On the Consciousness of Modern Women Revealed in the Novel The Scarlet Letter

Dr. Zenetta Rosaline
Professor & Director, Department of Women’s Studies, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore-641046, Tamil Nadu (India)

&

Wang Ting
Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Women’s Studies, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore-641046, Tamil Nadu (India)
Email: 287307060@qq.com

Abstract

The Scarlet Letter is recognized as the representative work of Hawthorne's most prominent and romantic novels in the most prestigious authority works. By revealing the "edge" of the patriarchal society in which the Puritan hero Hester status profoundly, Hawthorne criticized the male dominated social misogyny consciousness. Hawthorne's female strong socialist consciousness prompted him to succeed in The scarlet letter creating a negative image of female characters. the author expressed the strong protest comparison for the fate of helpless and subvert the concept that the "object" is always female, he tries to construct The Scarlet Letter for Hester to win a "subject" status in the world.

This article will employ the theory of feminism to analyze the mistress of the in-depth exploration of the novel The Scarlet Letter female consciousness, and finally reveal the novel contains positive social significance.

KEY WORDS: Scarlet Letter; modern; sense of feminism; consciousness

Introduction

The Scarlet Letter tells the story of a love tragedy in the American colony of New England during the initial period of American immigration. Starting from the social situation at that time, Hawthorne revealed the spiritual and moral destruction of people by the religious authorities through touching love tragedies, and criticized the hypocrisy and cruelty of the upper class of puritans and the rulers who held the political and religious power. Hester Prynne was the heroine of The Scarlet Letter, a strong and humiliated woman. Young and beautiful, she married to Roger Chillingworth, a body dysmorphic sorcerer, but they had no love and affection. Then Roger was carried away into exile at
sea and disappeared without a trace, leaving Hester alone and miserable. In her widowhood, Hester fell in love with Arthur Dimmesdale, a handsome young clergyman, and they had a daughter called Pearl. After the incident, the theocratic Calvinist (Puritan) regime treated her as a symbol of its discipline on sin, punishing her for a lifetime of humiliation with a red A on her chest.

However, she didn’t surrender but fought against the decadent Puritan regime to boldly pursue her own happiness, showing amazing courage and strength. Her courage and indomitable spirit reflected her pursuit of equal status for women and basic human rights.

1 Formation of Hawthorne's Feminist Consciousness

1.1 Hawthorne’s Family Background

Hawthorne’s father died when he was four, leaving his mother brought him up by herself. Hawthorne’s childhood and social status indicated that he was a social marginal figure. His situation was directly related to the status of women at the time. Therefore, Hawthorne directly experienced the hardship of life caused by the low, powerless and incompetent situation of women. Living in the middle of the 19th century, Hawthorne had already felt the inequality between men and women, and dreamed of a better future for his family.

1.2 Hawthorne's Religious Background

Hawthorne lived in a Puritan family and was deeply influenced by transcendentalism. His religious views were contradictory and complicated. He criticized and exposed the harsh extremes of puritanism, while endorsing the puritanical doctrine of abstinence and atonement.

As a writer, Hawthorne understood the most profound feminist thought at that time. Witnessing the efforts of women to enter areas of public life that have traditionally been off-limits to women, he created *The Scarlet Letter* in which Hester was the pioneer who dared to pursue the freedom of individuality and love, while the minister Dimmesdale was the representative of religious hypocrisy and the victim of religious suffering.

2 Overview of Feminism

2.1 The Meaning of Feminism

According to the Blackwell encyclopedia of political thought, “Feminism” is a general term for a complex phenomenon. The word “Feminism” entered The English vocabulary in about 1910. The meaning of "Feminism" is a "radical social revolution" of women's roles. There are two dominant idea, the liberation of women's liberation as a person and as a woman, and its goal is to eliminate interfere as a personal woman to gain development completely.

2.2 The Formation and Development of Feminism

The word “Feminism” first appeared in France, which meant women's liberation. In the west, it originally referred to the pursuit of equality between men and women to fight for the right to vote.
In the 1920s and 1930s, women in western countries basically fought for equal political rights, but they were still unequal with men in society and people's ideas. Feminists began to realize that there was a gender relationship, a gender rights issue, so the feminist movement became a framework to analyze why men and women were not equal.

Feminism is interlinked with feminism and women's liberation movement. The women's liberation movement can be roughly divided into two phrases.

First phrase was probably around the end of the 19th century, being the first wave of the women's liberation movement. At that time, the most important was to fight for political rights, which was referred to as the "feminist movement".

The second phrase, generally speaking, began in the 1960s and 1970s. It was thought to have originated in the United States. The keynote was to eliminate the gender differences. Influenced by the civil rights movement, the youth movement, and the anti-war movement, the movement gained momentum and spread throughout the country. After the mid-to-late 1980s, the feminist movement seemed to have come to an end due to the failure of the equal rights amendment.

3 The Embodiment of Feminist Consciousness in the Hostess Hester

3.1 Hester's Resistance to Christian Morality

Under the harsh clerical rule of colonial society, religion and law were almost dominating people's minds. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester did not regard religious morality as the highest moral principle. She did not regard her sin as a grave crime, but facing it with equanimity. Hester, who flouted the Canon law, showed a strong rebellious spirit and bravely faced the humiliation and persecution from society and the church. Her resistance to Christian morality was manifested in his treatment of his own symbols. Although Hester was punished and wore the scarlet letter on her chest, she did not see it as a sign of humiliation. When she stepped to the front of an audience from the prison, not only did people amazingly find her in the mist in shade "catastrophe", she came out with very beautiful light proud smile on her face, with two eyes unhurried. In this peculiar way she proved her deep love for Arthur Dimmesdale. The scarlet letter is a handicraft embroidered by Hester to express her rebellious spirit, just like the scarlet letter. Little Pearl was also the symbol of Hester's sin, but also her priceless treasure.

When the ruler's eagle's claw reached out to her daughter, little Pearl, Hester's desperate public rebellion ended in keeping herself and Pearl together. Her behavior showed her brave and strong personality, as well as her feminist consciousness. She had gone to great lengths to make little Pearl a costly gown to make her all the more lively and charming. Hester showed her resistance to Christian morality through the scarlet letter on her bosom and feminist consciousness.
3.2 Hester's Yearning for Love

When living in Boston, Hester fell in love with the young minister Dimmesdale. However, their love was doomed to a tragic end under the social system and religious law at that time. Having been widely attacked, ridiculed, misunderstood and insulted, Hester never wavered in her pursuit and yearning for love. She stood up bravely to bear all the sufferings alone. When her husband Roger went to prison to force her to confess her adulterer, Hester firmly said, "you will never know." Her pursuit of divine love and respect for human nature made her firm and tenacious in the face of a powerful enemy.

Hester was a pioneer in the quest for freedom, personal liberation and true love. The plot of the novel was written from the high platform in the place DE la courthouse, where Hester, holding her daughter in her arms, was to be interrogated and publicly arrayed. In the third chapter of the novel there is a passage: "she will not speak!" After her punishment, with the scarlet letter of ignominy, Hester and Pearl moved into a little house far from town. With her natural strength and rare faculty, Hester had purged her soul, and produced another divine purity.

3.3 Hester's Positive Attitude towards Life

Hester treated life positively and faced reality bravely. When she was released from prison, she took up residence in a small hut far from the town, where she was able to overcome the cold environment instead of running away to escape her guilt. Her skill at fine needlework kept her and Pearl alive, and she showed her determination to resist the oppression of Puritan society by her efforts. She was the first to help when others were in trouble. During the plague, she was more like an angel, giving warmth and comfort to others. The prejudice against her had also been transformed day after day, and she managed to change the ideology of the community. Hester rebelled against Puritan society by changing the meaning of the letter “A” through her character.

3.4 Hester's Free and Optimistic Thinking

Hester was a female image with unique female nature and temperament, independent personality and thought, and rebellious spirit. She fought against the decadent Puritan rule tenably, boldly pursued her own happiness, and showed admirable courage and strength. Hester's courage and perseverance embodied her pursuit of equal status for women and basic human rights. She won her freedom through her unremitting struggle and became a model of women. Her rebellious life to the majority of women especially unfortunate women with a lot of inspiration. She told women how to survive in adversity, how to win the rights of equality and freedom they should enjoy, and how to realize the self-value of life.

Hester was optimistic and courageous and free to think. Hester trusted her instinct to love Dimmesdale, and the morality of her brain led her to deny that it was a sin to meet with Dimmesdale.
In this peaceful environment beyond the reach of human civilization and law, she had free and optimistic thinking about her own life.

4 Conclusion

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester was a female image deeply insulted but full of the spirit of resistance. She had the role of the adultery of the puritans, the wife betraying her husband, the lover of a beloved minister, the mother of illegitimate child. In the face of difficulties and humiliations, she showed a haughty smile and looked around at her neighbors and townspeople with a calm, natural dignity and strength of character instead of bowing her head. Hawthorne molded Hester into a strong and thoughtful woman who would not submit to the old conventions. We seem to get a sense of Hawthorne's fantasy of equality between men and women through Hester. *The Scarlet Letter* is often seen as an expression of modern women's consciousness of their rights in the context of a traditionally male-centered society in literary history.

Reference


[4] Doubleday, Neal G. *Hawthorne’s Hester and Feminism*[M]. The critical response repaired from PMIA, LIV, 1939.188.