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A Marxist Reading of The Scarlet Letter

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Abstract

Throughout the years, the novel *The Scarlet Letter* has become a source of the representation of women's empowerment. Many researchers generally focused on the role of women from the perspective of Hester Prynne in a patriarchal and religious society and her punishment as an outcome of gender inequality and spiritual doctrines. In the name of bringing a new viewpoint for the novel, this research paper seeks to analyze *The Scarlet Letter* under Marxist reading by focusing on the demonstration of ideological hegemony and social hierarchy with sufficient examples from the life of Hester Prynne and through her miserable experiences in the Puritan society. By applying pivotal conceptions from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and Marx's seminal work *Das Kapital* (1867) as the primary sources of this paper, the study aims to delve into the ways in which Nathaniel Hawthorne's ability to demonstrate and critique the construction of ideologies of Puritan society that are based on religious doctrines. This paper attempts to answer two main questions: How the novel *The Scarlet Letter* illustrates social hierarchy among characters from a Marxist viewpoint and what effects of ideological hegemony in terms of religion and class in *The Scarlet Letter* can be seen. With a detailed inspection of character communication and social relations, the research aims to display how Hawthorne's work discloses the latent economic and ideological impacts that shape human interactions and societal notions of 17th-century New England.

Keywords: Marxism, Hegemony, Patriarchy, Puritan Society, 17th-Century New England

1. Introduction

The Scarlet Letter is a prominent novel in American literature which was written by Nathaniel Hawthorne and first published in 1850. The plot of the novel is set in the 17th century Massachusetts Bay Colony. The novel mainly focuses on the guilt of adultery that the protagonist Hester Prynne commits. The plot revolves around a woman named Hester Prynne and her action of adultery that has resulted in a punishment which is characterized by the obligation to wear the scarlet letter "A" symbolizing her sin. Upon the fact that Hester Prynne refuses to reveal the true identity of the father of the baby, the story unfolds around the themes of sin, redemption, morality, contradictory values of Puritan society, and oppression of society. Written in the 19th century, the novel reflects the deep engagement of Nathaniel Hawthorne with the historical and cultural realities of his descendants, namely, Puritans. The novel delves into the depth of human psychology and complexity along with social expectations.

Analyzing the novel from an autobiographical approach plays a crucial role in distinguishing the connection between Puritan society and its social dynamics. Since Hawthorne's legacy is based on Puritans, including John Hathorne who was a judge involved in the Salem witch trials that shaped Hawthorne's perception of Puritans thus it is inevitable to see the connection between his background and the themes of the novel such as sin and guilt. This historical reality influenced Hawthorne's writing and revealed the critical and harsh approach against the unforgiving and hypocritical social dynamics of Puritanism. The constant confrontation with his ancestors is evident throughout the novel as Hawthorne delves into the psychological and societal impact of sin and punishment through the protagonist Hester Prynne. Through Hester Prynne and her sin, Hawthorne critiques Puritanical diligence for public ostracism and the harsh imposition of moral codes. Hester's flexibility and dignity throughout public shaming and ostracism denote the implication of Hawthorne's perspective of individual strength under the influence of societal oppression. Class distinction and societal oppression, which are prominent themes throughout the novel highlight Hester's clash between individual identity and public acceptance that resonates with Hawthorne's struggle with his Puritan legacy.

The socio-economic dynamics of the Puritan community in Massachusetts Bay Colony provide the reader with a Marxist viewpoint of the novel. Hawthorne gives the impression that he skillfully employs Marxist theory that allows us to read the novel under the idea of class struggle and varying judgments of the superstructure including religion, morality, and hypocrisy of Puritan society. The resistance of Hester Prynne against the patriarchal and capitalist structures of her time is central to the article. The analysis of the novel from a Marxist viewpoint reflects how the protagonist Hester's punishment and conclusive public shaming reveal themselves as a result of social hierarchy and economic imperatives of Puritan society. By focusing on Hester's economic self-sufficiency through her needlework, the novel illustrates subversion in gender roles with the representation of a woman as a breadwinner and societal expectations of the ruling class. The patterns that Hester uses to decorate the letter "A" denote her dignity against the oppression that is imposed by the ruling figures of Puritan society. She transforms the letter "A" from being a mark of shame into the representation of her autonomy and capability. This resilience symbolizes the subjugated class discrimination, the hypocrisy of Puritan society, and the ideological dominance of ruling figures in the community. Accordingly, the analysis will proceed to examine the dichotomies between socioeconomic and religious-political systems in *The Scarlet Letter* with a Marxist viewpoint.

2. Literature Review

Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* is a profound example of the exploration of the themes of sin, guilt, and punishment within the rigid Puritan society that imposed its moral codes through oppressive ideology. Despite analyzing the novel in terms of feminism or through psychoanalytic lenses, a Marxist reading of the novel reveals the deeper socioeconomic crosscurrent and class struggle coordinated with the critiques of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and Marx's seminal work *Das Kapital* (1867).

In its very essence, Marxism's focus point is to reveal the inequality between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The conflict between the oppressive bourgeoisie and the submissive proletariat strengthened its reality with the rise of capitalism. The bourgeoisie functions as the subject and the proletariat becomes the object that plays a submissive role in production and money. According to Karl Marx, this paradox is imposed in a hypocritical system of politics and capitalism. As Marx stated in his work *The Communist Manifesto* "Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another" (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 32) Subsequently, political and religious powers are interested in exploitation to favor upper-class despite applying more neutral and equal approach towards society. They perpetuate oppression or ostracism against the proletariat which results in social discrimination.

In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels argue that history is driven by everlasting class struggle, oppression by the ruling class, and the contradiction between varying socioeconomic structures. In this context, *The Scarlet Letter* designates these dynamics under the influence of Puritanism and Puritan societal structure. Hester Prynne illustrates the existence through resistance that challenges the established moral codes and socioeconomic structure

of her society. Her punishment and ostracism not solely represent moral judgments of Puritan society but also reveal the social control that is reinforced by the existing social hierarchy.

In this context, Marx's *Das Kapital* provides a deeper analysis of the nature of capitalist society. In fact, this reality reveals how socioeconomic base and class struggle shape the social superstructure. Hester's needlework symbolizes her self-sufficient nature that accompanies her independent identity and challenges the patriarchal and capitalist norms threatening the conventional economic structure and gender roles. This economic independence pushes her to revolt against ostracism and subvert the applied punishment by transforming the letter "A" which is the mark of shame into the symbol of resilience and confidence. As a matter of fact, since Marx and Friedrich mention the hypocritical approach of the state institutions, Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale demonstrates this hypocrisy that exemplifies the internal conflict of the ruling class. As a religious figure, Dimmesdale embodies the superstructure that resonates with the socioeconomic base of Puritanism. The sin he committed reveals the hypocrisy and moral contradictions in maintaining social control and judgment.

The power that is shaping the Puritan community of 17th century New England is the significant force that is disguised under the presence of religious doctrines and the patriarchal structure of the society. The demonstration of the very structure of Puritan society and the ways in which they use certain discourse to employ their power over the community which creates class distinction will be exemplified through the journal article *Passion and Authority in The Scarlet Letter* (1970) by Nina Baym. It is crucial to apprehend the societal structure of the Puritan community that Hester Prynne lives in order to be able to analyze social dynamics that are based on class and religious hegemony.

Subsequently, a Marxist reading of *The Scarlet Letter* elucidates the class struggles and socioeconomic conflicts that underpin the narrative. By focusing on the two prominent works of Marxist theory, *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital* it can clearly be seen how Hawthorne critiques the junction of economic conditions and social relations indicating how ideology and the doctrines of capitalism shape societal expectations. This perspective provides the reader with a broad vision of the socioeconomic dynamics of Puritan society and its impact on the judgment of individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds. At this point, it must be understood that this study has closely bound us with two central questions such as how *The Scarlet Letter* illustrates social hierarchy among characters from a Marxist viewpoint and the effects of ideological hegemony in terms of religion and class in *The Scarlet Letter*.

3. Socioeconomic Dynamics in *The Scarlet Letter* and Its Reflection on the Characters Interchangeably

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne serves as an eloquent definition of social hierarchy and class distinction or inequality through the social interaction among characters that can be scrutinized with Marxist theory. "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 9) This idea can be captured from *The Scarlet Letter* through the contradiction among the characters such as Hester Prynne and the aristocratic ruling class of the Puritan community. Hester Prynne, in this context, symbolized the proletariat that is obligated to obey the rules and doctrines that are imposed by the ruling class. Therefore, because of her underestimated position in society as a both woman and an individual from the lower class, she suffers from double alienation. Her ostracism and punishment demonstrate the subjection and alienation of the working class implemented by the religious ruling figures of society. Hester, doomed to wear the letter A symbolizing her sin and punishment, epitomizes the misfortune of the proletariat.

Hester's position in the community that she lives in resonates with the lives of the proletariat that Marx defines in his many works. She becomes the illustration of the error in society and symbolizes the oppressed working class under the heavy expectations of the upper class. Despite her ability to seamstress which provides a source of income and economic independence for her, she becomes the indication of a position that is being the outcast and alienated figure in society due to the severe religious and moral codes of the Puritan ruling class. Throughout the novel, even the townspeople find something in Hester when they witness her craftsmanship, they are hesitant to express their admiration, especially women of the town. "She bore on her breast, in the curiously embroidered letter, a specimen of her delicate and imaginative skill, of which the dames of a court might gladly have availed

themselves [...]” (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 94) It can be clearly seen that her fascinating skillful work in seamstress is not enough to be welcomed in her community. As Marx and Engels state in *The Communist Manifesto*, the only aim of the bourgeoisie is to exploit the proletariat to get most of the work done and keep the production and cycle of money functioning perfectly. “Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests.” (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 20) Subsequently, the societal apparatuses that the ruling class or bourgeoisie uses function as a way to disguise their deeds to benefit the proletariat by exploiting them. In this case, the townspeople take advantage of Hester’s ability to sew without accepting her existence in their community as an individual. They still see Hester as a person who committed a sin that will never be forgiven.

Similar to the situation of the proletariat of the modern world, the same kind of societal structure can be seen in the Puritan community that Hester lives in. Marx explains the emergence of capitalist structure in society as

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed – a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market. (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 18)

Subsequently, Marx and Engels define the situation of the proletariat under the oppression of the bourgeoisie. Their existence is hinged on their labor which benefits the capitalist system. The proletariat has been seen as a commodity that only functions to produce for the capital. They are doomed to ambivalence and harsh conditions. Additionally, the severe conditions do not provide them with a comfortable life in the future. They work to please the capital and still are ostracized by the system. The same situation can be demonstrated with the life of Hester Prynne in her community. Hester Prynne is punished and ostracized by the public due to her sin, nonetheless, she has to work and provide a decent life for herself and for her daughter Pearl. In this context, even with her marginalization from the community she produced and functioned in her society to fit in and to gain economic freedom. The attempt to make a living and to fit in the community does not imply that Hester Prynne feels guilty about her actions. This symbolizes her dignity and revolt against the rigid punishment. However, the exploitation of Hester Prynne’s labor resembles the capitalist ideology. The ruling class and also the public uses Prynne’s labor to get benefit from it at the same time marginalizing her existence in the community. Hawthorne also describes Hester’s loneliness and the beautiful needlework that she depends on to prove a sufficient life for herself and for her daughter.

Lonely as was Hester's situation, and without a friend on earth who dared to show himself, she, however, incurred no risk of want. She possessed an art that sufficed, even in a land that afforded comparatively little scope for its exercise, to supply food for her thriving infant and herself. (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 94)

Hester’s needlework becomes a commodity. It is the production of skillful hands. The things that Hester sews are fanciful yet plain which refers to Puritanism. However, her great work and beautiful productions do not determine her position in the community. She provides quality with her needlework, while she never witnesses respect and an increase in her position in society just like the laborers of the capitalist system. In this case, she and her work are seen as commodities. “The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as " an immense accumulation of commodities," its unit being a single commodity.” (Marx, 1867, p. 41) Despite her contributions to the community through her needlework, she remains an outcast in society. The situation of Hester Prynne mirrors the ideological state apparatuses that the Puritan community of New England. Her punishment and marginalization from the community illustrate the social expectations and religious order that the ruling class attempts to impose. In this way, the ruling class preserves its control over both the proletariat and women. By declaring Hester as a sinner in the community they aimed to control her and maintain her submissive position. This reveals the ideological control that is applied by the upper class.

Power in this community is vested in a group of elders, ministerial and magisterial, who blend its legal and moral strands into a single instrument, and, acting as a group, make that power appear diffuse and impersonal. This is the Puritan oligarchy as an outsider, or an unbeliever might perceive it. (Baym, 1970, p. 214)

The oligarchy that is mentioned above represents the group of elders in Massachusetts Bay Colony which maintains their power over the public through religious doctrines. They exploit the lower class by imposing their ideological dehumanizing deeds. In the novel, Governor Bellingham is one of the members of this oligarchic structure. Arthur Dimmesdale comes in second place with his devoted priest appearance. People in the community obey them and believe their words since they are supported by the presence of religion and power. Their authority is based on moral and religious notions. In this way, the legitimization of their exploiting power over the public, especially, the ruling class can be seen. From a Marxist viewpoint, this oligarchic and patriarchal structure of the ruling class mirrors the existence of the bourgeoisie.

This power also reveals the essence of hypocrisy of the Puritan ruling class. For instance, even though Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale is Hester's secret partner with whom she committed the sin of adultery, his position as a priest in society secures him from being exposed to punishment. He becomes the bridge between moral and legal powers. Dimmesdale's position in the community hinders him from getting the same punishment as Hester. Governor Bellingham and other older people of the community do not think of Dimmesdale as someone who would commit the sin of adultery. He is seen as a perfect figure and described as "He was a soldier, legislator, judge; he was a ruler in the Church; he had all the Puritanic traits, both good and evil." (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 8) Subsequently, Arthur Dimmesdale is described as a perfect, flawless figure who symbolizes the moral codes of Puritan society. However, it was easy to judge and punish Hester without any hesitation due to her position in the public as a woman who is alone. On the other hand, Hester Prynne is exposed to public shame right away due to her sin of adultery, while no one puts Mistress Hibbins' sin of witchcraft into words.

This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die. Is there not law for it? Truly, there is, both in the Scripture and the statute-book. Then let the magistrates, who leave made it of no effect, thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray! (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 57)

The social hierarchy and the approach of the ruling class change according to the position of the characters throughout the novel. To illustrate this situation, Governor Bellingham's sister Mistress Hibbins can be taken into account. As a matter of fact, it is explicitly implied in the novel that Mistress Hibbins is involved in witchcraft and frequently goes into the woods to attend the rituals. The rigid religious existence of Puritan society, normally, would not allow such a sin to be committed in a small community. "Mistress Hibbins, Governor Bellingham's bitter-tempered sister, and the same who, a few years later, was executed as a witch." (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 141) The late punishment of Mistress Hibbins symbolizes the hypocritical systematic exploitation of the lower class that also resonates with the situation of the proletariat in the capitalist system. Due to her position in the community, Mistress Hibbins is not punished because of her frequent visits to the "black man", years later she is punished because of her involvement in witchcraft. While the older people in the community try to impose artificial virtues to disguise their rigid power that is aimed to exploit the public, individuals such as Mistress Hibbins are favored even if they share the same errors with the proletariat such as Hester Prynne.

4. Ideological Hegemony in Terms of Class and Religion

Mills states that "gloom of the Puritans is one of Hawthorne's chief motifs" (Mills, 1948, p. 82) Hawthorne uses the oppressive and gloomy or mostly melancholic psyche of Puritans in *The Scarlet Letter* to convey how severe and self-righteous they are in terms of justifying their hypocritical exploitation of the public. Mills also states that "Gloom was a prevailing characteristic of the age, Hawthorne wrote in "Dr. Bullivant," its long shadow, falling over all the intervening year visible, though not too distinctly, upon ourselves." (Mills, 1948, p. 83) Hawthorne's examination of the gloomy atmosphere throughout the Puritan age, and its withstanding reflection demonstrates the very structure of Puritanism and Puritan society in terms of moral and cultural notions. In the context of *The Scarlet Letter*, this idea is illustrated by the characters' position and the perception of sin in a rigid societal foundation. Hawthorne saw Puritanism as "[...] hard, cold, and confined; it was only the fervent faith of firm believers that redeemed." (Schwartz, 1963, p. 4) He saw the religion as harsh and apathetic. The true believers demonstrated the restrictive approach of the followers of this sect, especially when they found out about Hester Prynne's sin. In this case, Hawthorne's relationship was distant but based on respect since believed in individual practices of religion. The essence of the acceptance of religion and its impact on the community through Hester Prynne and Pearl can be exemplified with a further analysis of Governor Bellingham.

Hawthorne knew enough of their theology to have Governor Bellingham mention depravity as an essential tenet of the Puritan religion in *The Scarlet Letter*. When the eminent townsmen are deciding whether or not to take Pearl away from Hester, Bellingham is abashed by Pearl's liberal and elfin responses to his attempt to discover how well she knows the accepted religion. "This is awful!" he cries, because a child of three cannot tell him who made her. "Without question, she is equally in the dark as to her soul, its present depravity, and future destiny!" (vi, 159-160.) (Schwartz, 1963, p. 5)

The depravity that Governor Bellingham acquires as a view of life suggests the foundational notion of Puritanism. In this context, it reveals the inherent moral corruption and sinfulness of the individuals. "liberal and elfin" responses of Pearl symbolize her disobedience of Puritan doctrines with her nonconformist existence in the community. This is the point that Bellingham and the rest of the community interpret as she is the child of the devil. Since Pearl doesn't obey their theological doctrines, they ostracize her. It reveals the basic essence of the religious ideological hegemony that the colony has at its core. Bellingham's reaction of "This is awful!" suggests his surprise against the ignorance of the child towards religious doctrines since it is significant to impose religious doctrines on children in order to shape their brains as conformists to the established system. In this way, Hester Prynne becomes the emblematic reflection of the challenged figure against the religious doctrines of Puritan society.

"Nathaniel Hawthorne's defence of his family lies in the creation of a monolithic Puritanism, in which all figures of authority acted as his own ancestors acted. To this end, he obliterates the history of subversion and heresy that involved even the colonial elite; heretics are represented in Hawthorne's fiction as exceptional individuals, and subversives are always defeated by the overwhelming forces of orthodoxy." (Madsen, 1999, pp. 1-2)

The individual who is so-called, defeated in the case of Hester represents the subvarieties and monolithic structure of Puritan society that acquired heretical elements. All in all, it reflects Hawthorne's awareness of the religious background of his ancestors and the difference of their sect in terms of worldview. Hester Prynne becomes one of these exceptional individuals who are overwhelmed with the harsh orthodoxy. Her act of adultery designates the defiance of Puritan teachings and religious doctrines that they impose on society. Nonetheless, against her resilience, she faces the rigid judgment of Puritan society and she is ostracized from the community. Even though Hester tries to preserve her dignity, the ultimate subversion happens when Dimmesdale confesses that he is the partner in the sin of adultery. It displays the consequences of a lack of conformity.

Throughout the novel, the unforgiving nature of Puritan society is on point to reflect their rigid and harsh evaluation of any mistake that is committed. This severe bleakness of Puritan society shapes the lives and actions of the characters and imposes conformity. Mills states that "The Puritan sternness is also seen in what Hawthorne calls in *The Scarlet Letter* "the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law." He pictured the Puritans waiting with "grim rigidity" outside the jail for Hester to appear." (Mills, 1948, p. 84) The structure of the Puritan society is described as harsh and vindictive, which designates Puritan's perception of the world that is filled with sin and forbidden worldly pleasures. The emergence of strictly established notions of Puritan society evokes an image of a community that requires conformity. As a matter of fact, the action of waiting outside the jail to see Hester represents the satisfaction that Puritan society feels when they see that the social order that they aim to preserve is functioning. This also denotes the indispensable public judgment equal to legal punishment.

These primitive statesmen, therefore, —Bradstreet, Endicott, Dudley, Bellingham, and their compeers, — who were elevated to power by the early choice of the people, seem to have been not often brilliant, but distinguished by a ponderous sobriety, rather than activity of intellect. (Hawthorne, 1850, pp. 290-291)

According to the quote above from the novel, it can clearly be understood that these "primitive" older men in charge of ruling the colony are not "brilliant" or "intellectual" which resonates with the fact that they lack progressive ideas and innovative ways of governing. Their ideology is based on religious foundations. The ideological hegemony that they tried to impose on both Hester and the public symbolized the modern state of the proletariat and their suffering in a capitalist society. In the colony, the Puritan society uses the presence of religion instead of money as in modern capitalist societies. The elders represent "heaven" and the guarantee of a better life

in heaven if the public obeys the rules that are constructed to exploit society. "Heaven-the society of elders. [...] the assertion of manhood involves a shift of allegiance away from the values of a male-dominated ethos towards those held rather by a female." (Baym, 1970, pp. 214-215) Away from intellectuality, elders of Puritan society pledge a better life in heaven with the condition of obeying rigid moral codes of society which are designed to fulfill the expectations of the elite ruling class. The time has no significance in terms of oppression and exploitation. Through the times of Puritanism and long ago, it was religion held against the public to control and exploit, while it is money in modern societies to dominate and exploit. "Undoubtedly," it will be said, "religious, moral, philosophical, and juridical ideas have been modified in the course of historical development. But religion, morality, philosophy, political science, and law, constantly survived this change." (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 26) As Marx and Engels put it into words, over the course of history, ideological hegemonies such as religion, law, morality, and so on are used to control society. However, the most powerful and in the context of using it as a weapon, insidious one is religion. Throughout the novel *The Scarlet Letter* the ruling class figures especially Bellingham impose religious doctrines to control and judge Hester Prynne.

Governor Bellingham contradicts his pure and rigid devotion to religion as a Puritan. Through the depiction of his house, the contradictory image between his aristocratic, and exquisite existence and Puritanism's plain and modest proposition of a lifestyle can be extracted from the novel. This situation reflects the false and artificial doctrines that both elderly forefathers of the colony impose, and the modern bourgeoisie enforce to grasp the power in their hands.

Here, on the cushion, lay a folio tome, probably of the Chronicles of England or other such substantial literature; even as in our own days we scatter gilded volumes on the center-table, to be turned over by the casual guest. The furniture of the hall consisted of some ponderous chairs, the backs of which were elaborately carved with wreaths of oaken flowers; and likewise a table in the same taste; the whole being of the Elizabethan age, or perhaps earlier, and heirlooms, transferred hither from the Governor's paternal home. (Hawthorne, 1850, pp. 123-124)

Even though, ruling figures such as Governor Bellingham indoctrinate a lifestyle that is away from worldly-pleasures and luxurious assets, the depiction of Bellingham's house reveals the very essence of aristocracy and the elegant, luxurious lifestyle of the ruling class. The Elizabethan table, and the furniture that is described as "heirlooms" denote that his assets are ancestry and imply the existence of aristocracy. As Marxist theory is taken into account, the depiction of the house of Bellingham and little details accompanying the idea of aristocracy reflect the means of product in capitalist society. Through exploitation and oppression, they preach to the townspeople anonymity and to be plain. Nonetheless, "the ponderous chairs" which are elaborately and extensively decorated show the aristocratic background. They impose false grand narratives by indoctrinating morals and ethics that are filled with contradictions. This is a way of exploiting the public to get the highest production both socially and economically. Marx and Engels explain the very essence of the disguised deeds of the oppressive class "It compels all nations [...] to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image." (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 16) Consequently, the power of the bourgeoisie is reflected through their attempt to create an artificial world that mirrors their power. They aim to create the illusion of a better life for the proletariat that they never reach. However, the reader sees the contradiction between Bellingham's lifestyle and the values that Puritanism teaches from the mouth of Bellingham. "But it is an error to suppose that our grave forefathers [...] made it a matter of conscience to reject such means of comfort, or even luxury, as lay fairly within their grasp." (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 129) While repeating the ideas of his forefathers which is about rejecting all sorts of luxury and the pleasures of the world, he has a lifestyle of an aristocrat.

5. Conclusion

Reading *The Scarlet Letter* from a Marxist viewpoint reveals elaborate ways in which Puritan society imposed ideological hegemony and other state apparatuses to control the society that can be found in modern societies under the influence of capitalism. The ruling class of the Puritan colony that Hester Prynne lives in, creates a community that is shaped around conformity through the application of moral and legal codes stabilizing the social hierarchy. Hester Prynne's situation designates the tools that the Puritan ruling class applied such as religion to

oppress the public. The public shaming and ostracism reinforce the satisfaction that Puritan society gets by imposing rigid moral codes on individuals. The severe religious doctrines that Puritans apply to townspeople resonate with the Marxist view of the bourgeoisie perpetuating power to control the proletariat in order to reach the utmost production.

The analogy of Puritan society and capitalist society underscores the use of ideological hegemony. Both systems create the illusion of righteousness baffling the disguised power dynamics. This paper reveals the false doctrines of Puritan society to keep the power of the ruling class stable through the exploitation of the lower class. The ultimate class distinction and societal conflicts reveal Hawthorne's aim to show the hypocrisy of the ruling class of Puritans and their oppressive social structure. Subsequently, this paper provides a Marxist reading of the novel to unveil the manipulated ideologies in order to preserve power with the false vision of Puritan perception of the world. Hester's commitment to adultery that resulted from wearing the scarlet letter "A" and her attempt to change the meaning of the letter by improving its meaning from a devaluing symbol to a symbol of determination and dignity serve as an allegory for broader societal oppression and exploitation of individuals. This study underscores a timeless application of Marxist theory in order to demonstrate the power relations between the characters and the ideological state apparatuses in order to stabilize the power that the ruling class grasps throughout the centuries by changing the driving source as it is religion in the past, and money in the present.

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