

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
HESTER PRYNNE VIS-A-VIS
ANNA KARENINA
ILLUSTRATING
PURITANICAL MORAL
DECLINE**

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Abstract

This paper first offers a concise but comprehensive description of the characters of Hester Prynne and Anna Karenina. Then it presents a comparative, analytical and critical study of these two major female characters of Western literature. The moral deprivation of these archetypal characters will be analyzed in the perspective of orthodox Christian moral values as both these characters signal the emergence of a crisis of Christianity in both its orthodox and its puritanical versions. The work of Camille Paglia is used to show that Hawthorne's heroine is and Tolstoy's heroine is not a precursor of the modern Western sexually liberated promiscuous woman.

JEL Classification: Z000

I. The Authors

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts on July 4, 1804. Generations of Hawthornes—as the name was formerly spelled—had lived in Salem. Hawthorne was well aware of their status in the community, though that status was not always admirable. For example, Hawthorne lived with the knowledge that his great-great-grandfather, a judge in the 1692 Salem witch trials, was responsible for the deaths of some of the accused witches. Scholars have concluded that Hawthorne keenly felt the burden of his ancestry and assumed the guilt of his Puritan grandfathers. When Hawthorne was four years old, his father, a sea captain, died while on a voyage. Hawthorne's mother, Elizabeth, took the boy and his two sisters to live with her affluent brothers. In this chaotic, crowded, multiple-family home, young Hawthorne somehow managed to foster a love of reading. After graduating from college, he did not assume a career. He knew only that he was determined to one day become a writer. His first literary work, begun during college, was titled *Fanshawe*. He used his own money to have it published, but soon decided it simply wasn't good enough to be made public, and so he tried to destroy all the copies that had been printed. All told, Hawthorne spent a dozen years after college reading and writing. He lived with his mother in Salem during this period. Gradually, he met with success; he sold some short stories, which were published under a pseudonym. Finally, in 1837, he published *Twice-Told Tales*, a collection of short stories, under his own name. Hawthorne continued to write short stories for magazines, but he made only a modest living. After marrying Sophia Peabody in 1842, he appealed to several friends for help in finding a job, and they were able to obtain for him a position at the Salem custom house. He lost his job in 1848, a circumstance that he resented and wrote about in "The Custom-House," the introductory chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*. Soon after he lost his job, his mother died. In the midst of his grief, he wrote *The Scarlet Letter*, which was

published in 1850. Hawthorne himself felt it to be a gloomy story about a risky subject, but the book met with some success, eventually ensuring Hawthorne's place in literary history. Though Hawthorne achieved fame, he was not necessarily comfortable playing the role of a revered author. He was shy and avoided making eye contact with people. At home, he was likely to head out the back door if he knew a guest had arrived at the front door. At times he was playful, almost childlike, and unconcerned about appearances. Yet he was a good friend to other authors, including Herman Melville, who dedicated *Moby Dick* to him. More than a century after his death, Hawthorne is still revered as a father of American literature. From this man came, according to Henry James, "the finest piece of imaginative writing yet put forth" in America. (The Glencoe literature Library)

Count Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy was born at Yasnaya Polyana, at his father's estate in Tula Province, about two hundred miles from Moscow. Both of his parents belonged to the Russian nobility. His mother died when he was two and his father when he was nine. Tolstoy served in the army in the Caucasus and the Crimea, and after leaving the army he travelled and studied educational theories. While in the service, Tolstoy wrote *Childhood*, a short, semi-autobiographical novel. This was well received, and he continued to write other stories when he left the army. He and Sophie Behrs married in 1862 and had 13 children. For the next 15 years Tolstoy lived as a farmer and gentleman and wrote. *War and Peace* was finished over 1864-1869 and *Anna Karenina* during 1873-1876. Tolstoy went through a serious spiritual crisis, after which he wrote the autobiographical *A Confession*. From then on he began to publicize his views on religion, morality, non-violence and renunciation of the flesh. Other works from this time are *What Then Must We Do?* And *The*

Kingdom of God is Within You. Relations between him and his wife became strained because of his new beliefs and fame as a pacifist. In 1910 he left home at the age of 82 and died of pneumonia at a local railway station. Tolstoy's writings have influenced much of twentieth-century literature, and his ethical and religious works have influenced the beliefs of many spiritual and political leaders. In addition to Tolstoy's famous novels, he wrote many plays, stories and sketches, autobiographical and educational works, ethical and religious books and essays, and social and political essays and addresses. (novelguide.com/annakarenina)

II. The Characters

II.1. Hester Prynne:

Although *The Scarlet Letter* is about Hester Prynne, the book is not so much a consideration of her innate character as it is an examination of the forces that shape her and the transformations those forces effect. We know very little about Hester prior to her affair with Dimmesdale and her resultant public shaming. We read that she married Chillingworth although she did not love him, but we never fully understand why. The early chapters of the book suggest that, prior to her marriage, Hester was a strong-willed and impetuous young woman—she remembers her parents as loving guides who frequently had to restrain her incautious behavior. The fact that she has an affair also suggests that she, at one time, had a passionate nature.

But it is what happens after Hester's affair that makes her into the woman with whom the reader is familiar. Shamed and alienated from the rest of the community, Hester becomes contemplative. She speculates on human nature, social organization, and larger moral questions. Hester's tribulations

also lead her to become a stoic and a freethinker. Although the narrator pretends to disapprove of Hester's independent philosophizing, his tone indicates that he secretly admires her independence and her ideas.

Hester also becomes a kind of compassionate maternal figure as a result of her experiences. Hester moderates her tendency to be rash, for she knows that such behavior could cause her to lose her daughter, Pearl. Hester is also maternal with respect to society: she cares for the poor and brings them food and clothing. By the novel's end, Hester has become a profeminist (Profeminist is a term used to define women in a philosophical tradition that anticipated modern feminist concepts, yet lived in a time when the term "feminist" was unknown, that is, prior to the twentieth century.) mother figure to the women of the community. The shame attached to her scarlet letter is long gone. Women recognize that her punishment stemmed in part from the town fathers' sexism, and they come to Hester seeking shelter from the sexist forces under which they themselves suffer. Throughout *The Scarlet Letter* Hester is portrayed as an intelligent, capable, but not necessarily extraordinary woman. It is the extraordinary circumstances shaping her that make her such an important figure. (SparkNotes Editors, 2003)

II.2. Anna Karenina:

Anna is a beautiful, passionate, and educated woman. She is the wife of Alexei Karenin, a cold and passionless government official. Her character is rich in complexity: she is guilty of desecrating her marriage and home, for instance, but she remains noble and admirable nonetheless. Anna is intelligent and literate, a reader of English novels and a writer of children's books. She is elegant although always understated in her dress. Her many years with Karenin show her capable of playing the

role of cultivated, beautiful, society wife and hostess with great poise and grace. She is very nearly the ideal aristocratic Russian wife of the 1870s. Among Anna's most prominent qualities are her passionate spirit and determination to live life on her own terms. She is a feminist heroine of sorts. Though disgraced, she dares to face St. Petersburg high society and refuses the exile to which she has been condemned, attending the opera when she knows very well she will meet with nothing but scorn and derision. Anna is a martyr to the old-fashioned Russian patriarchal system and its double standards for male and female adultery. Her brother, Stiva, is far looser in his morals but is never even chastised for his womanizing, whereas Anna is sentenced to social exile and suicide. Moreover, Anna is deeply devoted to her family and children, as we see when she sneaks back into her former home to visit her son on his birthday. Anna's refusal to lose Seryozha is the only reason she refuses Karenin's offer of divorce, even though this divorce would give her freedom. The governing principle of Anna's life is that love is stronger than anything, even duty. She remains powerfully committed to this principle. She rejects Karenin's request that she stay with him simply to maintain outward appearances of an intact marriage and family. In the later stages of her relationship with Vronsky, Anna worries most that he no longer loves her but remains with her out of duty only. Her exile from civilized society in the later part of the novel is a symbolic rejection of all the social conventions that are normally accepted dutifully. She insists on following her heart alone. As a result, Anna contrasts with the ideal of living for God and goodness that Levin embraces in the last chapter, and she appears self-centered by comparison. Even so, Anna's insistence on living according to the dictates of her heart makes her a pioneer, a woman searching for autonomy and passion in a male-dominated society. (SparkNotes Editors, 2003)

III. Similarities in the Characters of Hester Prynne and Anna Karenina:

- Both Hester and Anna are much younger than their spouses. Roger Chillingworth is about 25 year older than his wife Hester. When somebody is as young as Hester, and for someone who has arrived in New England ahead of her husband from Europe alone, there is every possibility for her to go astray. The novel reveals to us that Chillingworth remained missing for a good seven years. A young woman of Hester's age could not be left unattended for such a long period and that too without any information whether the husband was alive or not. Chillingworth confesses in the novel that his and Hester's was an unnatural union. He says to Hester: "*It was my folly, and thy weakness. I—a man of thought, the book worm of great libraries, a man already in decay, having given my best years to feed the hungry dream of knowledge— what had I to do with youth and beauty like thine own! Misshappens from my birth- hour, how could I delude myself with the idea that intellectual gifts might veil physical deformity in a young girl's fantasy! Men call me wise. If sages were ever wise in their own behoof, I might have foreseen all this.*" (Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet letter*, ch.7) In case of Anna her husband too was much older than her and despite the fact that she had a wholesome and complete family life she felt a strong need to be loved. It was that extreme desire to be loved that made her accept the advances of young Vronsky. The aristocratic and mature Karenin seemed unable to satisfy the needs of young Anna. He could not come down to Anna's level. He being mature and older and she being young and robust as a consequence both could not get along well with each other.

- Both Hester and Anna are supposed to be attractive and beautiful. It would not be an understatement that both the writers presented their heroines as the most beautiful. On the one hand we have got Anna the most beautiful woman in the aristocratic society of Moscow and on the other we have Hester who is an epitome of beauty in New England. Despite their respective beauties both these women are presented as fallen women. It appears as if beauty and disgrace go hand in hand in the two novels. We know how beautiful Hester has been; we had a glimpse of it in the forest *“When Hester takes off her cap and unloosens her hair, we see a new person. We see the real Hester, who has been hidden for years under a shield of shame. Her eyes grow radiant and a flush comes to her cheek. We recognize her as the Hester from Chapter One. The beautiful woman who is not afraid to reveal her dark, flowing locks and displaying her beauty.”* (Emma Jones, literature-study-online.com) Anna’s beauty could be gauged when *“Vronsky followed the guard to the carriage, and at the door of the compartment he stopped short to make room for a lady who was getting out. With the insight of a man of the world, from one glance at this lady’s appearance Vronsky classified her as belonging to the best society. He begged pardon, and was getting into the carriage, but felt he must glance at her once more; not that she was very beautiful, not on account of the elegance and modest grace which were apparent in her whole figure, but because in the expression of her charming face, as she passed close by him, there was something peculiarly caressing and soft. As he looked round, she too turned her head. Her shining gray eyes, that looked dark from the thick lashes, rested with friendly attention on his face, as though she were recognizing him, and then promptly turned away to the passing crowd, as though*

seeking someone. In that brief look Vronsky had time to notice the suppressed eagerness which played over her face, and flitted between the brilliant eyes and the faint smile that curved her red lips. It was as though her nature were so brimming over with something that against her will it showed itself now in the flash of her eyes, and now in her smile. Deliberately she shrouded the light in her eyes, but it shone against her will in the faintly perceptible smile.” (Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, Part one, Chapter XVIII)

- Both Hester and Anna gave birth to illegitimate daughters as a result of their illicit relations. Hester gave birth to Pearl, whereas Anna gave birth to little Anna. Pearl grew up to be happily married, while little Anna was left with Karenin after her mother’s suicide. *“Brenda Wineapple said that Hester Prynne was a single mother devoted to the child who personified the scarlet letter: part symbol, part consolation, and part terror...Hester was a quiet rebel whose isolation granted her a certain freedom of thought, particularly concerning the plight of women. Hester is dedicated to Pearl, who represents so many graces and misfortunes, and being detached from society gives Hester the freedom to contemplate her ideas, especially pertaining to woman’s condition, that would normally be considered perverse. The relationship between Hester Prynne and her illegitimate daughter, Pearl, is extremely significant. It is unquestionable that Hester Prynne is devoted to Pearl. The way Hester pleads so touchingly for her when the governor tries to take her away proves this point. “‘Ye shall not take her! I will die first!’” (p. 100). This quote, said by Hester when she implores the governor to let her keep Pearl, shows just how important Pearl is to Hester. The reason it is*

so imperative for Pearl to be constantly at Hester's side is that she is the embodiment of Hester's sin. "(Megaessays.com). Anna's daughter's character did not come to the forefront due to the fact that she was left motherless by her mother in her infancy when she committed suicide. Young Anna was taken into custody by Karenin after the death of her mother. In the novel we have been given this information by Veronsky's mother, "*Oh, why talk of it!*" *said the countess with a wave of her hand. "It was an awful time! No, say what you will, she was a bad woman. Why, what is the meaning of such desperate passions? It was all to show herself something out of the way. Well, and that she did do. She brought herself to ruin and two good men—her husband and my unhappy son."* "*And what did her husband do?*" *asked Sergey Ivanovitch. "He has taken her daughter. Alexey was ready to agree to anything at first. Now it worries him terribly that he should have given his own child away to another man. But he can't take back his words."* (Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, Part eight, Chapter IV)

- Both Anna and Hester are exiled from society. In comparison with Hester Prynne, Anna's goodness deteriorates as she suffers from public humiliation and guilt, while Hester Prynne faces society regardless of her shame. "*Condemned by her sin, Hester Prynne suffers from isolation at the beginning of the novel. Hester Prynne had the opportunity to escape all social disaffection, but she decides to live in Boston because she needs to be close to Pearl's father. Consequently, Hester settles in an abandoned cabin on a patch of infertile land at the edge of town. Hester remains alienated from everyone, including the town fathers, respected women, beggars, children, and even*

strangers. Furthermore, Hester remains able to support herself due to her uncommon talent in needlework but brides will not wear the product of Hester Prynne's hands". (Coursework.info.com). Therefore, as Anna Karenina, Hester Prynne is alienated and isolated from the rest of the community. Anna Karenina also lives the consequences of her extramarital affair. Anna lives in disgrace and shame, after deciding to leave her husband, son and society. The scandalous aristocratic people, encourage Anna to leave St. Petersburg. Anna came to realize her situation fully when she went to attend the opera. "When Anna announces that she plans to attend the opera that evening. Vronsky begs her not to, warning her of the fact that the members of high society at the theater will scorn and humiliate her. He believes that she wishes to deliberately provoke and insult conventional society. Nevertheless, Anna leaves for the opera. Vronsky follows later and watches in horror as Anna is insulted by acquaintances in the neighboring box. Anna returns home angry and desperate. Vronsky reassures her of his love, and the two depart for the country side. Anna's humiliation in the theater is, of course, another case of isolation—a painful, forced ostracism "(SparkNotes Editors, 2002)

IV. Differences in the Characters of Hester Prynne and Anna Karenina:

- Anna commits suicide whereas Hester becomes something of a saint in the end. Hester grew into a saint by not only withstanding the negatives being hurled at her by society but also managing to earn a respectable living for herself and her child. In fact it became a common practice for the town's women to come and seek her counsel. *"She is an unceasingly generous*

giver, distributing food, necessities, and her precious garments to all who claim a need.

“None so ready as she to give of her little substance to every demand of poverty...None so self-devoted as Hester, when pestilence stalked through the town...She came, not as a guest, but as a rightful inmate, into the household that was darkened by trouble...” (p.179) She, in the words of Bill McKibben, a biblical scholar, has, “...fed the hungry, slaked the thirsty, clothed the naked, welcomed the stranger, and visited the prisoner”. She represents a “maternal figure” to society, specifically to women who are insecure about their identity—the scarlet letter undeniably being hers. She is, like Dimmesdale, a role model, and maybe even an angel to the people around her.” (en.allexperts.com). Anna commits suicide in tragic circumstances. She had become weary of her situation and finding no way out she decided that killing herself would solve all her problems. She completely disregards the people around her. It is something similar to what she had done at the start of the novel when she abandoned everything just to be with Vronsky. “Yes, hers was the fitting end for such a woman. Even the death she chose was low and vulgar. (Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, part eight, chapter IV)

- Vronsky seduces Anna whereas Dimmesdale gets seduced by Hester. It is quite apparent from the reading of the novel that initially many a times Anna was found admonishing herself for responding to Vronsky. Since she was a married woman with a son she naturally felt bad about the whole scenario. If it were not for the continued advances of Vronsky, Anna would never have walked that ill fated road. We have an insight into how Anna felt “*but at the very moment she was uttering the*

words, she felt that they were not true. She was not merely doubting herself, she felt emotion at the thought of Vronsky, and was going away sooner than she had meant, simply to avoid meeting him." (Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, part one, chapter XXVIII) Anna further gave us proof of her intentions when Vronsky met her at the station when she was on her way back home: "I didn't know you were going. What are you coming for?" she said, letting fall the hand with which she had grasped the door post. And irrepressible delight and eagerness shown on her face. "What am I coming for?" he repeated, looking straight into her eyes. "You know that I have come to be where you are," he said; "I can't help it." At that moment the wind, as it were, surmounting all obstacles, sent the snow flying from the carriage roofs, and clanked some sheet of iron it had torn off, while the hoarse whistle of the engine roared in front, plaintively and gloomily. All the awfulness of the storm seemed to her more splendid now. He had said what her soul longed to hear, though she feared it with her reason. She made no answer, and in her face he saw conflict. "Forgive me, if you dislike what I said," he said humbly. He had spoken courteously, deferentially, yet so firmly, so stubbornly, that for a long while she could make no answer. "It's wrong, what you say, and I beg you, if you're a good man, to forget what you've said, as I forget it," she said at last. "Not one word, not one gesture of yours shall I, could I, ever forget..." (Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, part one, chapter XXX). On the other hand we find Hester Prynne seducing Dimmesdale. She being young, beautiful, and robust strongly needed to be loved. Not knowing whether her husband is alive Hester found an apt lover in the form of the local minister Dimmesdale. One cannot help but think why she could not find some

one other than the minister in that community. Dimmesdale being the local minister and priest had been a sitting duck. He came in contact with Hester when she used to come to him for guidance and advice.

- Anna had a husband and a son so she had almost a complete family whereas Hester's husband was away and she was childless. We have already discussed how Anna initially tried to avoid Vronsky for the reason that she had a complete family life and did not want to get into an extra marital affair. Anna herself thought to herself in the novel, "*Come, it's all over, and thank God!*" was the first thought that came to Anna Arkadyevna, when she had said good-bye for the last time to her brother, who had stood blocking up the entrance to the carriage till the third bell rang. She sat down on her lounge beside Annushka, and looked about her in the twilight of the sleeping-carriage. "*Thank God! Tomorrow I shall see Seryozha and Alexey Alexandrovitch, and my life will go on in the old way, all nice and as usual.*" (Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, part one, chapter XXIX). We feel that she could not control her desires for long and had thus become a mistress to Vronsky and had finally ruined her life. As far as Hester Prynne is concerned she was young and newly married and had no children. Her husband had been missing for many years and there had been no news whether he was alive or dead. In this situation one can understand that Hester being green could go astray which she did. She like Anna became a mistress to Dimmesdale and in the process gave birth to an illegitimate daughter.
- Anna found a lustful lover while Hester a remorseful one. Vronsky was lustful in the sense that despite how hard Anna tried to shake him off he kept persisting and

imploring and thus always managing to have his way with her. Vronsky seems to be completely blinded by Anna's beauty. He did not even realize that she was a married woman. We come to know of his true feelings when he was travelling by the same train by which Anna was going to St. Petersburg, *"He felt himself a king, not because he believed that he had made an impression on Anna—he did not yet believe that,—but because the impression she had made on him gave him happiness and pride. What would come if it all he did not know, he did not even think. He felt that all his forces, hitherto dissipated, wasted, were centered on one thing, and bent with fearful energy on one blissful goal. And he was happy at it. He knew only that he had told her the truth, that he had come where she was, that all the happiness of his life, the only meaning in life for him, now lay in seeing and hearing her. And when he got out of the carriage at Bologova to get some seltzer water, and caught sight of Anna, involuntarily his first word had told her just what he thought. And he was glad he had told her it that she knew it now and was thinking of it. He did not sleep all night. When he was back in the carriage, he kept unceasingly going over every position in which he had seen her, every word she had uttered, and before his fancy, making his heart faint with emotion, floated pictures of a possible future."* (Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, part one, chapter XXXI). On the other hand we see how remorseful Dimmesdale had been throughout the novel. He suffers from the guilt to the extent that he finally died from the constant prick of his conscience. *"His position is all the more awkward for the simple reason that he was the local minister and he had no one to share his guilt with. Every human being needs the opportunity to express his feelings; otherwise the*

emotions are bottled up until they become unstable. It is almost as if the possessed physician, Roger Chillingworth, has trapped a volatile chemical (the secret of Dimmesdale's adultery) inside a vial (Dimmesdale) and now waits for the inevitable explosion (the revelation). Reverend Dimmesdale's pent-up feelings of guilt and shame became hazardous to his health. In Mr. Dimmesdale's secret closet, under lock and key, there was a bloody scourge . . . his brain often reeled, and visions seemed to flit before him."(Emma Jones, Literature-study-online.com)

- Despite all the odds Hester nurtures her child Pearl. She seems to care little for what people think of her. After the death of Dimmesdale she and Pearl inherited whatever belonged to Dimmesdale and both mother and daughter went away. Hester only came back after many years when she had had Pearl married. She resumed her old position by wearing the embroidered scarlet letter A on her bosom. Her love for Pearl could be gauged from her response to the Governor when he decided that Pearl should be taken away from her mother, "*Hester Prynne shows this defiant characteristic when Governor Bellingham tells her that it would be in Pearl's best interests if she were to be taken away from her mother, "clad soberly" and "disciplined strictly". She protests passionately, declaring: "Ye shall not take her! I will die first!" Up until this point, Hester has accepted the punishment chosen for her, but to take Pearl away would be crossing the line, and Hester stands up for herself and her belief that Pearl would be better off with her mother, and indeed, that she, Hester would be better off with Pearl ("Had they taken her from me, I would willingly have gone with thee into the forest, and signed my name in the Black Man's book."*).(Emma Jones, Literature-study-online.com).

- Anna's end suggests that moral corruption produces painful consequences while Hester's end suggests that immorality committed under particular conditions could make life worth living and full of adventure. We saw in the end how the actual meaning of the letter A changed. Previously it stood for adultery but later it ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world's scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe as well as reverence! We also saw how Anna's corruption destroyed her life. She became so blinded that she went ahead with Vronsky without realizing its consequences. By the time she realized her positions, she had gone too far. And the only choice she had was to commit suicide. Vronsky's mother aptly sums up Anna when she said, "*It was an awful time! No, say what you will, she was a bad woman. Why, what is the meaning of such desperate passions? It was all to show herself something out of the way. Well, and that she did do. She brought herself to ruin and two good men—her husband and my unhappy son.*" (Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, part eight, chapter IV). Anna's model leads to family integration while Hester's model leads to its disintegration. In the character of Anna we saw how one could ruin one's life when one becomes blinded by one's passions. What Anna did was against nature and thus nature intervened in order to restore the balance. One cannot help but feel sorry for Anna but then one realizes that perhaps that was the only solution for the entire problem. In case of Hester it is the total opposite of what we saw in Anna Karenina. It seems as if there was no guilty party at all. Dimmesdale got his punishment only because he was a priest. Otherwise he would also have gotten away with his crime.

V. Comparison and Contrast between the Approaches of the two Authors:

Both Hawthorn and Tolstoy had many contrasts in their approaches despite the fact that the themes they had chosen for their novels were more or less the same. It is the treatment of the two heroines at the end of the novels that should be questioned. Hawthorn lets Hester off and brings the entire burden of her sin on Chillingworth and Dimmesdale. He thinks that what Hester does is justifiable and that it is the right of every female to do as Hester has done. If one agrees to what Hawthorn is suggesting then this necessarily devalues the family. Hawthorne endorses women's right to get involved in extra marital affairs and have children. One cannot help but feel that Hawthorn's model is actually leading towards the disintegration of the family unit. On the other hand Tolstoy is all for family. He is a strong believer in the traditional orthodox doctrine that come what may, the family unit must be kept intact. He advocates this idea at the cost of the beautiful Anna when she commits suicide at the end of the novel.

VI. Camille Paglia's approach to the characters of Hester Prynne and Anna Karenina :

(Camille Anna Paglia (born April 2, 1947) is a US author, teacher, and social critic. A feminist Paglia (pronounced with a silent "g") has been a Professor at The University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania since 1984. She also writes articles on art, popular culture, feminism, and politics for mainstream newspapers and magazines. (Wikipedia))

It would not be an over statement to say that Hester had actually launched an open attack on religion. The way she enticed Arther Dimmesdale suggests that she completely disregarded the religious doctrine. Dimmesdale, being a preist, was a symbol of the church. Camille Paglia says, *"Happy are those periods*

when marriage and religion are strong. System and order shelter us against sex and nature. Unfortunately, we live in a time when the chaos of sex has broken into the open. (Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae* ch.1, p25) The order that Paglia refers to is the order of the religion. No matter how weak Puritan society was during the days of Hester, still there was some sort of religious order. Hester went against that religious order and hence she had to be banished from the society. Anna, on the other hand, disregards the family system. We know how happily she was married with a lovely son and a well off husband, yet she goes against the family tradition. Hester Prynne is actually the creator of “the chaos of sex”. She seems to be the fore runner to what Paglia refers to as the chaos of sex which is prevalent in today’s Western world. According to Paglia, Hester is a pagan. *G. Wilson Knight remarks, “Christianity came originally as a tearing down of taboos in the name of a sacred humanity; but the Church it gave rise to, has never yet succeeded in Christianizing the pagan evil magic of sex.” Historiography’s most glaring error has been its assertion that Judeo-Christianity defeated paganism. Paganism has survived in the thousand forms of sex, art, and now the modern media. The latent paganism of Western culture has burst forth again in all its daemonic vitality.*” (Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae* ch.1, p25).

Promiscuity is one of the core issues of both these novels (*The Scarlet Letter* and *Anna Karenina*). Both the major characters Hester and Anna were involved in extra marital affairs. We know how Tolstoy dealt with his heroin Anna in the end when she killed herself by committing suicide. On the other hand Hawthorne, instead of punishing his heroin, actually glorified her doings. Paglia is aware of the existence of promiscuity among females. She commented that, “The old “double standard” gave men a sexual liberty denied to women. Promiscuity in men may cheapen love but sharpen thought. Promiscuity in women is illness, a leakage of identity. The promiscuous woman is self-

contaminated and incapable of clear ideas. Male chase and female flight are not just a social game. The double standard may be one of nature's organic laws. Woman and nature stand ever ready to reduce the male to boy and infant". (Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, ch.1 p27). Paglia considers promiscuity among women as an "illness". According to her, promiscuity in men is a source of sharpening of thought examples of which could be such famous figures as Oscar Wilde, Lord Byron, and Shakespeare. Promiscuity in females contaminates them. A promiscuous woman is unable to think clearly. She gets corrupted not just physically but also morally and mentally. Hester Prynne and Anna Karenina both could not think sanely and became devoid of clear thinking. We know how Hester managed "to reduce" Arthur Dimmesdale, the reverend, to a mere "boy and infant." When Hester spun her web by turning on all her charms, Dimmesdale could not escape her snare. He had to submit to her despite his position in the society. The Bible is quite clear on promiscuity, "*Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.*"(Corinthians 6:18). It further states that, "*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*" (Corinthians 6:9-10). Hester in actuality attacks not only the church by luring Dimmesdale but she also actually negates the teachings of the Bible.

Paglia states that Christianity is unable to sort-out and protect the rights of women. Despite all its tall claims, woman is still treated as a play thing and is exploited as a sex tool. She rightly states that, "*Islam is wise to drape women in black, for the eye is the avenue of eros.*" (Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae* ch.1, p32).

Both Hester and Anna, in the end, despite the similarity of their sin have a different ending. We have seen how Hester proved to be successful, despite being a sinner. While Anna, on the other hand has been punished for doing something against nature and social norms. Hence it is quite clear that Hester is actually a precursor of the modern Western sexually liberated woman while Anna is not. The simple reason being that Tolstoy has shown her being properly punished for the sin that she had committed. If Anna were also a precursor of the modern Western sexually liberated woman then she would have been similarly glorified as Hester has been glorified by the author in the end.

VII. Conclusion:

In the *Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, the character Hester Prynne is viewed as a tragic heroine. Hester Prynne commits adultery and under Puritan laws, she has to wear a symbol for the rest of her life (The embroidered letter A). As her punishment, Hester Prynne suffers from the consequences of her sin. In *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy, the main character Anna is seen as a tragic heroine. Anna is a beautiful and elegant housewife who falls in love with Count Vronsky. The adulterous relationship disturbs their position in society and forces Anna to go into self exile in order to avoid the social life. In the end circumstance force her to commit suicide. Tolstoy is a strong believer in maintaining family traditions and upholding the family unit. Hawthorn's novel is against the family unit and suggests that even if one is involved in adultery, one can still not only survive but can also actually become a saint. We saw this happening in the case of Hester Prynne when she actually became a saint in the eyes of the local people specially the women folk. Hester therefore refers to the sexually liberated i.e. promiscuous women characteristics of modern/post modern Western society which Camille Paglia has shown.

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