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NASLOVNICA

SADRŽAJ

INTERVJU S POVODOM

KRITIKA

MANIFESTACIJE

ESEJI

i... Dabo E. Siromašno kazalište

i... Žeravica K. Max Frisch

i... Loinjak I. Neki aspekti hrvatske likovne kritike

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i... Stober D; Lončar Vicković S. Industrijsko arhitekstonsko naslijeđe osječke ljevaonice željeza

MEDUNARODNA

SURADNJA

IZ STRUKE ZA STRUKU

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This Small Man of Yesterday: A Neohistorical Perusal of Nathaniel Hawthorne

Abstract: The aim of the research is a circumstantiation that Nathaniel Hawthorne's literary work, and notably his *Scarlet Letter*, have always endorsed a clear idea pertaining to the achievement of the New English national unity. A vivid Biblical imagery, or sometimes even the ingrained Puritan prejudices that were still held by most of the New Englanders of Hawthorne's period, were used to accomplish this purpose. Hawthorne believed that only togetherness could save the Union in crucial political moments, and thus he was ready to forgive his compatriots many costly mistakes that were made during their common history. In what was often referred to as America's "promised land," exactly this hereditary trait of Hawthorne's generosity was paternally demonstrated in many cases. Methodologically, it has also empowered Hawthorne to be the prime torchbearer of Joseph Conrad's grandiose but slightly diabolical scheme of one's "heart of darkness" existent in still not gingerly explored and densely populated New England of his times. To Hawthorne, with a resulting implication extended as far as to the present, a new "chosen people" has started to wage a bitter struggle for the assurance of its survival therein while permeating it with its all-pervading gloom.

Keywords: Nathaniel Hawthorne, New Historicism, opus, perusal, *Scarlet Letter*, national unity

An In-Depth Analysis of the Puritan Mind: Symptoms Manifested in *The Scarlet Letter*

For Nathaniel Hawthorne, reaching maturity on the congested Chestnut Street in Salem, MA could potentially mean that he was also predestined to become yet another maritime trader, lawyer, or occasionally a physician—all the professions that he flatly rejected. In a letter to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow sent on June 4, 1837,^[2] Hawthorne wrote the following: *By some witchcraft or other... I have been carried apart from the main current of life, and find it impossible to get back again. Since we last met, which, I remember, was in Sawtell's room, where you read a farewell poem to the relics of the class—ever since that time I have secluded myself from society; and yet I never meant any such thing, nor dreamed what sort of life I was going to lead. I have made a captive of myself out—and if the door were open, I should be almost afraid to come out.* Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* was also written in an utter solitude of "this small man of yesterday," as Herman Melville called him in his 1850 article in George Long Duyckinck's *Literary World* titled "Hawthorne and His Mosses".^[3] However, one fact should be clearly stated: if we take the prefatory "Custom House" into our consideration as well, we cannot say that the conditions stipulated by the 19th century Salem have isolatedly made Hawthorne an apostate or have made his *Scarlet Letter* so critical of the Puritan Community and his own contemporaries. We should rather say that *The Scarlet Letter* was critical of a degeneration of the originally propagated Puritan principles that could be found in the 17th century New England and that Hawthorne's sequestration was so typical of him. Matthiessen provides evidence therefore in Hawthorne's own words: Hawthorne was aware that being a professional writer "was fatal in New England" because "there was a grossness in the conceptions" of his compatriots, for "they will not be convinced that any good thing may consist with what they call idleness; they can anticipate nothing but evil of a young man who neither studies physics, law, nor gospel, nor opens a store, nor takes to farming." Still, Hawthorne's cluttered mind exercised what he called an "irrevocable choice" and made him "the key turned and withdrawn from the lock," as correctly stated in a metaphor from his 1836 short story "Monsieur du Miroir".^[4]

Nevertheless, Matthiessen's statement that *The Scarlet Letter* is Hawthorne's simultaneous response to the Salem Whigs ("The Custom House") and a write-off of his kindred's unsettled debts is of great importance to both this paper and a study of the Hawthornian Puritan heritage in general. The account summarily establishes a connection between Hawthorne and the Hathornes, i.e., Hawthorne's predecessors who took up residence in the 17th century Salem, MA, and therefore necessitates an explanation. Bićanić states that five older ages have factually separated Hawthorne from these dignitaries, but his family circle deeply desired to catch the spirit of the times that had already past.^[5] Hawthorne's precursors had a guilty conscience because their conduct was not always reputable; on the contrary, it was occasionally rather opprobrious.

Major William Hathorne (1607–1681) of South English Wiltshire County, Hawthorne's great-great-grandfather, deserved to be mentioned in "The Custom House," an introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*. He sailed for America in 1630—in the English "Great Migration" to Salem, MA only a decennial subsequent to *The Mayflower*—together with almost 1,000 other immigrants led by John Winthrop (1588–1649). As demonstrated by Winthrop's journal *The History of New England*, Hawthorne's remote ancestor thus assistantly built a Puritan theocracy of the "Bible Commonwealth" for nearly fifty years. Consequently, this widely reputed merchant and local committee member soon became Speaker of the House of Deputies in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. As such, Hawthorne's eldest forebear became a forensic officer. It is documented, however, that William Hathorne was extremely adamant about the Society of Friends, having unfairly condemned the Quakeress Ann Coleman to public flagellation.

A flagrant case of ogreism in the next generation was Colonel John Hawthorne. He was also an arbiter notorious for his religious fervor and insatiable scrutiny. Superstitious about the "hags," Colonel John Hawthorne sentenced Sarah Good to death when presiding over the 1692 Salem witch-hunt. The woman's desperate and faithful spouse William Good could only witness his wife standing at the gallows and providing, according to a local tradition, her own irascible answer to the vigorous prosecutor and the Reverend Nicholas Noyes, "God will give you blood to drink!" Roper^[6] quotes this sentence as an apocalyptic vision and a succinct statement about all the Hathornes and their posterity; what is more, this malediction is said to be realized during the 18th century, when the Hathornes' regal splendor became just a faint light, while the Salem Irishmen cleared the slums away, fattened by bartering the ships' cargoes with China. Even so, Salem, nowadays a manufacturing city on the Massachusetts Bay side and Boston's residential suburb, is not the actual seat of a magistrate's court wherein the accused were haled, although this place is usually associated with the deliberate witchcraft deceptions of 1692: *The University Desk Encyclopedia* also corroborates the evidence that the historical location was the present-day municipality of Danvers, MA, originally named Salem Village.^[7]

Therefore, Nathaniel Hawthorne devoted a better part of his life to a "redemption" of his kin, which he rightly understood as his own. He wanted to furnish his environment a convincing evidence that he is not a Hawthorne, not exclusively because of the fact that he had appended the "w" to his family name when he ushered into the storytelling. For Hawthorne's antecedents, the stalwart Puritans, exactly this authorship of his, which was against all familial traditions, was the severest punishment. As explicitly demonstrated by "The Custom House" sketch, Hawthorne's idealistic, long-range aim was to create a New English myth, ease his consciousness, and establish himself as a writer, so he tried his best to achieve it. Perpetuating a Puritan stereotype in an allegorical way, *The Scarlet Letter* proves that he was indeed very successful therein.

It is, consequently, not a pure accident that Nathaniel Hawthorne has recreated a Puritan myth out of the characters of the Calvinist "luminaries" bravely fighting what they believed were the "savage tribes" of the indigenous American population. Hester Prynne of *The Scarlet Letter* is thence a forerunner to her husband, Roger Chillingworth, who was held captive by the "Amerindian sagamores" for two years.^[8] Nevertheless, Hawthorne did not intend to glorify and acknowledge any "white supremacy," as his Puritan precursors the Reverend John Cotton (1585–1652), Michael Wigglesworth (1631–1705), Edward Taylor (1642–1729), or Cotton Mather (1663–1728) did, but to convincingly demonstrate that the Puritan "Canaanites" were as impolite as the Native Americans were in many crucial moments, and Roger Chillingworth's subsequently inexcusable behavior is the best example thereof.

These scintillas of tragic description were later set aflame by Hawthorne's reverers and heirs apparent and marked off a momentous boundary between the earlier European and the American penmen; however, Nathaniel Hawthorne has already understandably explicated a projected image of a "new Canaan" as a precarious existence and a Mother Country wherein prosperity could be enjoyed only in an undissolvable union. Therein, the intrinsic values never sink into oblivion, and merely a set of diverse entities may constitute a whole. These were the ulterior motives behind a seemingly odd, favorable reception of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* during a ubiquitous American elation over an unequivocal success and an untrammelled economic growth. Although Hawthorne himself often indulged in reveries, he was utterly certain that only a State permanently keeping vigil over its past and its present might properly dub itself "the home of the brave."

New England: Hawthorne's Heart-Large Lump of Earth

It is worth noting that the elements of New Englandism in Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* and other short stories of his should not be observed as having an exclusively nationalistic connotation but mostly as a result of his nostalgia for the old New England; what is more, in his letter to Horatio Bridge dated January 15, 1857, Hawthorne wrote that "New England is quite as large a lump of earth as [his] heart can really take in" and even declared an intention to confer the title of *Provincial Tales* on his first collection. Thus, *The Scarlet Letter* should be seen as an important link of a chain initiated in 1835 by his tale "The Great Champion."^[9] In other words, Hawthorne wanted to make New England—referred to as "Yankeeland" by the Northeasterners of his time—cherish its priceless cultural heritage as much as the New Yorkers heroically extol Washington Irving's Diedrich Knickerbocker or as highly as the Scots praise Sir Walter Scott's portraiture of their homeland, the chivalrous "Caledonia." Consequently, Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* is one of those works wherein "a subdued touch of the wild and wonderful is thrown over a sketch of New England personages and scenery, yet, it is hoped, without entirely obliterating the sober hues of nature," for both the "jollity and gloom were contending for an empire."^[10]

Thence, *The Scarlet Letter* and Hawthorne's other short stories turn a new page in the American literary history. Although critical of a Puritan religious fervor in the New English life, these literary works share the same ardent patriotism that propelled Henry James to close an obscure passage on the American shortages in his critical biography of Hawthorne with an unflagging optimism. According to Cunliffe,^[11] the text, whose rewording can also be found in Hawthorne's proem to *The Marble Faun*, reads as follows: *One might enumerate the items of high civilization, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life, until it should become a wonder to know what was left. ... The natural remark, in the almost lurid light of such an indictment, would be that if these are left out, everything is left out. The American knows that a great deal remains; what it is that remains—that is his secret, his joke, as one may say.*

Prior to *The Scarlet Letter*, these Jamesian "things that remain" in the heart of any American and bind him or her to the native land, as well as a Hawthornesque "jollity and gloom" of being specifically a New Englander, are explicated in Hawthorne's short stories "The Gray Champion," "The Maypole of Merry Mount," "The Gentle Boy" and "Young Goodman Brown" at their best.

"The Gray Champion" is a blow-by-blow account of the storied regicide William Goffe (ob. c. 1679). After the Protectorate, led by Oliver Cromwell, initiated legal proceedings against King Charles I in 1647 and signed his death warrant, this English Puritan soldier killed the king in 1649. However, the 1660 Restoration made Goffe afraid of the British revenge, so he fled to America. Though already senescent, he came out of his forced retirement at Hadley, MA, having provided a big help to the United States in its skirmishing with both the Indians and the British. This assistance was actually Goffe's gratitude to America, his afforded shelter. As a result, "The Gray Champion" was ravenously devoured by Hawthorne's reading public especially during the American Civil War.

The second Hawthorne's story, "The Maypole of Merry Mount," brings into focus a provoked confrontation in the Plymouth Colony. It pertains to a serious disagreement between the early Puritans about a religious and political tolerance within the Colony, separation of the Church and State, and especially about an illegal expropriation of the Indian land. These disapprovals were later expressed so strongly that Roger Williams (c. 1603–1683), a noted Puritan politician and priest who advocated a more democratic State, was even banished from the Massachusetts Salem by the rigid local authorities. Consequently, Williams founded the Providence Colony in June 1836, having thus initiated a colonization of the future territory of Rhode Island. Therefore, "The Gray Champion" and "The Maypole of Merry Mount" reveal that Hawthorne voiced his keen dissatisfaction with a moral degradation of the New Englanders even in this intermediate stage of his literary activity, for an unbridled enthusiasm, radiated by the American pioneers, was, in Hawthorne's opinion, rapidly damped.

This is also plainly visible in a line of Hawthorne's human-interest short stories fabricated subsequent to "The Gray Champion." Although the titular Gray Champion protected the black-dressed New English believers from the elegantly dressed English "winebibbers" and thus gained the New Englanders their civil liberties, Hawthorne's tale titled "The Gentle Boy" (1837) already stated the obvious while demonstrating how easily the New English "abiding" faith in God and oneself can be shaken. For the literary critics, "The Gentle Boy" was the first Hawthorne's twist that themed a direct but unnecessary confrontation of the Puritans with the Quakers (c. 1656). The tale centers on a benevolent Puritan who, having seen a Quaker boy bemoaning his dead father, compassionately takes the child to his home, although he is painfully aware of all the grave consequences it may have. A thrilling and pathetic climax is reached when the boy ultimately dies, exactly at the moment of stoppage of a vigorous Puritan anti-Quaker persecution. Thus, the merciful Puritan can only console himself with a heroic defense of his deed, put up by the boy's mother, but a real *coup de théâtre* is produced when the woman also completely vanishes from sight.^[12] In consequence, "The Gentle Boy" delineates what Hawthorne asked of any Puritan: a heartfelt sympathy and a displayed tolerance; nevertheless, an embarrassing situation in New England took quite the

opposite direction.

A New English Puritanized intolerance caused Hawthorne to become increasingly disillusioned and faithless, just like the young Goodman Brown of his aforementioned narrative. To his indescribable horror, Goodman Brown finds the hypocritical Puritan dignitaries and his own beloved spouse Faith observing the witches' Sabbath. Goodman Brown soon realizes that this fact could dissolve his "marriage to faith," both literally (i.e., in the sense of a religious fidelity to God) and allegorically (i.e., in the sense of "faith" used as an appellation for a faithful woman); moreover, Hawthorne's protagonist eventually epiphatically understands that being a New English Puritan means that he has to do whatever the other Puritans do, not to behave honestly and considerately as any Puritan should. Fortunately enough, Nathaniel Hawthorne was never truly "married" to the Puritan faith.

Hawthorne swore fidelity to the upholding of a deep-seated Puritan tradition, both a familial and a religious one, as long as it was not greatly exaggerated. His son Julian Hawthorne therefore says, "Hawthorne's religious faith was of an almost childlike simplicity, though it was as deeply rooted as his life itself."^[13] Though practically unchurched, the New English Nathaniel Hawthorne speaks well of God whenever he mentions the unharnessed freaks of nature. For him, the Spirit still hovers over the clear New English waters (Gen. 1:2).

As uriculture was not yet disseminated to the whole 19th century New England, Nathaniel Hawthorne could even maintain a garden there, as well as his confreres Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862); however, Cunliffe points out that a fact that the 19th century New England was relatively undeveloped did not barbarize its denizens.^[14] E.g., Hawthorne could come across a copy of John Ruskin's 1851 *Pre-Raphaelitism* on a parlor table of a New Hampshire islet already in 1852, although the former city of Boston, having accumulated one of the hugest New English circulating libraries and having been known as the editors' forum, would also simultaneously boast the weak Dantesque engravings by the English sculptor John Flaxman (1755–1826). Nonetheless, a sharp deviation from a disciplined and modest behavior of the early New English "Edenites," i.e., perversion and hypocrisy displayed already a bicentennial ago, do not escape Hawthorne's notice. *The Scarlet Letter* thus expresses alarm at a danger of an easily possible new expulsion from this earthly paradise, as Hawthorne thought of New England. Yet, the book stirs up a fond hope in the Divine Grace, sincere repentance, and tolerance of the future New Englanders that could prevent it.

Reaching the Depths of Our Common Nature

Hawthorne's hope made him display modesty and savor an unpropitious moment for any radicalism, what exactly is a part of his New Englandism that will inspire the coming generations even a centennial later. Although a lasting Puritan legacy handed down to the New Englanders was Hawthorne's as well, a long transitional period between his remote ancestors and him enabled a very critical manifestational reexamination thereof. Accordingly, a *Scarlet Letter* reader may notice that a Puritan life is considerably different from Hawthorne's own, and a cogent reason for this variance is a fact that a Puritan existence, which proved to be a bonanza for his fictionalization, was a grim reality of his primogenitors. Therein, one could also find a base motive for Hawthorne's usage of moral allegory, since it was his vehicle for a demonstration that the same issues troubled both the Puritans and the 19th century New Englanders. An ethical parable thus serves as an interconnection between these two worlds. Yet, Hawthorne has never demonstrated a pronounced tendency to obfuscate the heart of a pressing problem in his picturesque descriptions, as his paragons John Bunyan and Edmund Spenser have, but he did not badly want to exploit sensationalism or maudlin sentimentality. Instead, *The Scarlet Letter*, for instance, should have rather reached "the depths of our common nature."^[15] Within an unfavorable Whiggish environment, occasionally truly reminiscent of a Puritan one, Hawthorne's "native propensities were toward Fairy Land, and also how much yeast is generally mixed up with the mental sustenance of a New Englander."^[16]

To acquire these "native propensities," Nathaniel Hawthorne carved out his career while learning from the others who have already produced an "American myth," so select authors were on a list of those who helped his New English legend arise. E.g., Hawthorne derived inspiration from a "damned ranting stuff" by the Portlander John Neal (1793–1876), now almost completely oblivion-sunken. Hawthorne met Neal's mixture of George Gordon Byron (1788–1824) and James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851) already as an undergraduate, but he also perused Cooper himself as a freshman of Bowdoin College in Brunswick, ME, having felt an "unwavering admiration" for him. Nevertheless, Hawthorne has never truly imitated Cooper; he just paid a touching tribute to him.

The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent by Washington Irving (1783–1859) and a quaternary of works by Brockden Brown (1771–1811) were also among Hawthorne's reading material, but *Peter Rugg*, a breathtaking adventure Hawthorne perused as a college junior, is the prose wherefrom he profited mostly and the book that might have also influenced the composition of his story "The Gray Champion." Written by the Bostonian legalist William Austin (1778–1841),

Peter Rugg is, namely, an American odyssey about a protagonist galloping back to the revolutionarily inclement Boston and to a pluviomantic folklore subsequent to more than a vicennial of wandering. Additionally, for his secularism's sake, Hawthorne might have also read a matrimonial poetry by Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672), since many a Puritan setting in *The Scarlet Letter* is reminiscent thereof.

However, what mostly contributed to the existence of *The Scarlet Letter* as a “Yenkeedom legend,” above and beyond all the literature, is undoubtedly a spirit of people recaptured by Hawthorne in his masterpiece. A description of the New Englanders, their past and their present, their customs, speech, love and hatred—all these elements made this book so typically New Englishish. In *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife: A Biography* (1884), Julian Hawthorne's account emphasized this as well: *The seed of democracy was bearing its first and (so far) its sweetest and most delicate fruit. Men and women of high refinement, education, and sensibilities thought it no derogation, not only to work for their living, but to tend a counter, sweep a room, or labor in the field. ... Plain living and high thinking can seldom have been more fully united than in certain circles of Boston and Salem during the first thirty or forty years of this century. ... Religious feeling was deep and earnest, owing in part to the recent schism between the severe and liberal interpretations of Christian destiny and obligations; and the development of commerce and other material interests had not more than foreshadowed its present proportions, nor distracted people's attention from less practical matters. Such a state of things can hardly be reproduced, and, in our brief annals, possesses some historic value.*^[17]

Hawthorne was also radiating this kind of boundless enthusiasm for the New Englanders, especially those of the Berkshires, where there was no Salem-like “mirth, anger, eccentricity.” E.g., Matthiessen quotes Hawthorne's warm words pertaining to a local blacksmith, “big in the belly, and enormous in the backsides,” whose conversation had “much strong, unlettered sense, imbued with humor,” as everybody else's there allegedly also has. What is more, the blacksmith was, in Hawthorne's opinion, an incarnation of an indescribable New English humanity.^[18]

Nonetheless, a political situation in the United States of America and a European sojourn made Nathaniel Hawthorne reexamine his position to the rest of the Union. As observed by Matthiessen,^[19] Hawthorne's painful impression about America of his times was later strengthened, inasmuch as he disappointedly uttered that “no life now wanders like an unfettered stream; there is a mill-wheel for the tiniest rivulet to turn,” because “we [the Americans] go all wrong, by too strenuous a resolution to go all right.” Already in Liverpool, England (1853–1857), Hawthorne was, namely, sorry to hear the announcements of possible hostilities that would subsequently foment the Civil War in his motherland (1861–1865), and no matter how intensely he reviled the British, he had to admit that “the United States are fit for many excellent purposes, but they certainly are not fit to live in,” as he indicated in one of his letters to William D. Ticknor. Consequently, when the information on “irrepressible conflicts” over slavery in the United States of America were divulged, Nathaniel Hawthorne, as a Unionist, almost completely rendered his unquestioned national loyalty to New England, having renounced everything heading south of the Potomac.^[20] Two of Hawthorne's issued statements openly speak thereof, for Cowley quotes his hope of a “terrible thrashing” being given to the Southerners, whereafter they should, in Hawthorne's opinion, even be ejected from the Union,^[21] whereas Matthiessen^[22] cites Hawthorne's judgment of John Brown, who “won his martyrdom fairly and took it firmly.”

As a final point, Hawthorne' implacable antipathy toward the British is also clearly visible in yet another example: when Great Britain denied an observed American neutrality in the Crimean War (1853–1856) and had an outright try at recruiting common soldiers from the United States especially for the Black Sea theater, Hawthorne's reflection thereupon was that the British Prime Minister George Hamilton-Gordon should be immediately revoked his diplomatic passport, as he demanded in his letter to William D. Ticknor on November 9, 1855. Interestingly, Hamilton-Gordon's compatriots have subsequently accused him of waging the war indecisively, so he had to resign and retreat from public life.

Deeply disappointed with the global American policy as well, Hawthorne studiously avoided dubbing the whole of America “Brave New World.” E.g., *The Scarlet Letter* is thus set in the colonial New England, i.e., prior to the birth of a nation. Conversely, Cowley circumstantiates that Hawthorne verbalized his innermost feelings about his mother country in an 1854 notelet to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, which, irrespective of Hawthorne's keen dissatisfaction with his contemporary America, reads as follows: “If I were in your position, I think that I should make my home on this side of the water,—though always with an indefinite and never to be executed intention to go back and die in my native land.”^[23]

Therefore, for Nathaniel Hawthorne, a pioneering mission to perform was an attempted synthesis of the American (notably the New English) and the European best.

Till the Heart Be Touched: A Revolution in Mind

Ousted from the Custom House in Salem, MA by the American Whig Party members in June 1849, Nathaniel Hawthorne did not bow thereto and stop writing; on the contrary, the very next year (1850) was marked by *The Scarlet Letter*

and his transfer to a country house in the suburban Lenox, a city in the Berkshire Hills of Western Massachusetts, so the eighteen months Hawthorne spent there were his necessary rest subsequent to an abject Salemite humiliation.

Hawthorne's decision never to go back to Salem stylized "The Custom House," an aforementioned introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, and although the prolog is a short biographical sketch that revisions the Salemite Whigs with a not-so-insignificant bitterness, it is actually seriocomic. Still, the death of Hawthorne's mother, Elizabeth Manning Hawthorne, contributed to the overall sorrowfulness of *The Scarlet Letter* and gave way to a warm affection displayed by this work, quite untypical of other Hawthorne's fiction. Thus, already on October 4, 1840, Hawthorne wrote the following prophetic lines in a letter to Sophia Amelia Peabody, his wife-to-be: "Indeed, we are but shadows, we are not endowed with real life, all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest substance of dream—till the heart be touched. That touch creates us—then we begin to be."^[24]

Therefore, irrespective of a deep gloom in most chapters, *The Scarlet Letter* also brings some expectations of a change in people's souls, which is to be come up to; however, it is, rather, a reader and not any of the *dramatis personae* who should meet them. Namely, as a work primarily dealing with a Biblically castigatory sin, *The Scarlet Letter* invites the avid persuer, primarily the New English one, to propagate tolerance for all, because an "adulteress prays upon [one's] very life" (Prov. 6:26), while "a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself" (Prov. 6:32). The reader seems, consequently, predestined to effect a needed change in mentality and unfetter the scions of the former Puritan "Iron Men," together with Hawthorne. According to Reynolds, an echo of a real "unfettering of people,"^[25] i.e., of a revolution, may be perceived in this pronounced Hawthorne's tendency.

Written in 1850, Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* might well have been influenced by both the French Revolution (1789) and its Italian counterpart (1849), and, indeed, the notion of a revolution is a firm basis in Hawthorne's ambiguous symbolism. Nevertheless, a Hawthornesque revolution is never a *coup d'état*—for Hawthorne, it should rather be a "revolution in mind." As Hawthorne saw the Puritan Community as a New English dungeon, this sort of a "revolutionary imagery" in *The Scarlet Letter* could be consequently traced from the book's cover to its last page: the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale is, hence, an Oxford-educated priest harboring the Royalist ideas, Governor Richard Bellingham's armor (from his battles with the Native Americans) is proudly exposed in his gubernatorial mansion, the Beadle is, in Hawthorne's opinion, one of the worst personifications of Puritanism and should be thus removed, and the centralized scaffold is really fully reminiscent of a part of any guillotine. Moreover, if we know that *The Scarlet Letter* actualizes Governor John Winthrop's rule and New England in a period from 1642 to 1649, even a connotation of the Puritan Revolution seems quite possible.

Liking to toy with historical facts, Hawthorne rightly noticed that a connection between Governor John Winthrop and a civil war in England (known as the Puritan Revolution, 1642–1646) was even closer than a parallel in time would suggest; namely, both Governor Winthrop's rule and the Puritan Revolution represented a profanation of an idea that a radical social change was needed. *The Scarlet Letter* demonstrates that Winthrop's governorship soon created an unbearable Puritan theocracy and made him unpopular despite the fact that the Puritan clique reelected him Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony twelve times. Similarly, the Puritan Revolution in England and its "Roundheads," i.e., the Parliamentarians or Puritans led by Oliver Cromwell, completely destroyed the Revolution's lofty ideal when these revolutionaries not only dethroned King Charles I and his "Cavaliers," i.e., the Royalists, but also brutally subdued Ireland (1649–1650) and Scotland (1650–1651).

Himself of an almost aristocratic English descent but always against any gross Puritan exaggeration (like the one in case of Oliver Cromwell, the "Old Ironsides"), Hawthorne was somewhat closer to the Royalists in this conflict and thus nostalgically wanted a return of "good old times" to New England as well. *The Scarlet Letter* thence advocates a new, yet anti-Puritan, revolution that would even the things up. In this respect, it is not a pure accident that one of the possible initiators thereof, the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, is an Oxonian alumnus with the Royalist sympathies.

However, Nathaniel Hawthorne was primarily a pacifist and therefore wanted to carry out a "mental revolution" first. Hawthorne thought that one should bring about a marked change in a one-tracked Puritanized mind and show the Puritan progeny that their religious fanaticism could diminish any good in them. Loving his New English soil and his diligent compatriots, Hawthorne primarily desired to save lives and help the New English Puritan posterity overcome a yearlong clerical indoctrination.

Getting a Right Pitch: From a *Chronique Scandaleuse* to a Great American Novel

In his 1850 missive to Horatio Bridge, Hawthorne phrased the following sincere words, really illustrative of his views: "*The Scarlet Letter* is positively a hell-fired story into which I found it almost impossible to throw any cheering light. ... There is an introduction to this book, giving a sketch of my Custom House life, with an imaginative touch here and there, which will perhaps be more attractive than the main narrative." Fortunately, *The Scarlet Letter* has highly exceeded the not-so-great

expectations of its pusillanimous but prolific author and thus became Hawthorne's *chef-d'œuvre* in all aspects, acquiring him his lasting popularity.

The authentic documents circumstantiate that Nathaniel Hawthorne had an incunabulum of the book as early as in 1837, when working on his story "Endicott and the Red Cross," for he mentioned "likewise a young woman, with no mean share of beauty, whose doom it was to wear the letter A on the breast of her gown, in the eyes of all the world and her own children." Additionally, Cowley quotes one of Hawthorne's 1844 notes, specifying the following: "The life of a woman, who, by the old colony law, was condemned always to wear the letter A, sewed on her garment, in token of her having committed adultery."^[26] Finally, Matthiessen reports about Hawthorne's 1849 purport on an actual scarlet-cloth letter found among the papers in the Custom House.^[27]

What is more, Cunliffe adds that, prior to *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne also published the "Main Street," a processual panorama of the 17th and the 18th century in Salem, MA, having retrieved the same Custom House data; thus, one could learn that, in the 17th century New England, the letter D ("drunkard") and I ("incest") were worn in addition to the letter A ("adulteress").^[28] However, this stigmatization was not an "ingenious" Puritan invention but a modification of an ancient Roman custom. Namely, the harlots there had to wear their names written on their foreheads (Rev. 17:5; Dan. 4:27), whereas the scarlet color, peculiarly, was associated with an unaccustomed luxury and adultery from time immemorial, as demonstrated by the Biblical "scarlet beast" (Rev. 17:3).

Hawthorne considered *The Scarlet Letter* his own tot and often expressed his deep emotions connected therewith; thus, it is not surprising that the book remunerates for his parental care, and will probably continue doing so for many years to come. E.g., as quoted in Cowley,^[29] the author "tried to read" the last episode of *The Scarlet Letter* to his wife Sophia Amelia Hawthorne (née Peabody, 1809–1871) on February 3, 1850, for his voice "swelled and heaved," as if he were "tossed up and down on an ocean, as it subsided after a storm." Moreover, he minutely described his being in "a very nervous state, then having gone through a great diversity and severity of emotion, for many months past," having even thought that he had never overcome his "own adamant in any other instance."

Cowley also supposes that Hawthorne began his work on *The Scarlet Letter* on June 8, 1849, i.e., on the very day the Whigs dismissed him from the Custom House in Salem, MA. Having just calmly commented that he could then write his book, his spouse Sophia Amelia Hawthorne was thus a sort of a grandmother to his manuscript; moreover, she even assured him of their financial situation secure enough to provide for their existence, despite the fact that his ouster from the Salem Custom House considerably cut their household budget. Nonetheless, Hawthorne was still frequently interrupted by his friends, who badly wanted to reinstate him, by his mother's mortal agony, which he ceaselessly recorded, by a fact that he himself suffered from a steady earache, and ultimately, in the fall of 1849, by the bedriddenness of his entire nuclear family. Even so, Hawthorne devotedly said the following to his publisher, James T. Fields: "*The Scarlet Letter* being all in one tone, I had only to get my pitch, and could then go interminably."

It is not an outright surprise, therefore, that Hawthorne's quartet of *dramatis personae* in *The Scarlet Letter*, i.e., the chief characters of Hester Prynne, Pearl, the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale and Roger Chillingworth, are all modeled after the New English men and women he knew, or even after his own filial relations. E.g., Hawthorne had a realistic picture of Pearl, based upon his own daughter Una, as early as in 1842, and jotted down the following: "Pearl—the English of Margaret—a pretty name for a girl in a story." Subsequently, one may find the other two male characters, i.e., the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, "a man who does penance in what might appear to lookers-on the most glorious and triumphal circumstance of his life," and Roger Chillingworth, "a story of the effects of revenge, in diabolizing him who indulges in it," portrayed in his sketches as well.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, a plot is rather simple: bemoaning his mother, Nathaniel Hawthorne structures it upon an inexorable fate whereby two hearts are separated. He sets a Puritan cliché as a real master, so the symbols like "cemetery," "inhumation," "prison" and "wilted rose" become more salient. Nevertheless, the audience, not exclusively that of the Berkshires, took with approbation what Hawthorne held "somber," whereas the fact that some sacerdotalists caviled at *The Scarlet Letter*, having chicaned it as a *chronique scandaleuse*, was indeed marvelously used for its wholesale Stateside.

The plot is interjected with flashbacks of an earlier adultery, committed by the charming brunette Hester Prynne with the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, whose fruit is their daughter, Pearl. If we keep in mind Hawthorne's deep-rooted detestation toward the British, it is not a sheer accident that Hester Prynne is an English newcomer to the Old Colony State: she conducts herself "lewdly" in the eyes of the Bostonian Puritans, and though two years have already passed since her arrival to Boston, they keep repeating that fact. Nonetheless, Hester Prynne's key role in *The Scarlet Letter*, i.e., that of a harsh social critic of the 17-century Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, is of a vital importance for the plot,

and therefore Hawthorne lets her speak up.

Whereas Hester Prynne exhibits her bravery during incarceration, her “paramour” does not possess sufficient valor to go to confession. Therefore, according to the Bostonian blue laws of the 1640s, Hester Prynne is characterized as a woman of easy virtue and Pearl as a devil’s seed. Still, the diabolization of illegitimate children, their mothers, “old hags,” “thaumaturgists,” eccentrics, and the rich is not a Puritan, i.e., New English, specialty, but rather an unnecessary European import. The stakes first burnt subsequent to the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (German, *Der Hexenhammer*) in Speyer, Germany in 1487. This “Hammer of the Witches” actually was a 250,000-word witch-hunt manual aimed at destroying the alleged necromancers and their heresy “as with a two-edged sword,” republished 29 times in spite of a Roman Catholic Church’s condemnation of its unethically illegal, inquisitory procedures as early as in 1490. Its compiler, Heinrich Kramer of the Austrian Tyrol (Latinized, Henricus Institor), was a Dominican clergyman and a protégé of Pope Innocent VIII, i.e., a theologian of scurrilous behavior. What is more, because of his acrimonious attitude toward the treatise, James (Jacob) Sprenger of Basel, Switzerland is merely observed as Kramer’s intentional creditory intervention, regardless of his co-auctorial attribution, which is presently academically disputed.^[30] Consequently, in its adverse criticism of the Puritan creations and injustices, *The Scarlet Letter* mentions other wanton cruelties of the contemporary Bostonians and Salemites as well: the executioners in these cities caused grievous bodily harm by cutting ears, noses, etc., of the less lucky but regularly guiltless members of the Puritan Community, thus being sinners themselves. As a mania advocating an “irreproachable Puritan conduct” lasted long after the 1640s, Chapter II of *The Scarlet Letter* also draws a brief sketch of the fictionalized life and times of Mistress Ann Hibbins, a wealthy widow and a reputed sister of the Governor Richard Bellingham, for it was she who was hanged in 1656 as the first witchcraft practitioner.

The Scarlet Letter “really” begins with Hester Prynne and Pearl’s release from prison, and the new life is thus symbolized by a blooming wild rose that sprouts beside the penitentiary; however, Hester Prynne has first to be pilloried, or “scaffolded,” as Hawthorne likes to call it, by wearing the scarlet “A” (for “adulteress”) on all her robes. Nonetheless, she displays it almost ostentatiously and even embroiders the stigma, bearing her cross proudly and being therefore ready to be earmarked only outwardly. On the other hand, in Hawthorne’s opinion, her spouse, the must-know alchemist, eccentric, and physician Roger Chillingworth, transgresses even more—against an already broken human heart. In a towering rage, he almost terrorizes Hester Prynne into revealing her lover’s name, although she is already serving her sentence out; moreover, having suddenly emerged in the crowd but having remained incognito, he even gives Hester Prynne (an empty) promise, telling her that he will not cause any grievous harm to her paramour and will not disclose his own identity of her common-law husband. Yet, after all his frantic efforts thwart, the cuckolded Roger Chillingworth reneges thereupon and becomes an elderly, unscrupulous avenger.

Roger Chillingworth chooses a perfidious method to tantalize the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, his helpless victim, having exorbitantly demanded his willing confirmation of paternity over little Pearl, and Hawthorne hereby demonstrates the very nature of Puritan degeneration in New England; what is more, Feidelson sees in Roger Chillingworth a satanic role assumed from an old Puritan myth of the Fall of Man.^[31] Having explained that his “dark necessity” made him do so^[32] Roger Chillingworth feels no responsibility: only in his “carelessness” about a response of the Puritan Community and in his acting according to his heart is he similar to Hester Prynne, but their motivations, i.e., Roger Chillingworth’s moral rigidity on one side and Hester Prynne’s profound love on the other side, are entirely different. Having an inkling on the valetudinarian young minister’s being the man he is searching for, Roger Chillingworth thus becomes the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale’s “leech”.^[33]

The Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, an ardent, juvenile, and widely reputed preacher, is consequently on the horns of a dilemma and therefore very embarrassed, asking himself whether Roger Chillingworth, or any other Puritan Bostonian, know about his peccancies, how much they do know (if they know it at all), whether his reputation as a good preacher will be completely tarnished in the Puritan Community if he tells them about his sin, and what God will say if he remains silent. Although he strongly suspects his “healer,” the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale unfortunately has no presentiment that Roger Chillingworth is Hester Prynne’s vendetta-leading consort.

On the other hand, Hester Prynne maintains her dignity, glaring in defiance toward the merciless Puritan authorities as well as Hawthorne does; nonetheless, it does not imply that either Hester Prynne or Nathaniel Hawthorne is rude to the establishment. Contrarily, Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne teaches her fellow townsfolk a lesson of Christian charity while vegetating with her Pearl as a seamstress in a thatched hut, or “cottage,” as Hawthorne has it, at the edge of a desolate wilderness, and the appellation “Pearl” itself demonstrates an attitude Hester Prynne took toward her offspring.^[34]

In a hypocritical, close-knit community, which the 17th-century Boston surely was, Hester Prynne sincerely believes that it is always better to temper justice with mercy; namely, in such a polarized society, everyone has his or her own guilt to admit. In fact, this is not merely a Hawthornian judgment on the Puritan Boston but a verdict on the Puritan world as a

whole. Hester Prynne is therefore symbolic: exposed to a vulgar and duplicitous Puritan mob as a sinner, she would deserve to be either hanged or branded on her forehead for the sake of her committed adultery, but Hawthorne sympathizes with the “mild” magistrates, not the throng, so she is consequently obliged to “only” wear the scarlet letter for the rest of her life.

Hester Prynne genuinely repents and humbly begs her husband not to unveil the secret to the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, but this, expectedly, fails to produce any echo when it comes to Roger Chillingworth. The resonance cannot be produced because Roger Chillingworth is a man of an age wherein “the men of the sword had overthrown nobles and kings”^[35] and not a spirit of a different time in New England, like Hester Prynne. In that time, there will be no “men of the sword” (exemplified by Roger Chillingworth), no nobilities, and no royalties.

The action of *The Scarlet Letter* culminates in a Hawthornesquely dramatic spectacle of the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale’s harsh punishment, which is self-administered but futile, for the minister wants to “bare” his soul thereby. However, for him, this “baring of the soul” does not imply the same as, possibly, for someone else: he does not confess his adultery to a person who could understand his convincing reasons and afford him consolation. Lost in a labyrinth of inflexible Puritan rules and psychophysically weak, the cleric is simply unable to take a right step, which renders him unjust primarily to himself. Therefore, this scaffold sequence, whose eyewitnesses are Hester Prynne, Pearl, and Roger Chillingworth, should be observed as a manifestation of the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale’s dispelled illusion that a physical pain would ease his mental suffering.

Deeply sympathizing with the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale subsequent to this distressing nocturnal scene, Hester Prynne divulges Roger Chillingworth’s secret to the priest in a contrastively sun-lit grove. Even more, she advances a suggestion that the parson, Pearl, and she go to England and begin a new life. To Reynolds, Hester Prynne thus begins to close a circle around her English aristocratic extraction, which is not completed by Pearl’s European marriage purely accidentally: no matter how intensively he ostracized the United Kingdom and the British, Nathaniel Hawthorne had to admit that, in the 17th century, it was not as Puritanized as his native New England. At that time, Europe was mainly characterized by revolutions, so it was a perfect setting for a prolonged, Hawthornesque “revolution in mind.” As Hester Prynne is a sinner, she could not wage it herself; therefore, Hawthorne subsequently invites the reader and little Pearl to be the first “revolutionaries.”^[36]

Although occasionally in her immature manner, Pearl does all she can to carry this “insurgency” out: e.g., she throws stones at the Puritan children, eradicates the weeds that represent them, and splashes the Governor John Winthrop with water. Therefore, the Puritan Community saw Pearl and not only Hester Prynne as its potential danger. Yet, Hester Prynne’s “aristocratic English heritage” should not be understood as Hawthorne’s acknowledgement of her supremacy over the Puritans but mostly as his own portrayal and nostalgia for a spirit of nobility that, in case of New England, was inevitably lost.

The Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale’s epiphany is therefore both dolorous and illuminative, but his triggered reaction thereto is rather unexpected. Nevertheless, such a response could be easily understood if we know that “transformation” indeed is one of Hawthorne’s favorites. Having been mostly timid heretofore, the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale detects and accomplishes his mission together with Hester Prynne, recouping sufficient inner strength to do so. He sees a confession as his personal sacrifice and deliverance from his spiritual captivity and recants his trespass. The priest thus delivers a fervent sermon to a bedazzled plebs exactly during the inauguration of a new governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, although he could have taken the occasion of the Governor John Winthrop’s Election Sermon to win his own promotion if he had wanted to. It is worth noticing, however, that the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale enjoys only Hester Prynne’s support in all these decisions of his, and, interestingly, Hawthorne’s text enables us to understand this “solid support” even literally, for the reverend lames in one leg on the fête day. Moreover, prior to breathing his last in Hester Prynne’s arms, the presbyter undresses his chest (or “unbreasts,” as Hawthorne has it), performing an act that both shocks and thoroughly disgraces the gathered Bostonians, for they keep asking themselves whether a stigma attached to his breast is also the letter “A,” a sign of a religious sect, a scar of a surgical procedure, or whether they have seen anything at all.

Paradoxically, Roger Chillingworth seems to be the only real loser of *The Scarlet Letter*: shame is actually brought to him, for Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne is elevated to a “Divine Maternity,” not degraded. The fact that she is accidentally or deliberately surnamed “Prynne,” probably after William Prynne (1600–1669), an English Puritan leader and pamphleteer, is indeed seriocomic. Nonetheless, Roger Chillingworth deserved to be a failure according to the high Hawthornesque principles, because he had desecrated the author’s inviolable sanctity—another man. Therefore, he has to hand down his legacy to Pearl, send her and Hester Prynne abroad, and eventually die, deprived of an urgent reason of his existence; thus, he has outlived the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale for less than a year. On the other hand, Hester Prynne returns to a wretched hovel, yet in her new capacity as a spiritual adviser to the Bostonian women. Likewise, the homecoming affords Hawthorne an excellent opportunity for the coinage of *The Scarlet Letter* motto, subsequently repeated in other works of his,

including even his itineraries: once, the humankind will come of age, and an unvarnished truth will cement the close male – female ties.

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