

***Hester Prynne in Hawthorne's  
The Scarlet Letter:  
More Sinned Against Than Sinning***

**Assist. Prof. Talat Ali Qadawi\***

تاريخ القبول: 2008/8/26

تاريخ التقديم: 2008/6/25

Hester Prynne in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter (1850) is a sinner against God's law and a breaker of the moral system of the seventeenth-century Puritan Boston. She commits a sin of adultery with the reverend young minister, Arthur Dimmesdale, who, unlike Hester, conceals his sin from the community. Therefore, she is punished first by being put in prison and then by being publicly displayed on a scaffold for three hours and forced to wear a lifetime scarlet letter "A" on the breast of her dress as a token of shame. It is expected, after her final release from prison, that the Bostonians will tolerate her, accept her as an ordinary person in their community, and give her an opportunity to start a new life. But what happens later is contrary to expectations. The aim of this paper is to shed some light on how her fellow-citizens, in particular, and people from other places, in general, sin against her more than she against them, and on how she pays for her guilt more than really deserves. It is not the intention of this short paper to cover all the incidents in the novel, but only a certain number of those that are as expressive of the aim of this paper as possible have been selected.

Hawthorne's ancestors were Puritans. As Joseph Schwartz has pointed out, Hawthorne always felt that the "religious system of Puritanism was hard, cold, and confined."<sup>(1)</sup> Hawthorne, he adds, complained about the Puritan lifestyle which was "gloomy, joyless, and rigid."<sup>(2)</sup> He adds, too, that "law itself was severe, and severely was it carried out."<sup>(3)</sup> Hawthorne was not against the civil law, but he condemned the way it was enforced. He criticized the

---

\* Department of Translation/College of Arts/University of Mosul.

"intolerance as well as the sternness of the law and the uncompromising rigidity of its execution,"<sup>(4)</sup> he concludes. Wilfred L. Guerin rightly argues that Hawthorne was "obsessed with the nature of sin and with the psychological results of violating the taboos imposed by this system".<sup>(5)</sup> The Puritans severely resisted, suppressed and controlled the people's natural needs, passions, dreams, hopes, feelings, freedom, and their tastes for all sorts of arts.

The attitude to sin in The Scarlet Letter is subjective, that is, it differs from one character to another. To one character, adultery, as John C. Gerber has noted, is a "violation of God's law", to another, no more than a "violation of the natural order of things".<sup>(6)</sup> Hester Prynne does not feel that she has broken the law of her nature; she rather feels that her adultery is only a natural response to her natural feelings and sexual needs. "Her relation with Dimmesdale", Gerber notes, too, "has been the inescapable result of her own nature, not a violation of it".<sup>(7)</sup> Similarly, she does not feel that she has sinned against the law of the community. Despite her unwilling surrender to the public display and the enforced wearing of the scarlet letter, Gerber continues to say, "her heart remains untouched" and she challenges the community by means of the "fine embroidery of her sign of guilt."<sup>(8)</sup> Affection and passion are deeply rooted in her nature. Throughout the novel Hester does not seem to have regretted her passion, and she feels that her deed is in keeping with her passion. "Passion", Ernest Sandeen argues, "is the basic principle and purpose of Hester's life, and in her secret heart she wears the scarlet letter 'A', not as a shameful badge of sin, but as a proud banner of love".<sup>(9)</sup> According to John C. Stubbs, Hester accepts but does not understand why her society imposes "reasoned limits on her behavior".<sup>(10)</sup> She feels it is unjust of her society to harshly limit or suppress her natural behaviour. She believes that her society has no right to punish her for her sin and deny her its respect, sympathy and mercy, because she has made no sin against it. She, as F. O. Matthiessen argues, feels what she and Dimmesdale did was sacred and "had a consecration of its own" and Dimmesdale

believes that they are not the worst sinners in the world because at least they have never “violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart”, as her husband, Chillingworth, has done as part of his blacker revenge on Dimmesdale.<sup>(11)</sup> “Love”, according to Morton Cronin, “provides its own justification”,<sup>(12)</sup> which is, of course, unconvincing.

In spite of the fact that Hester has unwillingly submitted to the law’s brutality shown in her imprisonment, her wearing the stigma of shame, and her public display, her suffering or trouble with the Puritan community does not end at this stage, but it really starts. Right from the early beginning of The Scarlet Letter the reader is given a grim picture of the ugliness and sternness of the old prison-building which, John C. Stubb says, stands for the “reasoned restrictions and the severe punishments which civilized society imposes on itself”.<sup>(13)</sup> The oak door and iron spikes represent the cruelty of the Puritan society and the rigidity of its morality. The crowd gathering round the prison door is also firm, ugly, gloomy and serious-looking. In contrast, the prisoner, Hester Prynne, is an elegant, beautiful, and attractive young woman, whom one cannot help admiring, sympathizing with, and criticizing her community which strongly believes that sinners or breakers of its law deserve no mercy and that they should be extremely punished.

One incident obviously showing the hardheartedness of Hester’s community is reflected by some of the women who wait in front of the prison door for the adulteress to go out and be taken to the scaffold on which she is to be publicly displayed. They start speaking ill of her and giving their opinions about her. Many of them are greatly resentful because the death penalty an adulteress deserves has not been enforced but replaced by a lighter sentence. The magistrates have taken into account Hester’s circumstances: she is still young, has a baby to look after, and her husband may be dead. Hawthorne depicts the cruelty of the women of Boston in this extract:

**“What do we talk of marks and brands, whether on the bodice of her gown, or the flesh of her**

**forehead?" cried another female, the ugliest as well as the most pitiless of these of self-constituted judges. "This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die. Is there not law for it? Truly there is, both in the Scripture and the statute-book. Then let the magistrates, who have made it of no effect, thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray!"<sup>(14)</sup>**

While going out of the prison door, carrying a three-month-old child, Hester rejects the town-beadle's hand which he puts on her shoulder from behind, an action which expresses her challenge, dignity, pride, and the strength of her personality. Facing the crowd, Hester feels so shy and embarrassed that she holds her baby tight to her breast, trying to cover the scarlet letter "A" imposed on her by the magistrates, but she soon discovers that she tries to cover one sin with another:

**In a moment, however, wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another, she took the baby on her arm, and, with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her townspeople and neighbours (p.80).**

The thing that attracts the attention of the crowd much more than the beautiful dress she herself has sewn in prison for this occasion is "that SCARLET LETTER, so fantastically embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom. It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and in inclosing her in a sphere by herself." (p.81). One woman asks how a woman ever dares to show by needlework such a sign of shame "if not to laugh in the faces

of our godly magistrates, and make a pride out of what they, worthy gentlemen, meant for a punishment?" (p.81).

Then Hester is forced by the Puritans to stand on a scaffold as part of her punishment so that everyone can see her disgrace. According to Hyatt Howe Waggoner, it is a sin to pull Hester into the public gaze and find joy in doing so.<sup>(15)</sup> In her ordeal she spares no effort to control herself, bear the hateful stares of the people, and "encounter the stings and venomous stabs of public contumely" (p.84). She undergoes a so psychologically critical moment that she feels as though "she needs shriek out with the full power of her lungs, and cast herself from the scaffold down upon the ground, or else go mad at once" (p.84). Trying to escape from her shame, her sense of loneliness, and the people's hostile gazes, and trying to defend herself against her miserable condition and to make the heavy burden of cruel reality light, she recalls some happy and nice pictures from her past in England. She remembers her native village, her home, the lovely faces of her parents, and her own beautiful girlish face. "Possibly, it was an instinctive device of her spirit to relieve itself, by the exhibition of these phantasmagone forms, from the cruel weight and hardness of reality" (p.85). She also remembers her husband who was an aging scholar, whose face was "well stricken in years, a pale, thin, scholar-like visage, with eyes dim and bleared by the lamp-light that had served them to pore over many ponderous books" (p.85). She cannot help imagining his figure "slightly deformed, with the left shoulder a trifle higher than the right" (p.86). But her relief from the harsh present is only short-lived, because these pictures from the past are soon replaced by those from the cruel present which she cannot overlook and from which she cannot escape: the market-place, the scaffold, the people's spiteful stares, her infant, and her shame. It is no surprise that one may feel sympathetic towards such a lonely beautiful young woman, inhumanly standing on a scaffold, encountering silently, patiently, and proudly such hostile-looking people, and with no parents, relatives or friends to keep her company.

Hester's husband, Chillingworth, arrives in town just in time for seeing his own wife, with a child in her arms, standing disgracefully on a scaffold. He gives her a sign not to recognize him or reveal his real identity to avoid embarrassment and discover her partner's name. He is told by an onlooker everything that he should know about the story of his wife: her adulterous act, her child, the scarlet letter "A", and her refusal to name her partner in adultery. While on the scaffold, Hester is urged by the leaders of the Puritan community to reveal the name of the adulterer and father of the child, but she refuses to do so. In trying to extort her secret from her, the Puritans, as Hyatt Howe Waggoner says, commit a sin of violating the human heart.<sup>(16)</sup> Her stand is expressive of devotion to and sacrifice for her strong love for Dimmesdale, whom she aims to protect from humiliation, disgrace, and the cruel society. She bravely bears the whole burden of responsibility and the consequences of their sin.

After her public exposure, Hester is returned to prison to complete her sentence. She feels so psychologically sick that the jailors send for a doctor who turns out to be her own husband who has told the community that he is a doctor. They start talking about who is held responsible for her present ordeal. He confesses to her that he is to blame for the recent events, and that his unsuitable marriage was a folly, because he was much older than her and he only cared for his books and knowledge much more than he did for her love, youth, beauty, and sexual needs. She tells him that from the start she had "felt no love, not feigned any" (p.100). He admits, as Ernest Sandeen notes, that he had married her "simply because he had wished to kindle a 'household fire' for his later years".<sup>(17)</sup> He also confesses that he has wronged her more than she him: "Mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding into a false and unnatural relation with my decay" (p.100). John C. Gerber believes that Chillingworth "erred first when he prevailed upon Hester to marry him".<sup>(18)</sup> Gerber considers Chillingworth's error as a violation of the natural order. Chillingworth forgives her but swears he will never let the man who has wronged both of them in peace once he finds

out who he is. He makes his wife swear to keep his identity a secret. Although conspiracy is out of line with her nature, she has no other alternative but to comply with him against her will, may be partly because she fears him, partly because she will be hanged if the community discovers that her husband is still alive, and partly because she feels she has done him wrong and, therefore, wants to please him. She is by nature, Gerber notes, a hater of deception and regrets having shared in a plot that puts her lover in the grasp of his worst enemy, because it is for her an “inexcusable violation of her nature”<sup>(19)</sup>.

As soon as Hester Prynne is released from prison, her suffering begins. She is first annoyed by the sunshine, the only purpose of which, she feels, is to “reveal the scarlet letter on her breast” (p.103). She is afraid of the coming days and has the sense that her sign will be her daily torment. She fears to become the “general symbol at which the preacher and moralist might point, and in which they might vivify and embody their images of women’s frailty and sinful passion” (p.104). Sin leads to spiritual isolation and to isolation from society. “Isolation”, Gerber says, “is a feeling of estrangement from persons or things whose code the individual feels he has violated”<sup>(20)</sup>. But she, he continues to say, does not feel that she has sinned against God; therefore, she does not feel isolated from Him.<sup>(21)</sup> He concludes to say that loneliness, which results from isolation, causes “defiance and rebellion, or escape into intellectual activity, or exquisite suffering, or a driving desire to effect reunion, or a combination of two or more of these”<sup>(22)</sup>. Hester lives as an outcast in an isolated, abandoned cottage on the shore on the outskirts of the town. She becomes self-reliant, in that she makes her living from needlework. She is also abandoned by her lover who has failed her, let her meet her fate by herself, and made her bear their responsibility alone. Children, likewise, have their share in increasing her suffering. Too young to know the reason for her isolation, they watch her through the cottage window while she is busy with her needlework and “discerning the scarlet letter on her breast, would scamper off, with a strange,

contagious fear" (p.106). They, seeing Hester and her child walking on the road, stop their play and start throwing mud at them.

Notwithstanding her imprisonment, public display, and isolation, Hester is not allowed to live in peace and is always kept reminded of her sin. The eminent figures in Boston do not object to her ornamentation of the clothes they wear on public and official occasions, regardless of the fact that the Puritan laws forbid such extravagances. They feign ignorance of the fact that the hands ornamenting their clothes are those of the very sinner they themselves despise. But they do not allow her to embroider the white, pure bridal veils, because they believe that her hands are stained with filth and sin and, hence, will spoil the veils of the chaste brides. Their attitude towards Hester and morality is hypocritical because the hands that ornament clothes are the same hands that embroider the veils of the brides. Besides, she gives alms to and makes clothes for the poor "who not unfrequently insulted the hand that fed them" (p.108). Boris Ford notes that "she chooses to tame the wilderness of her nature in the service of others".<sup>(23)</sup> Apparently, her charity work and services to the people are an attempt to seek the company of a society that is not yet ready to relent and forgive her sin. What she really gains in return for her services is but more rejection, more humiliation, and more sharp remarks about the scarlet letter:

**The poor ... whom she sought out to be the objects of her bounty, often, reviled the hand that was stretched forth to succor them. Dames of elevated rank, likewise, whose doors she entered in the way of her occupation, were accustomed to distil drops of bitterness into her heart; sometimes through malice... and sometimes, also, by a coarser expression, that fell upon the sufferer's defenceless breast like a**



**rough blow upon an ulcerated wound (p.109).**

Hester responds to these inhuman and unjustifiable attacks with patience and shyness: “She was patient, — a martyr, indeed, — but she forbore to pray for her enemies” (p.109). In addition, whenever clergymen meet her in the street, they stop and start preaching to her the same moral lesson on sin, while a hostile-looking crowd gathers around her. Similarly, whenever she goes to church, she becomes the object of the sermon; the preacher shifts the original topic of his sermon to Hester’s sin. The Puritan children, too, add to her torture when they follow her and her child in street and address some insulting words to them. Furthermore, strangers who have no idea about her story do her some harm. Their curious gazes at her scarlet letter increase her suffering.

**Another peculiar torture was felt in the gaze of a new eye. When strangers looked curiously at the scarlet letter, — and none ever failed to do so, — they branded it a fresh into Hester’s soul; so that, oftentimes, she could scarcely refrain, yet always did refrain, from covering the symbol with her hand.**  
(p.110)

Waggoner argues that the Puritans who have imposed Hester’s fate on her “must be guilty of a very grave wrong indeed in Hawthorne’s catalogue of sins. She is guilty of adultery, they of lack of charity.”<sup>(24)</sup>

One more incident of the community’s cruelty to Hester is the Puritans’ attempt to deprive her of the custody of her child, Pearl. It is rumoured in town that her child will be taken away from her and be taught the basics of the Puritan religion in some family or at church. She rushes to the Governor’s mansion to inquire about the truth of these rumours. It is unfortunate for her to discover that there are grounds for these

rumours, in that some of the leading figures in Salem have decided to separate mother and child, because they fear that Hester, whom they believe is morally corrupted, will have a bad moral influence on her three-year-old child. Therefore, Hester should be denied the custody of her child. Hester is so shocked by this injustice that she makes an impressive spiritual defence of her right as a mother to keep her child with her. She reassures the Puritan leaders that she makes sure her child would be taught properly, and that she will never let her child undergo the bad experience which her own mother has experienced. But her defence would not have convinced the Puritan leaders had Dimmesdale not interceded for her at her request. He tells them that, though the child is a heavenly gift and a source of happiness for her mother, she is also a source of torture for her mother because she keeps reminding her of her sin.

At the moral level, Hester, after seven years of her disgrace, proves to be better than her townspeople. She has been kind to those who have treated her unkindly, and her only means of defence against their unkindness and ceaseless insults is patience: "She never battled with the public, but submitted uncomplainingly to its worst usage, she made no claim upon it, in requital for what she fluttered; she did not weigh upon its sympathies" (p.179). She feeds the poor, looks after the sick, and makes those having trouble feel comfortable. Though people begin, due to her good deeds and conduct, to positively change their attitude towards her and her letter, they are still ungrateful and unable to forgive, because for them no good deeds will purge a sinner's impure soul.

Meeting her lover for the first time after seven years shocks and drives her to pity. She feels sorry for his miserable condition which, she believes, is close to madness. She attributes this to the secret agreement between her and her husband about keeping the latter's name a secret. She feels remorse for she believes she has done her lover a great wrong in helping her husband torture him. Consequently, she meets her husband and asks him to stop torturing him and tries to dissuade him from avenging himself upon him any more. She

also informs him of her determination to break her vow and reveal his real identity as her legal husband to Dimmesdale so that he can be on guard against his torture. Her stand is, not doubt, expressive of her loyalty and faithfulness to a man who is unworthy of her love because he is selfish.

When her husband leaves her after the meeting, Hester recalls her past life with and marriage to him. She feels annoyed and wonders how she could ever have married a man of his kind. She thinks she makes a fool of herself to feel that she has had a happy married life with him, because “in time when her heart knew no better, he had persuaded her to fancy herself happy by his side” (p.194). Then she immediately confesses: “Yes, I hate him!” repeated Hester, more bitterly than before: “He betrayed me! He has done me worse wrong than I did him!” (p.194). Her husband is not a match for her. Her marriage to him, unlike the love between her and Dimmesdale, is passionless, hence it does not fit in well with her passionate nature. “True passion”, Ernest Sandeen argues, “even though adulterous, may not be a sin to be repented of, but a loveless marriage is.”<sup>(25)</sup> Speaking of the typical love triangle [a husband, his wife, and her lover] in the Western tradition, Sandeen says that whenever there is a class between marriage and passion, the rights of passion shine more brightly than those of its humbler rival”. Hester’s marriage, in conformity with the tradition, is poor and mean compared to her love affair”.<sup>(26)</sup> Hester and Dimmesdale, as F. O. Matthiessen mentions, realize that their sin is a “sin of passion not of principle [and that it] is not the worst in the world”,<sup>(27)</sup> whereas her husband’s sin is greater, blacker and more evil since it has by means of revenge violated the sanctity of a human heart, Dimmesdale’s heart, a sin which Hawthorne calls the “Unpardonable Sin”. Here is Matthiessen’s view of the love triangle:

**They [Hester and Dimmesdale] are distinguished from the wronged husband in accordance with the theological doctrine that excessive love for things which should take**

**only a secondary place in the affections, though leading to the sin of lust, is less grave than love distorted, love turned from God and from His creatures, into self-consuming envy and vengeful pride.<sup>(28)</sup>**

Charles Child Walcott, viewing the romantics' attitude towards the sin of Hester and Dimmesdale, notes that they believe that it is sinful of the society to punish individuals who have only responded to a natural need. It is society that has committed a sin against nature. According to romantic conventions, "Man is good; institutions are bad because they thwart nature".<sup>(29)</sup>

Hester meets her lover in the forest because she loves and misses him, because she wants to tell him that his enemy is her husband, and because she wants to find for Dimmesdale a way out of his dilemma or suggest an escape plan for him. Learning of her tie to Chillingworth, Dimmesdale becomes shocked and strongly blames her for his suffering from her husband. She passionately asks his forgiveness, and they are soon lovers again. Because they are out of sight of the Puritan people's eyes, Hester and Dimmesdale sit alone in the forest as lovers after many years of separation and isolation during which Hester's external appearance has negatively changed. She has lost her former physical beauty and attraction. She has become like a nun in form. She covers her beautiful dark hair with a cap. Her face no longer shows any signs of love. She has become a passionless, cold human being. But here in the forest she feels free to remove the scarlet letter and throw it away: "The stigma gone, Hester heaved a sigh, in which the burden of shame and anguish departed from her spirit. O exquisite relief! She had not known the weight, until she felt the freedom!" (p.220). Then she takes off her cap and lets her beautiful dark hair down her shoulders. No sooner had she taken off both, the scarlet letter and the cap, that she regained her former natural beauty and sexual appeal which have been

buried for seven years. "In their moment of reunion, the one moment of released passion in the book", Matthiessen comments, "the beauty that has been hidden behind the frozen mask of her isolation reasserts itself".<sup>(30)</sup> Then she suggests to Dimmesdale that they escape back to England, where they can start a new life, far away from the brutality of the Puritan law, religion, Chillingworth, and the consequences of their sin. Leslie A. Fielder notes that Hester and Dimmesdale, "who are still the old Adam and Eve, deceive themselves for a moment into believing that they can escape the consequences of their sin"<sup>(31)</sup>.

While people wait to see the procession of the Election Day, the day of the new Governor's inauguration, Hester looks absent-minded and busy with her dreams of escape for freedom and how she will leave her agony, shame and loneliness behind. But her last hopes for freedom are soon shattered when she learns that her husband will be on board the same ship that will take her, Dimmesdale, and their child back to England. She also feels sad, depressed, and disappointed when her lover ignores her completely while he walks with the Puritan leaders in the procession. She, therefore, realizes that they belong to two different worlds and becomes doubtful about the success of their escape plan. Then she is overcome by a strong feeling of embarrassment and confusion when the Salem citizens, the American Indians, the sailors, and the people from the neighbouring countryside gather round her to see her stigma of shame, the scarlet letter. This incident, again, reminds her of her long years of shame, humiliation, isolation, suffering and persecution, all of which she has recently hoped to leave behind her back.

To Hester's frustration, her lover turns his back on her when he chooses to ascend the scaffold to publicly confess his sin of adultery instead of escaping with her and their child. He makes things so hard for her when he withdraws just a few hours before carrying out their plan. After his public confession and few moments before his death between her arms on the scaffold, she still has one hope for a reunion with him in the afterlife, a hope which he strongly rejects for it is

against God's law. Chillingworth dies one year later. Many years later Hester dies and chooses to be buried beside her lover, "but far enough away to suggest that the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle, even in death".<sup>(32)</sup> They share only one tombstone so as to suggest their common or joint sin. According to Leslie A. Fielder, "the sinful priest purges himself by public confession. ... Even Hester ... must finally accept loneliness and self-restraint instead of the love and freedom she dreamed".<sup>(33)</sup> A similar conclusion is offered by Thomas E. Connolly who argues that "society closes in upon the pair, and they are cut off, both by the vengeful Roger Chillingworth and by the Puritan code, from the escape that had momentarily opened before them".<sup>(34)</sup>

Hester's own child has always been a source of nuisance and torture for her mother. Pearl is for mother the devil's child and a symbol of her own shame. She even fears her child's strange looks and she sometimes feels as though the child were not her own. Whenever the child gazes at or tries to touch the scarlet letter on her mother's breast, Hester feels a great pain: "Then, grasping for breath, did Hester Prynne clutch the fatal token, instinctively endeavouring to tear it away; so infinite was the torture inflicted by the intelligent touch of Pearl's baby-hand" (p.120). When she becomes three, Pearl sometimes vexes her mother by making for herself a letter "A" out of the green plants, and she sometimes throws wild flowers at her mother's scarlet letter, an action which causes much pain to her mother and drives her to cover the letter with her hands. Pearl starts showing an increasing curiosity about the letter, and she keeps distressing her mother with embarrassing questions about the connection between the scarlet letter on her mother's breast and the minister's habit of putting his hand over his heart, to which Hester always tries to give evasive answers. "Throughout the rest of the novel", Thomas E. Connolly says, "Pearl constantly urges her father to acknowledge her, and she constantly associates the scarlet letter with the minister's habit of placing his hand over his heart".<sup>(35)</sup> Hyatt Howe Waggoner notes that Pearl "torments her mother with her demands for the truth, or

refuses to acknowledge the minister until he acknowledges them”<sup>(36)</sup>.

To conclude, Hester Prynne's torture is not caused by her feeling remorse for her adulterous act, because she feels that she has neither sinned against community, nor against religion, nor against God, and nor against her own nature. Her suffering comes from the rigid rules of her community. No one has ever spared any effort or missed any opportunity to attack, humiliate, contempt, and torment her. All have wronged and sinned against her in one way or another. Her imprisonment, scarlet letter, and public display have proven insufficient for her townspeople who demand but her death. In fact, Hester Prynne is not the only sinner in the novel, yet she has been victimized by both her community and her closest people – husband, lover, and child. Her husband is sinful of hiding his real name and of seeking revenge to which he devotes his time, intelligence, and knowledge of medicines. On the marriage level, he has not been a good husband for Hester and has wronged her more than she him. Her lover's sin is that of adultery, hypocrisy, cowardice and concealment of guilt. He is not worthy of her love. Her own child has caused her much annoyance and embarrassment. Her townspeople – men, women, and children – and others from outside town have all wronged her and treated her inhumanly. It is true that sinners or wrongdoers must be punished, not out of malice or joy but in the hope of correcting them. It is the way of carrying out the punishment that really matters. It is the extremity of enforcing the law and the people's cruel conduct that should be avoided.

### NOTES

- (1) Joseph Schwartz, "Three Aspects of Hawthorne's Puritanism", in Twentieth-Century Interpretations of The Scarlet Letter, ed. John C. Gerber (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall Inc, 1968), p.37.
- (2) Ibid., p.42.
- (3) Ibid., p.43.
- (4) Ibid., p.46.
- (5) Wilfred L. Guerin et al., A Hand Book of critical Approaches to Literature, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, n.d.), p.141.
- (6) John C. Gerber, "Sin, Isolation, and Reunion: Form and Content in The Scarlet Letter", in Twentieth-Century Interpretations of the Scarlet Letter, ed. John C. Gerber, p.105.
- (7) Ibid., p.107.
- (8) Ibid.
- (9) Ernest Sandeen, "The Scarlet Letter as a Love Story", PMLA, Vol.77 (September 1962), p.428.
- (10) John C. Stubbs, "The Scarlet Letter: The Theory of the Romance", PMLA, Vol.83, No.5 (October 1969), p.1446.
- (11) F. O. Matthiessen, "Allegory and Symbolism: From American Renaissance," in Twentieth-Century Interpretations of the Scarlet Letter, ed. John C. Gerber, p.57.
- (12) Morton Cronin, "Hawthorne on Romantic Love and the Status of Women", PMLA, Vol.69, 1954, p.89.
- (13) "The Scarlet Letter: The Theory of the Romance," p.1446.
- (14) Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, ed. John Seelye (1850; rpt. U.S.A.: Penguin American Library, 1985), p.79. Subsequent page numbers within parentheses in my paper refer to this edition.
- (15) Hyatt Howe Waggoner, "The Scarlet Letter", in Interpretations of American Literature, ed. Charles Feidelson, Jr. and Paul Brodtkorb, Jr. (1959; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.17.



- 
- (16) Ibid.
- (17) “The Scarlet Letter as a Love Story”, p.425.
- (18) “sin, Isolation, and Reunion”, p.108.
- (19) “Introduction”, in Twentieth-Century Interpretations of the Scarlet Letter, p.15.
- (20) Ibid., p.10.
- (21) Ibid., p.13.
- (22) Ibid., p.10.
- (23) Boris Ford, The New Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol.9: American Literature (England: Penguin Books, 1988), p.107.
- (24) “The Scarlet Letter”, in Interpretations of American Literature, p.21.
- (25) “The Scarlet Letter as a Love Story”, pp.425-26.
- (26) Ibid.
- (27) “Allegory and Symbolism: From American Renaissance”, p.57.
- (28) Ibid., pp.57-58.
- (29) Charles Child Walcutt, “The Range of Interpretations: The Scarlet Letter and its Modern Critics”, in Twentieth-Century Interpretations of the Scarlet Letter”, p.73.
- (30) “Allegory and Symbolism: From American Renaissance”, p.60.
- (31) Leslie A. Fielder, Love and Death in the American Novel, rev. edn. (1960; rpt. England: Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, 1982), p.233.
- (32) www.sparknotes.com. Internet.
- (33) Love and Death in the American Novel, p.233.
- (34) Thomas E. Connolly, “Introduction”, in Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter and Selected Tales (1970; rpt. England: The Penguin English Library, 1974). P.15.
- (35) Ibid., p.17.
- (36) “The Scarlet Letter”, in Interpretations of American Literature, p.25.

## هيستر برن في رواية "الشارة القرمزية" لهوثورن: ظلم

### المجتمع لها أكثر من ظلمها له

أ.م. طلعت علي القداوي (\*)

#### المستخلص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى إلقاء الضوء على الطريقة اللإنسانية التي يتعامل بها المجتمع البيوريتاني مع هيستر براين بطة رواية ((الشارة القرمزية)) للروائي الأمريكي ناثانيال هورثورن بصفتها مرتكبة لخطيئة الزنا. ويؤكد البحث على أن هذه الشخصية ليست الوحيدة المذنبة في مجتمعها بل جميع من حولها هم بالأحرى مذنبون بحققها بشكل أو بآخر لما يظهموه من سوء معاملة لها حتى بعد خضوعها للعقوبة التي يحددها لها قانون مجتمعها. ويؤكد البحث أيضاً على المعاناة النفسية الكبيرة التي يسببها لها رغم تعاملها الحسن معهم وخدماتها السخية لهم إلا أنهم غير قادرين على أن يغفروا لها خطيئتها ومنحها فرصة لبدء حياة جديدة. ويعتمد البحث بالمقام الأول على أمثلة ومواقف وأحداث من الرواية من شأنها تعزيز ما يهدف إليه البحث. في الواقع، تدفع هيستر براين ثمناً أكبر مما تستحق.

---

(\*) قسم الترجمة/ كلية الآداب/ جامعة الموصل.