The Trial Scene in Fiction
N. Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter

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Abstract: In fiction the question of justice is often represented in a trial scene. There are prominent trials that exemplify the practice of justice in world culture such as those of Socrates and Christ. This essay examines the trial scene in Nathaniel Hawthorne's (1804-1864) The Scarlet Letter (1850). It studies the relative centrality of the trial scene in it, how it is presented, dealt with and resolved. This essay examines the relationship between the trial as such and society, that is, its cultural context. The Scarlet Letter is the story of three sinners and the consequences of their acts, which led them to be tried, either literally or psychologically. It is for the reader to infer how moral standards have been twisted in the legal system, and surmise the tragic irony inherent in the trials. An elaboration of this phenomenon will be dealt with in this study.

1. Introduction

The question of 'justice' has almost always been an overt preoccupation of humanity, either as a conceptual issue or as a practical problem. Justice may be viewed as divine or profane, but in both cases it has socio-cultural dimensions. Justice itself, as R. W. Baldwin points out:

is essentially a quality of the behaviour of one man to another, that is of man in society so that all justice is social justice.\(^{(1)}\)

There are prominent trials that exemplify the practice of justice in world culture such as those of Socrates and Christ. Although they are non-literary, however, they are landmarks in the history of humanity, and in turn left their impact on literature.

Although it is over two thousand years since Socrates and Plato set off on pursuit of a definition, much of the answer is still in dispute. Justice means, "giving each his due."\(^{(2)}\) The essence of the concept is recognizing each person as an autonomous moral individual with claims as a person equal to those of any other person; equally free and responsible for his own life, work and affairs. Hence, the insistence on equality of consideration, of liberty, of political rights and treatment. Man is not only a passive recipient but actively responsible for his own actions.

However, his due is not only his equal share of nature's provision but also, "all the penalties he may suffer for the injuries he may cause to the 'other'."\(^{(3)}\)

In fiction the question of justice is often represented in a trial scene. Man has always been tried for different offences and charges. It could be an offence against Nature, human nature, God or man-made law. Historically speaking philosophy and religion were the first to tackle systematically the question and consequences of justice and trial. In Plato's Apology, the trial of Socrates may bear different interpretations and implications. It will be viewed as the trial of a philosopher who is charged of being

a doer of evil, who corrupts the youth and who does not believe in the gods of the state, but has other divinities of his own.\(^{(4)}\)

Plato's Apology, one of the oldest texts in which a trial is portrayed, is an elaboration of the trial scene in which Socrates is eventually condemned.

Christ's trial is thoroughly presented and discussed in the four Gospels. He was falsely accused of imprecation. Although, Christ's trial may have salvation rather than justice at its central issue, however, it constitutes an influential paradigm of unjust condemnation that is well known and need not be elaborated further in this context.

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The archetypal trials, cited above, represent not so much justice, as injustice. It is for the reader to infer how moral standards have been twisted in the legal system, and surmise the tragic irony inherent in the trials. An elaboration of this phenomenon will be dealt with in this essay.

2. Justice & Trial

Justice and trial have figured in different literatures and genres. The trial is not necessarily a literal one that is, taking place in a traditional court of law, with a conventional judge, public prosecutor, accused, jury and defense. However, it could be a figurative trial. For instance, the figurative trial and sentence, which were passed and executed in
The trial scene is also found in modern literature: Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925) and Camus’ *L’etranger* (1940). In this essay, I intend to present the trial scene in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).

As to form, any trial could be considered a kind of dramatic confrontation between different parties with opposing concerns. The characters enacting the trial like dramatic personae each performing his role on stage. However, the stage here is a legal one, that is, the court of law.

3. The Trial: A Dramatic Representation

The *Scarlet Letter* is a characteristic novel with a very special background. Accordingly, the trial scene in it has its specific circumstances.

I intend to examine *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of the relative centrality of the trial scene in it; how it is presented, dealt with and resolved. This essay examines the relation between the trial, as such, and society, that is, the cultural context.

*The Scarlet Letter* is the story of three sinners and the consequences of their acts, which led them to be tried either literally or psychologically.

Hawthorne’s novel begins with a scene on the scaffold, in the market place of Boston, where the heroine stands in disgrace with her infant child held close as if to conceal the letter "A" on her gown. The red letter "A" that the heroine is obliged to wear on her bosom represents her adultery, but as the first letter of the alphabet it may stand for the original sin of Adam, in which Puritans believed all men participated. Children in seventeenth century Boston had learned their alphabet from a book that printed a little verse for each letter. The first letter was illustrated by this verse:

"In Adam’s fall
We sinned all."

Hester Prynne, a gentlewoman whose husband is thought to be missing at sea, has borne a child fathered by another man, and she stands in disgrace before the entire community. The chief ministers of the community, including the guilty lover, Arthur Dimmesdale, admonish her to reveal the name of her child’s father, but she refuses. On this day of her shame, however, her husband arrives. When he sees his wife on the scaffold, he resolves to conceal his identity and to seek out the child’s true father. He assumes the name of Roger Chillingworth, and he makes his wife promise to keep his secret.

From these opening scenes the novel moves inexorably to its tragic conclusion. Hawthorne concentrates first on Hester’s punishment, her suffering, and her psychological endurance during the next seven years, and then he describes Chillingworth’s determined quest for the closely guarded secret. Chillingworth by instinct or black art, has been attracted to the guilty Dimmesdale, and in the guise of a physician and a friend he watches for the conclusive evidence. Hawthorne shows us the guilty man’s suffering from Chillingworth’s point of view, and then we see the minister’s full agony from inside his own mind as he struggles unsuccessfully to make a public confession.

When Hester sees how much her former lover is suffering, she resolves to protect him. She tells him to escape with her and her child to another country. But her lover’s impulse towards self-destruction and his over-whelming need to confess make this hope impossible. On the day of planned departure he delivers his last great sermon and then ascends the scaffold. Before the whole community, he confesses his guilt, asks Hester’s forgiveness, embraces his daughter, and dies.

Chillingworth, who has renounced his name in pursuit of revenge, has no life left. Hester leaves the community but returns for penance after her daughter grows up.

There are three trial scenes in *The Scarlet Letter*. The first and main trial scene leads to the second and the third. That is, they are the natural and eventual outcome of it. They all form one organic whole.

The main trial scene in this novel is presented in Chapter II *The Market Place* and in Chapter III *The Recognition*. However, before introducing the trial scene, it is important to note that Hawthorne’s people were

... a people amongst whom religion and law were almost identical, and in whose character both were so thoroughly interfused, that the mildest and severest acts of public discipline were alike made venerable and awful.

The trial scene begins in *The Market Place*. It opens with the women gossiping as they wait. What is most impressive about their collective character is their coarse physiques and bold speech. Many are dissatisfied with the lightness of Hester’s sentence. For her adultery she is to wear a scarlet letter on the bodice of her dress. She is not to be put to death or branded as stated in Scripture or the Puritan statute book. One of them says that

*The magistrates are God-fearing*
gentlemen, but merciful overmuch, ...  
At the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead.[7]

These women or 'goodwives' act as "self-constituted judges"[8] who believe themselves to be "church-members in good repute."[9]

Now, Hester Prynne, the accused, comes out of the prison door. First emerges the 'grim' and 'grisly' town-beadle:

This personage prefigured and represented in his aspect the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law, which it was his business to administer in its final and closest application to the offender.[10]

Hester's exit from the prison silences everyone. It is obvious that she is different from the other women in more ways than the nature of the crime suggests. She is tall and ladylike and even her clothing is different and shows the recklessness of her nature:

On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with and elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold-thread, appeared the letter A.[11]

As haughty as her demeanour is, Hester is terrified by the sternness of the crowd as she moves towards the pillory scaffold on which she must stand as part of her punishment:

In fact, this scaffold constituted a portion of a penal machine, which now, for two or three generations past, has been merely, 12 historical and traditionary among us, ....[12]

Hester's only escape from the leaden stare of the mob is to remember fonder times. Momentarily, at least, she dreams of her native village in England, the faces of her now-dead parents and her own faces a younger and happier girl. The present forces itself in again, and she hugs the child so fiercely that it cries out. Only the infant and the shame are real.

The trial scene, as a dramatic presentation, is gradually delineating its major characters. The Reverend Master Dimmesdale stands silent and trembling in the crowd. What we hear form the gossiping women is that he

... her godly pastor, takes it very grievously to heart that such a scandal should have come upon his congregation.[11]

However, we will soon know how much irony that remark holds.

The other important character, Chillingworth, is first introduced to us through Hester’s wandering thoughts as the image of a ‘misshapen scholar’. His actual presentation takes place in the following chapter 'The Recognition'. The staging of characters in this drama-like scene is unfinished yet.

Chillingworth appears standing on the edge of the crowd facing the scaffold. He is described as a man who was wearing strange clothes. This is the misshapen and scholarly-looking man Hester has been thinking about. Just as she recognizes him and seems about to show her reaction to the crowd, he calmly raises his finger and lays it to his lips. And then with what appears to be great self-control he begins asking a man in the crowd the background of the culprit and her crime.

When he knows Hester’s crime and sentence, he comments by saying that it is

"A wise -sentence! ... Thus she will be a living sermon against sin, until the ignominious letter be engraved upon her tombstone. It irks me, nevertheless, that the partner of her iniquity should not, at least, stand on the scaffold by her side. But he will be known!-he will be known!-he will be known!"[14]

The stranger or Chillingworth learns that Hester refuses to name her lover and that because of her youth and the possibility her husband maybe dead she has been spared the death sentence. The manner in which the stranger's comment is rendered carries all the severity of an oath. As the stranger moves through the crowd, Hester’s public inquisition begins. It commences with Reverend John Wilson’s pleas -for Hester to confess. Then he turns to Master Dimmesdale, and asks that he continues the exhortation. He tells Dimmesdale ironically that

"... the responsibility of this woman's soul lies greatly with you. It behooves you, therefore, to exhort her repentance, and to confession, as a proof and consequence thereof."

Now Dimmesdale is staged in the trial as a young Clergyman whose

... eloquence and religious fervour had already given the earnest of high eminence in his profession .... [Moreover], there was an air about this young minister, - an apprehensive, a startled, a half-frightened look, as of a being who felt himself quite astray and at a loss in the pathway of human existence, and could only be at ease in some seclusion of his own.[16]
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Time and again, Mr. Wilson makes Dimmesdale feel that it is the latter’s responsibility that Hester should confess: "Speak out to the woman, my brother, ..."[17] Mr. Wilson’s words serve as a dramatic irony in a play. These words bear more than one meaning. For the onlookers of this trial Dimmesdale acts as the guardian of Hester. Thus, he is responsible for her acts and consequently for her confession. On the other hand, we, as readers are aware that he is as responsible for her sin as she is. Or as Mr. Wilson says he is in charge of her and her confession.

Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale begins his plea:

"Hester Prynne,..." thou hearest what this good man says, and seest the accountability under which I labor. I thou feelest it to be for thy soul's peace, and that thy earthly punishment will thereby be made more effectual to salvation, I charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer![18]

So powerful seem the minister’s appeals that the people believe for the moment that Hester will name her seducer, or that the guilty one himself would be compelled to ascend the scaffold. However, the question leads to nothing. On the contrary she says:

"Never!" .... " It [the name] is too deeply branded. Ye cannot take it off. And would that I might endure his agony,as well as mine![19]

Moreover, another voice in the crowd urges her to speak out. However, being insistent she says:

"I will not speak!" .... " And my child must seek a heavenly Father; she shall never know an earthly one![20]

Furthermore, another clergyman begins a sermon on sin lasting well over an hour. Over and over again he refers to the scarlet "A", and the embroidery on Hester’s dress seems lit with Hell-fire.

Meanwhile, Hester Prynne

... kept her place upon the pedestal of shame,

.................. [And] With the same hard demeanor, she was led back to prison, and vanished from the public gaze within its iron-clamped portal.[21]

This scene serves partly as a display of the characters involved in this dramatic presentation. The satanic and scholarly-looking stranger is posed against the angelic and almost effeminate-looking Dimmesdale. Within this contrast the narrator manages to weave many verbal ironies. Whatever the stranger says is true enough, but we will soon realize that it is truth taunted with infernal spite. Hester’s sederer will be uncovered, but not for the moral purposes the stranger’s comments suggest. Dimmesdale’s remarks are also morally valid. As he himself says, Hester’s stubbornness shows ‘wondrous strength’ and generosity in protecting her lover. In his pleading Dimmesdale says that she disregards whatever reputation the man may have, for he (the lover) is as guilty as she. All quite true, and as we discover, all apply, in full force to him, the yet-to-be-discovered partner. Dimmesdale’s reactions to his remarks and Hester's quiet refusals are as much as an assessment of his own guilt as they are a reflection of his fear of being discovered. The ambivalence of his remarks symbolically project, guilt and fear, conscience and hypocrisy, that will rip his personality in two when he falls prey to the probing nature of the stranger. This will lead to the second figurative trial scene. Furthermore, the first trial scene dramatizes and introduces all the dramatic personae involved in this play.

The second scaffold scene taking place in chapter XII 'The Minister’s Vigil’ is a figurative trial scene.

It is Mr. Dimmesdale who ascends the scaffold this time:

Walking in the shadow of a dream, ...

..............................................

Mr. Dimmesdale reached the spot where, now so long since, Hester Prynne had lived through her first hours of public ignominy. The same platform or scaffold, black and weather – stained ............

..............................................

The minister went up the steps.[22]

It is a cloudy night in early May, and as he stands there, Dimmesdale, feels that the act is much like his other public confessions and secret penances.

Time and again,

He had been driven hither by the impulse of that Remorse which dogged him everywhere, and whose iron sister and closely linked companion was that Cowardice which invariably drew him back, with her tremendous grip, just when the other impulse had hurried him to the verge o-F a disclosure.[23]

Dimmesdale standing on the scaffold was like a ‘vain show of expiation’.[24] Moreover, Dimmesdale

... was overcome with a great horrorof
mind, as if the universe were gazing at
a scarlet token on his naked breast,
right over his heart.[25]

He momentarily feels he will be finally discovered,
but the cry is no more than a whimper. Only Governor Bellingham, who sleeps lightly, and his sister Mistress Hibbins have heard the noise, but they soon return to bed. Dimmesdale becomes comparatively calm again, and he notices a lantern light approaching in the darkness. It is Reverend Wilson returning from the deathbed of former Governor Winthrop. As Wilson passes, Dimmesdale imagines that he speaks out inviting the old man up there with him. This illusion is followed by a series of hallucinations. Now Dimmesdale sees the village gradually awake and all rushing to gape at the forlorn figure. Carried away by the grotesque horror of this picture, he begins laughing, and it is only the sight of Pearl and Hester returning from the same deathbed that restores his sense of reality.

He invites them to ascend the scaffold with him. He says:

"Come up hither, Hester, thouand little Pearl," .... "Ye have both been here before, but I wasnot with you. Come up hither once again,andwe will stand all three together."[26]

Unlike his former invitation to Wilson, this one is heard, and the three join hands on the platform. Dimmesdale, for the first time since Hester's trial feels

... a tumultuous rush of new life, other life than his own, pouring like a torrent into his heart, and hurrying through all his veins, as if the mother and the child were communicating their vital warmth to his half-torpid system. The three formed an electric chain.[27]

Pearl seems moved by the seriousness of the occasion and she asks "Wilt thou stand here with mother and me tomorrow noon, side?"[28]

Dimmesdale says that he will stand with her and her mother some other day, but not tomorrow. However, when Pearl repeats her question the minister gives only half an answer:

"At the great judgment day," ... "Then, and there, before the judgment seat, thy mother, and thou, and I must stand together. But the daylight of this word shall not see our meeting."[29]

Pearl then laughs. However, before Dimmesdale finishes his explanation a meteor lights the sky, and the three stand illumined: Hester with her scarlet letter, Dimmesdale with his hand on his heart, and Pearl as the link between the two adults. Pearl now seems touched with witchcraft in the strange light, and she points to Roger Chillingworth standing near the scaffold. Dimmesdale is terrified of the weird appearance of the man, and he bends to hear what Pearl has to say about him. The child mumbles gibberish in his ear and laughs again. She scolds him for his cowardice, and a shaken minister is led home by the doctor.

This is the second of three scaffold scenes, and it indicates that the action will rush downward now to its inevitable conclusion: the third and last scaffold scene.

In this metaphoric trial scene, Dimmesdale’s reactions on the scaffold showhow close to insanity he is. While the three people seem to represent the happy Christian family, their presence on the scaffold is "tainted with Dimmesdale fear".[30] If anything, the three are "a mockery of family life and of the love which exists between Hester and Pearl because of Dimmesdale".[31] Chillingworth does not feel this, of course: the company before him with its "supposed unity will only give him more cause forspite as he thinks of the family life he has been denied".[32]

Pearl is only a child and there is no reason to suppose that she is aware of the special significance of this meeting. She has asked for a friend and a "protector who will publicly associate himself with her and her equally outcast mother".[33] She is denied and she chides Dimmesdale, because "she is tooyoung to be satisfied with abstractions about judgment day".[34] When he bends to hear what she has to say about the doctor, she is only annoying him.

Dimmesdale holds the key to his salvation, and action, not abstraction, will save him. He cannot understand Pearl’s mutterings because he cannot understand himself; he has "been denied any special insight into the role of Chillingworth because he has refused to do anything positive to earn that insight".[35] Moreover, Pearl is the link between Hester and the minister; she is here not an elfin sprite but "truth and honest action, and Dimmesdale does not have the courage to clasp it with both hands".[36]

It is important to note that in the second trial scene - no matter it is a figurative one - all major characters involved in the action are brought together. Still further, they will appear again in the third scene. Thus, holding the unity of the three scenes together. Moreover, it is of consequence to note that the trial scene is viewed as a dramatic representation with all the paraphernalia of a drama. However, it is important to have an overall view of the three trial scenes as one dramatic representation.
The first trial scene is the beginning or introduction; the second is the middle or climax, which in return will lead to the third trial scene. Precisely, each one of these scenes is a play itself - a one-act-play - and the three together constitute one longer and more elaborate play.

4. The Revelation

The conclusion of this long play is the third trial or scaffold scene. It takes place in Chapter XXIII, The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter. In the preceding chapter, The Procession, all of the town gathered on its way towards the meeting-house; where in compliance with a custom thus early established, and ever since observed, the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale was to deliver an Election Sermon. His tremulous voice has reached every corner of the church, and the congregation stood spellbound as he spoke of the new civilization being cut out of the New England wilderness and the new destiny for these newly gathered people of the Lord. As the parishioners reached the open area of the marketplace, their rapture broke into speech. According to their united testimony, never had any man spoken in so wise, so high, and so holy a spirit as he had this day. But through it all there has been a certain deep, sad undertone of pathos, which could not be interpreted other than as the natural regret of one soon to die. This sense of his transitory stay on earth gave the final emphasis to the effect felt by all, that the preacher was an inspired angel who had shaken his bright wings over the Salem people and "showered golden truths upon them". He stands at this moment, on the "very pinnacle of his spiritual reputation and his eloquence". Hester still stands beside the scaffold of the pillory.

Once again the procession of magistrates moves through the crowd that in a highly charged spirit shouts its acclaim for the venerated preacher. As Dimmesdale moves through the crowd, his cries falls into murmurs; his disposition is drastically changed, as if all "the eloquence had drained his life's blood". Reverend Wilson steps forward to offer his arm, but the young minister waves him back. As Dimmesdale reaches Pearl and Hester, he pauses, and before Governor Bellingham can reach him to offer assistance to the awaiting festivities, Dimmesdale stretches his arms towards the scaffold and calls Pearl and Hester "Hester" said he, "come hither! Come, my little Pearl!"

Hawthorne comments

"It was a ghastly look with which he regarded them; but there was something at once tender and strangely triumphant in it. The child, with the bird-like motion, which was one of her characteristics, flew to him, and clasped her arms about his knees. Hester Prynne - slowly as if impelled by inevitable fate, and against her strongest will - likewise drew near, but paused before she reached him." [41]

However, Chillingworth is nearby and rushes through the mass of surprised people saying:

"Madman, hold! What is your purpose? ... Wave back that woman! Cast off this child! All shall be well! Do not blacken your fame, and perish in dishonour! I can yet save you! Would you bring infamy on your sacred profession?"

Dimmesdale shouts back at his tempter saying:

"Ha, tempter! Methinks thou art too late!" ...
"Thy power is not what it was! With God's help I escape thee now!"

Moreover, he again "extended his hand to the woman of the scarlet letter," crying loudly:

"Hester Prynne," ... "in the name of Him, ..... ..............................
..............................come hither now; and entwine thy strength about me! ... ..............................
..............................Come, Hester, Come! Support me up underneith scaffold!"

The narrator, here, supports the idea that this is a dramatic representation when he comments:

"The crowd was in a tumult. The men of rank and dignity, ..... ..............................
..............................were so taken by surprise, ... - unable to receive the explanation which most readily resented itself; - that they remained silent and inactive spectators of the judgment which Providence seemed to work. They beheld the minister, leaning on Hester's shoulder, and supported by her arm around him, approach the scaffold, and ascend its steps; while still the little hand of the sin-born child was clasped in his. Old Roger Chillingworth followed, as one intimately connected with the drama of guilt and sorrow in which they had all been actors, and well entitled, therefore, to be present at its closing scene!"

Chillingworth tells the minister that there is no place
on earth that he could have escaped him, "Save on this very scaffold". Dimmesdale goes on in his confession in a glaring sunlight:

"For thee and Pearl, be it as God shall order," ...

'make haste to take my shame upon me!"

"People of New England! " ... " ye, that have loved me! - ye, that have deemed me holy! - behold me here, the one sinner of the world! At last - at last! - I stand upon the spot where, seven years since, I should have stood; here, with this woman, ...."[48]

Dimmesdale, in his weakness and faintness of heart, strove to disclose the remainder of his secret:

"It was on him!" ... "God's eye beheld it! The angels were forever pointing at it. The Devil knew it well, and fretted it continually with the touch of his burning fingers! ... 

Stand any here that question God's judgment on a sinner? Behold a dreadful witness of it!"[49]

As he finishes, he tears open his clothing as if to show some hideous and hidden wound to the terror-stricken multitude. Then down he sinks upon the scaffold. As he collapses, Chillingworth bends over Dimmesdale and cries that he has escaped him. In all this the doctor's appearance has changed also, and he seems to be as bloodless as his one-time victim.

There is not much time, and young Pearl gives all her childish and tear-filled love to this man in a single kiss. Hester asks if they shall at least be together in the life hereafter, but Dimmesdale still has too much remorse to comfort her even now:

"Hush, Hester, hush!" said he, with tremulous, solemnity. "The law we broke! - the sin here so awfully revealed! - let these alone be in thy thoughts! I fear! It may be that, when we forgot our God, - when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul, - it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion.

God knows; And He is merciful! ....

Praised be his name! His will be done!

Farewell!"[50]

And so dies Dimmesdale reminding her of their sin and the ever-present justice of God.

In the last of the three scaffold scenes, all the major characters have been finally brought together. The various characters need no "verbal amplification to show all of their relationship one to the other".[51] Here again, like the former trial scenes, Hawthorne has constructed a tableau. For us at least it is clear that it is a perfect picture of all the anguish in the love triangle. Hawthorne has re-employed several of the actions or images associated earlier, in the other trial scenes, with certain characters to solidify the final role of all here present. Hester stands by as an angel of mercy buttressing the weak and ministering to the dying. The doctor bends over the dying man as a real physician would to administer the last physical comforts.

Dimmesdale for the first time is bathed in the full light so often associated with Pearl, and yet his confession is tinctured with the "hypocrisy and cowardly masochism"[52] we have noted earlier. His speech begins with "I!" but ends in the third person. He rips open his clothing to inflict as much punishment as possible on himself at this last minute, but it is done in such apparent anguish that part of the crowd at least is not entirely sure of his reason or his explanation. And, of course, his final words show that he is still committed to a pessimistic view of himself and Hester. He cannot comfort Hester, but merely says, that God's will be done. Dimmesdale can claim only to have ransomed himself from hell-fire by his final "triumphant agony" (his words), but he is in no way convinced that his love for Hester and hers to him is worth anything. The question then arises whether Dimmesdale dies in this fashion to exonerate Hester or to free himself from more torment here and hereafter? There is no final answer because Hawthorne has kept the workings of Dimmesdale's mind on this last day hidden from us.

What happened in the last scaffold scene, or the conclusion of this dramatic representation, affects even Pearl. The narrator told us that she cried in sympathy for the first time in her life, and that as she kissed her father, she became a complete human being now to grow within the joys and sorrows of any ordinary life. What we are being told, of course, is that Pearl need no longer be regarded as the elfin angelic creature of previous times. Her role as reminder of hypocrisy is no longer needed. This may seem like so much allegorical magic on Hawthorne's part, that is to say, since the spirit of evil and hypocrisy has been vanquished Pearl's supernatural character is no longer needed as a
However, any tremendous emotional experience can change the alienated personality of a youngster to a more conventional and social outlook and this is precisely what happened to Pearl here. She has briefly won a father, learned to love someone besides her mother, and "gained an ally from the society which estranged her, and she is the better for this".\[54\]

On the symbolic level a similar change must happen, and it does;

\[\text{but one is not necessarily a supernatural consequence of the other, rather the symbolic change is a literary consequence of a change in Pearl's natural personality and environment.}\[55\]

Cillingworth’s position in all this tumult is never clearer than these final minutes. Hawthorne gives us nothing to remind us of the man Chillingworth, instead we see the figure of Satan hovering over a departing soul. Pearl is fully human now and Hester always was, but the physician is a "caricature from some medieval representation of the fallen angel".\[56\]

Gerard Hanley Hopkins wrote something about the essence of man and all natural objects which applies specially to Chillingworth:

"What I do is me, for that I came".\[57\]

Thus, he has become the sum total of the unnatural things he has done.

And finally, the curtains fall and the play ends as represented through the trial scenes. These trial scenes, in my view, demonstrate the everlasting conflict between what is new and coming up, and what is old and decaying whether holy or unholy. Hester believes that one should wait for "the heavenly justice to strike".\[58\]

Hawthorne is using the trial as a psychological tool to probe through guilty conscience. However, to get a full understanding of the 'trial' in this novel, we have to examine it closely in its cultural context. The cultural context here is Puritanism.

5. Puritanism

To start with is the puritan emblem:

"a true believer is a true confessor; he should reveal to God and to the world what he really is".\[59\]

Moreover, in the eyes of the public a puritan became identified as one who followed a strict and closely regulated habit of life. The Puritan was a spiritual athlete, characterized by an intense zeal for reform, a zeal to order everything - personal life, family life, worship, church, business affairs, political views, even recreation in the light of God’s demand upon him...

[Moreover!, the practice of religion is the business of his life.\[60\]]

This was not, of course, the case with Dimmesdale who should have experienced "the miracle of grace himself and produced it in others".\[61\]

It is important to note that, by the end of the 17th century England, the Puritan preachers, who had been insisting upon the necessity for the word of God to be freely preached for three generations, had cultivated a climate of opinion among many of their followers that was hostile to any restriction upon the freedom to preach.

In America, in the New England colonies, Puritanism was generally understood to mean ‘Congregationalism’. These Puritans managed to establish Massachusetts Bay colony which was said to be the wealthiest, most educated, most capacious in the history of European colonization. These colonists were selected people, that is "sifted grain"\[62\] with strong clerical leadership. Their intention was to create in the American wilderness a "new Zion”\[63\] that would become "a city set on a hill”\[64\] and face by the power of its example the desired reformation in England. Church membership was restricted to the regenerate and their children who should own the covenant and only church members enjoyed political rights. Religious uniformity was enforced, and dissenters were informed that they had the right to stay away or to cross the river and to take up land of their own beyond the boundary of Massachusetts. The restrictions were difficult to maintain; there were demands that the franchise be broadened and religious dissent kept appearing.\[65\]

However, the second generation saw a diminution of zeal. The clergy interpreted recurrent misfortunes as signs of God’s wrath with growing laxity, but the adoption of the "halfway covenant"(1691) was evidence of clerical inability to halt the trend.\[66\]

The Puritan heritage, however, was stamped deep in the character of the New Englanders, and with the great immigration westward it became a major factor in the shaping of the American spirit.
Moreover, the most conspicuous contributions of Puritanism was

\[ \text{the sturdiness of character it produced.} \]

The puritan mind was one of the toughest the world has ever had to deal with. It is unconceivable to conceive of a disillusioned Puritan: (Dimmesdale) no matter what misfortune befell him, no matter how often or how tragically his fellowmen failed him, he would have expected no better.\[67\]

The Puritans knew that the life of faith is an arduous struggle, that

\[ \text{sin is a stubborn fact of human existence and that affliction is frequently the lot of the saints, but they were served by a great elevation to God and by a great confidence in God's overruling Providence.} \[68\]

However, and despite their beliefs, the Puritans became the architects who fashioned the principles of religious freedom. This was partly the result of the fact that the religious diversity they generated bred of necessity a spirit of toleration: "who was to decide who might preach, when God might speak through the humblest of the brethren?"\[69\] The trial scene is thus, a demonstration of this creed orthought.

6. Conclusion

Man is composed of a carnal body, a rational mind and a feeling heart. Man must express his needs freely. Religion fulfills some of these needs but not all. Besides religion, man in his development through the ages has tried to accomplish his other needs through the various arts and his tremendous progress in the sciences. Therefore, dealing with religion as the one and only source for realizing man’s earthly demands would be a very narrow and limited outlook and might be destructive.

Furthermore, religion must be defined in terms of its proper, normal and natural magnitude. However, the intrusion of religion in all ways of life would lead to either hypocrisy or illusion. This is because those people who are truly able to make religion their sole goal in life and the source and reason of living are very rare. They are those who can repress their natural desires and abstain from getting involved in human needs. These are prophets and saints not weak human beings like us. Moreover, trying to be a saint leads to either hypocrisy or illusion. This is what happened in the story. The character of the disillusioned and hypocritical clergyman is an evident example of eccentricity in religion. This clergyman puts on the robe of religion while sinning in the dark. However, this does not imply that all men of religion are hypocrites. It simply means that we are normal human beings with natural desires.

Finally, religion is not life and it cannot be - religion is part of life and should remain so.
End Notes

2. Ibid., p. 15.
3. Ibid., p. 25.
7. Ibid., p. 93.
9. Ibid., p. 94.
10. Ibid., p. 95.
11. Ibid., p. 99.
12. Ibid., p. 93.
15. Ibid., p. 114.
16. Ibid., p. 114.
17. Ibid., p. 115.
18. Ibid., p. 115.
19. Ibid., p. 117.
20. Ibid., p. 117.
21. Ibid., p. 118.
22. Ibid., p. 231.
23. Ibid., p. 232.
24. Ibid., p. 233.
25. Ibid., p. 233.
26. Ibid., p. 239.
27. Ibid., p. 239.
28. Ibid., p. 240.
29. Ibid., p. 240.
31. Ibid., p. 160.
32. Ibid., p. 161.
34. Ibid., p. 135.
35. Ibid., p. 140.
37. Ibid., p. 109.
38. Ibid., p. 131.
39. Ibid., p. 133.
41. Ibid., p. 385.
42. Ibid., p. 386.
**Bibliography**

**Primary Sources:**


**Secondary Sources:**


