



**“Sister of Mercy”: A psycho-cultural study of rape trauma in *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne**

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**Abstract** ; This study, entitled “Sister of Mercy”: A psycho-cultural study of rape trauma in *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne,” is a detailed analysis of a universal issue, which is rape trauma that Hester and her daughter, Pearl, suffered from in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) by Hawthorne. The protagonist, Hester Prynne, falls in love with a man who betrays her upon learning about her pregnancy, abandoning her and her unborn child in the Salem community of seventeenth-century America, where women are judged based on the traits of the cult of true womanhood, such as submissiveness, purity, and powerlessness. Thus, this psycho-cultural study attempts to apply Kübler-Ross’s model of grief to examine whether Hester and Pearl can heal from their trauma by successfully passing through the five stages of grief. To conclude, Hester’s failure to embody the trait of purity prolongs her healing journey to almost twenty-one years, whereas Pearl only requires seven years to focus on the cultural influences that affect her healing process, particularly through Veese’s concept of “the moment of exchange.”

**Keywords:** Hawthorne, psycho-cultural, rape, *The Scarlet Letter*, trauma,

أخت الرحمة: دراسة نفسية ثقافية لصدمة الاغتصاب في رواية الحرف القرمزي لناتانيال هوثورن

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### الملخص

تُقدّم هذه الدراسة، بعنوان "أخت الرحمة: دراسة نفسية ثقافية لصدمة الاغتصاب في رواية الحرف القرمزي لناتانيال هوثورن"، تحليلاً مُفصلاً لقضية عالمية، ألا وهي صدمة الاغتصاب التي عانت منها هيوستر وابنتها بيرل في رواية "الحرف القرمزي" (1850) للكاتب هوثورن. تقع بطلة الرواية، هيوستر برين، في حب رجل يخونها عندما يعلم بحملها، ويتخلى عنها وعن طفلها الذي لم يولد بعد في مجتمع سالم في أمريكا خلال القرن السابع عشر،

حيث تُحكّم على النساء بناءً على سمات "الأنثوية المثالية" السائدة، كالخضوع والطهارة والعجز. وبالتالي، تسعى هذه الدراسة النفسية الثقافية النوعية الاستنتاجية إلى تطبيق نموذج كوبلر-روس للحزن لدراسة ما إذا كان بإمكان هيستر وبييرل التعافي من صدمتهما من خلال المرور بنجاح بمراحل الحزن الخمس. وختاماً، فإن فشل هيستر في تجسيد سمة النقاء يطيل رحلة شفائها إلى ما يقرب من واحد وعشرين عاماً، في حين أن بييرل لا تحتاج إلا إلى سبع سنوات للتركيز على التأثيرات الثقافية التي تؤثر على عملية شفائها، وخاصة من خلال مفهوم فيسر عن "الحظة التبادل".

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** أعتصاب, الحرف القرمزي, هاوثورن, نفسية-ثقافية, صدمة.

## 1. Introduction

Rape trauma is the psychological and emotional pain inflicted on a person who is raped, molested, or sexually abused. Rape trauma can cause post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, shame, guilt, rage, fear, loneliness, and suicidal ideology and attempts. Rape, as a traumatic event, is an issue that affects all societies; even the post-traumatic effects appear differently in different cultures (Hutanen, 2009, p. 59). Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the psychological responses of Hester and Pearl to Hester's rape to determine whether they can heal from their trauma or if there are obstacles to their recovery journey. Thus, cultural study is essential to examine those barriers.

Many researchers have begun to analyse *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) from various perspectives. For instance, Laura Korobkin employs a historical approach in her research "The Scarlet Letter of the law: Hawthorne and criminal justice" (1997) to examine how individuals in *The Scarlet Letter* adhere to the rules established by the powerful magistrates for the community. Further, she seeks to determine whether these rules truly benefit the public and regulate behaviour, ultimately showing that Hester's adherence to the laws leads to no future happiness, aside from some personal enlightenment, and that following such rules may offer no guarantees, as the psychological consequences could surpass human capacity. The present study highly endorses that conclusion; however, the current analysis employs different approaches.

Feminism also plays a significant part in interpreting the story of Hester Prynne's *The Scarlet Letter*. In their study, "Sin and punishment in *The Scarlet Letter*: A feminist perspective" (2022), Sheikh Saifullah Ahmed and Kazi Imran Hossain employ a feminist reading of *The Scarlet Letter*, concluding that Hawthorne endeavours to challenge conventional norms. They try to show the strength of a woman, Hester Prynne, who embodies resilience and defiance against societal expectations and oppression.

However, some investigators utilise the psychological approach to read *The Scarlet Letter*; Valentina Markasović composes a rather socio-cultural article, “Shame, despair, solitude: Punishment for adultery in *The Scarlet Letter*” (2021), to examine Hester’s and Pearl’s internal and external worlds. The researcher concludes that the authorities in Puritan society exploit Hester’s situation as a public example for anyone who challenges patriarchal rules, and Pearl’s innocence does not shield her from being marginalised like her mother, despite having never committed a sin. Therefore, the current study indicates that Pearl was marginalised for only seven years, not her entire life. However, Markasović’s research focuses on the concepts of shame, despair, and solitude as psychological tools to study the novel, which means that there is no specific approach like the five stages of grief, which the current study adopts.

The current study identifies a gap in the literature: previous scholars have not analysed *The Scarlet Letter* from a psycho-cultural perspective using Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’s and David Kessler’s model of grief, alongside Harold Aram Veese’s concept of “the moment of exchange.” As noted by Kübler-Ross and Kessler, dying patients and their families have to experience a series of emotional stages as they are approaching death. These stages are called the “five stages of grief” (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 7). The Kübler-Ross model diagnoses first with denial, anger, bargaining, then depression and, lastly, acceptance (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 7). As far as this study is concerned, the female victims, Hester and Pearl, are not suffering from terminal illness in the medical sense. Instead, they are dealing with the trauma of rape and its effects in the Salem community, which is governed by “the moment of exchange’s” texts, as they navigate the societal stigma and emotional turmoil that accompany their experiences.

Veese’s concept involves three marketplace terminologies: circulation, negotiation, and exchange of ideas (Veese, 1989, p. xiv). He believes that a profound relationship exists between culture and power. For him, culture consists of “selves and texts” that are hostile to others, while disciplinary power is defined in terms of “the King, Religion,” and “Masculinity” (Veese, 1989, p. xiii). Even though he refers to “others” as “Indians, Jews, and Blacks,” this study considers “others” to be women, depending on several studies. For example, Simon de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) observes that women in the patriarchal society are

defined as the “Other”; a woman is not “a person in her own right. She is man’s Other” (qtd. in Tyson, 2006, p. 96). Kate Millett, in *Sexual Politics* (1970), also refers to the same unfortunate fact—the otherness of women in patriarchal cultures (Bressler, 2012, p. 150-1).

As Veesper suggests, circulation is not only a reference to money or knowledge. Instead, it indicates the “social assets,” which refer to the prestige of masculinity or the possessions a man holds within his family and community (Veesper, 1989, p. xiv). The patriarchal culture negotiates that a man will not be a real man if he lacks total control over what he owns; a woman is one of those properties. Such exchange happens constantly; the social reward is a dignified man in his marital institution and society. At the same time, women’s obedience is exchanged for preserving their lives and being included inside the “cult of true womanhood” (Welter, 1966, p. 151). The cult of true womanhood is founded on key characteristics: purity, piety, domesticity, powerlessness, and submissiveness. Otherwise, they would be punished by the patriarchal culture. Nonetheless, this paper examines how such exchanges operate within *The Scarlet Letter*.

Accordingly, this work addresses the gap by focusing on Hester’s and Pearl’s experience of the five stages of grief to examine how the characters cope with trauma, particularly in relation to Hester’s rape within the patriarchal culture of Salem’s community, where “the moment of exchange” plays a significant role.

## 2. “Like a Ghost”: Hester’s Five Stages of Grief

*The Scarlet Letter* begins with a prison gate opening to a woman, Hester Prynne, wearing the scarlet letter “A” on her bosom and holding a three-month-old baby daughter in her arms, passing through the crowd to the scaffold. She is accused of adultery, so she has been obliged to wear the letter “A” as a permanent sign of her sin. She responds to the seniors of her community’s questions about her partner’s identity with silence, a normal response in her situation as a denial mechanism. However, in seventeenth-century American society, which was governed by restrictive and often patriarchal Puritan doctrines, it was easier to call a woman’s reputation into question. Thus, at this point in her life, Hester is traumatized by shame as she loses her purity in terms of “the cult of true womanhood” (Welter, 1966, p. 151).

For a period of time Hester Prynne was in a love relationship with a man who promised to take her to the cage of true womanhood. She believed him and gave him her love and purity to discover that he was a cowardly man. Once she discovers her pregnancy, he leaves her to face her fate alone. Consequently, it is not a love relationship; instead, it is rape because Hester is a lonely woman without any male protection, so she is an easy prey to be manipulated and deceived. It is seduction in the name of love (Mckibbin, Shackelford, Goetz, Starratt, & Miner, 2008, p. 87; Greene, 2001, p. xiii, 65, 121). The seniors in her society decided to imprison her until her childbirth. Hester is only watching helplessly. She is traumatised by her partner's meanness, her community's aggressive reactions, and her Puritan background, which considers her a sinner. Thus, the first reaction to her rape trauma is denial.

Hester denies her reality through mixed emotions: elation, shock, avoidance, and fear on both levels: the outer and inner worlds (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 11-12). She appears from the prison door with a brightened, precisely decorated capital letter "A" as if it were not a scarlet letter; instead, it is a medal of courage:

In fine red cloth surrounded with an elaborate embroidery . . . of gold thread, appeared the letter "A" . . . It had the effect of a spell, taking her from the ordinary relations with humanity and enclosing her in a sphere by herself. (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 48-9)

She walks steadily and quietly to the scaffold: "She stepped into the open air, as if by her own will. . . . She was ladylike" (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 48-9). She denies the reality of her loss and punishment through elation to numb herself psychologically (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 10); she walks like a leader, going up the honour stage to be rewarded with people's applause. She is denying people's gossip and insults. Her elation is mixed with fear as she desperately tries to hide her daughter Pearl by pulling her tightly to her breast, "her first impulse to clasp the infant closely to her bosom; not so much by an impulse of motherly affection, as that she might thereby conceal a certain token" (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 48). Such mixed emotions are symptoms of denial as the victim refuses to admit the reality (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 10).

Soon, her fears lead her to realise that the scaffold is a symbol of punishment rather than an honouring platform, prompting her to employ another emotional mechanism to deny the truth: avoidance (Kübler-Ross

& Kessler, 2014, p 9-10). She attempts to escape from reality entirely. She goes back to her dreams of past times, to England, remembering her parents, the mirror she used to look at to see her innocent, girlish face, and even her ex-husband:

She saw her native village, . . . her parental home . . . She saw her father's face . . . her mother's too. . . . She saw her own face, glowing with girlish beauty . . . illuminating all the interior of the dusky mirror . . . there she beheld another countenance, of a man well stricken in years, a . . . scholar-like. (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 53)

The Puritans' sharp stares, like arrows aimed at Hester's heart, shatter her initial attempt to avoid confrontation. Unconsciously, she clutches her daughter tighter to her bosom until the child begins to cry (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 54). She hears Pearl's voice and touches the letter "A" to ensure that she is a sinner. Now, she has all the materialistic proof from the outer world to understand her reality. As a result, the suppressed pain emerges to the surface (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 10-11).

Waiting on the scaffold under harsh June sun for three hours from 10.00 am to 1.00 pm (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 57) motivates Hester's emotions from denial to the rage stage. Thus, her silence and disengagement from both John Wilson's sermon for an hour or more about adultery (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 62) and the entire audience are evidence of her suppressed irritation, as if she were saying internally, "What do you know?" to judge me (Hester) (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 12); indeed, they know nothing about the reality only gossips.

Miserably, she is not allowed to express her emotions. Consequently, she becomes increasingly frustrated every minute. As the priest reaches the climax of his speech, Pearl cries out loud (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 62) as if she were hearing her mother's inner scream so that she cries at them to stop. Hester senses that she no longer belongs to the cult of true womanhood, as if she had wanted to express her awareness of her sin as a Puritan woman. Even in the future, she is unwelcome, simply because she is stained with shame.

After three hours of interrogations, sermons, and people's hypocrisy, Hester returns to the jail with her two scars: the scarlet letter "A" and Pearl. One can imagine how Hester walks coldly; her steps are frustrated. She is not the same proud woman who comes to the sunshine; she is a defeated woman who returns to the darkness of Boston's prison. At night, she is

occupied with hysteric anger; Hawthorne describes it as “nervous excitement” (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 63). No more can she repress her inner struggles; she wants to give them structure as Kübler-Ross and Kessler describe the stage (2014, p. 15).

The amount of rage and anxiety she holds for hours comes out through screams and shouts directed at her poor infant as if she were blaming Pearl for her anguish. Frustration and anxiety spread all over Hester’s veins and into her daughter’s veins through breastfeeding during that night (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 64). According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler, such anger is healthy to identify the victim’s grief and to move forward in the five stages of grief (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 12).

The prison setting amplifies the frustration experienced by both the mother and daughter. Furthermore, Hester’s anger blocks any logical thinking or communicating (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 11); thus, she does not care about the jailer, Mr. Brackett, rebuking and threatening punishment (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 64). Sometimes the surroundings, including the victim herself, may not understand the reason for such screams, which in fact reveal her inner pain. It is a psychological tool that provides her with enough strength to pass on to the next stage (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 15).

Master Brackett accepts the strange physician’s help, who later turns out to be Hester’s ex-husband, Roger Chillingworth (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 64). Her screaming episode has ended, providing her with the moderating calmness of the bargaining stage (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 15-16). Hester’s bargain works in refusing Chillingworth’s prescription to her infant (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 65), whereas she accepts to take it for herself. The helpless woman changes from blaming Pearl to blaming herself and wishes to die because life is worse than death. Hester bargains to die but is unsuccessful, and she has a single imposed identity: that of a sinner.

Having failed in her bargaining with her ex-husband, Hester fluctuates backward to the anger stage once more. Nothing is unusual, as wavering among the stages is possible and healthy to get out of all the grief emotions (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 7, 18). In response to being excluded to a separate cottage near the sea, where she lives alone with her daughter (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 72), Hester becomes angry once again. This time, she projects her rage through needling skills (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 73), due to societal rules that prevent her from any extreme behaviour. Needlecraft

helps her to express her inner anxieties as she transitions to the next stage, which is bargaining. Activities, such as needlework, are defence mechanisms used in this stage by some victims (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p.16).

After three years, Hester's emotions are relatively stable; she is living in the bargaining stage. Consistent with this stage, she directs blame inward, questioning her actions (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 17). Hester's self-blame is evident when she whispers to God, "O Father in Heaven . . . what is this being I have brought into the world!" (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 85) Hester feels responsible for bringing Pearl—whom the community views as a devilish child—into Salem; she believes that "if only..." (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 17) she had resisted that love, which was actually rape, the consequences would have been different. Nevertheless, the reality is that the rape occurred, and Pearl now exists as a living reminder.

Soon after, she bargains for life on two levels: the inner world to have emotional support and the outer world to safely sustain her way of life. Hester's emotional world consists of two aspects: first, she negotiates with God for forgiveness. Thus, she tries to dress Pearl in a very "airy charm" (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 75) to remind herself of her sin all the time for the sake of repentance. Additionally, she spends all her remaining money on charity (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 75). Moreover, she patiently endures people's insults just to achieve God's forgiveness, which is the emotional assistance she desperately needs.

Secondly, she bargains with herself, as Mrs Prynne sometimes feels that she is a victim of her society's doctrines. She feels a sense of injustice in wearing the scarlet letter on her bosom all the time. However, if this "A" possessed a kind of magical power, she might see that many others would also be wearing it. She believes that no man is without sin; this reflects Hawthorne's exact belief that a person is a mixture of goodness and evil deeds (Bramlet, 2020, p. iv-v).

Thus, when some people have the letter "A" carved on their bosoms like Hester, others hide it under a cloak of dignity. "Hester says to herself . . . there would be nothing human within the scope of view" (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 78), suggesting that she is attempting to be more merciful with her soul because blaming destroys her inner life. Mrs Prynne is on the right track of Kübler-Ross's model of grief in this stage as she bargains with her

pain not to sense the feeling of guiltiness (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 17).

The second level of Mrs Prynne's bargain is her ambition to keep her outer world safe for her and her daughter. Initially, it is demonstrated when Hester allows her daughter Pearl to shout and scream at the Puritan children who mock them on their way to the Governor's house (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 91). Further, Hester negotiates with the elders of her community to keep Pearl, as Pearl represents both Hester's happiness and her suffering (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 100-101). Interestingly, this moment is the first time Hester raises her voice since she last shouted in the prison, as she now wishes to live differently than before. She is searching for a means to maintain her strength in the face of life's injustices. Pearl is the source of that strength (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 101).

Thus, in Hester's case, the bargaining stage operates on two levels, each with its own sublevels. Sadly, despite all these efforts, she comes close to the truth that she has lost her femininity, dignity, and Puritan spirituality to continue her life (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 20). Hence, this stage serves as a beneficial preparation for the upcoming emotion, which primarily revolves around the meaninglessness of life.

At the Governor's house, Hester sees the reflection of her two scars; she sees the letter "A" as big as covering her whole body, and Pearl's exaggerated size, both serving as reminders of her sad reality (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 94), pushing her to the depression stage. She is overwhelmed with profound feelings of helplessness; it appears that society is unable to accept her and her daughter. For example, Hester's community considers Pearl "an imp of evil" (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 83), to the extent that it makes Hester herself doubt Pearl's existence when she kisses her several times and hugs her tightly to confirm that she is a human, not a fairy (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 82). Furthermore, the culture does not allow her to sew for bridals (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 73) because she does not belong to the cult of the true womanhood. Additionally, she must endure the insults and heartbreaking words from both adults and children in silence (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 75-6).

Hester is humiliated by both those she assists financially and the wealthy women who benefit from her needlework; they never hesitate to remind her of her shame. During the Sabbath day, the clergymen successfully shift the topic of their sermons to moral issues, giving her as an example, and the crowd gathers around her and her little daughter

(Hawthorne, 1988, p. 76), or when the stern magistrate refers to her shame badge, which makes her unsuitable to be a mother (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 98).

All these factors transform Hester into a desperate woman who experiences a sense of emptiness. She is unable to share either happiness or sadness; cannot smile; lives alone with her daughter; and walks silently like a ghost while her daughter holds her fingers (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 77). People's gazing at her scarlet letter "A" burns her completely, but without smoke, it intensifies her suffering and makes her feel internally empty. Thus, depression is her fourth stage, which is characterised by her harsh clothes—"Her own dress was of the coarsest material and the most somber hue" (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 74); similarly, her decision to cut her hair or hide it under the scarf (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 146) and her silence about the culture's inhumane behaviour suggest a suppression of identity or femininity she was experiencing. Hawthorne describes this stage in Hester's life in the following lines:

In all her intercourses with society, however, there was nothing that made her feel as if she belonged to it. Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact, implied, . . . that she was banished, and as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere, . . . yet close beside them, like a ghost that revisits the familiar fireside . . . no more smile . . . nor . . . sorrow. (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 75-6)

However, this stage is harder than anyone might imagine, as individuals feel withdrawn from themselves and from life, and their lives are coloured with darkness, as if there were no hope. It is better to accept sadness and meaninglessness, as they are like a volcano; once it is ready, it erupts, and quietness covers the area (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 21-2). All of Hester's behaviours reflect her stage, which is depression; she shuts down her "nervous system" to protect her heart and mind (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 21).

Depression has consumed almost four years of Hester Prynne's life, as Pearl is now seven years old since her last appearance at the Governor's house. Hester still has two green spots in her life: Pearl and the good deeds that provide her with the strength to pass her ordeal. Despite her sorrow, she is doing her best to save the precious things that keep her away from the "Black Man"; she does not try to immerse herself in the dark forest.

Instead, she waits patiently to achieve spiritual calmness and divine forgiveness (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 104).

The time she consumes in depression is not counted because this journey is individual; each passes it in her way (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. xiv). She is withdrawing from life but not immersing herself in darkness, of course with the assistance of her two green spots.

Therefore, Hester's prolonged depression serves as a valuable bridge to the acceptance stage, marked by personal plans for a promising future. Moving steadily and silently on, she pursues her ambitions without interfering in the public or private spheres of others (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 43). She is highly focused, dedicating herself to spirituality, consistently navigating her small community during difficult times, regularly delivering food to the poor, and engaging in needlework for both the impoverished and the wealthy—excluding those intended for bridal use. She spends entire nights nursing the sick to leave with the sunrise (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 143-44). Even though she is like a ghost, the good deeds unintentionally work on her inner world, leading her to a deeper understanding of herself and her place in the community.

Gradually, the meaning of her scarlet letter undergoes a considerable transformation within the community, from a symbol of shame to one of ability "Able" and even sainthood "nun" (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 144-45). Some even call her "Sister of Mercy" (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 144). Despite these new perceptions, some still view her with suspicion, highlighting the complexity of human nature. Yes, Hester is not only accepting her sin but also the culture's low cognition about freedom and "mutual happiness" for both sexes (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 233).

She avoids verbal communication with others; for instance, Hester does not respond to greetings or expressions of appreciation for her efforts, as she looks down, touches her badge of shame, and silently goes on her way (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 144). She is surprised by people's logic: how could one scandalise someone, prevent their children from playing with her, and, at the same time, thank her? She is the same woman!

The four years of depression affect Hester internally, enabling her to develop a personality stronger than her surroundings; her outward behaviour reflects her inner strength. She no longer submits to their humiliation through manipulating her emotions, which explains why she keeps silent and touches her badge with every compliment. She does not

accept subjugating herself to the authority of the seniors in her community. For example, one day, Roger Chillingworth informs her with the pleasant news that the seniors have decided to strip off the scarlet letter “A” but she does not respond positively (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 155).

For her, the scarlet letter will lose its significance when society’s views towards women change, so she wants to keep it as a symbol of feminism, as if she were challenging cultural norms. She dreams of a brighter period (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 233). Therefore, she does not view the scarlet letter as a symbol of shame but rather as a badge of rebellion.

At this stage, Hester is more robust; she overcomes her fears of Chillingworth and informs Dimmesdale of Chillingworth’s real identity (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 171-72). She no longer perceives herself as the “worse sinner” (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 173), but rather as an individual capable of moral judgment. Her sense of acceptance helps her formulate a hopeful plan to travel with Pearl and Dimmesdale to another country, such as London, Germany, or Italy, in order to start anew, away from people's gossip and judgments (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 175-77). Even though Dimmesdale dies before they can go on their voyage (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 226), Hester succeeds in planting Pearl inside the cult of the true womanhood cage (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 232).

Hester feels lonely and silent in her daughter’s house. Thus, she plans to return to Boston, where her story becomes legendary, to have a more active role as a “counsellor” (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 232-33). Interestingly, she becomes a legend, and women come to her for advice and guidance (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 232-33). Therefore, her acceptance stage works on different levels: accepting herself as a human being who has good and evil deeds and accepting her two badges of shame, the scarlet letter “A” and Pearl. Moreover, her insistence on maintaining good deeds changes her nation’s perspective towards her and her daughter, and she gains the title of “sister of mercy.” Furthermore, she works on her fears and plans for her future, and eventually she becomes a counsellor. All these are the obvious characteristics of a successful victim gaining acceptance (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 24-25).

Throughout the five stages of grief, Hester passes from one stage to another only through silence, which reflects the fact that the Salem community does not allow her to explain herself. Occasionally, Pearl embodies her mother’s physical response to the inhumanity of their culture.

Hence, Hester's voice rises in the bargaining stage to defend her green spot, her treasure (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 79), "Pearl," and in the acceptance stage, to defend her desire to keep her badge of shame. Finally, her voice appears like that of a counsellor, showing her ambition to discuss a brighter future for women.

However, in cases of rape and rape trauma, not only does the victim suffer trauma and need treatment using Kübler-Ross's model, but if the rape results in pregnancy, their offspring may also require it. In *The Scarlet Letter*, it is not only Hester who endures the burden of rape trauma but also her daughter, who sucks up all her mother's anger, depression, and sadness. Consider how a girl born from sin could cope with such trauma so that examining Pearl's character is essential for understanding the broader implications of rape trauma within the narrative.

### **3. "Mother's child": Pearl's Five Stages of Grief**

Hester spends her pregnancy months in the darkness of a wooden prison (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 43), then three months of confinement before she sees the sunlight. Therefore, Pearl's first reaction to the sun's brightness is to close her eyes (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 48), as if she was denying her reality. Meanwhile, Hester makes her way through the crowd, hearing their insults while carrying Pearl in her lap. Eventually, she cries at the priest John Wilson, who resembles authority and the voice of the community, showing that she understands her reality. One can imagine how her cries silence the crowd for a while (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 62). Her pain crawls into her unconscious to come out in the form of anger.

However, this is an imaginary explanation; while babies may feel their mother's sadness and react accordingly, it does not necessarily indicate an act of denial. This study successfully interprets Pearl's response to her mother's rape trauma through the lens of the denial stage. Pearl is three years old, and she is excluded from the Christian children's circles. She is isolated, as if destined to share her mother's fate—a destiny she refuses (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 83).

The little girl expresses her anger on two levels: firstly, anger directed at the injustice of her community, and secondly, anger towards her mother and towards God. At this stage, it is natural for the mourner to direct anger at others and even at God. Once this phase has passed, she will draw strength from God, whom she has blamed for her sorrows for a time (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 15).

Pearl begins her first level in the angry stage by expressing her anxieties over the community's injustice towards her and her mother (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 13). She shouts and screams at the children's jeers, occasionally throwing stones at them (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 84, 91). Excluded from children's playgroups and treated unfairly by adults, Pearl's frustration intensifies. As a toddler, she seeks revenge on her rude, tyrannical community through unusual play, using her imagination like a dramatist to ridicule her society—a form difficult to classify as satirical, comic, or tragic. Despite her small size, she mimics the act of slapping Christian children harshly and without mercy, just as they do to her, all while mocking the elders:

The pine trees, aged, black and solemn, and flinging groans and other melancholy utterances on the breeze, . . . to figure as Puritan elders; the ugliest weeds of the garden were their children, whom Pearl smote down and uprooted, most unmercifully. (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 85)

Pearl is traumatised—not only by her culture's oppression but also by her mother and God. Pearl is the “walking-talking scarlet letter” to her mother (Suresh, 2010, p. 31); thus, Hester dresses her daughter in a way to identify with her bright, embroidered scarlet letter on her bosom (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 91). Pearl is aware of her mother's concerns about the nature of her existence, which causes her significant pain (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 83, 85). As a result, she looks at her mother with a devilish smile to express her hurt (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 82). However, the little girl's anger reaches its peak to express her anger toward God and the seniors at the Governor's house.

Pearl angrily replies to Mr Wilson's question of whether she is a Father's child or of the Devil, “I am Mother's child” (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 97-8). Although she knows the correct answer, her insistence on a contrary response only shows hostility towards the Puritan culture at that time. In other words, it is as if Pearl was blaming God for her ordeal. Shortly, she projects her anger at God and her mother for her miserable situation (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 87).

To summarise, Pearl's behaviour—acting strangely and returning emotional hurt to her mother in response to Hester's suspicion that she may be the devil's child, as well as engaging in illogical communication with both the elders and her mother—reflects her irritation, confusion, and

sadness, as if she were avenging herself. In this sense, she is unintentionally trying to frame her pain in one form or another (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 11, 14, 15).

As an innocent child, it is difficult to bear all that sadness; she needs emotional support from her mother. She feels responsible for her mother's agony and her own, a clear manifestation of the bargaining stage (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 17). Pearl could make a connection between the scarlet letter "A," herself and their anguish, so she asks herself, "What if" that letter disappeared? (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 17) As a result, she scatters flowers upon it and dances around it in her ambition to please her mother, but Hester does not respond positively (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 86-7). The miserable toddler does not know what to do next regarding her mother's adverse reaction.

Thus, Pearl begins to think differently; she bargains with her mother to embrace her as her little daughter, and she tries to convince her that she is neither God's work nor the Devil but her little Pearl instead (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 87-8). She bargains to accept her as she is, without any external considerations. As she is in her early childhood, she can only offer her mother smiles, laughs, and hugs in return for Hester's love (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 88; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 17-19).

By the way, Pearl's behaviour aligns with Hester's depressive phase, particularly as Pearl grows older, which was discussed earlier. Although Pearl believes her efforts to bring happiness to her mother are ineffective, they actually play a crucial role in helping Hester move towards acceptance. However, the inexperienced Pearl fails to understand that her mother is in a critical phase that requires time to heal. Meanwhile, Hester's ability to control her emotions is inconsistent—sometimes she manages well, while at other times she struggles (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 185). This inconsistency reflects the complexity of their emotional states as they both are on their grief journey while bearing the challenges of their mother-daughter relationship.

The few times that Hester succeeds in displaying her motherhood assist Pearl in avoiding a depression stage, such as dressing her well, holding her hand, letting her shout at the rude children, and accepting that she will not want to pick the scarlet letter "A" off the ground; all these are profound in motivating Pearl's inner acceptance. Unlike her mother, Pearl does not experience the depression that consumed four years of Hester's life.

Instead, she skips over this stage and moves directly towards acceptance. Her progress is facilitated not only by her personality but also by her father's support during this period, which helps prevent her from retreating from emotional isolation.

Ultimately, all the hardships that Pearl goes through during her past three stages of grief help her pass to the final stage. It starts with self-acceptance and ends with aims and life plans (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 25-8). No more does Pearl internalize blame for her mother's supposed sin; instead, she is convinced of her purity and innocence.

Consequently, her goal is to be included in the cult of true womanhood; she wants that reward. For instance, when she enters the sunshine circle, she asks her mother to stay out; otherwise, the sunshine will fade away (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 185). She rejects picking up the scarlet letter "A" off the forest's ground and asks her mother to do that by herself (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 187) because she believes that she is not responsible for that badge of shame. Indeed, she succeeds in her goal as she finally marries and inherits a considerable fortune from Chillingworth (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 232-33).

The second step is her aim for public acceptance when she asks her father to stand with her on the scaffold (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 188); she wins in her intent. Her father agrees to be with her on the scaffold in the sunshine (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 225), which means public approval of her existence as Father's child, not that of the Devil's. Once these two steps are done, she achieves higher acceptance, which is the ability to forgive. Eventually, she forgives her father, kisses him, and even mourns his death (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 231).

Pearl's healing journey takes only seven years and does not include a depression stage, while her mother requires almost twenty-one years to regain emotional ability and a sense of her voice. Based on Professor Vivian E. Hamilton's study "The age of marital capacity: Reconsidering civil recognition of adolescent marriage," which suggests that age twenty-one was the appropriate age for girls in the past American colonies (1829), it is likely that Pearl marries at that age, indicating the relevance of this study's findings. Meanwhile, Hester primarily remains in a state of depression; in contrast, Pearl skips it. These differences can be understood by analysing *The Scarlet Letter* culturally in relation to Veesper's concept of "the moment of exchange."

#### 4. Pearl: Salem's The Moment of Exchange

A community's culture is vital for its members' beliefs, behaviour, and actions. Thus, *The Scarlet Letter* portrays the culture of seventeenth-century Boston as characterised by patriarchal cultural disciplines. Consequently, it is advantageous to apply Veesper's concept of "the moment of exchange" (Veesper, 1989, p. xiv), which consists of three interchangeable ideologies: circulation, negotiation, and exchange. Such a patriarchal society conceals its central interest in masculinity beneath the gown of Puritanism. The Salem community, as presented in *The Scarlet Letter*, consists of three components: selves (authority and the public), texts, and others (others in this context are Hester and Pearl). The authority uses physical and psychological punishments to maintain the texts (rules) that enforce conformity to societal norms and uphold the patriarchal structure (Veesper, 1989, p. xiii-xiv). The aim of the texts is to preserve masculinity in its established role within a patriarchal society. The public has only one role: to verbally support the authority's judgement.

However, "the selves" are also divided into two circles: the closed circle, which includes fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons who have critical reactions to rape that may extend beyond religious beliefs to maintain their prestige within their families and communities (Veesper, 1989, p. xiii). In contrast, the larger circle is content with guessing, gossiping, and blaming. The following paragraphs illustrate how the selves negotiate the circulation of masculinity because once masculinity is ensured, the exchange will be prominent and more accessible.

Regrettably, women are the first group to begin gossiping and judging about Hester's situation. A group of five women gathers to negotiate Hester's condition and how she destroys the circulation of masculinity, leading to her being labeled an adulteress. They are tough and temerarious in their speech (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 46). Moreover, they eagerly push through the crowd to get closer to the scaffold in the marketplace, providing them with a direct view that facilitates a nuanced examination of the shameful woman's appearance and behaviour for the sake of criticism to support the authority verbally as mentioned earlier.

The eldest woman, who is in her fifties, calls the other women "good wives" because they are pure; they hold the characteristics of the cult of true womanhood (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 47; Welter, 1966, p. 151). She believes that Hester's punishment is not enough compared to her sin. If the

authority left the judgement to them (women), they would not show any kind of mercy (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 47). Another old woman in the autumn of her life shows a similar attitude, adding that the authority is “God-fearing gentlemen” (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 47), which is the reason for such a merciful sentence. Ironically, women do not possess a “God-fearing” nature, which enables them to boldly discuss Hester’s issue through suggesting to iron the letter “A” on her forehead (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 47) as a fair exchange for her disobedience to the texts of the “moment of exchange” (Veese, 1989, p. xiii).

Furthermore, there is a woman who is saddened by Reverend Master Dimmesdale’s sickness, as he cannot bear such sin in his society (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 47). The young woman, who holds a new generation in her hand, comforts the frustrated woman by explaining that Hester will bear the scarlet letter not only on her bosom but also in her heart forever; “let her cover the mark as she will, the pang of it will be always in her heart” (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 47), which serves as a reference to psychological torture as an exchange for her destruction of the circulation of masculinity.

Yet the ugliest woman cannot accept any punishment less than death, because Hester brings shame to all women. She feels that the texts should contain such a law to protect men’s dignity and women’s purity, as Hester stains the whole community (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 47). She adds that such lenient punishments only encourage wrongdoing and that the authority should consider their own prestige—especially if their wives and daughters were to fall to such transgressions:

This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die. Is there not law for it? Truly there is . . . Then let the magistrates who have made it of no effect, thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray! (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 47)

It appears that a pleased man overhears the women’s negotiation (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 47) as if their talk had condoned his fear of such sin being repeated by his wife, sister, or daughter. Hence, all these judgements are made before Hester’s appearance, as the women believe they are going to see a defeated, depressed woman who stumbles during her walk to the scaffold. However, Hester surprises them with a strong personality and elegant dress, as if she were a queen wearing the crown on her breast

instead of her head. The women become irritable and begin to start another negotiation.

The eldest woman believes that they should remove that elegant gown and offers her own torn rag, which she uses to bind her muscle pain, to carve Hester's scarlet letter to maintain the circulation of masculinity from destruction:

If we stripped Madam Hester's rich gown off her dainty shoulders; and as for the red letter, which she hath stitched so curiously, I'll bestow a rag of mine own rheumatic flannel, to make a fitter one! (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 48)

However, the youngest woman assures them that each stitch of the needle, before embroidering that gown, was like stitching her heart several times (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 48). Ironically, her speech relieves the crowd of women. Thus, women support the circulation of masculinity through their harsh speech and gaze. In return, Hester buys exclusion from the cult of true womanhood as a punishment for destroying the texts of the moment of exchange (Veese, 1989, p. xiii-xiv). Such practices continued for many years, and this is one reason for Hester's silence and long psychological healing journey.

Then, there is the authority, who are the most important members in "the selves" to negotiate the texts regarding Hester's case on three separate times; each time, Hester is sentenced based on their attitudes (Veese, 1989, p. xiii). First, they gather on a platform, which is like a balcony that opens to the scaffold where the sinner and her infant stand. Each member tries to make her confess her partner's identity. They balance severity, dignity, and threat while exploiting religion to maintain the circulation of masculinity; since Hester does not conform to the ideals of the true cult of womanhood, she is condemned to wear the scarlet letter "A" on her bosom for the rest of her life and on her grave thereafter as an exchange for her disobedience to the texts of patriarchal culture (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 58-62).

On the second occasion, the same committee, together with the physician Chillingworth, convenes at the Governor's house to consider yet another consequence for Hester's disregard of the rules governing the moment of exchange. They discuss revoking Pearl's custody from her, which reveals a patriarchal society intent on controlling and disciplining women who defy its codes. Believing that a sinner is unfit to teach her daughter religious doctrine and serves as a poor role model, the committee

reinforces the expectation that only those adhering to masculine-defined morality can raise children. For the first time, Hester asserts her rights—using her voice to defend herself (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 100).

Sarcastically, she reminds the committee that Pearl is a constant, living reminder of her sin. If she ever forgets the scarlet letter “A,” the child will surely revive her memory (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 101), ensuring that the punishment is ongoing, as she will continually experience psychological torment. This implies that there is a compelling reason to grant her request, since the townspeople wish her to endure perpetual psychological suffering as an exchange for her disobedience to the texts of patriarchy.

Moreover, Hester appeals to Mr Dimmesdale for assistance, i.e., to persuade the committee with her logic (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 101). She names her daughter Pearl because she is precious; Pearl symbolises all that Hester has lost, including her purity (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 101). Reverend Dimmesdale reiterates Hester’s argument and further contends that Pearl is a miracle, intended to prevent her mother from repeating past mistakes (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 102). Without Pearl, Hester would be more vulnerable to sin and, consequently, might cause further damage to the circulation of masculinity. Therefore, the committee allows Hester to retain custody of her daughter, thereby ensuring the continuation of her psychological punishment, which serves both as recompense for her perceived impurity and as a safeguard for the circulation of masculinity against any future transgressions she might commit (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 102, 104; Veaser, 1989, p. xiv). This decision reflects the committee’s cultural motivation to maintain the dominance of masculine values and prevent challenges to their authority.

After seven years, the authority gathers again to discuss the possibility of removing Hester’s scarlet letter in exchange for her proper behaviour during that period. They negotiate whether she deserves to be freed from the burden of the letter “A”: “It was debated whether or no, with safety to the common weal, yonder scarlet letter might be taken off your bosom” (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 151). This debate demonstrates how the Salem community is influenced by the texts of “the moment of exchange” and how “the selves” (the authority) control women’s destinies and freedoms (Veaser, 1989, p. xiii-xiv).

However, after enduring seven years of psychological punishment, Hester has become strong enough to assert her perspective. She makes it

clear that she has borne her punishment to please God, not the authorities, and insists that the badge of shame will fall away only when God wills it: "It lies not in the pleasure of the magistrates to take off this badge. . . . Were I worthy to be quit of it, it would fall away of its own nature" (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 151).

Hester's response to such a decision could highlight how the authorities exploit religion to sustain the circulation of masculinity and, consequently, their power. However, if they truly relied on Christian teachings, they would recall that Jesus prevented men from stoning an adulterous woman. He said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." No one stepped forward, and Jesus forgives the woman, asking her not to sin again (Bible, John 8.7, New International Version). This verse means that all human beings are sinners, and no one has the right to judge someone else, specifically using religion, as is the case with Hester.

It can be concluded that Hester agrees to their first negotiation, but she refuses to participate in the second and third exchanges. If the reader goes back to Hester's five stages of grief, he/she will see her psychological growth; she confines herself to her internal world as she does with her appearance so that the patriarchy could not subject her to the moment of exchange anymore.

Finally, there is the closed circle that is embodied in the character of Roger Chillingworth, who is an ugly old scholar and physician; he is Hester's husband (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 53-4). Years ago, the spouses decided to travel to Boston, with the intention of Hester going ahead of her husband. However, upon her arrival in Boston, she receives news that her husband has been drawn into the sea (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 56). This leaves the widow, Hester, alone for two years, making her an easy target (Mckibbin, Shackelford, Goetz, Starratt, & Miner, 2008, p. 87; Greene, 2001, p. xiii, 65, 121). On the same day of Hester's judgement, Chillingworth arrives in Boston to be shocked to see his wife on the scaffold for an adultery accusation (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 55).

Hester shows fear and complete submissiveness to keep his identity hidden as he wants; it is sufficient to observe his gesture to directly respond: "raised his finger, made a gesture in the air, and laid it on his lips" (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 55). Even though she is excluded from the cult of true womanhood community, she unconsciously conforms to its rules: she obeys her husband and even promises him to keep his identity secret

(Hawthorne, 1988, p. 69; Veerer, 1989, p. xiii-xiv). Indeed, her fear demonstrates Chillingworth's ability to kill her and her infant (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 65).

Revealing Chillingworth's identity means he must act according to the texts of the moment of exchange, which involve killing to maintain his prestige within his community (Veerer, 1989, p. xiii-xiv)—an action he would rather not take. Instead, he is cunningly making another plan to preserve the circulation of masculinity. He believes that life can be more painful for his sinful wife than death. Living with the scarlet letter "A" means experiencing thousands of deaths per day. He also aims to avenge himself on her partner by ruining his soul (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 66). In other words, Chillingworth believes that killing Hester is not enough to protect his prestige; he desires an intense exchange for Hester's betrayal:

What could I do better for my object [revenge] than to let thee live. . . . As he spoke, he laid his long forefinger on the scarlet letter, which forthwith seemed to scorch into Hester's breast, as if it had been red-hot. He noticed her involuntary gesture and smiled "live, therefore, and bear about thy doom with thee, in the eyes of men and women. (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 66)

Taken together, disclosing his real identity secret, yet refraining from killing his wife and her infant in pursuit of revenge. He is then compelled to endure the patriarchal stigma of being labelled as the "adulteress's husband" (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 69). Ironically, the old Chillingworth prefers to live under another identity to keep his masculine prestige. Such texts are ingrained in the unconscious minds of patriarchal communities, influencing their perceptions of gender roles and the consequences of infidelity. In this exchange, Hester agrees to the arrangement: she will live with her fears from her disguised husband due to her impurity, while Chillingworth enjoys his vengeance and protects his prestige.

Pearl, as the daughter of a sinner who breaks the rules of masculinity, has to bear some difficulties. As a result, the adults negotiate and decide to call her the Devil's product (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 86), while their children exclude her from their playing circles, similar to Hester's exclusion from the cult of true womanhood circle. However, the authority insists on offering her all her rights to attend church lectures and school (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 103) to properly learn the texts of "the moment of exchange." Conversely, as Chillingworth's real identity is secret, he sees Pearl as an

innocent child (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 65). This is a sinew of hope and shows that while they apparently conform to patriarchal codes unconsciously, they believe the opposite.

Eventually, after seven years of remorse, Reverend Master Dimmesdale is compelled to confess the truth publicly. He summons Hester and Pearl to join him upon the scaffold in the marketplace, where he exposes the scarlet letter branded upon his chest to the assembled crowd (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 223-4). The man who had judged Hester turns out to be her partner of sin. The man who had judged Hester all those years turns out to be her partner of sin.

This revelation echoes Jesus' belief regarding stoning the adulterous woman when he directs his speech to his community: anyone who considers himself to be freed from sins can stone her; it comes out that all of them, one by one, turn away from the platform of punishment. However, it is a patriarchal community that deceives by appearance to keep the circulation of masculinity, ensuring that women remain the primary victims—though men, to a lesser extent, also suffer under these norms, as they are often pressured to conform to rigid standards of masculinity that can lead to their own emotional and social struggles, such as feelings of inadequacy, isolation, and the inability to express vulnerability.

However, the final scene of the cemetery, in which the lovers' graves are separated by the letter "A" on Hester's tomb (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 233), serves as another example of patriarchal exchange to Hester's disobedience to the cultural codes of the Salem community. This scene reflects a tendency to view her as a sinner even after her death, while Dimmesdale escapes cultural judgement—only facing their inner conscience if they have one—and, of course, God will have His say in the afterlife. Nonetheless, giving Hester and her daughter the chance to live—which is their customary right—not only affects them, as Hester transforms into a "Sister of Mercy" and later a counsellor while Pearl becomes a respectable, happy wife (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 232), but also impacts others. During this period, Dimmesdale becomes remorseful and repents his sin publicly while Chillingworth ceases to be the "Black Man" and offers all his fortune to Pearl to live a comfortable life (Hawthorne, 1988, p. 230–31).

If one imagines an alternative scenario in which Chillingworth becomes angry and seeks to avenge his wounded masculinity by killing Hester and her innocent daughter, he would turn into a murderer who never has the

opportunity to repent, as his victims would be dead. In such a case, he turns into a murderer and never has the opportunity to repent, as the victims are murdered. At the same time, he will have no heir to his wealth. Similarly, Dimmesdale will remain the hypocritical priest who deceives people; he, too, does not have the opportunity to repent for the same reason. More significantly, the society will lack both a “Sister of Mercy” and a “counselor” for their problems.

### **Conclusion**

This study has concluded that Hester and Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter* (1985) by Nathaniel Hawthorne successfully pass through Kübler-Ross’s model of grief, each in her own distinct manner. Both characters’ experiences are shaped not only by personal emotion but also by the specific expectations imposed upon them by their society. Pearl moves through the stages with diverse emotions and outward reactions—such as sadness, shouting, screaming, acting, hostility, and forgiveness—possibly due to her youth, which makes her naïve to what society expects. Hester, on the other hand, is more internal, often responding in silence because of the harsh cultural judgements of her community, which lead her to experience profound feelings of isolation and despair as she grapples with the societal rejection. Furthermore, Pearl does not experience depression, whereas for Hester, it is the longest stage.

These differences highlight how Salem society is governed by the strict norms of Veese’s concept of “the moment of exchange,” particularly those relating to women’s purity and destiny, making it harder for Hester to achieve acceptance, while Pearl, to a lesser extent, is affected by these expectations. In sum, the psychological study of these two characters not only deepens the reader’s understanding of rape trauma but also serves as a powerful critique of the cultural doctrines that dictate—and often distort—women’s destinies in patriarchal societies.

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