

# Good literature review on nathaniel hawthorne's views on gender in the scarlet le...

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Nathaniel Hawthorne explores the idea of gender comprehensively in his work, *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne tells the sad story of love and betrayal in families. His story is based on the 17th century Puritan New England. The cultural values and morals observed by Hawthorne's community influences the social and gender expectations of the narrative. Hawthorne develops an interesting tale by basing his perspective on the 17th century world, which significantly affects the development of characters. *The Scarlet Letter* highlights that community and individual characters observe strict codes that provide guidelines on how individuals are supposed to live. Furthermore, individuals are charged with these codes when they engage in wrongdoing. Hawthorne explores the world that offers special interest on the struggle between sin and righteousness. In consequence, the scholar examines how such attitude affect individual perspective towards the ideas of self-justification and self-righteousness. Through this scenario, one can easily understand how gender is a main preoccupation of cultural and literary studies. Hawthorne's provides an informative piece of work that describes how culture constructs gender. Examples of such gender constructions are identifiable throughout the novel. The paper explores the concept of gender by examining the Hawthorn's views on gender in his work, *The Scarlet Letter*.

*The Scarlet Letter* presents female characters who show diverse personalities and attitudes. Some female characters such as Zenobia and Hester are confident, strong and independent-minded. This is in contrast with the cultural constructions attached to the definition of the female gender. On the other hand, some female characters such as Phoebe conform

to gender expectations for women during Hawthorne's time. Hawthorne challenges his community's culture-based definition of the gender, which assumed that women are essentially inferior to men. He successfully criticizes this perspective by developing strong female characters. Most of female characters in *The Scarlet Letter* act as redemptive figures for men who have isolated themselves from a biased community (Stefanovici 429). Furthermore, the author develops a number of female characters who are discriminated and suffered due to exercise of the male power. Hawthorne reviews the nature of gender relations in his world, through these experiences. From a critical viewpoint, *The Scarlet Letter* challenges the idea of domesticity in modeling female characters, the role of emotion and reason in the human experience. In some instances, Hawthorne identifies old women as primary figures, thus using them as examples for highlighting how women are influenced by both their individual and community history. In sympathy with the most female characters in his work, Hawthorne highlights the complexity of the women's lives in the era of pronounced social change (Stefanovici 430).

In reference to Hawthorne's work, it is apparent that gender is essentially culturally constructed. The culture defines the attributes that define good or well-behaved women. In consequence, women are obliged to conform to this definition to suit in their position. Similarly, the culture presents various attributes that a man should present. The binding role of culture in defining gender is evident in the fact that individuals who fail to conform to the provided gender definitions are regarded as deviants. Furthermore, cultural-based gender definition prompts gender assumptions, most of which are

entirely biased. These assumptions have the potential of shaping one's habit (Goldsmith 78).

Hester's story highlights the effect of gender construction and assumptions on the person's development and perspective. Hester identifies the need of fighting to keep custody of her daughter only after her life in jail. They both lived in an isolated cottage on the edge of the town. This seclusion offered Hester time for reflecting upon her life. The situation offered her a chance of engaging in an independent thinking, which enables her reflect on the concepts that the Puritans would tag to antinomian as she believes and obeys moral law and social customs (Watts 7). The isolated state may be viewed as an environment in which cultural and social constructions attached to gender have been withdrawn. Apparently, Hester engages an independent mind only after the cultural and social effects have been withdrawn from the equation. Hawthorne emphasizes the situation of the Hester's nature by relating it to the 17th century Puritan, whose trial assumed the central position in the Antinomian Controversy. Hawthorne highlights the significance of free oneself from cultural and social codes by developing Hester into a heroine following her ability of thinking independently (Goldsmith 79).

Hester presents a very strong character in the novel. This is in contrast with Dimmesdale, who is essentially weak and lack ability of expressing himself. He joins his family feeling ashamed of his situation. Dimmesdale can hardly stand to overcome his sin; however, Hester faces her sin with a bold heart. This presents a situation that is contrary to the community's expectations. The society assumed that the female gender is feminine and weak. This

meant that Dimmesdale who is a man should present high levels of boldness than her wife Hester who presents the weak gender (Watts 9).

Hawthorne presents an argument that the habits of mind were characterized with men because the society makes them think of their state in this manner. Furthermore, he believes that the traits of the heart belong to women because the society identifies them as objects that are made for nurturing. In view that the male gender comprise of extraordinary and unique individuals, the society challenges men to show high levels of reasoning. In consequence, men work hard and engage their minds in rational thinking to suit in their profile. In the process, men develop traits of minds. In essence, men's high performance is mainly caused by the society's support and the motivation of conforming to the high standards set for them by the community (Stefanovici 427). In contrast, the society associates the female gender with the matter of the heart. In reference to the society and cultural believes, women should be compassionate, light-hearted and lovely among others. In particular, the society expects women to present high levels of feminine attributes. The society assumes that individuals from the female gender lack ability of making rational decisions or thinking independently. This means that individuals from the female gender should be nurtured by ones of the superior gender for them to live a successfully life (Goldsmith 79).

Hawthorne reviews the idea of gender from a critical and discerning viewpoint. Through Hawthorne's work, one learns how gender may be constructed culturally. Gender inferences and assumptions are apparent in the habits presented by a number of characters in the novel. Hawthorne

seeks to control his reader's understanding of the story's characters and themes by creating exigent situations that make the reader approach the story from an unbiased viewpoint. This included empowering women characters while presenting men as inferior beings who are susceptible to religious fervor, obsession, weak heart, and excessive pride among others. Therefore, *The Scarlet Letter* challenges the reader to view the idea of gender from a rational point of view.

### **Work Cited**

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