

Resolution, Autonomy and Accomplishment in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article History</p> <p>Received: April 01, 2021</p> <p>Accepted: June 06, 2021</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords : Resolution, autonomy and accomplishment, existentialism, Nathaniel Hawthorne, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i></p> <p>DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4900041</p>	<p><i>This qualitative study critically analyzes the role of resolution and autonomy in achieving accomplishment, and how the said elements shape the directions of human life. These are the basic traits to surpass the critical situations of the human race and the stringent rule of the various reticent communities in different parts of the world. The chief argument of the study is to examine how human beings struggle for existence in society from the existential perspective in the novel, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> by Nathaniel Hawthorne. It explores three phases of the heroine who begins her journey from resolution to accomplishment. The main objective of the study is to investigate how an individual can turn the predominant thinking of his/her time through determination. The paper uses textual analysis technique for data analysis. The study found out that the protagonist of the novel, due to her intellectual maturity and firm resolution and daring decision, becomes self-reliant, and achieves independence and identity. The study will be a contribution to the main bulk of knowledge available in this domain.</i></p>

Introduction

To be successful in life, man has to be brave and firm, and must be able to act on one's own interests and values. Nathaniel Hawthorne, being an egalitarian, was against the belief that certain people have a right to have their opinions heard more than the others (Gao et al. 2014). Therefore, he voices against the elitism that had prevailed in certain circles in America, which was appreciated by the public for the egalitarian approach (Robyn, 2015). However, there runs a risk of anarchy, mockery and imprecision of a democratic literature. But America, known as the land of opportunities and adventures, encourages the spirit of adventure where command and uniformity of all kinds are apt to be misnamed as subjugation, where vitality, fervor, passion and common sense have place, but experience, depth and imagination are rare (Amy, 2011). In this context, *The Scarlet Letter* is selected to view critically this despotism from the existential perspective that regards human survival as unexplainable, and emphasizes the autonomy of selection and accountability for the consequences of one's actions.

The novel was published in 1850 as Hawthorne's magnum opus. Set in the 17th-century, Hester Prynne is a female protagonist of this novel, who conceives a daughter through a love relation and struggle to construct a novel life for herself of penitence and solemnity (Gao et al. 2014). Existential approach optimizes man to surpass the acquisitive world of experience and facts and become conscious of pervading spirit of the universe and the potentialities for human freedom (Amy, 2011). Hawthorne welcomed the companionship of his transcendentalist neighbors, but he had little to say to them. Artists and intellectuals never stimulated his full confidence.

Statement of the problem

This paper critically analyzes the role of resolution, autonomy and accomplishment from existential perspective in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. The paper analyzes how the said aspects of life have effect on freethinking and repression of an orthodox community for the ultimate fruits of liberation. The story is about a daring and courageous girl who challenges the authority of an abrasive but an orthodox feudal class of the time in America. She endures dreadful afflictions bravely, and finally, she becomes successful in proving her existence. The aim of this study is thus to explore how she goes through different situations, and what she finds at the end. For this purpose, the existential theory is employed to examine efforts of the heroine for self-actualization and identity in the novel. The theory also purports that man is a conscious being with his/her imaginations, memories and desire; therefore s/he should act freely to achieve his/her dreams. This is what the common people demanded in America, also known as 'The American Dream'. The dream asserts that men can accomplish their own ways of success in a society regardless of where they were born or what class they were

born into. The content of this slogan can be reflected in the Heroine's struggle for existence represented in her dreams, hopes and beliefs.

Related Literature Review

The Scarlet Letter has been analyzed from different perspectives by the scholars. Lona Glenn (2016) in her essay 'The Scarlet Letter - Character Analysis of Hester' describes Hester as freethinker. The outcome of this forced thinking time was that Hester becomes meditative and nonconformist whom the rest of the public regards as hazardous. Hawthorne superficially condemns Hester's rebellious nature but readers can guess easily his inward support with Hester Prynne and as he praised her efforts to stand alone and tolerate all problems of society. Doubleday (1939) in her bachelor thesis is of the opinion that the concept of freedom and nature is closely interrelated in the novel *The Scarlet Letter*. It is discussed in that part of the novel where forest and brook are living symbols of freedom as both of them represent nature. It is the forest where Hester and Dimondale give full expression to their inner repressed feelings. The brook is the border between the free atmospheres of the forest and the strict puritan rules and code of conduct (22). In a research paper, 'Individualism of Hester Prynne in the Seventeenth Century Puritan Society: *The Scarlet Letter*', Jahan an Abidi (2016) describe how Hester Prynne worked for her identity with her indomitable courage and strength of character. She is a non-conformist but not a rebellious, she decides to live amidst the puritan community by celebrating her individuality and win over the societal constraints. Hester endures her punishment with fortitude because she trusts her own inner sources for facing the catastrophe in which she had been put. Puritan laws were worthless to her in front of her own trusted deep thought and moral philosophy which she propagated by her willing service to the community. Jianying, et al. (2014) sheds light on the visible traces of ostentations found in the life styles of Puritans; they considered their selves as the most supreme creed among all creeds, therefore worthy to be followed. For this imperiousness, they gave the upper most position to religion in their daily life affairs. Whether it was the field of education, marriage, or clothing the puritanical religious fervor, all could be clearly seen. The review of the previous research studies reveals that there is hardly any work done on this novel from this perspective that Hester's resolution, autonomy and accomplishments have been investigated before. The present research aims to fill this gap by examining resolution, autonomy and accomplishment in the selected text.

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative. Therefore, it is descriptive as well analytical in nature. It seeks to explore the main aspects of existentialism as well as how far Nathaniel Hawthorne has been successful in his endeavors to project the essence of existentialism in the novel, *The Scarlet Letter*. Moreover, the paper views the existential struggle of the protagonist, from resolution to accomplishment through Sartre's philosophy of existentialism that states that man surpasses the materialistic world of experience if he becomes conscious of the permeating spirit of the universe. Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) is a French philosopher who is generally considered as the father of existentialism. According to Sartre, man is free. He claims in his book, *Existentialism is Humanism* (1926) that man is nothing other than what he makes of himself and this is the first principle of existentialism. It supports the potentialities of human freedom. Existentialism is a rapidly growing philosophy in the 20th century. It says that without awareness, man is not truly alive, and the individual's loneliness and experiences in the world focus on the freedom of choice. He accentuates his view that no one in the world guides us in our life. We must make our decision and we are alone to produce a moral decision in our life and judge our moral choices.

Analysis and Discussion

This part of the paper critically analyses the role of resolution, autonomy and accomplishment from existential perspective in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*. The analysis is divided into three parts: the resolution, autonomy and accomplishment. Moreover, it is chiefly focused on the heroine of the novel. Hester Prynne, the heroine of Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*, is a strong, independent and self-reliant lady, who believes in her own instincts, her own code of conduct and inner strengths. In the face of trials and tribulations of life she makes her existence possible through her freethinking and paves way for her redemption. "The Scarlet Letter" consists of 24 chapters, each of which contains the varied themes and angles of existential thought, that we would try to search out in the selected text for analysis. .

Resolution

The very first chapter of the novel shows how Hester becomes resolute to gain autonomy from the stringent community a multitude of bearded in gloomy-colored outfits and gray steeple crowned hats, together with women, some wearing hoods, and others bareheaded, was gathered in frontage of a wooden structure, the door of which was deeply wooded with oak, and studded with iron spikes (Hawthorn, 2010:50) in the prison house where a culprit is going to be heavily paid for his or her mischief. The dress code of the puritans shows their strict and black demeanors, iron spikes door timbered with an oak tree, whole architecture of the building was as prominent as puritans in the 17th century (51). Sartre propounds this idea of existential root that existence means much for the individual; what is more important is that he or she is at freewill, and must act independently according to the need of existence i.e. free will instead of following the pre-conceived roles,

ideas, concepts and categories which should fit on them, inform of essence justified by others for him or her. The true essence or meaning of life is possible only when a person utilizes his or her own consciousness to extract the elixir of life. Hester's clothes stand in sharp contrast to the dress code of the rest of the community. Puritans wear black and grey color dresses but her use of golden and red hues portrays Hester as a defiant and propagator of individuality. It is due to her independent thing that she even uses and mould art into her own choice (57).

Hester's journey for resolution when her freedom is restricted by the puritan society of new settlements, her most covetous desire to love and to be loved was slaughtered by these followers of the old creed. Whispering could be heard among the Venerable preachers from the terrace when the highest in rank addresses the young clergy as Hester comes under his congregational jurisdiction so it is now his responsibility to advise her to regret and confess about her sin (Hawthorn, 2010:71). Arthur Dimmesdale was famous in his community for his influential sermons, his voice was so powerful that it could easily move anyone so when this young priest addresses Hester, the public was sure about this young lady that she will confess her and reveal her partner's name in the sin or he may be present somewhere among the mob, and so he will be moved by words of this clergyman, will come but in vain. Hester was so much resolved not to reveal his name despite the coercive of the mob (73). She does not surrender herself to the authority and keeps the secret intact. Since she is resolute, she gets redemption.

Autonomy

Hester's journey starts for achieving freedom when the community that has publicly stigmatized her now needs compensation on her part, but Hester wants new identity not on the conditions put forth by the hard-headed puritans like wearing of the scarlet letter, with its effect on her soul as a reminder not to sin again, rather she opts for new ways of redemption that she has harbored in her own heart. Hester was a bold woman she knew that what audacious step she had taken after that she would be left all alone by her community people, in order to make her both ends meet she believes in her own potentials, her art of needlework (Hawthorn, 2010:90). This is the positive side of her freethinking that inculcates in her heart and mind love for all humankind. She succeeds in securing a position of a communal philanthropist. Hester helps out the poor and needy of her locality and gradually changes the meaning of letter 'A' from adulteress to 'Able' and 'Angel of mercy'. She constitutes a spiritual being that is not affected by external forces of the society; this trait of her character is just because of her strong love for Dimmesdale (88).

Her freedom starts when the news reached to Hester's ears that high-ups of the town have devised a plan to take away her daughter from her so that the child may flourish in safe hands (Hawthorn, 2010:108-109). Authorities of law and religion once again meddle with Hester Prynne's life with the prospect to take away Pearl, her daughter, from her as it is essential for the well-being of both souls. It seems that wherever one moves, and how far one moves, cannot escape from the restraints of religious bodies, they will haunt him not really in the sense of someone's own personal interests but actually to mend that hole has been made in the coarse fabric of this so-called spiritual authority that seeks for the harm that has been done to it.

It is her daring act that she seizes Pearl against her bosom, facing the old puritan authority with nearly a furious face. Unaccompanied on the earth, and with this solitary fortune to keep her heart breathing, she believed that she had perpetual privileges against the world, and was ready to protect them till her death. She believes that the creator has given her this child. This child was given to her in exchange for all things else by the Maker which they wanted to take from her. For her, she was her pleasure as well as torture; she saw life in her along with her chastisement. For Hester, Pearl was a scarlet letter personified as the best source of vengeance for her (Hawthorn, 2010:122). Pearl, like her name, was a valuable asset for her mother because she had bought at the expense of her place in that community. Moreover, she boldly defends her case in front of governor Bellingham. Her resolution encompasses her revitalization when the authoritative body of Boston, talks about the prospect to snatch Pearl away from her, Hester's complaints affirm that part of her recovery that centers on her daughter.

Her desire for autonomy arises when she looks at the bright aspects of life, and same urges surge up in Arthur Dimmesdale when he gets the company of highly cultivated and philosophical minded Roger Chillingworth. Arthur Dimmesdale with a trembling delight felt the intermittent respite of looking at the world through the standard of another kind of intelligence than those with which he customarily communicates. Windows of new and fresh air were thrown open before him, acknowledging a freer air into the shut and muffled study, where his life was slaying itself away, in the middle of lamp-light, or thwarted day-dreams, and the stuffy fragrance, be it physical or ethical, that breathe out with comfort. Hence, the clergyman and the doctor departed again within the confines of what their cathedral defined as orthodox (Hawthorn, 2010:134).

Her physical manifestation of autonomy is seen in the form of Pearl as she has no reverence for man-made laws. She is as wild as her breed. In Pearl's nature, there was neither commandment nor veneration for power, neither consideration for human decrees nor judgments, right or wrong, such was that child's composition; this was opinion of Arthur Dimmesdale about Pearl in front of Roger Chillingworth. Her origin is unpredictable at one moment she seems like an offspring of some devil while another; she appears as under

some satanic spell, for this young clergyman she is actually the liberty of wrecked regulation of this community (Hawthorn, 2010:147).

Hester's moral substance never changes, with her punishment, and with the cold and insulting behavior of her society; instead she becomes more haughty and defiant. She transforms into a silent rebellious and starts to believe in her own inner thoughts like a self-reliant person. Hester's utopia about her community which she entertains in her domain of freethinking is worthy in itself. The sphere of her own life is very much illuminated by her own ideas and principles which she has marked out for herself, that's why even after such calamity she is still self-reliant not only in her thoughts but also in economically independent. Hester's determination and desire for autonomy is revealed when she refuses to give the letter of ignominy to the magistrate of the colony if she is really worthy to be refrained from of it, it will fall away of its own character, or be altered into something that should speak a diverse claim. (Hawthorn, 2010:187).

Hester's resolution to keep the badge of shame is firm, she wants to transform it from sign of infamy into something sacred and of value, for this aim she starts charitable works and hopes that one day meaning of notorious 'A' would vanish and will alter. She believes in the redemption from Providence because her sin was not of purpose or principle but of passion. Hester trusts in God and has a faith that He will give her strength and courage to get through this ordeal that is why she bears every hardship and trouble with perseverance and fortitude. Her daring nature fulfills her personality and makes her able to appear as a strong person,

Accomplishment

Hester feels accomplished when she comes to know that, for a successful matrimonial relationship only physical possession of a woman is not the requirement rather willpower is also necessary to face man, otherwise, their married life would be simply a ruin (196). Mismatched marriages make miserable situation and Hester is aware of her rich contemplative nature. She believes that a nuptial bond is therefore a sacred oath to her between two parties required of honesty and steadfastness to keep that relation successful but if one partner is not happy then this bond is an utter failure. Hester propounds the idea that a woman should also be given equal right to decide for her future life, if this right is snatched from her then the concept of family life in any society where the basic unit is husband and wife would be shattered at all, for happy and thriving conjugal life man should not make himself capable of winning his wife hand with worldly gains and cold intellectual powers but also with his warmth and care the very affections of her heart. In such situations, Hester's intelligence and mind had their residence, as it were, in barren places, where she traveled as freely as the wild Indian in his forest. For years past she had looked from this alienated point of view at human establishments, and whatever priests or legislators had established, criticizing all with hardly more admiration than the Indian would feel for the religious crew, the legal robe, the pillory, the scaffold, the fireside, or the church. The affinity of her destiny and fate had been to set her liberated (Hawthorn, 2010:222).

'Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!'(Hawthorn, 2010:290). Reality of one's own being is necessary to be shown to the world, what is your real face should be disclosed to the world because then a person could save himself from the pain of hypocrisy which at some stage of life irritates the wearer of its double faces. Human nature is complicated it cannot sustain for a long time the false show in which people are placed at some juncture of time, they will long much for it to be thrown away, and if they could not do so then it would have devastating effect on their souls that need honesty, truth, courage and bravery. Hester identifies the need to challenge the established faith structure of puritans. While she has gone for some years, associations between male and female stay unaffected. She prefers to take up her mothering again, but first and foremost to the population of her own gender, ongoing to reflect that no contentment is feasible until the affiliation connecting both sexes can be altered. The destination is still far away, and until the transformation has been made Hester persists to battle for reciprocated esteem and devotion between the genders. However, her struggle now consists of guidance and direction.

Conclusion, Findings and Recommendations

Hester's story is a journey from resolution to accomplishment and from a moral failure to moral victory. In this voyage, self-pride and personal hatred were overstepped to change the system that could not be overthrown otherwise. This Scarlet Letter gives new dimensions to her life and being. For Hester, her sin was not a sin; it was a natural response to a compulsive desire for autonomy. She gives a novel meaning to the scarlet letter different from puritans with her freethinking. She is a living emblem of self-reliance and an existential figure who bravely faces the society. Her independence, self-determination and ethical powers do not collide with the regulations of the social order, but convert it to a much more human shape, a sort of triumph in her defeat. Her resolution for autonomy and accomplishment lead her to isolation and redemption. Her philosophy of self-sufficiency, shown by her actions, makes her existence possible during crucial situations. Moreover, she fights for love, suffers for it and then with same love for humanity, she redeems herself. Motivation behind her bold and brave attitude was none other than her love for Dimmesdale. Hester's daring actions in life are demonstrated in the forest 'place of evil' in the eyes of puritans, but Hester is shown as a deep-seated philosopher engaged in a radical struggle in opposition to the conventional array. She is attempted to be crashed by the puritans but her

self-reliance saves her. The modern age is skeptical and psyche of the modern man is even more complicated and bravery enables its exhibitors to face any kind of tuff situation, it develops fortitude and discipline in a person because a free thinker never subjugates to any external authority and body of rules and regulations. Liberty itself is the autonomy that's why marks out all codes of life to be spent with his pen of boldness and audacity. Such person never yields to external troubles and hardships because the weapon of free speculation helps him to pave out the right way of life for himself, in other words s/he becomes the writer of his/her own faith. This paper can be a great help to a person who is interested in the search of identity and real independence of his/her souls.

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