

Oppression in Puritan culture towards female identity with a particular reference to Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter."

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Abstract :

Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose novel, "The Scarlet Letter, " is one of the most well-known American literature authors, is generally acknowledged as a significant contributor to the formation of the romance novel genre. His writings are heavily influenced by Puritan philosophy. Hawthorne portrays the society of 17th-century Puritan America in The Scarlet Letter, interpreted as a reflection of women's difficulties during that era. This study aims to explore how female characters struggle with oppression and intolerance in the Puritan community. The design of the study is a textual analysis. Data was collected from the text "The Scarlet Letter" as the primary data, while secondary data came from various books, papers, websites, Britannica, and other sources. A qualitative data analysis method is adopted. The data were analyzed and described using Puritan ideology as the basis for interpretation. The findings indicate that the analysis may predict how women were portrayed in patriarchal Puritan societies throughout Nathaniel Hawthorne's lifetime, particularly in the middle of the eighteenth century. The study recommends that additional research be carried out to analyze the topic of oppression and dominance over women.

Keywords: (Nathaniel Hawthorne; The Scarlet Letter; Puritan; Oppression; Patriarchal).

Introduction

One of the very few truly successful and creative novelists in America, Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter has widely attracted public interest. He is a crucial figure in the development of American literature (Foster, 1996). Hawthorne relates the tale of Hester

Prynne's miserable existence, depicts the poor status of women in Puritan New England in the seventeenth century, and, at the same time, ruthlessly exposes the cruelty and prejudice towards women in Puritan culture. One explanation for why Hawthorne chose the seventeenth-century New England setting for his masterpiece of a human tragedy, *The Scarlet Letter*, is that this was a time of moral degradation (Nasrum, 2013). In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne expresses his concern about this moral degradation in a melancholy and ironic tone.

People who believe that the Christian faith should be practiced more holistically are called Puritans. The term "Puritan" was initially coined in the 1560s to describe people who advocate greater sanctity in doctrine and worship (Miller, 1982). They bring their interpretations of Christianity and come to America to practice it. Early American Puritans tried to reconcile their divisive religious beliefs and practices. It resembles the circumstances in English before entering a new setting almost precisely. These circumstances gave rise to many well-known religious leaders and academics. The Puritans founded new colonies, which eventually evolved into what is now known as the United States of America. With a doctrine and ethics, the American Puritans formed the Puritan beliefs. They purify the practice, which was tainted at the time due to widespread corruption in the community. The doctrine they adhered to during that time was known as Puritanism (Mills, 1948). Puritanism in America has evolved in response to the shifting conditions of the times. Puritanism altered the essence of the freedom to practice the faith of Puritans who immigrated to America during the country's formation. (Nuttall, 1992).

The radical feminism philosophy, which maintains that patriarchy is the leading cause of women's oppression and subjection, will be applied in this study to ascertain the author's conceptions about women's roles. This will be done by analyzing the author's work. According to Kreps (1970), radical feminism opposes patriarchy by distancing itself from conventional gender roles. Radical feminism also views patriarchy as the primary factor

contributing to the subjugation of women (Suhadi, 2014). According to Kamarae (1992), Because it provides a conceptual form and allows for an organized accounting of women's oppression, the term "patriarchy" is the most appropriate explanation. Generally, "patriarchy" denotes men's dominance and control over women (Sultana, 2010). This philosophy is the same as that of Kate Millet, who focuses more on submission and dominance. However, they are almost identical. Therefore, use radical feminism to highlight oppression and patriarchy to investigate how Hester Prynne triumphs over patriarchal authority in their respective worlds. According to Kate Millet, the "self-reliance" concepts that are central to radical feminism as a strategy for liberation from patriarchal oppression are what give this philosophy its distinctive character in this study.

Research Significance

The importance of this research can be summed by adding to the existing body of knowledge some new information, especially for English literature readers and researchers, On how to determine the central idea or essence of a literary work concerning a specific literature theory, both overtly and implicitly notably English literature students who are reading literature works by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Thus, the findings of this research make a considerable contribution to the body of previous work in the field of feminism. In addition, It will add to the corpus of research on these subjects from the perspective of radical feminists. In addition, it will contribute to the research's overall generalization of the research that has previously been done on women's images in society. Both of these things are important.

Literature Review

This section reviews the concepts of radical feminism, Puritanism, and oppression towards women. The review will then focus on how Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* explores female identity. Several studies have analyzed *The Scarlet Letter* from various

angles. So, it is essential to review this analysis in order to gain a better understanding of other relevant studies. The ideology known as radical feminism claims that it is concerned with women's equality and has pushed for several causes connected to this objective. The concept developed by Kate Millet is at the heart of the conflict between moderate and radical forms of feminism.

This concept holds different points of view regarding the most effective approach to accomplishing the common goal of achieving complete equality for women. Millet (1977) contends that the patriarchal system is the source of all forms of inequality and women's oppression, which regards women as holding a secondary position in the gender relationship. According to McCann (2016), the ideology of radical feminism contests patriarchy by rejecting traditional gender norms. Radical feminism also views patriarchy as the primary factor contributing to the subjugation of women (Makama, 2013). It developed as a response to the liberal feminist and Marxist mindset confronting many different forms of women's oppression. Gimenez (2018) notices that women are oppressed through roles in reproduction. She thinks that men's and women's reproductive duties contribute to the masculine oppression of women.

In the 1560s, the term "Puritan" was first created as a pejorative way to refer to individuals who advocated for greater holiness in both worship and teaching. The Puritans held that every individual and every congregation were directly answerable to God instead of replying to God via an intermediary, such as a priest, bishop, or other religious leader. This was in contrast to the more common practice of answering to God through an intermediary.

Adultery was typically greeted with severe punishment, mainly for the woman but occasionally for the man. These punishments generally included the death penalty, mutilation, or torture. A study by Kartika (2021) showed women's status during the Puritan time. The study discussed how a female considered a deviant becomes an outcast from society due to her actions. It discusses how the Puritan society reacts to adultery as

violating their rules. In other studies, Thomson (2011) asserted that Hawthorne had a strong identification with the character of Hester and frequently criticized the Puritan community in his writing. He concluded that male culture gave women much credit for their resilience in the face of their partner's adultery and abuse. Puritans held the view that one person's sin contaminated the community in its entirety. Gao (2018) analyzed Hawthorne's work in *The Scarlet Letter* from the angle of symbolic images technique by criticizing Puritanism. This research illuminated the shadowy aspects of human nature during that era. It was concluded that the images of nature, time, and color highlight love and human emancipation while exposing the societal aspect of Puritan oppression of women.

As mentioned above, several studies have underlined the feminism issue; however, few studies have measured the impacts of Puritan oppression on female identity. Therefore, more studies are needed to examine not only the oppression of women but also the rigidity, intolerance, and ostracism of society. This study was guided by the following research question: what are the impacts of Puritan oppression towards female identity in the *Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne?

Methodology

This study examines Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* through the lens of textual analysis. It will study women's identity inside the Puritan group, known for its patriarchal structure. By applying radical feminism concepts, which highlight the patriarchal order, one can comprehend the depiction of women's identities at the time of Hawthorne, which was based on the assumption that women were subjugated, helpless, and dominated in society. Consequently, The concepts put out by Kate Millet will be taken into consideration in an examination of patriarchally oppressed female characters. She emphasizes the idea of patriarchy, which highlights the subjugation of women. Her ideas, such as "confrontation" and "self-reliance," can help researchers disentangle women's

tyranny and bring about emancipation. As a result, the ideas of Kate Millet will be utilized to investigate the experiences of female characters subjected to patriarchal tyranny. She stresses the importance of the patriarchal system, which emphasizes the subjugation of women. Her ideas, such as "confrontation" and "self-reliance," can assist researchers in figuring out how to free oppressed women and make it possible for them to live without restriction.

Data Collection

Data used by the researcher for this study came from the text of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter" as the primary data, while secondary data came from various books, papers, websites, Britannica, and other sources. The researcher gathers and uses secondary data because it is pertinent to the subject. The researcher closely read the novel text to identify key concepts related to the problem investigated. Texts, sentences, phrases, words, and descriptions that depict the social aspects when the novel was written. In addition to using library research to gather the data, the researcher also uses the internet to obtain information after reading.

Analysis and Findings

The researcher employed a data analysis method to support the analysis in this study. After carefully reading the information, the researcher created a list of data by grouping it according to its importance and relevancy. All data was examined and analyzed through comprehending reading based on the related theory. After that, the data were analyzed and described using Puritan ideology as the basis for interpretation.

In patriarchal societies, women are frequently subjected to dominance and oppression by men in positions of power. The significant result of this approach has been to deny women on a systematic level and to prevent them from recognizing their requirements, preferences, and capabilities as females (Hadi, 2017). In patriarchal countries, women are

perceived in a negative light, whereas men are more commonly linked with the adjectives "active," "powerful," and "superior." Khadroh (2014) notes that in a patriarchal oppression society, male privilege is encouraged to be dominating, and women are imaged with negative conceptualization.

Nathaniel Hawthorne makes the insights mentioned above in his works. In his depiction of patriarchal oppression, women are subjugated by the power of the male. In the *Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne must challenge the hypocrisy of being oppressed by male authority in the Puritan community. Hester Prynne is portrayed by Hawthorne as the agent of oppression (Wang, 2010). The author, Nathaniel Hawthorne, wants to draw attention to the preponderance of men in the Puritans' culture by bringing to light the low status of women in that society (Guebert, 2016).

The beginning of Hester Prynne's wretched life can be traced back to the Puritan community's accusation of adultery against her. Hawthorne makes her resistance by relying solely on her strength of mind and resolve. As a result of this circumstance, Hester can successfully reconstruct her identity as a woman who is entirely subject to the oppression of Puritans (Person, 2001). Hence, we shall apply the concept of radical feminism to examine the issue above. According to Kate Millet, "sexual politics" refers to a power-structure connection in which another controls one group of people. As such, she views patriarchy as a system of government in which women are subjugated to men (Millet, 2014). Another oppressive aspect of the Puritan culture is when people remark that Hester Prynne's affair with Arthur Dimmesdale has damaged the purity of society. This is an issue that needs to be addressed. Nasrum (2013) elucidates that the Puritan culture's ideas, which hold that sins not only prevent a person from entering paradise but also weaken society; as a result, the community should exclude those who commit sins. The experience of Hester Prynne in Puritan society is thus similar to this one. One could argue that her scandal with Arthur Dimmesdale constitutes oppression (Wang, 2010).

Hester also possesses freedom of thinking, which is another form of self-reliance. Even if it could endanger her life in the future, she can maintain her loyalty to her spouse. She does not love her husband, Chillingworth, so she leaves him to pursue her love with Dimmesdale. As the narrative portrays, Hester consistently upholds human values, including privacy, independence, and uniqueness (Wang, 2010). She views and employs them as instruments for asserting her Puritanism. Her actions demonstrate this; whenever someone inquires about her lover, she only responds, "Never!" (Qadawi, 2008).

The researcher concludes that Hester is a perfect example of a woman who never gives up on her struggle against oppression. She willingly accepts her situation so that she might explore a new universe. The character of Hester Prynne, as portrayed by Hawthorne, serves as a classic example of a feminist; however, Hester is unable to fully embrace feminism due to significant obstacles and the prejudice of the Puritan culture, but she has managed to play a significant role in later feminism campaigns.

The findings indicate that the analysis above may predict how women were portrayed in patriarchal Puritan societies throughout Nathaniel Hawthorne's lifetime, particularly in the middle of the eighteenth century. Generally speaking, Nathaniel Hawthorne has avoided having his female characters in his works be portrayed as weak, subservient, or submissive. He has distinctly crafted his characters as brave individuals; they have demonstrated their unique methods of opposing Puritan customs in their society. Nathaniel Hawthorne gives the radical feminist concept of freedom or liberation some historical perspective. In contrast to contemporary women seeking freedom, he calls attention to the gender roles artificially established and manufactured by society and the biases that come with them. In a nutshell, Hawthorne, via the Scarlet Letter, lends support to radical feminism, which seeks to combat and free women from the oppression, dominance, and exploitation prevalent in Puritan society at the time.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the study's objective is to explore how Hawthorne's female character struggles with Puritan community oppression. This study examines how Nathaniel Hawthorne's female character fights Puritan oppression in response to authority and power dynamics. To investigate the matter mentioned above, the researcher applied the concept of radical feminists, including the concept of Kate Millet. Based on the findings of the analysis, which were mentioned in the previous section, it was discovered that Nathaniel Hawthorne demonstrated that the female character he created was subjected to oppression due to authority and power. This was the case with Hester Prynne. Due to the Puritan control, Hester Prynne is severely mentally burdened. This female character ended up falling prey to the power of males. As a result of the religious system in her society, she lives in exile because she is subjected to oppression and is cut off from her community. In addition, the study recommends that additional research be carried out to analyze the topic of oppression and dominance over women, as well as the numerous methods in which women have rejected such intolerance and the results of such resistance. This recommendation is included as a part of the conclusion of the paper.

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