

Women's Sacrifice in the Works of Hawthorne and Heywood: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to highlight the importance of women by closely examining Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel "The Scarlet Letter", and Thomas Heywood's play *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. By focusing on patriarchy and female sacrifice, this study aims to find similarities and differences between two different literary genres with two different historical backgrounds in the protagonist's scope. Using "The Scarlet Letter" and *A Woman Killed with Kindness* as the primary sources of the research data, this paper also delves into how the patriarchal system affects women's behaviors, and the possible consequences of rejecting it. Ultimately, this analysis offers a close reading of women's suffering under the norms and traditions of the Boston community and the English seventeenth century.

Keywords: comparative study, women's sacrifice, patriarchy, Thomas Heywood, and Nathaniel Hawthorne

1. Introduction

1.1 Patriarchy

A patriarchy is a dominant social system where women's lives are controlled by the authority of men in all social aspects. Its ideology arises from the belief that men are more powerful, privileged, and dominant than women. Women suffered a lot under patriarchy, they were oppressed emotionally, socially, and even economically. Their lives were hidden from public knowledge, and their rights remained ignored and unremarked. According to Evan's article, she claims that patriarchy is a complex system made up of many elements. It is a set of symbols and ideas that make up a culture, embodied by everything from the conversations that are had, to literature and film (Evan, 2023).

She explains the most common elements of patriarchy including male dominance, male-centeredness, male identification, and control of the family system. Furthermore, women have roles to play in a patriarchal society. The role of the woman is to be subservient and submissive to men, catering to all their hopes and desires without complaint (Evan, 2023). They are expected to stay at home as mothers and homemakers.

Since women in a patriarchal society are seen as subservient to men, if they display any 'disobedience', men may be forgiven for acting violent towards them. Because women are designated and desirable objects of male control in a society organized around power, force and violence often works to keep women under men's command (Johnson, 2004).

According to the Elizabethan era, the patriarchal system was the dominant one. Women's roles were limited. They were not allowed to be educated or to take political positions, Women, regardless of social position, were not allowed to vote (however, only men of a certain social position were allowed to vote) (*Elizabethan Women : History of Tudor Women*, n.d.-b). Their primary role is to give birth and be housewives. Elizabethan society was patriarchal, meaning men were considered leaders and women their inferiors. Women were regarded as "the weaker sex," not just in terms of physical strength, but emotionally too (*Elizabethan Women : History of Tudor Women*, n.d.-b).

The patriarchal social system was not dominant only in England but also in America. It affects the social life of American societies such as Boston. Some critics and essay writers comment on the issue of patriarchy and how this system affects people's lives in different aspects and from different angles. In her article, *Women, and Patriarchy in Early America, 1600–1800*, Ryan discusses how patriarchy affects American society. She comments, patriarchy profoundly affected social relations and the daily lives of individuals in early America by supporting the elaboration of racial differences and sexual hierarchies (Ryan, 2019). Patriarchal ideals held that men should supervise women and that economic, sexual, legal, and political power rested with men (Ryan, 2019).

Moreover, patriarchy in America was seen as a loss of women's identities. The wife traditionally loses her own identity when she takes her husband's name, and her children have to carry their father's last name.

1.2 Women and Sacrifice

Usually, the concept of “sacrifice” is related to men, but in literature, it’s different. Many literary works connect the concept of “sacrifice” with women to show their importance. Women have been sacrificed for everything: religion, morality, love, freedom, politics, motherhood, and even themselves. These sacrifices were hidden and unremarked under patriarchy. The main reason to hide these sacrifices is to show the hierarchy of men in society and minimize the effective role of women.

Authors express the value of women in all facets of life by highlighting the sacrifices made by women in their creative works. Because literature frequently expresses the peculiar perception of women in patriarchal societies. It's crucial to talk about this issue in order to change the perception that women are the weaker sex. The hierarchy of masculinity was rejected by numerous societies, including English and American communities, despite the fact that various authors of different nationalities constructed a good picture for women to underline their importance.

Women's sacrifices are portrayed by Nathaniel Hawthorne in "The Scarlet Letter" and by Thomas Heywood in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* to highlight their hardship, significance, and useful positions in society. As a result, this article tends to emphasize patriarchy, women's suffering, sacrifices, and useful social roles as seen through the eyes of the protagonists of the aforementioned works.

2. Background

The background of this paper is centered on studying women's sacrifices under patriarchy, their suffering, and their roles in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel "The Scarlet Letter" and Thomas Heywood's play *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. Both pieces examine themes such as femininity, motherhood, patriarchy, and women's roles in society. The paper focuses on the precise ways that patriarchy victimized women and stole their identities. It also emphasizes how patriarchy is portrayed in two distinct works with two distinct historical contexts. Furthermore, it clarifies how both works reflect the sociocultural context in which they were written and how female sacrifices under patriarchy are depicted in Heywood's play and Hawthorne's novel.

"The Scarlet Letter" is a novel written in the United States that was first published in 1850. It takes place in 17th-century Puritan Boston between 1642 and 1649. It demonstrates how patriarchy dominated women and how they saw women as a shame and a flaw. The novel was a watershed moment in not only Hawthorne's literary work, but also in the history of American literature. The narrative bridges the gap between the past and the present. The harsh past oppresses the delicate present in "The Scarlet Letter." Many critics believe that the novel's primary source is the story of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. To some extent, Hawthorne's novel reflects the scriptural Jesus Christ.

According to the novel's historical context, a Puritan was someone for whom religion was the most essential single part of life—more important than the self, family, friends, fortune, and status. Furthermore, Puritans saw God's providence permeating every aspect of daily life and sought divine instruction in everyday occurrences. The most essential thing a Puritan could do was get religion properly. Because the God of the Bible was male, the Puritans believed that men were superior to women. As a result, men were the only ones who could speak in church and other gatherings.

Although certain gender norms were changing, in Puritan Boston community, traditional Puritan ideas about men's and women's proper roles remained unchanged. Puritan women were not allowed to pick a role for themselves, and they were raised to be mothers and wives. They were restricted to housework and family care, whereas men may engage in public activities and hold formal positions of power.

The novel follows the life of a woman named Hester. Hester believes her husband is killed in the war, therefore she lives her life as a widow. She falls in love with Arthur, a holy young minister. Hester and Arthur had a sexual relationship, which resulted in her becoming pregnant and giving birth to a baby girl named Pearl. Hester's husband returns to New England alive after a lengthy absence and confesses his identity to the people. Hester's husband, Roger Chillingworth, is astonished to find his wife punished for her adultery by wearing the scarlet letter A on her frock. Everyone is curious about Hester's lover, but she decides to keep this information to herself. Arthur later becomes ill and decides to tell his secret, which he does in the end.

A Woman Killed with Kindness, on the other hand, is a seventeenth-century English comedy written by Thomas Heywood in 1603 that symbolizes the Elizabethan era. According to several critics, Heywood's play is a masterpiece. The plot revolves around two couples: Master John Frankford and his wife, Anne. The plot revolves around a houseguest named Wendoll, who uses John's hospitality to seduce and fall in love with Anne. As a ruse to discover their affair, Frankford goes on a work vacation. Anne is tortured by guilt following her affair with Wendoll; she is unaware that Frankford has been monitoring the two of them the entire time. Frankford bursts into the house and attacks Wendoll with a sword. Frankford bursts into the house, brandishing a blade at Wendoll, but one of his servants prevents him from killing him. Anne, humiliated, begs Frankford to murder her, but he refuses because he believes death is good for her. Anne is sent to a modest house, where she is to live alone and never see Frankford again. The drama delves into themes of female sexuality, interactions between men and women at the time, and various Elizabethan societal standards.

3. Discussion

The phrase sacrifice is separated into various dimensions, such as self-sacrifice, emotional and social sacrifice, reputational sacrifice, and so on. According to a detailed reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic "The Scarlet Letter," the heroine, Hester Prynne, is seen as an absolute example of women's sacrifice. She assumes full responsibility for the situation and refuses to divulge the name of her spouse, Dimmesdale; she accepts the repercussions of her silence.

According to Ambarasi, because of her adultery with the priest, she gets many punishments from many cases, especially in the aspect of law or government regulation that to be a Dominant Ideology (*AGAINST THE DOMINANT IDEOLOGY IN NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S THE SCARLET LETTER: A MARXIST APPROACH.*, n.d.-a). Hester never denies her feelings for Dimmesdale or their relationship. For the sake of love, she challenges her husband and society, and they accuse her of being guilty. She gives up herself and her reputation, both of which are valuable to every human being. Hester also shows self-sacrifice. She takes full blame for the whole matter and refuses to name Dimmesdale, accepting all the consequences (Jawad & Jabir, 2016).

Hester is subjected to social and psychological punishment in addition to government and legal punishment. People in town rejected her and stopped talking to her; she was an outcast to them. They barred her from attending social gatherings. For them, she is no longer a member of Boston society. They imprisoned her as a criminal. She gives birth to her baby girl, Pearl, on her own, which is a difficult task that demands strength and patience.

Harold Bloom remarks in his book "Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter" that "it also enables him to marvel at Hester's extraordinary strength of character and appreciate in full her sacrifice for him" (*Harold Bloom (Ed) Nathaniel Hawthorne S the Scarlet Letter (Bloom S Guides) 2010, 2014*). Bloom claims that Hester has tremendous strength to sacrifice herself and her reputation in order to safeguard Dimmesdale and care for a baby girl on her own! Bloom depicts the American woman as strong, independent, and sturdy, rather than weak or dependent.

Bloom continues, "She becomes a benefactor to the community that has judged her harshly and ostracized her for a not incomprehensible crime; she becomes a sign and a prophet, as well as to the Puritan community of Boston." According to Bloom, Hester becomes a symbol of courage and power when she suffers and sacrifices herself. He also refers to her as a "prophet," implying that she is God's chosen and possesses unique attributes that only God can see. As is customary for prophets, Hester delivers the message of God to her society and the world at large.

Jawad and Jabir suggest in their work, *The Christ of Boston: A Character Study in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter*, that, "Hester resurrects from a life death and wins her vigorous and good personality back" (Jawad & Jabir, 2016). The use of such a term, life and death, conveys a deep meaning of pain, pain from preserving the secret and sacrificing herself, her emotions, her reputation, and her social life.

"Yet, she submits herself to the harsh and lifelong penance that the scarlet letter inflicts upon her," they continue. Furthermore, she patiently endures the various agonies that this "badge of shame" imposes on her daily because she understands what the letter means to the Boston community and feels the shame that was projected to be her retribution" (Jawad & Jabir, 2016). The authors intend to stress Hester's suffering and the tough life she leads as a result of self-sacrifice. She is capable of admitting and revealing the absolute truth about her lover's and Pearl's father's identities. She chooses to remain silent and risk her reputation in order to protect him. She wears a badge of shame and lives in humiliation as a result of her silence.

While in prison, Hester gives birth to Pearl. Giving birth necessitates strength and self-sacrifice in order to care for the baby in the absence of her father. Hester gives up her life and her reputation for Pearl, and for the most part, Pearl appears to love her back. She seeks advice from Dimmesdale, who points out that Hester must be allowed to keep Pearl. As a way of giving back to her community, Hester sacrifices her dignity for those who criticize her and make disparaging remarks about her. She sews garments for the destitute and feeds them with what little she has.

Anne, on the other hand, is the protagonist of Heywood's play, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, just like Hester. The play is seen as a model of self-sacrifice. Anne and her husband, Frankford, had an ideal life and a lovely marriage. When Wendoll seduces her and they fall in love, everything changes. Anne betrays her husband, despite his loyalty to her. She depicts a woman who gives up her reputation for love. She sacrifices herself for Wendoll's love, and she lives in pain. This sacrifice sends her into exile, where she lives alone with the servants. It has far-reaching consequences.

Anne is never truly alive until she is on her deathbed, and her lover is never truly alive... at all (Smith, 1938). Her spirit dies because she sacrifices herself for Wendoll's love and betrays her husband, yet she remains physically alive. Anne lives with self-inflicted punishment; even when Frankford realizes she is dying, he goes to her while she is still alive and assures her he forgives her faults, allowing her to die with a clear conscience.

In her article, *The Homosocial Economies of A Woman Killed with Kindness*, LYN Bennett contends that "the confusion that results from this ambiguity leads to Anne's adultery and, ultimately, to her death" (Bennet, 2000). The preceding quotation demonstrates how disastrous the ramifications of Anne's sacrifice are. She dies as a result of self-imposed punishment; she is unable to adjust to life alone without her husband and her family. She died with her husband's tenderness since he had forgiven her before her death. Anne, on the other hand, could not forgive herself for such a sin. She died with the care she showed to Wendoll out of love.

4. Results

According to the previous argument, we can see how Hester's story is comparable to Anne's. Hester and Anne represent self-sacrifice. Both of them risk their reputations for the sake of love, accepting full responsibility and the repercussions. Hester has also been barred from participating in society and communicating with others, and Anne, like her, has been thrown into exile from her home and from communication with her husband and family. Furthermore, Hester has been imprisoned, much like Anne, who has been exiled and lives

alone in a house, much like she is imprisoned.

In life, Hester and Anne are both representations of death; both are embarrassed and punished for what they did. Hester and Anne betray their husbands and have adulterous with other men. Referring to the norms and traditions of American and English society, Anne and Hester refuse the norms and rebel against their societies' traditions and morals, resulting in endless suffering. Both recognize their sins and make an effort to repent. However, it was not easy at first and required far too many chances. It was difficult because, in patriarchal societies, it means following specific rules and not being allowed to think outside the box.

Despite their similarities, Anne and Hester are not the same in some ways. Hester's life is governed by the Puritan Boston laws. Because the Puritan Boston community was governed by church regulations, Hester was punished first by the church and then by the entire town. In contrast to Anne, who was punished by her husband.

Furthermore, everyone in town knew what Hester had done and accused her of being guilty. They didn't talk to her, communicate with her, or support her in any way. She was strange and rejected. Anne, on the other hand, is only suspected of being guilty by her husband. Except for Windoll and the servant, no one knows about her sin.

Moreover, Hester was imprisoned as a punishment for her sin, whereas Anne was punished by living alone in a house. It felt like a real prison to her. In contrast to Anne, Hester gave birth to her daughter Pearl alone.

5. Conclusion

The paper presents a thorough analysis of Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel "The Scarlet Letter", and Thomas Heywood's play *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, focusing on the concepts of patriarchy and women's sacrifices. In "The Scarlet Letter," Hester is the protagonist who gives up herself, her reputation, and her life to protect the Minister, her lover. She was imprisoned and gave birth to her daughter, Pearl. She gives up her life to care for the baby alone and continues to wear the scarlet letter A as a symbol of her adultery. Although this sin is regarded as a serious threat to the Puritan community, death is considered just retribution for it.

In *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, the protagonist, Anne, sacrifices her reputation and her optimal life with her husband for the sake of love with another man. However, this type of sacrifice causes her pain and has negative consequences; she has been exiled and must complete her life alone; she lives death in life until she physically dies. Anne acknowledges her sin and attempts to repent, but this type of immorality in her community, which depicts Elizabethan and seventeenth-century English culture, is difficult to forgive.

This paper offers a comprehensive understanding of patriarchy in English and American seventeenth-century, women's roles under patriarchy, women's sacrifices and suffering, Puritan Boston community and its origin. Furthermore, the offers a complete comparison between a play and a novel by comparing different themes and historical backgrounds. Also, the study finds the similarities and differences between the heroines of both literary works.

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This study was particularly unique as it involved a combination of two seemingly disparate genres, namely fiction and drama. I believe that this interdisciplinary approach allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of patriarchy and female sacrifices in the literary text, as well as to explore the novels and plays' feminist themes and perspectives.

I hope that my findings may be valuable to other literary academics and scholars, as well as anyone interested in learning more about Nathaniel Hawthorne's work "The Scarlet Letter" and Thomas Heywood's play *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. I would also like to thank anyone who has indirectly contributed to this study by providing me with inspiration, encouragement, or support along the way.

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