

# Puritan's Hegemony in the Nathaniel Hawthorn's The Scarlet Letter

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**Submission date:** 09-Nov-2021 07:00AM (UTC+0700)

**Submission ID:** 1697188455

**File name:** 25766-67588-1-PB\_1.pdf (165.47K)

**Word count:** 5608

**Character count:** 29677

## Puritan's Hegemony in the Nathaniel Hawthorn's The Scarlet Letter

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DOI <https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v15i1.25766>

Submitted 20 August 2020. Revised 23 September 2020. Accepted 19 October 2020

### Abstract

Misperception and inhuman behavior presented by Puritan in conducting state administration, consequently character of Hester Prynne in the novel of Nathaniel Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter* under the implementation of religious values, law assembling, and political system. The implementation of Puritan's inhuman religious, law and political values to Prynne's personal character is something criminal behavior, and assembling of the law in the case of sin of Prynne's adultery presented by Custom House was irresponsible decision or immoral severance in front of court. Puritan's values over the social living is regulated not only for social norms, culture, and law affairs, but even political matters, means that everything must be obeyed and be bent over the God's rule, and so to whom (married woman) has committed adultery, must be committed as a sinner and impose a sentence in front of general public. It is a library research and used descriptive qualitative analysis. In challenging and lift it up the universal value in against suppressive, hegemonic in the case Prynne the writer used two approachings as solution to solve the problem and they are feminism perspective and deconstruction model as a solution over the Prynne's problem.

**Keywords:** hegemony; patriarchy; human-right; feminism; deconstruction

### INTRODUCTION

The story of Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter* is a story of human life that present how Puritan's law, religious, and political values misinterpret principle of justice and human right in the case of Hester Prynne. *The Scarlet Letter* illustrates the process by which past pain and secret suffering into moral truth, this is a most powerful but painful story, and there was a criminal behavior. Hester Prynne's adultery in Puritan's values was defined as an uncivilized behavior consequently, she must be punish under the God's law and she has been rejected to defend herself by any means and put her into the jail as Chalise Thomson (2011, p.3) mention:

Puritans viewed sin as wrong in all instances. For them, there was never an acceptable reason for sinning. There was no situation that the Puritans felt warranted secrecy. If a mistake was made, then the proper action to pursue was confession. A voluntary declaration of the sins or wrongs committed was preferred. Interpretation of Puritan's rule for Hester Prynne's lawlessness being in an uncompromising thing make her being in wrong and has to be have social punishment, "Clearly, the godly authorities and the whole

community had to sentence Hester to death" (Dodzi Woameno, 2018, p. 127). It was unjustly behavior for Puritan's law orders to pronounce judgment to Hester Prynne without judgment procedure, so in the following questions is formulated into three main problem statements. Firstly, how and why is Puritan's values interpretes Hester Prynne's lawlessness based on God's rule? Secondly, how and why is Puritan's political attitude against the principle of human right in the case of Hester Prynne? And thirdly, how and why is moral attitude of Puritan's values to place women presented in Hester Prynne as a second level society? One reason of hegemony may be happened in the Puritan's society where there state and church in all together become an integral part in living society as Wulansari (2017, pp. 17-18):

[...] to a big sin [...] Puritans prohibited based on the Ten Commandments [...] use the Bible as their guidance of law to determine the punishment [...] Puritan use religion and morality law in dealing with Hester Prynne's adultery [...] Hester Prynne's attitude will get punishment from God.

There was church hegemony influenced Puritan's societies mostly dominated by men folk, "The puritans had varying degrees of beliefs where so-

ciety, religion and the family structure is concerned. They believed men were head of the household and made all important decisions, while women were just there to take care of housework" (Richardson, 2014). Furthermore Rinan Surbakti (2014:164) in *Moral Value of Massachusetts Society in the Puritan Era: A Study on Nathaniel Hawthorn's The Scarlet Letter* stated that:

[...] and it was the duty of man to search the Old and New Testaments for a more exact knowledge of the will of God toward man. Daily life was to be lived in strict conformity to the rules and regulations to be found in the Bible, and all that man does, was to be done with the utmost intensity and zeal to the greater glory of God.

Hegemonic attitudes can be defined as domination ideology, belief, culture, ethnic system, and gender in social life, and it requires subordination of the other group to the one having the power or ruling the society, according to Nye Jr. in Kasiyarno, that: "[...] the ability is called soft power or the ability to entice and attract which tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as attractive culture, ideology, and institutions." Furthermore, Juan Jr. In Kasiyarno (2014, p. 13,14,15) also stated, that: "[...] hegemony refers to the central system of practices, meanings, and values that are experienced as practices and appear reciprocally confirming."

Generally, hegemonic behavior is sometimes happened in multi-culture, multi-ethnic, multi-religion, and multi-racial in the society. In American society there was White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) as a dominant class legitimated their beliefs and culture as German (2002): "The perceived racial inferiority of non-WASPs-particularly non-Europeans – was accepted as a concrete fact [...] Throughout the 19th century and much of the 20th century, being an American implied belonging to the WASP mainstream." In the same work Guebert and Claywell (2016:2) stated that: "An extreme branch of Protestant Christianity, Puritanism advocated the complete "purification" of Catholic practices from the Church of England, which included the abolition of gambling, drama, and the celebration of Christmas." They strengthen their powerful authorities or hegemonic and transformed into political laws regulating people to behave in their daily social life, so white supremacy in American society legally assumed as dominant power and the others group (black and Indians) oppressed to behave accordingly. In the Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter* there were some universal values related to women's problem in the context of religious hegemony in New England's Puritan society, so the purpose of this study is to find out and lift

it up the universal value in against suppressive, hegemonic, and dominating values in human respective. In other words this writing aims to confront the conflict between Hester Prynne's character and Puritan's mental suppression and physical oppression, and come into the struggle for gaining the human right by using feminism issue and deconstruction concept against the hegemony of Puritan's traditional belief.

There are some previous studies related in this study such as Seymor Gross, Sculley Bradley, et.al. in editing version, *An Authoritative Text Essays in Criticism and Scholarship*, 3rd edition Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Pramono's thesis entitled *Hegemony and Silent Resistance in Hawthorn's The Scarlet Letter* and Tohari, Ekisar Merah and Belantik, Kardansy's article, *The Scarlet Letter Karya Nathaniel Hawthorn: Homologi antara Struktur Karya dan Struktur Masyarakat Amerika pada Abad ke-19*, Anitasari's journal article, *Arthur Dimmesdale's hypocrisy as a Puritan Clergyman in Nathaniel Hawthorn's The Scarlet Letter (A Sociological Approach)*, and Riana's article, *Simbolism dalam The Scarlet Letter Karya Nathaniel Hawthorn*.

There two significance study that the writer intend to explore on his writing. Firstly, to extend the bad values and unjustly procedure Puritan's law and political system by using religious values as a legal prosecuting over the woman (Hester Prynne) who falls in sin of adultery, and the second one is to strengthen Hester Prynne's minor character in criticizing the hegemonic Puritan's behave by using humanism and feminism values, and using binary opposition model in against moral attitude of Puritan's values by using Jacques Derrida's deconstruction concept.

## METHODS

In conducting the research it took descriptive qualitative and used two kinds source of the data they are primary and secondary data. The primary data was taken from the object of the research it was the novels it-self, meanwhile the secondary one was taken from some literatures, books, articles, etc. In presenting the analysis the writer used three kinds of approaching as basis of analysis, they are humanism and feminism values, and Derrida's deconstruction theory. There are two perspectives in challenging the Puritan's law in the case character of Hester Prynne's under the pressure of Puritan's hegemony, they are Feminism and Derrida's deconstruction theory perspective.

### Feminism Perspective

The word of feminism was taken from word of *femme* means women, and the term of feminism is means a range of political movement, ideologies, and social movement that share a common goal, to definite, establish, and achieve politic, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes, includes equality for establishing the educational and professional for women. Besides that women's movement struggle the principles of human right such liberation and civil right especially women's rights. The reason of feminists' movement was motivated from inequality situation between men and women in social system where women treated such as second level society as Swisky & Angelone (2014:1) stated that "*Patriarchy describes the lack of social power that leads to the subordination and oppression of women....generally speaking the feminist movement works to end the social dominance of women and supports gender equality in social, political, and economic arenas.*" Feminists believed that inequality must be eliminated, feminists not only try to do better as an individual in the social world, but they must work together to change the social structure of the social world, as Maynard in Eyayu Enyewu & Getaneh Mihret (2018:60), [...] "*focusing on individual rights and on the concepts of equality, justice and equal opportunities, where legal and social policy changes are seen as tools for engineering women's equality with men.*" Women have to change their thought, find alternative solution and then revitalized their movement to challenge patriarchal domination proposed by Lacanian and Derridean's post-structuralism theory such as Selden in A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (1985:128), stated that: 10

Much feminist criticism wishes to escape the 'fixities' and 'definites' of theory and to develop a female discourse which cannot be tied down conceptually as belonging to recognized (and therefore probably male-produced) theoretical tradition. "However, feminist have been attracted to the Lacanian and Derridean types of post-structuralist theory, perhaps because they actually refuse to assert a 'masculine' authority or truth.

The physical and psychological oppression toward women caused by patriarchal authority, by reason dominant power, they systematically oppressed women over social, political and culture norms, according to Sultana in Syiva (2019, p. 1) "*The feminists use the term 'patriarchy' to describe the power relationship between men and women as well as to find out the cause root of women's subordination.*" Patriarchy is a social system in which society is organized around male authority figures. In

this system fathers have authority over women, children, and property. It implies the institution of male rule and privilege, and is dependent on female subordination. Most form of feminism characterized patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women. Based on the condition above, the feminists by supporting Freudian's statement in Selden (1985, p. 129) stated that, "[...] *female sexuality is shaped by 'penis-envy.'*"

### Deconstruction Theory

Deconstruction was a new critical thought in post-structuralism it was inspired by Jacques Derrida a French philosopher in the twentieth century (1930). Deconstruction theory was a critical way not only both literary and philosophical text but also political institutions. Derrida's theory refused Saussure's structuralism assumption that claimed meaning being general and absolutely, it was final and there is no others interpretation beyond the text. In the beginning Derrida's deconstruction focused to the relationship between text and meaning, he argued that in conducting reading of the text with an ear to what runs counter to the structural unity or intended sense of a particular text, and the essential of the meaning that supposedly exist prior to language and therefore beyond the text as being central or fundamental meaning and knowledge, and by translator in his introduction as Kelley (2019), "*Deconstruction makes the claim that language and literature are inconsistent and that the true meaning of the work is not rooted in what the author wrote, but instead is rooted in the reader's own ideologies.*" In reading the text is deconstruction as Manibol (2016) proposed that: 4

[...] in contrast to see works in terms of their undecidability. They reject the formalist view that a work of literature is demonstrably unified from beginning to end, in one certain way, or that it is organized around a single centre that ultimately can be identified. As a result, deconstructionists see texts as more radically heterogeneous than do formalists.

The purpose of deconstruction is to refuse western science and philosophy forms are structured around a centre as Singhal (2015):

[...] deconstruction is primarily concerned with something tantamount to a critique of the Western philosophical tradition. Logocentrism, phallogocentrism and perhaps most famous the metaphysics of presence are some of the terms Derrida exploited to illustrate the deep-seated ways of thinking of the traditional Western philosophy.

Derrida's deconstruction can be also app-

lied to a variation field such as social, politic, culture fields. Deconstruction in partly proposed matters in contradictive perception or sometimes called binary opposition structure such as female and male or woman and man, equality and inequality, good and bad, right and wrong, superior and inferior, strong and weak, God and evil, etc. and these words to oppose one another to pursue essential of truthfulness was being the contexts. For example in the case of men and women in human perception in the context of patriarchal rule, blacks and Indians in the context of WASP in the United States, Old Statement Bible and New Statement Bible in the case of sin of adultery, etc. And deconstruction theory by using binary opposition is partly proposed or recommended the truth or rightness that standing out in the system may social, politic, norms, law, religious, etc., and those things contextually give the influence.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion will criticize inhuman Puritan's religious and spiritual values preservation, Inequality law and political demand of Puritan's church, and how to challenge the Puritan's law and political system. Inhuman perception of Puritan's religious and spiritual values in the case of Hester Prynne's adultery Puritan society was a migrant, a Christian sect from England at the times of James I (1603). Because they were forbidden in England by Calvinists, they moved to New England for aimed to find the liberation in preserving their religious values and belief, according to El-Naggar (2017, p. 70), "*Religious uniformity was enforced, and dissenters were informed that they had the right to stay away or to cross the river and to takeup land of their own beyond the boundary of Massachusetts.*" New England as a dream land or freedom land as a final destination for their trip and some of them settled in Massachusetts Bay, and lived and tied under the church authority from the very beginning. Some people said that Puritan religion taken from the spirit of biblical times and the implementation of Puritan's values over the social living is regulated not only for social norms, culture, and law affairs, but even political matters, means that everything must be obeyed and be bent over the God's rule, according to California Department of Education (CdE), that:

The Puritans gathered in different groups and made a covenant (formal agreement) with God to obey his will as revealed in the Bible, they focused on Bible reading, preaching, and following God's biblical laws. In these "covenant

communities," they focused on Bible reading, preaching, and following God's biblical laws.

In the case of Hester Prynne's adultery in Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter* is one example to Puritan's religion and spiritual interprets inhumane values. For Puritans sin is sin and must be confessed. In Puritan's religion and spiritual values was legally to who (married woman) has committed adultery, she was committed as a sinner and impose a sentence in front of general public. Apparently the Puritan society to exaggerate the interpretation of God's law taken from Bible of Moses and finally punished the sinner inhuman. Although Hester Prynne's adultery was being a violation in God's law, but Hester Prynne humanly is still has right to be protected as human being and God's creation.

### **Inequality law and political demand of Puritan's church that presented by Puritan's Custom House**

The living of social norms and political matters Puritan's law was tied on the Bible of Moses, there were only right or wrong words been there and there were no other values would be compromised both social and political rights, consequently, in order every living society must be referred to the rule of the Moses' Bible. There was no segregation between human law and law of God but all the human beings must be obeyed to the God's orders, as Cotton in Wolosky (2009, p. 3) stated, that:

Moses his Judicials" presents an outline of political, legal and social norms that were evolving in contemporary Puritan culture.....Puritan theology and polity themselves were deeply influenced by elements in the Hebrew Scriptures, notably attitudes towards history and community articulated there.

In the case of sin of Hester Prynne's adultery in Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter* as Puritan's law Hester Prynne was being in the wrong side because she had to violate the rule of God as a result she had to be sentenced to hang. Hester Prynne did not have any opportunity before the law legally to challenge her political right of Custom House, but she readily accepted the decision and punishment under the pressure of the power of hegemonic in membership of church, in other words that Puritan's law did not recognize words of equality before the law, and Morgan in Christine Leigh Heyman (2020) argued that:

[...] the early New England families embodied the broader Puritan emphasis on hierarchy and order, but they also reflected the values that the Puritans placed on consent and reciprocity

[...] great authority over dependents vested in husbands, fathers, and masters was the understanding that each member of the household had certain rights as well as duties.

It was clearly that not only Hester Prynne as minor character to be simple evident from Puritan prototype in seventeenth-century, but it was just one from another drawn directly. Furthermore, in against Puritan's mental suppression and physical oppression is Hester Prynne as representative of womankind could be strengthen the feminism ideology and movement to protect personal right in the term of equality before the law. It was recommended because Hester Prynne was a victim by indictment of Puritan's church authority and the inequality treatment by Puritan's society. For Hester Prynne, she has to demand personal equal right before Puritan's Custom House to be protected although she was being wrong in the perspective of Puritan's law.

#### Reconstruct the hegemony of Puritan's religious values, law and political system

The term of word of hegemony is to force people to obey whatever political, social and law system, and religious values were being in the living society. Apparently that Puritan's religious and traditional values were still tied on Moses' Bible and it was become standardized in conception of Puritan society as a New Israel, quoted in Albanese's *American Religions and Religion* (1992, p. 115):

Puritan rhetoric had become standardized in conception of Puritan society as a New Israel, a light to the nations, and the like [...] Here we need to notice that the growing sense of assurance in all of the New England colonies that they were the New Israel brought with it clear transformations of the Puritanism of old England [...] New England Puritanism expressed its sense of chosenness by increased attention to the doctrine of the covenant between God and his people was modeled on the biblical covenant God and Israel.

To reconstruct the minor character of Hester Prynne in the situation of hegemonic and autocracy of Puritan's religious and spiritual values that presented by Custom House this study using binary opposition strategy. The purpose of this strategy is to opposite between inhuman Puritan' religious and spiritual values and the dimension of human being and human right as God's given individually such as in the Hester Prynne's powerless character then may ask any reasons on the basis of death sentence of hang by Puritan's Custom House over the sin of adultery in Hester Prynne. If the Puritan's Religious Court believed

that sin of adultery for married woman in the case of Hester Prynne has to be punished with the death sentence was based on faith of God in Exodus: 20:20 (Bible of Moses), Hester Prynne's character may asking any considerations by opposite them within John's Bible (Chapter 8, pp. 3-11) as follows:

<sup>3</sup>The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group <sup>4</sup>and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup>In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" <sup>6</sup>They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. <sup>7</sup>When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." <sup>8</sup>Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup>At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. <sup>10</sup>Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" <sup>11</sup>"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Sin of adultery as Jesus Christ in the Bible of John (Chapter 8, p. 7,10,11) means that no one has authority to put someone on to be death sentence but it was being in God's authority:

<sup>7</sup>[...] Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her [...] <sup>10</sup>Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" <sup>11</sup>"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

These also means that in the case of Hester Prynne's adultery was being in private and ethic matter. In the case of adultery, someone can not be punished with the death sentence, but according to Terri Stovall (2016), dean of women's programs at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, TX, in *The Christian Index: Adultery, divorce and the believer* stated that:

[...] "to forgive in the same way God has forgiven us [...] to love unconditionally in the same way God loves us without condition [...] to remain faithful in the midst of unfaithfulness in the same way God remains faithful to us when we are faithless."

We are called to remain bound to the covenant we made in the same way our covenants with God cannot be broken. In establishing the law and political system for people who living

in the society was hoping that people can live in harmony, and the spirit of law must be supporting the social justice system and rule of law as well as needed by people, but in application sometimes the social justice system and rule of law did not run as well as needed by most of people because the authority in most implement the system as well as their own interest. In some regions, religious values are transformed into law and political system and regulating the people to behave in their social life, so the hegemonic religious values become obvious and real. This situation also happened in Puritan's society settled in Massachusetts Bay where resulted ones being victim over the system such as case of Hester Prynne in the story of Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter*. The reasons of Puritan's law and political system being unrepresentative is caused by the hegemonic of traditional values that presented law and political system based on religious values consequently, in implementing the law and political matter in severance the decision, Puritan's Custom House did not concern to the consideration of Hester Prynne's human right that also given from God. In discussion of deconstruction theory related to Hester Prynne's problem in human right perspective being same way where there is recommend binary opposition strategy with two approaches as a way of solution for Hester Prynne to struggle her right over the hegemony of Puritan's law and political system. Firstly we propose liberal feminism and the second one is radical feminism ideology, and so, by the two approachings believed will be able to strengthen her right in challenging Puritans' political and law system.

#### Liberal feminism ideology and action

Liberal feminism closely track the political learning of the larger society focused on women liberation and seeks individualistic equality of men and women through political and legal reform without altering the structure of society. Liberal feminism emphasized to changing people's values and beliefs with respect to gender. Liberal feminism has led to that form feminism being individualized rather than collectivized and becoming detached from social inequality. Liberal feminism cannot offer any sustained analysis of the structures of male dominance, power, or privilege, but it was tend to talk about personal right politically among political system that was implemented in the living society, Tong in Eyayu & Getaneh (2018:60) "[...] liberal political philosophy in the enlightenment period, and centers on the core ideas of autonomy, universal rights, equal citizenship, and democracy." In the case of Hester Prynne in

Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter* advised to use liberal feminism ideology for Hester Prynne individually in against Puritan's law and political values as command law among Puritan's society even law and political right at that time, we recommended her to use liberal feminism ideology as a strategy to pursue. By this strategy she can struggle to strengthen her personal right politically even individual rights and also justice based on human right perspective before the Puritan's law and political system, furthermore, Maynard in Eyayu & Getaneh (2018:60) stated that: "*It is depicted as focusing on individual rights and on the concepts of equality, justice and equal opportunities, where legal and social policy changes are seen as tools for engineering women's equality with men.*"

#### Radical feminism ideology

In the case of Hester Prynne in Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter* is may be proposed and recommended because in Puritan societies were dominated by the power of patriarchy and it took over for all system in Puritan's society. And in the same way Hester Prynne has to be free from Puritan's patriarchy hegemonic. Hester Prynne must be redefined herself as a rebel and take over the rebellion against the power of Puritans' patriarchal hegemony, in other words as Vocočić (2013, p. 43):

The "revolution of ideas" in which there will be a replacement of one model of thinking with other, is the only way to break down the patriarchy and to establish a social system based on humane relations among people, which will not be characterized by subordination and repression.

And according to Sapiro (1986, p. 445), the argument of radical feminism is advocate to counter-attack and advocate separation country, "[...] unity among women against men's authority. The task of women is to look among themselves to discover their own feelings and interests and their own culture and to refuse to participate in the male's order."

Radical feminism considered that because men's societies have any power over women, history, social structure, and women oppressed by men in much and same way, and also in men's societies mentioned women as a colonized people it was better being separation. It means that Hester Prynne as representation of womankind has to fight out the power of hegemonic whatever means or founded her own societies and reforming ways of social culture, belief system, and rule of law in her own societies, to rediscover the lost and devalued aspects of women's culture and to create their own alternative organizations and

communities.

## CONCLUSION

Hester Prynne's minor character which is presented in Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter* is representing women oppressed by Puritan's hegemony even in religious matters, rule of law, and politic system, because Puritan's moral values was being representation of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant community model based of country of origin and legitimated their beliefs and culture as superiority one while the others. Puritan's moral attitude in implementing religious, law, and political values that represented by Puritan's Custom House, moreover to challenge Puritan's demoralization and hegemonic behave in facing woman's adultery case like Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter*. They sometimes use hegemonic power in conducting social instrument without law and justice consideration. And in against Puritan's hegemonic power for Hester Prynne's minor character is recommended to strengthen human and feminism perspectiv and also by reconstruct Hester Prynne's minor character to be main character by means of Derrida's binary opposition.

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