



REALITY AND ROMANCE IN THE NOVELS OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

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Nathaniel Hawthorne is a famous novelist of nineteenth century who was deeply affected by the history of New England in which he was born “ A mild shy. Gentle melancholic, exceedingly sensitive and not very forcible man.” Hawthorne primarily deals with the individual’s passions and emotions of love and the reaction of the society against them. The individual who loves romantic and fanciful pursuits is always tamed and obstructed by the hard and harsh realism of society as the society punishes him in form or the other and this represent the inter play of reality and romance in novels of Howthrone that in turn also reflects the socio-cultural edifice of the American society which always formed the cornerstone of Hawthorne’s fiction.

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The subject of romance and love has been treated by a number of writers of fiction from times immemorial, as and different writers have dealt with these emotions in different ways, but Nathaniel Hawthorne has discussed these intense feelings only within the social context of his contemporary Puritan society exclusively in his own method and manner. So, in the hands of Hawthorne this theme has become unique because, here, romance is pitted against reality, and he describes first romance as it is qualified and restricted by the social milieu but eventually the romance of love triumphs over the society and proves immortal and everlasting.

Hawthorne’s major themes and thematic patterns include self-trust versus accommodation to authority; conventional versus unconventional gender roles; obsessiveness versus open mindedness, hypocrisy versus candor presumed guilt or innocence; forms of nurturance and destructiveness; the penalties of isolation; crimes against the human heart; patriarchal power; belief in fate or free will; belief in progress as opposed to nostalgia for the past; the truths available to the mind during dream and reverie; and the impossibility of earthly perfection.

The range and scope of romance is very wide. Before Nathaniel Hawthorne; many English writers have explored and discussed the subject matter e.g the Greeks and the Elizabethans have discussed romance in regenerative form, and argued that the world of romance must be informed by the social values so that it becomes harmonious, expansive and forward looking. In every age, romance has been featured with some special characteristics of the age which are not be found in those belonging to other periods, but in puritan age is more subtly linked with society. According to M.H. Abrams.

“ The plot of the prose romance emphasizes adventures, and is frequently cast in the form of a quest for an ideal, or the pursuit of an enemy, and the nonrealistic and occasionally melodramatic events are claimed, by some critics, to project, in symbolic form, the primal desires, hopes and



terrors in the depth of human mind, and to be therefore analogues to the materials of dream, myth, ritual, and folkmore.”

Hawthorne, himself, in the preface to **The Blithedale Romance (1952)** also contends.

A theater is a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives.”

But in case of Hawthorne the study of reality and romance assumes serious connotation between the world of reality and the realm of romance. It is unique in Hawthorne’s fiction because these opposite terms are superbly blended and Harmonized in the form of a powerful vision of reality and romance, as we find illustrated in **The Scarlet Letter (1850), The House of the Seven Gables (1851), and the Blithedale Romance (1852)**. So these different and even opposite streams of realism and romance co-exist, intermingle and overlap in his work and even in his short-stories, so as to define the central thematic vision of the novelist.

In the novel **The Scarlet Letter** the framework of the story is romance within which Hawthorne construct the world of realism. The shallow realism of the puritans proves that even the most highly placed man like Arthur Dimmesdale becomes vulnerable to the most immoral and unbecoming romantic affairs with a young lady. Hester Prynne, who as a result becomes pregnant and gives birth to an illegitimate daughter Pearl, especially when her husband Roger is not with her. According to the social mores the delinquents who defy or disobey the social norms would be punished, but the actual reality rampant in the society and which continues unhindered is the immoral and illicit romance. So, romance may be a web of imagination thought not always, it may be real, it not according to the social norms, then according to individual’s passions and emotions. Realism is identified in terms of the effect of this immoral affairs between Hester and Dimmesdale within the framework of romance on the society and its people at large because such type of fictional expression represents life and milieu in such a way that common reader thinks that such people are a reality and such incidents and situations may well happen. According to **M.H.Abrams**.

The realistic novel is characterized as the fictional attempt to give the effect of realism, by representing complex characters with mixed motives who are rooted in a social class, operate in a developed social structure, interact with many others characters, and undergo plausible, everyday modes of experience.”

In the custom house Hawthorne, evidently describes the sense of guilt vis-à-vis the achievements of his puritan progenitors who were judges, soldiers and above all the persecutors of the dissidents, and of the witches of seventeenth century Salem Town. The Custom House as the prelude to **The Scarlet Letter** is inevitably indispensable to satisfy the reader’s appetite along with providing a firm historical platform to the story of the novel. By adding The custom House as a prelude , the novelist succeeds in incorporating the authenticity of proofs, and becomes more powerful and eminent representative of American society. Hawthorne accounts in the earlier pages of the custom house.



A desire to put myself in my true position as Editor, or very little more, of the most prolix among the tales that make up my volume this, no other, is my true reason for assuming a personal realation with the public.

Hawthorne is criticized and admired by critics and scholars alike in their different ways and their different angles of perception. **A.N.Kaul** has beautifully examined the psychological aspect of reality and romance as a powerful interaction and expression of two varied but intergral facets of life so as to look **into the depths of our common nature, for the purpose of psychological romance.**”

His writing are concerned with the flexible expression of “social indignation and protest.” In fact, there is a strong dose of eighteenth century rationalism flavoring the romantic idealism of the age which makes Hawthorne a powerful writer of humanistic values as well.

In case of **The House of the Seven Gables.** Hawthorne’s words justifies the facts when he says, “ The story would include a chain of events extending over the better part of two centuries, and written out with a reasonable amplitude” (THTSG, 245). The next is **The Blithedale Romance** in which Hawthorne accounts for the failed possibilities and multiple betrayals with the help of four characters of different hues and views comprising Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Prescilla and Miles Coverdale. The protagonist Hollingsworth presents the showy philanthropic adventures of contemporary American Society. All this imparts authenticity to the individual as well as social values of the age. Thus, there is a fine blend of Puritan norms and individual spontaneous instincts and Hawthorne has successfully welded and wedded these to illustrate his vision of life and to come out the above charges unscathed.

Hester Prynne, the heroine of the novel, a charming young and vibrant lady, is married with the decay of the age of Roger Chillingworth. She is brave lady of sovereign nature, hardly amenable to rigid courts and suffocative values of Puritan milieu. She falls in a love affair with Arthur Dimmesdale the minister of the church, and as a result becomes pregnant. As a consequence of this adulterous relationship she is brought to trial and sentenced to wear a red letter ‘A’ representing ‘Adultery’ on her bosom as punishment. When she is taken out of the prison stand on the scaffold, one of the judge cries, “This women has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die. Is there no law for it?” again he comments. “is there no virtue in woman? (TSL,48). She appears on the stage more “lady like” with an infant in her lap which is the “image of Divine Maternity” (p.48), However, on her way to the scaffold Hawthorne associates her with the purity and fragrance of flower. She does not divulge the identity of her paramour as he is the minister of church. In a way she is doing a favour to the society which is hell-bent on punishing and humiliating her for the lapse. When she refuses to disclose the name of her paramour, Spiller says:

As artist it gave him (Hawthorne) the perspective necessary for treating reality with the freedom of fiction, and as moralist it provided him with his message; this brand of sin-committed or thought- binds man to earth and so to a common fate with his fellows.

It is the romance of Hester Prynne which forces her to wear the shame mark and to live and ostracized life but again it is the kindness, love and courtesy shown by her to the people of Boston which transforms the meaning of red letter ‘A’ taken from ‘adultery’ to ‘Angle’ or ‘Sister of charity’. It means, love is



spontaneous and natural but these puritanical iron rules and restriction are repressive, vain and inhuman. There is fine over lapping of the dimensions of reality and romance in the book.

The book **the House of the Seven Gables** deals with the conflict between democracy and aristocracy, and between poverty and richness, in which Hawthorne illustrates the theme of pride and avarice which are more dangerous than intolerance and fanaticism. Although, this novel does not treat the dynamics of reality and romance as powerfully as it has been done in **The Scarlet Letter** and **The Blithedale Romance**, but the crisis between two families comes to an end with the marriage of phoebe and Halgrove. The house of the seven gables, known as The pyncheon House, was built are erected by its first inhabitant Colonel Pyncheon. Colonel Pyncheon represents aristocracy. Selfishness and the greed which eventually become the cause of degeneration and decline of the life of Matthew Maule who was a plebian. Old Matthew Maule is executed for the crime of witchcraft. When he is under trial on the scaffold, it was colonel pyncheon who joined the general cry to purge the land from witchcraft. It was an inhuman deed done by colonel Pyncheon which was also recognized by the victim. The revenge of personal enmity was taken in a disgusting way. At the moment of execution Maule had addressed him from the scaffold and uttered a prophecy. "God will give him blood to drunk." (THTSG, 247) So, these traits of pride and avarice resulted into a gradual decay and downfall of the Pyncheon. Later on Colonel's role is played by judge Pyncheon who is very dangerous to Clifford and Hephzibah. In this way, Hawthorne here deals with the problem of heredity and shows through this novel a powerful study in the hiatus and discrepancy between appearance and reality where Hawthorne avers that a hypocrite himself is deceived by those whom he takes at the face value. Hawthorne in this novel authentically manages to carry the reader to the past and ensure a deep involvement as if he were witnessing an action actually happening before his eyes.

After vetting both the novels, the novelist indicates that indulgence in the act of witchcraft in **The house of the Seven Gables** and in romance in **Blithedale**, in former some efforts are made by the main characters which convert the long separated miserable life into a society acceptable relation and in latter an individual is forced to live a life of humiliation, and who also becomes familiar with society after sometime. Here, it seems that Hawthorne focuses on the conflict and interaction between social and individual perception and between reality and romance especially when it touches the peak, and comes to the level of compromise which may be either in the form of marriage or it the form of public acceptance of social guilt representation of socio-cultural scenario under various diverse forces which are cast within the framework of a romance. In this novel the character are the carriers of certain individual's emotions of love and romance and their social impact on him and on society. Although, the society does not interfere directly but indirectly impinges upon and influences every character. There is triangular love affairs in this story which makes the novel a powerful study of the character of Hollingsworth, a fanatically devoted philanthropist and a social reformer who is never the less blind to the importance of the dignity of an individual. Hawthorne sets the story at Blithedale Farm, Utopian community modeled upon the author's residence at Brook Farm. The story is told in first person narrative by Miles Coverdale, a fictionalized self portrait of Hawthorne himself. So, the novelist as a keen observer of the psychology of every character, succeeds in explaining the emotion of love within the society with a few charactgers at Blithedale Farm. The first person narration gives Hawthorne the advantages of ironic distancing from the character and the events in the novel. Zenobia, wealthy and intelligent woman, and Priscilla-a delicate, weak willed girl falls in love with Hollingsworth. He courts Zenobia for the money, so that he could carry out his



Philanthropic ventures, but she eventually marries Priscilla. Zenobia commits suicide forcing Hollingsworth to see the gulf between his ideals and action, which in fact constitutes the core of dramatic action in the novel. **Henry James** admires this novel in these words: “**the lightest, the brightest, and the liveliest.**”

Conclusion

The paper unfolds the interaction and the interplay of Reality and Romance in Hawthorne’s fiction with particular reference to the three novels namely. **The Scarlet Letter, The House of Seven Gables and The Blithedale Romance.** The very title of these novels show Hawthorne’s inclination for “a romance” and not “a novel”.

The author explores the social phenomena of American society by penetrating the psycho-psychic impulses of the Individual. Both these streams are contrasted with each other, because for Hawthorne individual has more meaning and substance than anything else. Hawthorne focuses on the elements of reality and romance and tries to synthesize them in his novels. Hawthorne’s fiction seems to be realistic in the complete sense of the term where it also becomes emblematic and illustrative.

Hawthorne also makes use of allegory which makes the novel a beautiful specimen of romance where an abstract idea is personified and the author maintains full control over his characters with the help of this spectrum of reality and romance. Here, Anthony Trollope seems right when he remarks.” **Hawthorne had dealt with persons and incidents which were often and barely within the bounds of possibility**”. Even **Roger Chillingworth** comes to recognize that he is “**a mortal man, with a one human heart.**”

Nathaniel Hawthorne is a great American novelist who has illustrated the interaction of reality and romance beautifully, powerfully and uniquely in all these three novels in its varied shapes and shades so as to fuse the socio-cultural forces of society into the psycho-emotional make up of the individual to precipitate a coherent and comprehensive vision of life. We can say that he never allows his imagination to soar on the wings of mere fantasy and fallacy, rather keeps it firmly rooted in the hard crust of reality. So, after the romantic flights, he comes down to the stark and harsh reality of life to explore and express this complex and complete picture of human nature viz-a-viz human society, which makes his novels a powerful study of reality and romance.

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