



## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'UN *KIZIL DAMGA*'SINDA HESTER PRYNNE'NİN DEĞİŞİMİ

### HESTER PRYNNE'S TRANSFORMATION IN NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S *THE SCARLET LETTER*

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### Özet

Nathaniel Hawthorne tarafından kaleme alınan ve 1850'de yayınlanan *Kızıl Damga*, Püriten kültürü ve inançlarına eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla on yedinci yüzyılda Püriten yaşam tarzının nasıl olduğuna ışık tutmaktadır. Roman, tüm insanlığın günahkâr olduğu ve sürekli şeytani güçlerin tehdidi altında olduğu fikrinden yola çıkarak adaletsiz yasaları, cezalandırma yöntemlerini ve çarpık gelenekleri anlatır. Hawthorne, sessizliği, özgüveni ve sevgisine olan inancıyla Püriten inancına meydan okuyan Hester gibi güçlü bir kadın karakter yaratarak, Püriten toplumunun ikiyüzlülüğü ve ahlaksızlığı ile sert teokrasisini etkili bir şekilde eleştirir. Hester, Püritenlerin gaddar tavırları karşısında toplumdan dışlanmış bir kişilikten saygın ve erdemli bir kişiliğe radikal bir değişim sergileyerek zaman ve mekânın ötesine geçer. Bu makalenin amacı, Hester Prynne'in toplum içinde aşağılanması yoluyla karakter gelişimini ve ruhsal dönüşümünü ve Kızıl Harf "A"nın anlamının sembolik değişimini tartışmaktır. Aynı zamanda, Hester'in kamusal imajındaki değişikliğin, azimli çalışması, kararlı tavırları ve güçlü iradesiyle nasıl yakından bağlantılı olduğunu feminist bir mercekten göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır ki bunların hepsi, günahını inkâr etmeyen; ancak Püriten toplumun ikiyüzlülüğüne meydan okuyan güçlü iradeli bir kadın olarak hayatta kalmasına katkıda bulunmuştur.

### Abstract

*The Scarlet Letter* penned by Nathaniel Hawthorne and published in 1850 sheds light on what a Puritan lifestyle was like in the seventeenth century with a critical perspective on the Puritan culture and beliefs. The novel portrays the unfair laws, punitive methods and distorted customs based on the idea that all mankind is sinful and they are constantly under the threat of demonic forces. The hypocrisy and depravity of the Puritan society as well as its harsh theocracy are effectively criticized by Hawthorne with the creation of such a strong female character as Hester, who defies the Puritan faith through her silence, self-confidence and belief in her love. Hester transcends time and space with her radical transformation from a social outcast to a respectable and virtuous personality in the face of the Puritans' vicious manners. The objective of this paper is to discuss the character development and spiritual transformation of Hester Prynne through her public humiliation and the symbolic transformation of the meaning of the Scarlet Letter "A". It also aims to demonstrate how the change in her public image was closely linked with her persevering work, adamant manners, and strong-will, which all contributed to her survival as a strong-minded woman not denying her sin but defying the hypocrisy of the Puritan society through a feminist lens.

## INTRODUCTION

*The Scarlet Letter* penned by Nathaniel Hawthorne was first published in 1850. The novels of this period were based on the principles of Puritan society and morality. Nathaniel Hawthorne was against depraved Puritan understanding and this book was written to criticize Puritan life and the Puritans' strict rules. Being descended from a Puritan family, Nathaniel Hawthorne was a significant American author who was born in 1804 and died in 1864. His family was one of the first settlers in Massachusetts Bay Colony. Hawthorne was born and raised in Salem. His family's Puritan background played an important role in his writings. As one of his relatives, John Hathorne was one of the leading judges in Salem witch trials, Hawthorne didn't want to be associated with the same surname with him and added "w" to his surname. As Stephen Nissenbaum points out, "the parallel between Hawthorne's public humiliation in the summer of 1849 and Hester Prynne's experience in the opening scene of *The Scarlet Letter* is too plain to be ignored, and it suggests a possible source of Hawthorne's newly recovered creative energies" (Nissenbaum 1978: 59). Hawthorne worked as a custom surveyor and then left his work to join his fellow transcendentalist author friends, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson. Transcendentalists attached great influence to a direct connection with nature and God. In his essay 'Nature', Ralph Waldo Emerson noted: "The foregoing generations beheld God and Nature face to face; we—through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?" (Emerson 2008: 38). The free development of individual feelings was of great importance to them for the solution of individual problems. They regarded the world of spirits as the only reality, while the physical world is just its ephemeral reflections. Hawthorne was also under the influence of the transcendentalist movement. According to Emerson and his followers, individuality and self-reliance were of primary importance, and truth was within human beings who can realize their individuality through deep connections with nature, God and beauty. In his work *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne also reflected the transcendentalist ideology. Under the influence of his Puritan background and transcendentalist ideology he wrote his famous novel *The Scarlet Letter*. In his novel, even though he was Puritan and had its heritage, Hawthorne also showed his religious sect's errors in itself through the sin, which refers to the adultery that Hester Prynne and minister Dimmesdale committed. However, he was not against Puritanism but showed its conflicts to the reader through characters. In this paper I will discuss the character development and spiritual transformation of Hester Prynne through her public humiliation and the symbolic transformation of the meaning of Scarlet Letter "A".

## A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON *THE SCARLET LETTER*

Coming from a Puritan background, Nathaniel Hawthorne was both passionate about his Puritan ancestors and critical of them in some respects. In fact, one of his ancestors, John Hawthorne served as a judge in witch trials. Since he was not supportive of the erroneous judgements of his ancestors, he did not want to be associated with John Hathorne and he added “w” to his surname. On the other hand, born into a period when the movement of transcendentalism emerged, Nathaniel Hawthorne was a leading pioneer of this philosophical movement. He served in Custom House for a period and then left and started to write. In *The Scarlet Letter* he included New England Puritan society in the early decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The book is focused on the protagonist, Hester Prynne’s sin, her illegitimate child, Pearl, Puritan society and its complexities within the theme of “sin”. It sheds light on the true nature of the Puritan society against which Hester Prynne struggles because of her sin with Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. In this regard, Hawthorne shows readers both Puritan society in a critical point of view and by doing so he includes the various features of these themes with the character of Hester Prynne and her transformation with a new image of women in Puritan society. As T. Walter Herbert notes, “Hester is a vigorous and independent-minded woman who bitterly resents the oppression she has suffered and sees it as bearing on “the whole race of womanhood.” (T. Walter Herbert, Jr. 1988: 288) On the other side, Baughman stresses:

we are astonished at her strength; we applaud her heroism in insisting on her own truth: the love transcends all God- and man-made limits-the heroism of fallen angels. However, she is a Puritan, and her salvation (a state that fallen angels do not seek) must be found within the system of Puritan belief and practice. She too must be led to repentance, not held up as the model of the “new woman” (Baughman 1967: 546).

Hester Prynne lives in Boston in Massachusetts Bay Colony. The community that Hester lives in reflects the ideals of Puritan society. First of all, in the opening chapters, we, as readers, encounter with Hester Prynne. She is on the scaffold and out of prison, she is getting her scarlet letter “A” in order to represent her adultery. We do not know unborn Pearl’s father’s name; what we know is just secrecy. Until now we have known that Hester is married to Chillingworth who works abroad as a scholar and then is captured by native Americans. He sends Hester to New England while he deals with his own affairs in Europe. Thereby, Hester lived alone for a time and her affair started with Arthur Dimmesdale who was an important public figure. At the very beginning of the day when her public humiliation starts because of her sin, she does not want to reveal the name of Arthur, both because of his position in society and for the sake of

her love for Dimmesdale. However, in his confrontation with Hester, Chillingworth accepts his own mistake in their marriage:

“Hester”, said he, “I ask not wherefore, nor how, thou hast fallen into the pit, or say, rather, thou hast ascended to the pedestal of infamy on which I found thee. The reason is not far to seek. It was my folly, and thy weakness. I - a man of thought- the bookworm of great libraries – a man already in decay, having given my best years to feed the hungry dream of knowledge – what had I to do with youth and beauty like thine own? Misshapen from my birth-hour, how could I delude myself with the idea that intellectual gifts might veil physical deformity in a young girl’s fantasy? (Hawthorne 1992: 56)

However, Hester justifies herself: “thou knowest that I was frank with thee. I felt no love, nor feigned any’ (Hawthorne 1992: 56). Puritan society is patriarchal and it has strict religious rules. Basically, everything is structured in its own order. Thereby, Hester, because of her “sin” becomes a rebellious character for the doctrines of the Puritan society. She becomes an error for the religious teachings of this society and in this regard, as a result she gets her punishment. This punishment is to wear a scarlet letter which symbolizes her sin in terms of adultery. She must wear it in every aspect of her life, in this case she can get humiliated and can become the representative figure of her shame and for also as a reminder of the general understanding of the concept of sin. “Could it be true? She clutched the child so fiercely to her breast, that it sent forth a cry; she turned her eyes downward at the scarlet letter, and even touched it with her finger, to assure herself that the infant and the shame were real. Yes! - these were her realities - all else had vanished! (Hawthorne 1992: 44) She takes it on her bosom and carries it. In opposition to the indication of Hester being rebellious, she actually accepts her sin and her punishment. In public view “the penalty thereof is death. But in their great mercy and tenderness of heart they have doomed Mistress Prynne to stand only a space of three hours on the platform of the pillory, and then and thereafter, for the remainder of her natural life, to wear a mark of shame upon her bosom” (Hawthorne 1992: 47). She is aware of her own position and what her position indicates to the society in general. The general view on her sin and her position as an outcast in the Puritan society will cause her transformation as a new image of woman in the Puritan society. Since she is the epitome of sin in public eye, she gets lonely and she is even forced to become isolated. At that period, “preferring any of them, either speech or silence, women is made to lose; while a “life of feminine submission” is a “life of silence,” a “life of female rebellion” is a “life that must be silenced” because of the threats it suggests (Gilbert &

Gubar 1979: 14, 36). This silence actually, within her awareness comes along with her significant transformation.

Perhaps there was a more real torture in her first unattended footsteps from the threshold of the prison than even in the procession and spectacle that have been described, where she was made the common infamy, at which all mankind was summoned to point its finger. Then, she was supported by an unnatural tension of the nerves, and by all the combative energy of her character, which enabled her to convert the scene into a kind of lurid triumph (Hawthorne 1992: 59).

We know that she is an “adulterer” but with her own work with the very significant symbol of “A” she adds comments and makes it her own piece of object. This actually shows how Hester accepts her sin and starts to change it by accepting it and making it her part. In this regard by wearing the scarlet letter she actually gains awareness about the errors in this Puritan society. In this case by accepting her punishment she remains self-reliant, which leads to her own individual growth. As a matter of fact, she is also able to go somewhere else to live but she remains in her own place since she thinks that it is the place where everything happened, in this case, her individual sense of understanding results in her maturity of accepting her own sin.

### **HESTER’S SYMBOLIC TRANSFORMATION**

After Hester gave birth to Pearl, along with her mother even as a child of secrecy, Pearl encountered with public shaming, even people called her the child of the devil. Even Pearl identifies her mother with the scarlet letter “A” directly. In this regard Hester became isolated with her child at the outskirts from the society, in which she actually starts to develop her individual growth because there are no politics or patriarchal order. There she is alone with her child and minding her own business only. From this aspect, with the created characteristics of Hester, through her emotions and struggles as a representative figure of sinner, starts to develop a new image of a woman who accepts her sin. By doing so and accepting her sin within the new individual female image, Hester tries to earn money with her needlework. She starts to help the poor, her kindness and generosity to other people start to evolve through the end of the book. In this regard it takes people’s attention. She even does the job which a religious person does not, such a perception starts to emerge, and even some women of the society start to realize the sexist structure of the puritan society. In this regard, she changes with her new image. At the very beginning of the novel her scarlet letter represented adultery, but after the change that she undergoes compared with the past, she becomes an icon and the general indication of the letter A becomes “ABLE”. The general perspective upon Hester Prynne changes. On the other hand,

on the day of election, as a representative figure of the Puritan society, Arthur Dimmesdale tells everyone that he is the father of Pearl. In this case this scene is very important in that it both indicates the change in Hester and her revenge for Puritan society, but also it sheds light on the significant errors of the Puritan society. When Arthur Dimmesdale reveals that he is the father of Pearl, we actually observe the hypocrisy of the Puritan society. Because Dimmesdale actually shows that in such a society they do not see the evil which they are feeding. However, at last Hester accepted her sin strongly, lived with it, learned from it, became empowered in her own individual dimension. This is, in fact, a strategic way of complementing her revenge for Hester. Even after a time when she turns back to the hometown, she remains with her scarlet letter A. As Leland S. Person comments, one remove, furthermore, Hester's silent power becomes Hawthorne's. Identifying with Hester and with the effects of her silence, Hawthorne sublimates his own desire to enact revenge upon his political enemies, the Salem Whigs (especially the Reverend Charles Upham) who had forced his removal from his job as customhouse surveyor" (Leland S. Person, 1989: 466).

Puritanism was a religious sect that believed that human beings were the fruits of the original sin, they were sinners all alike, and had to live their life away from all worldly pleasures. Puritans were very strict in their rules of religion. They wanted to purify the Church of England. However, because of the oppression and isolation in England that they suffered from, they emigrated to America. Hester Prynne was also one of these people. Since Hester Prynne committed the sin of adultery, the public reaction was harsh. Because Hester does not want to share any knowledge about the identity of her baby, Pearl's father, she is humiliated, isolated and becomes an outsider in Puritan society. This humiliation did not shake Hester's proud appearance in the scaffold. She held her head straight against the public humiliation of Puritan society. Since she didn't reveal the name of the father, they thought that Pearl was the child of the devil.

The truth was, that the little Puritans, being of the most intolerant brood that ever lived, had got a vague idea of something outlandish, unearthly, or at variance with ordinary fashions, in the mother and child, and therefore scorned them in their hearts, and not unfrequently reviled them with their tongues. Pearl felt the sentiment, and requited it, with the bitterest hatred that can be supposed to rankle in a childish bosom... It appalled her (Hester), nevertheless, to discern here, again, a shadowy reflection of the evil that had existed in herself. All this enmity and passion had Pearl inherited, by inalienable right, out of Hester's heart (Hawthorne 1992: 71).

Hester's isolation after this humiliation led her to live with her reminder of her sin, scarlet letter "A". In her isolation Hester makes needlework and embroiders as a seamstress and helps poor people. She tries to change the meaning of the "A" through her behaviours. She accepts her sin and faces with its consequences in public eye. The Puritan society's aim of applying the rules of their belief, reveals their own "evil" in their souls. Emotionally, instead of leaving the colony after her punishment, Hester prefers staying in Boston. Because if she left the colony, she would accept her sin and portrays an individual who feels guilty and ashamed. However, she chooses to stay in order to demonstrate that she lives with her sin and wants to change its meaning with her individuality. By Hester's or Dimmesdale's interior silence, Hawthorne actually intends to suggest that "in this life the heart must be allowed to keep its secrets; to probe the secrets of another's heart is to commit a sin even greater than adultery or hypocrisy - the Unpardonable Sin" (Sganlon 1962: 203), as indicated by Lawrence Sganlon in her article "The Heart of The Scarlet Letter". Moreover, she emphasises that "the essential privacy of the human heart must be preserved at all cost, for the heart is for Hawthorne indisputably the center of man's being. To surrender this center to analysis is to lose one's identity, individuality, and to become little better than potential prey for villains like Chillingworth or Ethan Brand" (Sganlon 1962: 203-4). By this way, she gains her identity and reveals self-reliance perspective. In this case, the letter "A" changes its meaning to Able from "Adultery". The good deeds that Hester shows changes the meaning of the scarlet letter. As regards the gender roles and their reversal in *The Scarlet Letter*, in her article entitled "Hester's Prisons: Sex, Intellect, and Gender in 'The Scarlet Letter'" Nina Tassi points out

Even as he [Hawthorne] clings to his belief in the "natural" differences between the sexes and to the corollary that civil order depends on keeping these divisions firm, he upsets the balance himself. In rearranging traditional gender traits in his lovers, Hawthorne not only expands the range of qualities for each sex but also, in moments of crisis that intensify as the romance goes on, sets up opposing energies: As Hester becomes more "masculine," Dimmesdale becomes more "feminine." The sexual energy increases as these reversals grow more marked. If a woman's mind is "masculine," may she not also have a "masculine" sexuality? And does this bode well or ill for man? Once departed from the conventional view of woman, Hawthorne confronts enormous female power, which he finds both exciting and appalling (Tassi 1998: 27).

What Hester learns from the scarlet letter is the sinful nature of human beings with whom she shares a life full of tests and ordeals as well as her own sinful nature. Her awareness upon

the evil aspect of other people around her increases as she observes and analyses the reasons for their queer and improper attitudes towards herself and her child. She is of the opinion that the rest of her life can be changed. Hester demonstrates that individuals can commit sin, but they are inclined to change for the better, and they can take lessons from their mistakes. “Had Hester sinned alone?” “Her imagination was somewhat affected and, had she been of a softer moral and intellectual fibre, would have been still more so, by the strange and solitary anguish of her life ... - she felt or fancied then, that the scarlet letter had endowed her with a new sense. She shuddered to believe, yet could not help believing, that it gave her a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts” (Hawthorne 1992: 60). By this way, she shows that the attempt of the individual can clash with the barriers of assumptions of the society, especially Puritan society. With her isolation and alienation, she gains a chance to think about the patriarchal order and the false assumptions of Puritan society. Puritan society applies the rules of their religion; however, they show a cruel behaviour towards Hester even though she regrets her sin. The evil which is mainly considered as the sin that Dimmesdale and Hester committed, actually reveals itself in the rigid, harsh, and cruel puritan society.

On the other hand, through her good deeds, Hester gains self-empowerment despite her outcast female identity in Puritan society. She improves her identity both philosophically and psychologically. She tries to resist against the cruel perspective of Puritan society. She acquires self-reliance and by this way she becomes aware of the “self”. When she turns to self, she gets rid of the authority and religious hierarchy that is the result of patriarchal order of puritan society. She shows the women in town, the sexist and discriminating aspect of patriarchal puritan society. In this way, society starts to change the meaning to the scarlet letter “A” in their minds. It turns into “able”, rather than adultery. Able stands for the fact that Hester portrays a strong, self-sufficient woman figure in society. She is a seamstress and helps people, especially women, and poor women in society. By this way, Hester takes her revenge from the harsh and cruel puritan ideologists and its society through her silence and independent behaviours. She changes the meaning of scarlet letter “A” into something positive.

### **A PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH ON *THE SCARLET LETTER***

The scarlet letter is a symbol of both sin and power as Hester uses it as a way of repentance and rebellion towards the Puritan society she lives in. Hester Prynne was scorned by the people of her town because she fornicated with another man while she was married to another. She was not sentenced to death but instead sentenced to public humiliation. With her baby in her arms, she stood before the townspeople. She did not look gloomy but instead she radiated light

as she accepted her sin. The public humiliation and the letter “A” that was on her bosom as a symbol of sin was her fate and she accepted it helplessly. Yet at the same time the passion that caused her to sin also lit a fire in her as she did not fully accept the Puritan society’s way of oppressing and legislating morality. As a woman, she felt alone, with just her baby she lived an isolated life, all while seeking Dimmesdale, her baby Pearl’s father which she refused to confess to her actual husband Chillingworth. Some people thought that “thus she will be a living sermon against sin, until the ignominious letter be engraved upon her tombstone. It irks me, nevertheless, that the partner of her iniquity should not, at least, stand on the scaffold by her side. But he will be known! - he will be known! - he will be known!” (Hawthorne 1992: 47) Hester shouldered her sins by herself as Dimmesdale did not confess until much later. She lived as a scorned woman and stayed in the same town as she believed that “her sin, her ignominy, were the roots which she had struck into the soil” (Hawthorne 1992: 60). She was strong enough not to run away from what was right as she valued the moral value of honesty. The scarlet letter was a symbol of both her sin and her pride because from her sin, God blessed her with a baby.

the days of the far-off future would toil onward, still with the same burden for her to take up, and bear along with her, but never to fling down; for the accumulating days and added years would pile up their misery upon the heap of shame. Throughout them all, giving up her individuality, she would become the general symbol at which the preacher and moralist might point, and in which they might vivify and embody their images of woman’s frailty and sinful passion (Hawthorne 1992: 59)

The letter “A” and her life struggle with feelings of sin and guilt were a way of defence and standing firm against the Puritans by living in the shadows of their hypocrisy, while Hester radiated with honesty. This was a part of her learning what it really means to be an honest individual living in a society full of dishonesty and oppression. Although Hester did not shout and scream, her silence within itself was powerful enough as she proved herself to be the strongest out of all the other sinners. Hawthorne focuses on the effects of guilt on each individual and unlike Dimmesdale or Chillingworth she accepted her responsibilities and did not direct her negative feelings to another person. In a way, her refusing to let go of her baby and raising her the right way, her embroidering the scarlet letter was a way of gaining control and power from the Puritan society. She did not fully lose her identity or self-worth, which upset the Puritans as they were strict on all sins.

Hester’s scarlet letter was like that of a rosebush-wild and beautiful. It is a part of nature which is the opposite of the rigid Puritan society. The bright red on her bosom was a shield

towards harsh Puritans. Nature was her place of escape and protection. This was also what helped her continue to stay true to herself. Although she became less passionate than before, she never wronged herself or denied her wrongdoings as this was obvious when she was sentenced for public humiliation. She was not full of shame but repentance and control. This was also a way of rebelling against Puritan society. She refused to reveal the real identity of Dimmesdale who was just as guilty and responsible as her. She refused to give up her baby Pearl and refused to leave herself to the hands of evil. All of these are her taking the sin and shame upon herself and turning it into something positive and opportunity to live an honest life. Her passion had turned into wisdom and her wisdom had turned into salvation as she was not chained to the wrong ideals of Puritans. She learnt that the scarlet letter was not something that chained her to a life of misery but instead it was something that made her “able”. She was more than an “adulterer”, and she became aware of it while making other members of the Puritan society also realize this fact. She had become someone to come to and seek aid from after many years. This within itself is a very important way of controlling and rebellion as she shifted the rigidity of the Puritan society and made some people flexible like nature.

### **TRANSCENDENTALIST IDEOLOGY IN *THE SCARLET LETTER***

Basically, Romanticism was a reaction against realism and intellectualism. Imagination, creativity, human’s inner feelings, nature and also their interest for nature were important. Dark romanticism was interested in the inner dark sides and feelings of human beings, human fallibility, evil theme which include human soul and mind. In this novel, as Dark Romantic themes and elements, we see judgment and punishment, evil soul, sin and guilt and also revenge. In addition to that, we can also observe some transcendental ideas in the novel. Transcendentalism means going beyond and their aim was to get rid of the social taboos and breaking all the rules in the society. Moreover, nature and individualism, and self-reliance were important to them. In his essays, “Nature” (1836), “Self-Reliance” and “The Over-Soul” (both 1841), Emerson and in his book *Walden* (1854), Henry David Thoreau dealt with the essential ideas underlying transcendentalism which viewed nature both as beautiful and as a reflection of divinity. Leslie Perrin Wilson emphasized “above all the Transcendentalists believed in the importance of a direct relationship with God and with nature” (Wilson 2004: 4). For them the “microcosm” (the individual) and “macrocosm” (the universe) were in direct relation with each other. They both also seized all animate and inanimate objects, and the divine as well.

Moreover, in his book entitled *Romanticism and Transcendentalism*, Jerry Philips points out: “Emerson’s romantic philosophy is most clearly seen in his work, *Nature* (1836). In *Nature*,

Emerson describes a world in which nearly everything in it is a symbol of the spirit. For Emerson, nature is the material world, everything that exists outside the self. This world is one-half, a cover over a greater realm, the spirit or Soul” (Phillips 2010: 52). Transcendentalists were of the opinion that Nature represented all humankind as well as God, and they also indicated that much could be learned through a careful examination of the minute elements of nature as microcosms of the larger world (Felton 2006: 120). Furthermore, they asserted that the union with the “Over-soul”, which was reflected in everything in the world, was the purpose of human life. They believed that people could enhance their capacity by immersing themselves in the beauty of the natural world. Individuals can experience this beauty and truth through intuition, although they can find out its laws through careful observation of nature. In addition, transcendentalists believed that each individual can change positively and reach divinity if they rely on their own instinct and inherent goodness after attaining a communion with God. Each person should look for meaning within themselves. Their soul was identified with that of the world. However, it was obvious that man was not perfect and evil was everywhere in nature and the world. It was highly probable for human beings not to incline toward truth, justice and beauty due to their fallible nature, as reflected in the works of American writers, such as Herman Melville (*Moby Dick*, 1851) and Nathaniel Hawthorne (*the Scarlet Letter*, 1851).

However, Puritans were religious and conservative groups which devoted themselves only to God. For them they are all in a test in this world and they will be rewarded after they die. Moreover, they believed that they were all sinners because of the Adam and Eve’s sin and their aim was to purify themselves by praying to God and hard work. They were hard-workers. They had strict rules and moral codes. Especially, for women, illicit love was a sin and throughout the novel we clearly see the negative impacts of committing such a sin upon individuals who were exposed to social humiliation and oppression. For them, there shouldn’t be extremely individualistic behaviours that run counter to social and religious tenets. First of all, Hester Prynne comes to Boston alone and she was married, but she didn’t tell it to anybody. Her husband Chillingworth comes from an upper-class, but he didn’t come with her there. Hester is a very strong and individualistic character and it bothers Puritan society. When she was in a speech in the Church, she saw and met with Dimmesdale there and they fell in love with each other. After that, they had some sexual affairs and Hester got pregnant. When the Puritan society learned that she was pregnant as a consequence of an extramarital affair, they started to humiliate her and pushed her to confess her child’s father’s name. She never confesses it. Dimmesdale wanted to confess, but Hester did not let him to do that. She was a very brave

and strong-willed woman. While she was in the prison, she gave birth and she gave her daughter the name “Pearl”.

Firstly, Hester Prynne was very scared because of the public humiliation, but she never confessed the name. This oppression, alienation and humiliation got worse and it led to some contributions and advantages about Hester’s emotional transformation. As time passed, she became stronger. We can relate judgement and punishment system, and Dimmesdale and Hester’s sin with Dark Romanticism because Puritans believed that Hester and her child had an evil soul inside them. In addition, there were some rose-bushes and some dark florals that were identified with Hester and Pearl’s characteristic features, which we can also relate to Romanticism and Dark Romanticism. This public humiliation makes her stronger and more individual. We can identify Hester’s individualism and her transcendental behaviours with the transcendental idea of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

It is to the credit of human nature that, except where its selfishness is brought into play, it loves more readily than it hates. Hatred, by a gradual and quiet process, will even be transformed to love, unless the change be impeded by a continually new irritation of the original feeling of hostility. In this matter of Hester Prynne there was neither irritation nor irksomeness. She never battled with the public, but submitted uncomplainingly to its worst usage; she made no claim upon it in requital for what she suffered; she did not weigh upon its sympathies. Then, also, the blameless purity of her life during all these years in which she had been set apart to infamy was reckoned largely in her favour. (Hawthorne 1992: 120).

One day when she was subjected to public humiliation again, she saw her husband Chillingworth and she was shocked. Hester and Chillingworth didn’t reveal that they were married. Chillingworth has some evil ideas in his mind despite his developed intellectual faculties and sagacious personality as an old physician. Out of the evil thoughts and feelings hidden in his heart as a result of his fire of revenge, some parts of his character can be related to Dark Romanticism. As part of the duality of good and evil in human soul, evil feelings can predominate over good feelings or vice versa. For instance, Chillingworth wanted to kill Dimmesdale even if he did not know Dimmesdale was Pearl’s father. Again, we can consider his dark side and dark thoughts as a Dark Romantic element. Dimmesdale, as a religious character, is significant. As a young clergyman he stands out with his eloquent speeches, religious fervour and eminent position in his profession. He feels shame and guilt because of his sin but he didn’t confess it. Because of this situation this young minister could not help

having an apprehensive and half-frightened look in spite of his scholarly gifts and high eminence. All the time he felt himself uncomfortable and quite astray, and thought that self-punishment would purify his sins. That's why he tortured himself physically. It shows us that inside his mind and soul, he also has the dark side and evil thoughts. We can also make a connection between Dark Romanticism and Dimmesdale's ideas about self-torture, self-punishment and inability to confess his sin. Not bearing the torture of his conscience any longer, Dimmesdale intends to reveal his sin and evil side to the public through the end of the novel with the implication of his own infamy:

‘People of New England!’ ... ‘ye, that have loved me! – ye, that have deemed me holy! – behold me here, the one sinner of the world! At last! - at last! - I stand upon the spot where, seven years since, I should have, here, with this woman, whose arm, more than the little strength wherewith I have crept hitherward, sustains me at this dreadful moment from grovelling down upon my face! (Hawthorne 1992: 90-91)

Furthermore, Puritans regarded Pearl evil as an illegitimate child. Hester's scarlet letter (A), which means “adultery” also affects this innocent child. Society ignores her and nobody wants to play with Pearl, so she has to devote herself only to nature. Nature was her only friend. There was a startling interaction and intimacy between Pearl and nature. Thus, we can say that there is a reference to transcendentalism at this point. “Pearl was a born outcast of the infantile world. An imp of evil, emblem and product of sin, she had no right among christened infants. Nothing was more remarkable than the instinct, as it seemed, with which the child comprehended her loneliness” (Hawthorne 1992: 70). Hester wants to give the name “Pearl” to her daughter because she knew that this society also judged her. Hester wanted to protect her child from this dark society. Pearl's relation with nature and Hester's strange behaviours and individuality can be related with Transcendentalism. In addition to all of that, Chillingworth's revenge plan is also a Dark Romantic element in this novel. In a way, Hester's emotional transformation and her silence were some ways of taking revenge from this hypocritical Puritan society. Her revenge meant ignoring Puritan rules and breaking their taboos. Her silence shows us her strength and basically a form of revenge in the face of this dark society. Her emotional transformation helps her to take revenge from this society. She has just learned that she could not live in this kind of society and she should not trust anyone, even her own sex, because some women humiliate and judge her because of what she did. She wanted to create a new identity for herself and also for her daughter Pearl, so Dimmesdale and Hester had a plan to go to Europe. This kind of thinking can be associated with her transcendental idea, but Dimmesdale

confesses his sin later. Even in the face of this situation Hester does not give upon her character and behaviours. Hawthorne's aim was to criticize this kind of strict Puritan morality. He proves that whatever we experience, we shouldn't give up on our real identity and character. If we feel like a sinner or guilty about something, it shouldn't make us low and we should resist. If Hester weren't such kind of a powerful, persevering and rebellious character, she wouldn't be successful and wouldn't reach her aims. "Women, more especially – in the continually recurring trials of wounded, wasted, wronged, misplaced, or erring and sinful passion – or with the dreary burden of a heart unyielded, because unvalued and unsought – came to Hester's cottage, demanding why they were so wretched, and what the remedy! (Hawthorne 1992:96-7)

## CONCLUSION

With his novel *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne mirrors very significant features of the Puritan society. Their moral ethics are examined through the characters Hester, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth. What is striking throughout the novel is the significant transformation of Hester Prynne and her final account is the significant criticism of the Puritan society. What can be deduced from this novel is that "acceptance" is better than denying. The book shows Hester Prynne's character development and spiritual transformation despite all social drawbacks, pressure and challenges. At first, she was a woman who committed adultery. She was shameful because of her sin. However, through the end, she tries to be a whole with the letter and tries to change its meaning in the eyes of the puritan society. She gains power over herself and over the symbol of her sin which is the scarlet letter "A". She does not let society to create the meaning of the letter which is full of shame, sinful and cruelty. "The letter was the symbol of her calling. Such helpfulness was found in her – so much power to do, and power to sympathise – that many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. They said that it meant Able, so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength" (Hawthorne 1992: 120-121). Hawthorne shows her self-improvement and self-reliance through a transcendentalist point of view. By this way, he uses Hester to show the importance of individual and individual relationship between divinity and human beings. Thus, by gaining self-reliance Hester shows that individuals can create meaning of things rather than the others such as puritan society.

Her intellect and her heart had their home, as it were, in desert places, where she roamed as freely as the wild Indian in his woods. For years past she had looked from this estranged point of view at human institutions, and whatever priests or legislators

had established; criticising all with hardly more reverence than the Indian would feel for the clerical band, the judicial robe, the pillory, the gallows, the fireside, or the church .... Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers – stern and wild ones—and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss (Hawthorne 1992: 150).

In conclusion, Hester’s emotional transformation and rebellion was a way of revenge as she made the scarlet letter her power rather than weakness while removing herself from the clutches of Puritan society. Even if Hester is free to go to wherever she desires at the end of the novel, she returns and prefers living in New England with her free of will as she feels entirely identified with the scarlet letter and the place where the scarlet letter emerged. Interestingly, “but there was a more real life for Hester Prynne here, in New England, than in that unknown region where Pearl had found a home. Here had lain her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her penitence (Hawthorne 1992:196). Pearl, who was considered as “the elf-child”, or “the demon offspring” by some people in that epoch turned into the richest heiress of her period in the New World and the story of the scarlet letter turns into a legend. By “bringing the community to accept that letter on her terms rather than its own,” Nina Baym argues, “Hester has in fact brought about a modest social change. Society expands to accept her with the letter—the private life carves out a small place for itself in the community’s awareness. This is a small, but real, triumph for the heroine” (Baym 1976: 130). Hester’s exceptional situation in an extremely restrictive society did not prevent her from being exalted into a higher position as a virtuous person despite all socially restrictive barriers and pressures. Thanks to her virtuous deeds and charitable work she managed to acquire a respectable place within the same society which had condemned her to isolation and public humiliation once upon a time. The change in her public image through her transformation into a more decent and honourable personality was, in fact, a moral lesson that defied years, societies and generations. Her persevering work, adamant manners and strong-will all contributed to her survival as a woman with a strong personality.

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**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Transcendentalists attached great influence to a direct connection with nature and God. The free development of individual feelings was of great importance to them for the solution of individual problems. In his work *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne also reflected the transcendentalist ideology. Under the influence of his Puritan background and transcendentalist ideology he wrote his famous novel *The Scarlet Letter*. In his novel, even though he was Puritan and had its heritage, Hawthorne also showed his religious sect's errors in itself through the sin, which refers to the adultery that Hester Prynne and minister Dimmesdale committed. In this paper I discussed the character development and spiritual transformation of Hester Prynne through her public humiliation and the symbolic transformation of the meaning of Scarlet Letter "A". The novel is focused on the protagonist, Hester Prynne's sin, her illegitimate child, Pearl, Puritan society and its complexities within the theme of "sin". The general view on her sin and her position as an outcast in the Puritan society causes her transformation as a new image of woman in the Puritan society. Since she is the epitome of sin in public eye, she gets lonely and she is even forced to become isolated with her daughter, Pearl. On the other hand, through her good deeds, Hester gains self-empowerment despite her outcast female identity in Puritan society. She improves her identity both philosophically and psychologically. Hester accepts her sin and starts to change the flow of her fate by making it her part. In this regard, by wearing the scarlet letter she actually gains awareness about the errors in this Puritan society. In this case, by accepting her punishment she remains self-reliant, which leads to her own individual growth. At the very beginning of the novel her scarlet letter represented adultery, but after the change that she undergoes, she becomes an icon in society and the general indication of the letter A becomes "ABLE". In her isolation Hester makes needlework and embroiders as a seamstress and helps poor people. She changes the meaning of scarlet letter "A" into something positive. What Hester learns from the scarlet letter is the sinful nature of human beings with whom she shares a life full of tests and ordeals as well as her own sinful nature. Her awareness upon the evil aspect of other people around her increases as she observes and analyses the reasons for their queer and improper attitudes towards herself and her child. Puritan society applies the rules of their religion; however, they show a cruel behaviour towards Hester even though she regrets her sin. Her passion had turned into wisdom and her wisdom had turned into salvation as she was not chained to the wrong ideals of Puritans. The public humiliation made Hester stronger and more individual. In a way, Hester's emotional transformation and her silence were some ways of taking revenge from this hypocritical Puritan society. The novel reflects Hester Prynne's character development and spiritual transformation despite all social drawbacks,

pressure and challenges. Hester's exceptional situation in an extremely restrictive society did not prevent her from being exalted into a higher position as a virtuous person despite all socially restrictive barriers and pressures. Thanks to her virtuous deeds and charitable work she managed to acquire a respectable place within the same society which had condemned her to isolation and public humiliation once upon a time. Hawthorne sheds light on her self-improvement, emotional transformation and self-reliance through a transcendentalist point of view. The change in her public image through her transformation into a more decent and honourable personality was, in fact, a moral lesson that defied years, societies and generations. Her persevering work, adamant manners and strong-will all contributed to her survival as a woman with a strong personality.