hawthorne wrote:

"The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect elegance, on a large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam, and a face which, besides being beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow and deep black eyes. She was lady-like, too, after the manner of the feminine gentility of those days; characterized by a certain state and dignity, rather than by the delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace, which is now recognized as its indication" (Sholihah:2019,22).

In such a disgraceful situation, she was supposed to show her shame and bow her head, but she walked with steadfastness and composure, ignoring all the harsh criticism and comments. The attendees were amazed by the strength of her personality and self-confidence, as they were forced to remain silent and stop chattering (Antivil: 2019,20).

When Hester was receiving punishment for adultery, she does not want to acknowledge the name of her partner in sin (Kartika&Others:2021,194). Arthur Dimmesdale had an extraordinary ability to influence the minds and hearts of people due to his ability to deliver a moving speech and a powerful voice that would compel anyone to submit to answer all questions. Therefore, the audience was certain beyond a shadow of a doubt that this

woman appearing before them would soon confess and reveal her secret about who had seduced her. They may also have believed that Dimmesdale's charm and ability to question might move a partner who might be in their midst. To come and confess, but all this did not yield any results because Hester is determined to keep the secret and wants to ransom the partner. (Ullah Khan & Others:2021,413).

Hester is economically independent because she works and supports herself. She does not ask for charity from people in the name of God. She does not ask from Dimmesdale, nor even from her husband, Chillingworth, who is supposed to be responsible for her. This clearly reflects that Hester defies all the laws of the Puritans and proves to them that women are independent and are not supposed to live under the wing of men. She can work and not ask for help from others. She also destroyed another of their principles, which is that women cannot enjoy the joy of life. Hester's work was not just a craft to make a living, but rather a way to restrain emotions, enjoy life, and calm the soul. (Ahmad:2015, 27).

Hester lives with her daughter an independent life. She doesn't perpetrate any immoral things and also never make problems. Her strong character and humanity helped to change the meaning of "A" which means adultery to "Able" or "Angel". Her charitable situations gained her the estimate and the honor of people in her city (Johansson:2015,17).

Hawthorne is distinguished by his wisdom and intelligence, which is able to extrapolate innate nature of people. He is precise in his descriptions, as this is very clearly exemplified in Hester's case regarding the mark of shame on her chest. She is an angel of mercy without receiving worldly benefits. She presents brotherly services to others without expecting favor. She is always ready to help anyone who needs help without hesitation, and does not care in the slightest about appreciation and gratitude for what she does for

people. This woman, who is considered an outcast in the eyes of many, devotes all her efforts to alleviating people's pain and suffering during the spread of the epidemic that is taking over the city. She is very present in every crisis and ready to cure of everything that people suffers from, she is then able to transform from an adulterer to an able woman because of the good she does (Mohammed&Yahya:2018,57).

The strict religious authorities are once again interfering in the life of Hester Prynne in order to create more penalties on her, by withdrawing her daughter from her custody under the pretext that this is necessary for the healthy growth of the child and for the happiness of both. This means that wherever a person goes and separates himself from others, he cannot get rid of the religious restrictions that surround his life. The religious authority that claims salvation is in fact seeking to harm it (Ullah Khan & Others:2021,413). Hester once again proves her independent thoughts when she stands before the Governor of Bellingham in the case of her daughter's custody, where she confronts him with all her strength and rejects the guardianship of others over the child, saying that God is the one who gave it to her and she did not allow him any opportunity to seize her guardianship, claiming that femininity is a source of strength for her daughter. It is not a source of weakness (Sholihah:2019,44&45).

For Hester, Pearl is the real wealth that she obtained in exchange for all the forms of punishment and tragedies that she faced in her life. She also represents a symbol of the freedom and happiness that Hester seeks. Therefore, she devotes her whole life to making her looks cheerful, as she considers her as a hope for salvation and a lifeline from the pain she faced(Zhang & Li:2018,597).

Another evidence of Hester's strength is that she does not rely completely on the influential minister Arthur Dimmesdale in the issue of guardianship over her daughter, despite his sympathy for her. Even when Dimmesdale's



health condition worsens, Hester tries to help him by escaping with him to any place in Europe to save him from torment, and here the vast difference between a strong woman becomes clear. The one who acts and plans wisely and has the strength of will, and the weak hesitant and disturbed man (Antivil:2019, 6).

The reason why Hester Prynne remained in the city of Boston despite her public scandal in front of people is to prove that she could challenge the puritan laws and refutes them, and her escape from the city would represent a big defeat to women at the same time it is a clear victory to puritan claims. Hester did not allow others to interfere in defining her identity. Through the strength of her will, she created a strong personality that represented a model of a liberated woman. When Hester returned to the city again, she continued to wear the scarlet letter on her chest, even though it was a source of worry and annoyance to her. However, she was able to change the way people looked at her and forced them to respect her. They also no longer saw in the scarlet letter, which had become part of her personality, anything that detracted from her personality and her position among them. Hawthorne wrote:

*But there was a more real life for Hester Prynne here, in New England, than in that unknown region where Pearl had found a home. Here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her penitence. She had returned, therefore, and resumed, — of her own free will, for not the sternest magistrate of that iron period would have imposed it, — resumed the symbol of which we have related so dark a tale. Never afterwards did it quit her bosom. But . . . the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world 's scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, and yet with reverence, too (Imene:2011/2012,80,81).*

The inimitable writer Nathaniel Hawthorne was able to create an exceptional, unconventional feminist character through his novel the scarlet letter, where the novel's heroin, Hester Prynne, was able, despite her suffering as a result of the shame that befell her because of her sin, and despite society's inferiority view of her, but in her own mind, she rejects the puritan thought towards women. Hester Prynne does not acknowledge the Puritan interpretation of her action, as she absolutely believes that the desire to love is freedom and not evil(Wang:2010,894).

Hawthorne portrays Hester Prynne, the heroine of The Scarlet Letter, as an individual opposed to the Puritan movement. The writer also shows that Hester's method of salvation is the method of heroic confrontation and defiance, and Dimmesdale's method is negative and unproductive. (Thomson:2011 ,70).

Society's view of the sinner is a double standard. Hester was seen as an adulterer and a rogue, deserving of punishment and defamation, while sympathy was shown for Dimmesdale when he confessed his sin. Here lies the hypocrisy. A man's mistakes are justified, but a woman's mistakes are unforgivable crimes. (Anitasari:2010,61).

When the novel approached its end, Hawthorne explained that Hester had become a woman who possessed a strength to be reckoned with, and this strength she had gained from her bitter experiences. This strength could also be seen as a strength resulting from an individual confronting oppressive, aggressive circumstances and heralding the emergence of the seeds of individual democracy in a dry environment created by oppressor social and religious institution. (Imene:2011/2012,78).

The death of Nathaniel's father at the age of four and his living with an extended family which consists of women in different ages. These women were unmarried and depended on themselves in everything and his marriage from Sophia Peabody who was a clever and strong woman, all these things

made his thoughts about women debatable, so the heroines of his works reflected some qualities of the women around him (Liu:2021,3).

## 5.2-Arthur Dimmesdale

Hawthorne's novel draws attention to Arthur Dimmesdale, a distinguished character in the novel. He is a sacred priest who finished his study at the university of England. He is a man who has great knowledge and a good social position. People who attend to the church see him as a typical person, a person without sins. They ask him about advices and instructions. Dimmesdale's physical distress exposes Hawthorne's opinion about the plights and the interior conflicts of the human in addition to his mysterious point of view about puritanism. The pronunciation of the name "Arthur" is like the word "Author" which refers to his education and rational thinking (Lei:2015,2166). Dimmesdale has a majestic personality, supported by his religious fervor and eloquent speech. He has a white face, a high forehead, wide eyes that radiate from them hidden sadness, and a mouth that could tremble from excessive anxiety and nervousness were it not for his ability to restrain it with the power of self-control (Chen: 2017,86).

Dimmesdale's character is complex and it's difficult to decipher. His sin is not only adultery, but rather his lack of sufficient courage to confess his sin, and thus he suffers from a compound sin. He suffers from a psychological torment and pain that do not leave him, so he remains silent all the time so that he is able to continue carrying out his duties towards God(Li:2019, 665).

There is no social or legal requital for Reverend Dimmesdale, but what bothers him is his internal psychological torment resulting from not having the courage to confess this sin. What increases this torment is the feeling of religious and social hypocrisy. The Puritans see in him a pious and good man.

For this reason, he lives in difficult times. No one knows that this venerable person has a guilt like Hester Prynne's (Kartika & Others:2021,194).

The psychological conflict that Dimmesdale suffers from leads him to an unhappy life and the feeling of the burden of sin on his shoulders that makes him gradually decline. He reached the point of sleepwalking unconsciously, and one day his legs led him to the scaffold. He punished himself by going on a hunger strike, not getting rest, and self-flagellation, and he refused the medicines that doctors prescribed because he knew that the medicine of the wise would not work for his illness (Anitasari:2010, 65). After seven years of remorse, he feels impatient and unable to bear the pain. He begins to feel that the death is creeping towards him, so he decides to use the day of the city mayor's election as an opportunity to confess his sin and purify himself from the torment of conscience. On this election day, people were eagerly waiting to hear eloquent sermons from the Reverend Dimmesdale, and his anticipated sermon was the talk of everyone. After that, Dimmesdale announces the truth to the public, and his confession becomes astonishing and completely unexpected (Ibid:2010, 60).

### 5.3-Chillingworth

The figurative meaning of his name contains viciousness. As an insane revenger, he is described as an evil character, harsh Satan, and an ultimate rouge (Lei:2015,2167). Chillingworth is a scholar who studies the science of herbs and medicine. He was an old disorder man while Hester was young and full of vitality, so their marriage was morphologic. He was unable to fulfil her desires so that he was the cause of her miserable life (Abdul salam:2011,713).

His name contains two words "chilly" which means a pitiless revenger and "worth" which refers to his study which is precious. After his arriving from Boston, he saw his wife on the scaffold because she committed adultery. He was seen as a victim, but later he is described as a villain. His concern was to



take revenge and not to rescue his marriage. He claimed that he helps Dimmesdale to overcome his sadness and difficulties, but on the contrary he used his viperous means to torture and agonize him in order to take revenge and to know the person that Hester loved. When Chillingworth died, he left all his fortune to Pearl(Zhang:2021,408).

#### **5.4-Pearl**

Pearl is the illegal daughter of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale. She is the outcome of their adultery which was the reason of her agony and torture (Hadjira:2013,28). Hawthorne describes her as a small girl who has a pretty face, dusky eyes, limber appearance, and supple shape. Her actions, her behavior and her manners make a noticeable effect on readers (Wang:2017, 378).

Pearl was charming and full of energy. She was unlike the children of the puritans. She emerged the genuine beauty of the villager girl and the fabulous grace of the princess. The puritans see the genuine love as a wicked thing, so they scorn Hester and her child and a few of them dishonor Hester and pearl. Pearl was the cause of many problems but Hester succeeded to overcome these problems. The meaning of Pearl's name refers to a precious stone. It represents Hester's love for Pearl and Dimmesdale. Hester suffered from loneliness except from pearl who was the motive to challenge the difficulties (Zhang:2021, 408,409).

### **6- The Symbols**

#### **6.1-The Scarlet Letter "A"**

Hester, the married woman who perpetrated adultery with a priest and her society forced her to wear the scarlet letter "A". The letter "A" is the remarkable and outstanding token in this novel. This token is garnished on Hester's dress ((Hadjira:20112/2013,32).

Hawthorne wrote:

*“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 to the apparel which she wore, was THE SCARLET LETTER, so fantastically embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom”.*

*“... she turned her eyes downward at the scarlet letter, and even touched it with her finger, to assure herself that the infant and the shame were real” (Roy:2017,219).*

Although she lived a difficult life but this token represents many things to her. The token "A" represents the first letter of Arthur Dimmesdale's name and the first letter of the word Amour which means love, so when she stood on the scaffold, she stood with dignity and strength. She preferred to be punish rather than exposes the name of her lover and her daughter's father. She endured the scorning and debasing of her society. The only one that she took off this token when she met Arthur in the forest and decided with him to leave Boston and Settles with Pearl in Europe but the plan flopped because of her husband, so she returned to wear this token (Zhang:2021,407).

## 6.2-The Scaffold

Hester was punished to stand on the scaffold with her illegal daughter for three hours. Hawthorne wrote:

*“It was, in short, the platform of the pillory, and above it rose the framework of that instrument of discipline, so fashioned as to confine the human head in its light grasp, and this hold it up the public gaze. The very ideal of ignominy was embodied and made manifest in this contrivance of wood and iron...her sentence bore that she should stand a certain time upon the platform, but without undergoing that gripe about the neck and confinement of the head” (Hadjira:2012/2013,34,35).*

The scaffold has been used in many places in the novel. The first one in section two When Hester stood on the scaffold and was punished, the scaffold represented the symbol of sin and felony. The second one in section twelve when Dimmesdale stood on it and confessed his sin, but nobody heard him so the scaffold represented the symbol of recognition and prospect. It is used for the third time in section twenty-three when Dimmesdale confessed his sin before his death and got rid from his prolonged constant mystery (Abid Khalaf:2022,38).

### 6.3-The Meteor "A"

Hawthorne used the meteor "A" to point two things: the first one refers to the sin of Dimmesdale, his committing of adultery and his hypocrisy. He left Hester faces her fate alone. The second thing, it refers to Winthrop who was the first Governor of Massachusetts and people of Salem see him as a good man and they reelected him many times, so they considered this meteor as a sign of goodness.

*"We impute it, therefore, solely to the disease in his own eye and heart that the minister, looking upward to the zenith, beheld there the appearance of an immense letter –the letter A marked out in lines of dull red light. not but the meteor may have shown itself at that point, burning duskily through a veil of cloud, but with no such shape as his guilty imagination gave it, or, at least, with so little definiteness, that another's guilt might have seen another symbol in it."* (Ahmedgoli & Hassan,2020,598).

### Conclusion

Many readers see Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The scarlet letter" as just a story about "a young women" who fell into the sin of adultery and was subjected to a severe punishment by the ruling religious authority as well as by society. While the writer, wanted this novel to serve as a spark for a great revolution that would lift woman from the miserable situation imposed on her by the religious authority and society. Of course, he does not mean at all

to justify the disgraceful act committed by the heroine of the novel in a moment of weakness, but appeals to society and his mouthpiece was saying, as the lord Christ said to the people who once wanted punishing to an adulterous woman "let him who is without sin among you cast a stone at her". Actually, the writer was able with extreme intelligence, to create an individual revolution led by the heroine of the novel against an entire society and against oppressive religious authority. Through this novel the writer made an effective contribution to support the feminist liberal movements. He also revealed the puritan religious hypocrisy, through the character of the highly respectable reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, who is Hester's partnering her sin, but was cowardly concealed the fact, leaving this poor woman and her daughter to bear the burden of this sin. But Hester was more brave than him, because she bore all its consequences. She carried the scarlet letter on her chest and kept it until the last moment of her life to be a witness of her struggle to liberate woman. She was able to convert the meaning of the scarlet letter from shame to the honor when she forced the society to respect her.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Chelouache Loubna. The Scarlet letter: A Feminist Reading. 2015/ 2016, P. 38.

<sup>2</sup>Chelouache Loubna. The Scarlet Letter: A Feminist Reading. 2015/2016, p 38 &39.

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