

Social indignation and public condemnation research paper example

[Life](#), [Adolescence](#)



“ Young Goodman Brown,” “ The Birthmark” and “ Ethan Brand” are all notably published works from the dark romanticism sub-genre era published by Nathaniel Hawthorne that have lead characters embracing the concepts of morality and isolation. Hawthorne is an American author well-known mostly for his writings in this particular classification of stories from 1839 to 1860. Hawthorne typically incorporates such topic as isolation, sin, and the devil in his writings. These topics can generate and fester sinister feelings and ideas of alienation, guilt, and gloom. Hawthorn draws influence from multiple aspects of his life, for example, incorporating the use of his hometown Salem, Massachusetts as background settings as found in the story of Young Goodman Brown. Hawthorne years of isolation and his associations as a Puritan seems to concur with the motifs that are often low-spirited, menacing, and ominous. Each has its sense of anguish, despair, and misery because they all resolve in tragedy inspired by his background. Particularly, Hawthorne is influenced by an ancestor who participated in the trial of the Salem witches. It was the ruthlessness and the public humiliation that Hawthorne finds disgusting in the whole trial which eventually drove him to insert a “ w” in his last name, if only to hide whatever association people might have of him and John Hathorne, a Salem witch trial judge . Hawthorne believes of the whole trial as an epitome of evil at the very core of human existence. The evil that does not originate from the “ witchcrafts” that condemned the selected few, but rather the evil that lurks in the society in its attempt to project itself as perfect. Social indignation and public condemnation was the central theme to these stories. This was the very core of evil that can be rooted from the core of human existence.

This paper attempts to dissect the theme of “ social indignation and public condemnation” which is the root of evilness found at the core of human existence” in Hawthorne’s three significant works which include “ The Birthmark”, “ Young Goodman Brown”, and “ Ethan Brand”. This paper will draw evidences from these three stories citing the theme of social indignation and public condemnation as root to the evilness that exist in man, innate of his human nature.

Social Indignation and Public Condemnation: The Evils at the Core of Human Existence

A common plot can be traced in three of Hawthorne’s works—“ The Birthmark”, “ Young Goodman Brown”, and “ Ethan Brand” involves social judgment. In all three stories, Hawthorne tried to show how society has a tendency to judge people based on a standard that has been set to decide which is acceptable or not. These standards are considered social norms and a slight variation or shift away from these standards and norms would immediate result to holding an individual defiant or deviant. It makes deviancy a crime or an ill-manifestation of existence that needs to be radically changed or modified in order to fit in or to belong to the society. In fact, in the story The Birthmark, this deviancy is traced from Georgiana’s minuscule red birthmark that took the shape of a hand on the woman’s cheek, which later on became the subject of the lead character Aylmer’s obsession. This imperfection in Georgiana’s face was identified as the reason Aylmer had the urge to modify desperately and alter Georgiana’s face. While the birthmark has been in Georgiana’s face even before they marry, Aylmer had not overgrown that slight imperfection in his wife that it almost drove

Aylmer to the point of insanity. Aylmer was almost vindictive to his wife's birthmark as expressed when he uttered the words

“ Here is a powerful cosmetic. With a few drops of this in a vase of water, freckles may be washed away. . . A stronger infusion would take the blood out of the cheek, and leave the rosiest beauty a pale ghost. . . Your case demands a remedy that shall go deeper.” .

Carefully analyzing this statement, one could come to a clear conclusion that Aylmer wanted to change his wife. It reflects how his character was making social judgment on Georgina's character simply on the sole basis of the red birthmark that the young woman has on a woman's cheek. It seemingly implied that Georgina was being judged and scrutinized not by who she was or what she does or say but by something that Georgina's character has no power or control over. Thus, to achieve perfection and to make herself accepted in the society, more so by Aylmer, there is the implied necessity to have the birthmark removed. Georgina's red birthmark was the symbol of social indignation, the criteria in the social standards and social norms. The birthmark epitomizes one's desperate pursuit and obsession towards perfection that is not achievable in our vague and idle existence. The desperation that corrupted the very essence of Aylmer's character towards wanting perfection for his wife Georgiana was the cause of evil central to the story of *The Birthmark*. In the story Hawthorne tried to capitalize on what one's inability for contentment can lead to, which on the case of the characters in the story, specifically Aylmer leads to the death of his wife. One's displeasure of the superficial will transcend to the very core of human existence that could plague the later even until his sleep. Eventually, this

discontentment and desperation towards achieving perfection concludes to one's self-destruction.

On the other hand, in the story of Young Goodman Brown, the social indignation, and public condemnation was rooted on the practice of witchcraft. It presents the rituals and the witchcraft that were believed to have existed during his period. In fact, the story of Young Goodman Brown epitomizes an actual event in history that emanates a similar, but a more realistic depiction of the story. This was in reference to the Salem witches trial participated by one of Hawthorne's relatives mentioned earlier, Judge John Hathorne. The author uses this plot to create the settings in the story of Young Goodman Brown. Similar to the actual and the real Salem Witch Trial, Young Goodman Brown's encounter with a ritualistic practice in the forest of the Salem community was an indictment of the harsh and unfair trial of the individuals who were accused as witches. This can be used parallel to how society judges religious sects by virtue of their ceremonial rituals that runs contrary to what society has been so typically accustomed.

“ But, irreverently consorting with these grave, reputable, and pious people, these elders of the church, these chaste dames and dewy virgins, there were men of dissolute lives and women of spotted fame, wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice, and suspected even of horrid crimes. It was strange to see that the good shrank not from the wicked, nor were the sinners abashed by the saints.” .

Again, society thrives in the notion of human perfection and human standards. People are so repugnant of something that is out of the ordinary condemning it to be a plot against the balance that society has made people

believed exist. In this particular case, Hawthorne epitomizes two social institutions who maligned and corrupt the minds of the public of what is accepted and otherwise. These institutions refer to religion and the law. The moral and ethical standards dictated by religion implies that there is a very strict code that has to be followed in one's pursuit for ceremonial rites.

Anything away or different from this code and sets of rules are to be considered evil and is warranted a sin for being sacrilegious.

In addition, the plot in the Young Goodman Brown's story also implores that connotation that society wants people to believe about the perfection of the society in reference to its systems as well as its institutions. The trial on the Salem witches and Young Goodman Brown's personal trial to battle were manifestations of social indignation. Likewise, people who are repulsive of the system and the norms imposed by society will experience its wrath. This was the major lesson of the story that can be related to the theme. When Young Goodman Brown refuses to be indoctrinated by the witches of Salem which he witnessed in the forest, he was punished to experience public ridicule because of how defensive he will get and how aversive he will be, doubting the sincerity and truthfulness in people. Similarly, in the contemporary times, if you refuse to embrace being indoctrinated and agreeing to the pulse of the greater majority, you will run the risk of being mocked and ridiculed for being different and for fighting the supposedly correct system.

Lastly, in the story Ethan Brand author Nathaniel Hawthorne explores the concept of the "unpardonable sin." However, if one would explore the context of this unpardonable sin, one would immediately ascribe to the sin of

unknown. The unknown is one in which others being totally unaware of violating a social norm that on the ' so-called" moralist are aware to exist. Indifference is most like a term to be used for the unpardonable sin. It is the sin of not knowing where you stand in society in reference to vast norms and standards it has created and yet none are allowed to question or point out because none would like to claim authorship to, and yet despite the author, people are being obliged to follow otherwise they will be discriminated or judged.

The unpardonable sin is again the sin of the unknown. In fact, in the story only the character of Ethan Brand can explain what the term unpardonable sin refers to. Brand has defined this as,

" It is a sin that grew within my breast. A sin that grew nowhere else! The sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its mighty claims! The only sin that deserves a recompense of immortal agony! Freely, were it to do again, would I incur the guilt. Unshrinkingly I accept the retribution!" .

If this definition is to be evaluated, many will have to come to the conclusion that it was a deliberate attempt of the speaker to make himself vague in order to confuse people. The ignorance of the specifications and qualifications of the unpardonable sin could easily subject the greater majority into believing that they have violated something sacred or religious thereby making it even easier to commit them to blindly follow a rule that is to be created and implore as a standard.

Social Application and Warrants of the Theme

There are many themes that can be rooted in the stories “ Young Goodman Brown,” “ The Birthmark” and “ Ethan Brand.” However, all theme boils out to a single major focal point, and this is the evilness that lurks in the very core of human existence. This study focused only on the specific of this evilness as one being classified as social indignation and public condemnation. Society has been way too harsh and often too quick at passing judgment mainly on the basis and the argument of individual differences. While society flags on respect of cultural differences and holding to the highest esteem individual uniqueness, we cannot but simply doubt in the sincerity of this battle cry.

Organizations claim to exercise diversity of the workforce. However, behind the curtains of the corporate walls there are massive injustices being hurdled against employees who had nothing but the best interest of the company while at the same time striving to progress and improve themselves along the process. While we prefer to call ourselves living in the contemporary period, where there is the modernization of system applied and embraced by any civilized society, the same issues that were brought out in Hawthorne’s stories are still very evident today. While witchcrafts and sorcery are no longer the issue and while there are no longer potions and concoction to cure our imperfections and while there are no unpardonable sins to malign our existence, we are still caught in between the drama of defending ourselves against the vindictive eyes of society. We are still being publicly judged and condemn for simply embracing our uniqueness as individuals. Today, if you are different you will be labeled as dysfunctional, abnormal, handicapped,

disabled and among other things. Some unfortunate people will be medicated, drugged, misdiagnosed and even institutionalized to silence their desperate pursuit to self-expression.

Society has been gravely vindictive of differences and practices that are wholly an expression of one's culture or personal beliefs. While the contemporary society hailed carving out the injustices and the ill-practices against humanity that existed during the Dark Ages, there has been very little change, if any. The injustices and the abuse are simply masked differently but as Jean-Jacques Rousseau once said, " Men are born free, but everywhere they are in chains" . A child might be born in the United States, the Herald of Democracy or the Philippines, home of the Matriarch and Defender of Democracy against a Tyranny, however, the child will never be totally free. We are corrupted by social idealism that will never flourish because regardless of whether we accept this as truth or not, we are all guilty of discriminating people. We are all guilty of stereotyping. We are all guilty of blind obedience.

Nathaniel Hawthorne offered a timeless approach to the ills of society. He was able to incorporate in his stories the evils that society brings to people. In addition, the author Nathaniel Hawthorne has also been able to establish how despite our earnest effort to create an ideal society, the concept of perfect pulls us down. The three stories used in this paper all had one root of evil to address and this is in reference to how the individual characters in the stories defined perfection and how they have allowed their personal understanding of the word control their existence. Aylmer of *The Birthmark*, Goodman in *Young Goodman Brown* and Ethan from *Ethan Brand* were all

discerning of the concept of perfection addressed in different areas of human lives. In the end, their desperate pursuit to achieve the unattainable which is absolute perfection cause them the people they love, the respect of society and their personal sanity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the author has taught us a valuable lesson about life and our ways to address our existence. While it is true that perfection in its absolute sense cannot be achieved, and while the concept of evil is as real and inescapable as the concept of goodness, society has a big shoe to fill. It is the role of the society to nurture every man's interest and peculiarities. It is the responsibility of the society to protect the manifestations of individual difference and foster global understanding, respect and tolerance. Everyone is special regardless of how seemingly different they are from everyone else. Musician Bob Dylan asked this pivotal question, " How many years can some people exist before they're allowed to be free?" . Society can answer this given all the standards and norms that it keeps under its sleeves.

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