

**Article 4**

***Rebellion and Resistance in selected works of Nathaniel Hawthorne Kate Chopin, Zora Neale Hurston, And Alice Walker.***



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**ABSTRACT**

The literary works entitled Rebellion and Resistance in the selected works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Kate Chopin, Zola Neale Hurston and Alice Walker set out to exhibit the different degrees of feminist awareness, which criticises the different forms of restrictions imposed on women in society. It tackles a topical issue, that of feminist consciousness in an era of massive violations of the rights of women. These violations have various forms: sexual assault, sexual slavery, forced marriage, physical aggression and other gender based violence.

These works investigate the struggle of American Women to achieve personalized identities. It is based on the assumption that the social construction enforcing prescriptive roles on women leads to various forms of rebellion and resistance, fragmentation and the consequent redefinition of the female identity.

Through the use of Feminist, New Historist and psychological approaches, this study criticises the dominance of male perspectives rooted in the judeo-christian religion with regard to gender considerations, marriage of convenience, traditions, cultures and class difference which in practice restricted women's place in society.

This study demonstrates that independence is sometimes achieved through self-determination, self-realisation, self-definition, rebellion or violent reactions even though one can succumb to despair during the process.

This work is also part of a broad current of social reform, which also included a movement advocating the rights of women.

**Key Words:** Feminism, matriarchy, gender,

**RESUME:**

*Ce travail littéraire intitulé « rébellion et résistance en référence avec les œuvres choisies de Nathaniel Hawthorne, Kate Chopin, Zora Neale Hurston et Alice Walker » veut*

*montrer les degrés de prise de conscience féminine face aux restrictions sociales qui violent le droit des femmes. Il analyse la domination du mâle dans toutes ses formes à savoir : l'agression sexuelle, l'esclavage sexuel, le mariage forcé, l'agression physique et violence basée sur le genre.*

*Il faut souligner aussi la quête effrénée du personnage féminin pour l'autodétermination. Il est basé sur l'hypothèse selon laquelle l'oppression sociale qui limite l'épanouissement des femmes a amené celles-ci à des réactions violentes et de rébellion qui figurent une pétition d'émergence vers l'indépendance.*

*Une lecture féministe fonde dans un ordre chronologique la base théorique de ce travail. L'approche psychologique assimilant le roman à un rêve, à la manière de Freud nous a permis de faire l'analyse des souhaits et l'étude du courage et de défier des traditions millénaires qui ont réprimé la liberté des femmes. Le new historicisme décrit l'histoire culturelle et intellectuelle d'un peuple particulier dans son contexte historique.*

*En définitive, ce travail veut montrer que la liberté est quelque chose qui peut s'arracher même aux prix de son âme.*

*Cet article se situe dans le cadre des réformes sociales pour le droit des femmes.*

**Mots clés :** *féminisme, matriarchie, genre*

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## INTRODUCTION

Women have somehow been underrepresented in a literary tradition written by men. Because of the male's extended prejudice toward them, women were simply excluded from literary works and found themselves on the peripheries of literary traditions. This article tackles the topical issues of resistance and rebellion demonstrated by women to overcome their oppression. Women, black and white alike, are victimised or oppressed by men. They are refused certain rights to certain activities. Many politicians, writers, ideologies, traditions and laws, define them negatively. According to an anti-feminist French politician, Napoleon Bonaparte, a woman is one of her husband's properties. One can read his assertion quoted by Robert Morgan (1970),

*Nature intended women to be our slaves...They are our property, we are not theirs. They belong to us just as a tree that bears fruit belongs to a gardener. What a mad idea to demand equality for women...women are nothing but machines for producing children (Morgan: 32).*

This work investigates the struggle of American Women to achieve personalized identities. It is based on the assumption that the social construction enforcing prescriptive roles on women leads to various forms of resistance, fragmentation and the consequent redefinition of the female identity. Through the use of Feminist, New Historist and psychological approaches, the study criticises the dominance of male perspectives rooted in the Judeo Christian religion with regard to gender considerations, marriage of convenience, traditions, cultures and class difference which in practice restricted women's place in society.

This study proves that independence is sometimes achieved through self-determination, self-realisation, self-definition, rebellion or violent reactions even though one can succumb to despair during the process. The work is also part of a broad current of social reform, which also included a movement advocating the rights of women. In the face of that acute crisis of gender, women start reacting psychologically, physically and sexually to gender barriers. Such consciousness will be evident in this article. This is a strong indication of self-realization, awareness and subsequent rebellion.

This study analyses how women became conscious of their oppression and how they decide to define themselves despite many hindrances. To better understand the reaction of the protagonists we will develop a brief account of the socio political and historical contexts, which have sparked the feminist movement in America. Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were God mentioned that "black woman is the mule of the world", Hurston's view of black women's status in America in the folk wisdom was given to Janie Sparks by her grandmother who says: "De white man throw down the load and tell de nigger man to pick it up because ha have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule of the world so far as Ah can see (Hurston; 29)".





Born out of the abolitionist struggle, American feminism began in a great affirmation of the unity of these two struggles and as long as the issue was the abolition of slavery the alliance remained secure. Alongside their male counterparts, black women got an experience from the legacy of the battle against slavery. There were also collective efforts, like those led by Harriet Tubman. She was called the "Black Moses" because of her role as a leader in the Underground Railroad, a secret escape route to the North used by many slaves. Many white women were inspired by the fight against slavery. The struggle against slavery and the women's rights movement had a common enemy.

What is important to know is that sometimes people are forced to change by those who are more powerful. Sometimes they change without even realizing it, growing or evolving along with other developments. Sometimes they feel injustice or limitation and resolve to overcome these difficulties and sometimes they consciously claim new opportunities never before imagined. The United States and the Mid-West had a developed sense of gender distinction and the existence of a strict division of labour, which both have disenfranchised women from the public sphere and economic opportunities. The public world, culture and society outside the family, was the world of men while women are at home (Cathy 888). In The Scarlet Letter, it is said: "*Hester's only real comfort was when the child lay in the placidity of sleep.*" Same as Edna, her area of intervention is to stay home and take care of children.

Talking politics and defining important issues are the monopoly of men. Women are judged by men as incompetent in discussing such issues. That is why during Hester's trial, no women were counted among the judges and the puritan rulers. They become conscious themselves and aspire above their traditional role of being in the kitchen and decide to be active in the public sphere.

The main concern of this article is to answer the following questions: How do women react to conditions imposed on them to redefine themselves? For the given reason this article will deal with all American women (black and white alike) in the domain of literature. As a guideline, this work will be divided into three sections, which are as follows: transgender, transgression, physical and sexual awareness.

## **TRANSGENDER**

Women realised that they were being oppressed under the banner of sexism, patriarchy and racism. More and more, they realised that their oppression was becoming less bearable. Women of various classes, racial and ethnic backgrounds devoted tremendous energy to the political movements such as the civil rights and black power struggle, the anti war, anti-poverty and labour movement.



The concept of matriarchy can be understood in terms of the battle of women for an equal chance for both black and white women who have continued to be on the front lines of all aspects of the black liberation struggles. Currently, there are significant developments that must be taken into account in discussing black women and the family. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of families headed by black women. Sofia's tragic defiance against the mayor and his wife at the suggestion of domestic service in The Color Purple culminates in her arrest and thereafter the mitigation of her punishment in the form of employment in the mayor's household. Moreover, the novel makes apparent Sophia's unwillingness considered as detachment from the mayor's family not only suggests her unhappy state but also provides as insight into the inner life of the quadroon nurse and numerous black servants maintaining the domestic sphere in The Awakening.

In addition, the social decay characteristic of advanced capitalism in crisis is increasing the divorce rate among blacks. The same social crisis, however, also contains its positive seeds. It is creating a greater objective need for an interest in the struggle for black liberation and social change among black women who bear a disproportionate burden of the current crisis. The crisis is laying the basis for a collective approach to solving problems that more and more black women are experiencing along with the entire society.

Many women (both white and black) in the women's liberation movement in the United States basically accept the capitalist system and simply work toward integrating women into that system on an equal basis. Though they may understand the oppressive nature of patriarchy, many do not see that the capitalist system itself ensures the exploitation of people. This is not how the masses of black women have analyzed their situation and have plotted the course of their struggle. In short, black women face conditions of oppression and mounting problems that are similar to but also different from Black men but black women will continue to go forward to uphold their rich legacy as active fighters for the full freedom of all black people and an end to their own special "triple oppression".

At the same time, on the literary scene, writers were at the forefront of the struggle to criticize and reject completely the passive roles imposed upon women. They desire to create their own roles rather than to slip into patterns prescribed by tradition. In these novels under study, these writers investigate the gender discrimination in employment, education and politics with an analysis of gender oppression in private, familial and sexual contexts.

Gender revolution has developed in many areas and forms as portrayed in the novel. These are transgender transgression, sexual and physical awareness. White and black American women alike realise that their oppression is due simply to male chauvinism. They therefore have an

extremely anti- male tone. For example, Edna, as a white woman stands up to Leonce Pontellier the same night of her groundbreaking swim. She says no to him and will not follow him inside. This lack of obedience angers him. She has awakened from a nap and it seems a dependent life that she hopes to leave behind as well.

In a similar situation, Celie, a black woman, one day told her husband that: *“You a low down dog is what is wrong. It is time to leave you and enter into the creation and your dead body just the welcome mat I need telling of Mr Albert for the first time. (Walker:211)”*

Gender resistance feminism claimed that gender order cannot be made gender neutral because male dominance is too strong. Feminists were concerned with patriarchal gender structure and gender ideology. Some were considered cultural feminists who were concerned with countering the negative images of women with valorisations for their nurturance, emotional supportiveness and mothering (radical, lesbian, Marxist). When Edna began to express her freedom considering her marriage as purely an incident, it triggered Mr Pontellier's mind to wonder if his wife was not growing a little unbalanced mentally. However, no constraints prevented some courageous white women from fighting against their oppression.

As for black American women, racial consciousness is also added to the types of discriminations mentioned above. Hester, Edna, Janie and Celie, respectively protagonists of The Scarlet Letter, The Awakening, Their Eyes Were Watching God, and The Color Purple are all prototypes of women who struggle to get out from their oppression to have jobs. They neglect households; they consider their house as a kind of prison (Edna) and a working career on the outside as a kind of liberation (Celie).

Although marriage, sexuality and feminist issues are significant themes developed in those novels under study, the themes of “resistance “and rebellion “are also significant for many reasons. Janie for instance survives three marriages. The resistance and rebellion we refer to here is the systems mentioned above, we mean patriarchy, sexism, capitalism.

Kate Chopin’s once banned novel explores Edna Pontellier’s resistance to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian norm for womanhood in order to show at least woman’s identity could not be realized within the prescribed sex roles of her culture. In The Awakening, the protagonist Edna Pontellier demonstrates the intuition that life is incomplete and partial, consisting of the “outward existence that conforms, the inward life which questions” (Chopin: 17).

The outward existence conforms to the order and precepts of society and is immersed in the symbolic order of law and culture. However, docile conformity is undermined once incongruities between societal decrees and natural phenomena are perceived. Anti-essentialist theorists such as



Kristeva, Butler, and Judith Haberstam believe that identities such as gender categories are not natural givens but are rather socially defined by identification of characteristics.

The biological accident of having been born with certain anatomical organs does not automatically determine one's destiny. Furthermore, a person's biological-anatomical makeup in no way in and of itself suggests or indicates that he or she must perform certain duties in life and act or think a certain way. Society writes the script and disseminates the fiction of femininity and masculinity. However, it is sometimes demonstrated that the line of demarcation between the categories of male and female, i.e. femininity and masculinity, is not as stable as or natural as it seems. Perhaps contemporary theories in art and science at the time Chopin's text was written partly informed concepts of gender and sex. Chopin and to some extent Walker resist entering contemporary debate in art and the aesthetic since to do so would mean indirectly subscribing to categorization and definition. In general the novels aim at subverting society's rigid categorization of gender and definition of femininity and masculinity.

## TRANSGRESSION

As for sexism, the portrayal of women in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God provides tremendous insight into the role of African American women mainly through the different relationships that Janie has with her three husbands. Just like Celie in The Color Purple, she is seen as being victimised by men and by her own passive acceptance of their treatment of her. She accepts her role as a commodity in respect of gender differences between man and woman. She is used for sex labour or scapegoating because she can conceive of no other life. White or black, the sexual division of labour was found to be not just a division but also a hierarchy of labour and not just one of labour but primarily a sexual division of value and reward (Mary Beth: 9).

At home, a woman must be submissive and the attributes of true womanhood by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbours and society even religion are piety, submissiveness and domesticity (Welter qtd in Beth: 115). If Hester was condemned, it is because she did not embody or respect these virtues. It was a tradition that many male writers, religious, ideological and scientific theories portrayed women negatively. They seem to have transformed the image of the biblical Eve to a universal archetype of women.

Freud for instance maintains, *women are not whole human beings but mutilated males who long all their lives for a penis and must struggle to reconcile themselves to its lack.*" In opposition to her role as an obedient lady, Edna begins to claim self-control by dismissing Léonce's demands. The first time she disobeys her husband is when he tells her to leave the porch and go to bed since it is after one in the morning. His first command is met with refusal, so he attempts to alter



his condescending tone and requests her to go inside “with a note of entreaty” (53). Edna stands her ground and tells him, “No; I am going to stay out here” (53). Quite irritated that this fails, Pontellier again reverts to an authoritative tone as he commands, “You must come in the house instantly” (53). Léonce’s assumed power over Edna in this scene cannot be attributed to a domineering personality because his “authority is implicit in his role as husband in nineteenth-century society and his use of the modal auxiliary verb ‘must’ signals the explicit power relations between husband and wife that Edna is attempting to alter” . Edna doesn’t disobey because she disrespects Léonce but because she desires a sense of self-empowerment and is increasingly becoming intolerant of her husband’s authoritative status. That is why the word “must” makes Edna even more opposed to his commands and “with a writing motion she settled herself more securely in the hammock. She perceived that she will have blazed up, stubborn and resistant, she could not at that moment have done other than denied and resisted (Chopin: 53).

At the end of this passage Edna transforms from a submissive housewife to an independent woman. In response to his command that she must come into the house, she says, “*Don’t speak to me like that again; I shall not answer you*” ( Walker :53). It is at this point that she transitions from merely thinking for herself and desiring to gain control, to telling Léonce that he is no longer in control. Her assertion is an attempt to be seen as an independent adult and when he realizes that he will not be heeded, he sits on the porch with her and smokes a cigar. It is ironic that the scene ends with Edna asking Léonce if he is ready to go inside. Even though, “she does not, however, command him as he did her, her success in deciding when to go inside is a breakthrough as it is the first time she is controlled and shows that she is unwilling to accept to authority.

Leonce no longer has the role of authority that men were assigned to in their society. Edna’s new found autonomy also results in her abandonment of all womanly duties dictated by society. Her behavior changes.

Janie in Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God experienced three successive marriages in search for her sexual fulfilment. Tea Cake, who is the last of her husbands, provides the ultimate fulfilment of her idealism regarding what marriage ought to and should be. These are briefly how women began to express their consciousness in the novels, which are at the basis of our analysis. They realised that in marriage, the actions and the rights of married women are often restricted.

That is to say, married women could not control their own property or earnings or enter into contracts, nor could they claim custody of their children. However, Janie has abandoned three husbands because fulfilment is not granted but men. She transcends the law code of being submissive and respecting marriage until death.



The Awakening, for instance, shows Edna's increasing self-awareness; she awakens from her loveless marriage, her imprisoned situation as a married woman, mother and good wife to seek fulfilment in the arms of men and in the studio artists. In order to fulfil, Edna moves out of her husband's house and leaves the two children she has behind in favour of living indecently. The move symbolizes that she rejects her role as a conscientious housewife. Her full abandonment of familial duties can be critiqued as selfish but without the move, there is no way for her to escape the oppression that causes her depression. In that mental state, she would not be a nurturing mother nor would she be of any use to her husband.

In the same vein Celie transcends the natural action of lovemaking between a male and a female. In order to emancipate, she should know herself not only emotionally but also physically. She regains the control of her body with Shug's encouragement after viewing her sexual organ in a mirror for the first time and shouts "It is mine" «Shug initiates Celie to the pleasure of sex and after lovemaking Celie feels true love for the first time with a fellow female. She feels transformed when she says "It feels like that heaven is what it feels like, not like sleeping with Mr \_ at all (Walker 98). Janie started refusing the mayor's proposal to stay home as a wife, being at home for her is a kind of prison and slavery.

Another attitude is Edna's in «The Awakening» by Kate Chopin, a number of brief scenes, almost like paintings or a series of tableaux that are clean, direct reminders of how far the protagonist has strayed from her assigned duties as wife and mother as well as, on a much grander scale, the conventions of Victorian society.

Some women not only ignore but also militantly regret the absence of meaning in people's lives. They prefer to be lesbians or to commit abortion as a way to freedom.

That gender discrimination in employment, education and politics with an analysis of gender oppression in private, familial, sexual life and culture led women to use some inappropriate strategies and options to struggle for their freedom may justify some of the protagonists' fatal end. Some protagonists are simply perceived as anti-children as Edna has abandoned her own children; anti men as Celie to Albert or anti-family as Janie with three successive marriages. They regarded marriage as a kind of prison, with a working career on the outside as a kind of liberation.

Hester Prynne, protagonist of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter. The novel, which was published in 1850, yet set in seventeenth-century Puritan New England, tells the story of Hester, an adulterous woman who is punished for her 'crime' by being made to wear a scarlet letter 'A' on her bosom. Hester harbored an intense love for her child Pearl although the child's mischievous and imp-like qualities brought nothing but pain to the child's mother. This is demonstrated as



Hester, after having her talents as a seamstress publicized, began to change the attire of her family. For example,

*Her own dress was of the coarsest materials and the most somber hue; with only that one ornament, the scarlet letter, which it was her doom to wear. The child's attire, on the other hand, was distinguished by a fanciful, or, we may rather say, a fantastic ingenuity, which served, indeed, to heighten the airy charm that early began to develop itself in the little girl. [Nathaniel 83]*

This demonstrates that although Hester herself would dress only plainly in order to redeem her lost purity, she wished to make her child stand out. She had such an intense love for the child that she wanted only the absolute best for Pearl. Also, Hester was simply astounded and horrified at the idea of Pearl being taken away from her when this question was brought to the governor. This is demonstrated in the lines,

*'Speak thou for me!' cried she. 'Thou wast my pastor, and hadst charge of my soul, and knowest me better than these men can. I will not lose the child! Speak for me! Thou knowest, - for thou hast sympathies which these men lack! - thou knowest what is in my heart, and what are a mother's rights, and how much the stronger they are, when that mother has but her child and the scarlet letter! Look thou to it! I will not lose the child! Look to it!' (Nathaniel: 113)*

Hester's speech demonstrated that her only true reason for life was the child and that if the one richness of her life was devoured by Puritan thought and society, she would have lost all. Her child was her heart, love and life. It was all that she had left to lose and she would do anything to protect her Pearl. Hester seems to love Pearl to a greater degree than Edna loved her children and in that respect, in her devotion to little Pearl, Hester could be seen as fitting the mould of a stereotypically 'true woman' more accurately than Edna does. Yet Hester does not fit this mould perfectly. There is the obvious discrepancy of her adulterous affair with Reverend Dimmesdale but Hester also secretly disobeyed the codes of her society by harboring visionary thoughts:

*In her lonesome cottage, by the sea-shore, thoughts visited her, such as dared to enter no other dwelling in New England; shadowy guests, that would have been as perilous as demons to their entertainer, could they have been seen so much as knocking at her door. [Nathaniel 164]*

These forbidden thoughts were of social reform, especially concerned with the role of women in society. Hester believes that, “*the whole of society is to be torn down, and built up anew[...] before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position (Nathaniel : 165).*” So, in effect, we can observe how society's attitudes changed during the nineteenth century through the characters of the novels written at this time. At the beginning of the nineteenth-century), Hester Prynne disobeys the codes of her harsh society by committing



adultery, and during the latter part of the century, Edna Pontellier disobeys completely the set codes of her society and failing to find a place in that society escaped by means of suicide.



Although these female characters were from different times, backgrounds and cultures, the four novels were all written during different stages of the nineteenth century. They can therefore show us how the authors of this time became more daring and defiant in the creation of these characters. Kate Chopin was ostracized from society when The Awakening was first published. This was because her character, Edna made such a departure from the female characters of earlier nineteenth-century novels, that it shocked and appalled her society. It would seem that, in the course of one century, we have moved from the perfect female character to the complete opposite, in the form of Edna Pontellier. This reflects the changing attitudes towards women's role in society, at least to some degree.

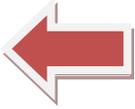
About thirty years after the publication of The Awakening. Edna refuses to be seen as a possession, so she moves out of her grand, comfortable abode into 'the Pigeon House' where she can lead an independent life free from the restraints imposed upon her by her husband, and society as a whole. She strives to find a room of her own, yet towards the end of the novel, she realizes that Robert will not follow her in her rebellion against the codes of their society, which would mean that she would live a solitary and lonely existence, which turned out to be worse than death, in her mind.

In The Scarlet Letter, set in a 17th Century Puritan community, a young woman accused of political power proves that she had an affair with someone other than her husband. She serves some time in the town prison and after her release is made to wear a scarlet letter made of cloth upon her chest as a badge of shame.

During the course of the story, the scarlet letter takes on many direct and implied meanings. The most obvious representation of the scarlet letter that Hester Prynne must wear pinned to her chest is the crime she was accused of, adultery. The letter is to serve as a constant reminder to her and others of her shortcomings and sin.

In their struggle for self-assertion, some of them are sexually promiscuous, immoral or sometimes lack human compassion by being anti-children, anti-men, anti-marriage or anti-housewives. As one can read in The Scarlet Letter

*Let men tremble to win the hand of woman, unless they win along with it the utmost passion of her heart! Else it may be their miserable fortune, as it was Roger Chillingworth's, when some mightier touch than their own may have awakened all her sensibilities ( Hawthorne: 176).*



## PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL AWARENESS

Sex has been also another weapon used by men to oppress women; sexual awareness has been another strategy that some characters like Hester Prynne, Janie, Celie have used to overcome the preconceived opinion of sex that men have. Celie has been the subject of repeated rapes and beatings; therefore, she has no desire to get to know her body. The only concept that Celie has of her own body is that she is ugly. To protect herself, she has had to eradicate her body as well as her soul. However, in order to emancipate herself, a woman should know herself not only emotionally but also physically.

The Scarlet Letter is a novel based on the the sin of adultery. Hester, the main character, slept with another man, thus having a child with him while she was already married. The Awakening is a novel that is based on selfhood and feminism. Edna does not love her husband the way that he loves her, so she gains feelings for several other men. Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel The Scarlet Letter, and Kate Chopin's The Awakening, both have similar motifs, yet differ in many ways, like the actions of Hester and Edna and how the other characters affect Hester and Edna, which all affect the views on women and femininity. Hester commits adultery by sleeping with Arthur Dimmesdale thus causing her to have a baby with him that she loves dearly. The problem is that Hester already has a husband, whose name is Chillingworth but she did not love him as much he loved her. Now, she has to wear a scarlet letter, which is an "A," on her chest at all times until she finally reveals who the father of her child is. "Here, there was the taint of deepest sin in the most sacred quality of human life, working such effect that the world was only the darker for this woman's beauty, and the more lost for the infant that she had borne." (Hawthorne, 54) The sin that Hester created is hidden behind her beauty and her child. Divine Maternity is a great image for Puritans, which Hester was. As for Edna, she also does not love her husband but she does love her two children. Since Edna does not feel the same way for her husband, feelings for other men start to occur; not only one, but several others. "Beneath its pink-lined shelter were his wife, Mrs. Pontellier, and young Robert Lebrun." (Chopin, 2) Robert was one of the men Edna would flirt with and ended up having feelings for. However, Robert cared about Edna too much to have her commit adultery. Both Hester and Edna had to marry during their time but they did not love their husbands, so they separatedn.

Edna, who is a married woman, seeks a true fulfilment in other men's hands: First Robert and then Arobin can be considered at that time as an immoral and anti-marriage attitude. From the point of view of some critics, she should have made the right choice at the beginning to choose only one husband. Her case is adultery and it is bad to consider it as a path to freedom. Adultery and divorce are also the paths that Janie has chosen for her self-fulfilment. She undergoes the process of self-discovery, as she evolves through her experiences with three marriages and three

different husbands. Janie defies conventions but at the end, she shoots her last husband whom she loves. Here we refer to radical feminism, which has no place for men in accordance with each character's options; some have led themselves to self-destruction. Feminist consciousness as we have defined above is a process by which women can make a better condition for themselves.

In their rebellion, women go also against some longstanding conventions of society and even against the contract of marriage. Women have done so through the character of Hester Prynne. She had had extramarital sexual intercourse with someone who is not her husband; this was an unforgivable sin (Hawthorne 57). The overriding Puritan doctrine dictates that Hester must be exorcised from the community to maintain religion pure from insanity.

Hester foresees a revolution concerning gender she is a revolutionary in a world that is not ready for revolution, which is why she becomes its apostle on a small scale. The narrator states that it is Hester's

*firm belief, that, at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness. (P. 263)*

Yet another expression of sexual revolution can be found in the act of adultery of Hester with Dimmesdale. Hester chooses to sleep with Dimmesdale out of her own free will and in doing so she defies both her moral obligation towards her husband and Puritan law. The connection between sexuality and womanhood is an important theme in The Scarlet Letter. Sex, however, is nowhere mentioned in The Scarlet Letter and the narrator tries to distance Hester from her act by presenting her as dignified and overcome by feelings of guilt. Her behavior when she is in the forest, however, proves that Hester does not feel as guilty as she appears to counsel Dimmesdale to keep courage.

## CONCLUSION

We have just seen that in the face of the acute crisis of gender affecting every facet of women's lives, they were not passive. Many women were determined to create ways in which they themselves grew into feminist consciousness. They contributed enormously to creating a supporting female network and new structure for living. They raised a revolutionary challenge to the old century's practice by which the bodies and lives of women are dominated and ruled by man-made laws. When analysing these two races of American women, a question arises whether there are many parallels between the struggle and the movement on the part of black women and white women for total emancipation. There are certain comparisons that one can make because they both live under the same exploitative system.



The role of women in society has nearly always been, until recent times, one of oppression. They have been relegated to the home, assumed as inferior, patronized and infantilized by men and unfairly treated as a different 'category' of human being. Throughout the majority of developed human societies, this record of patriarchy and misogyny has remained consistent. The selected novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Kate Chopin, Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker address women characters who live in times before the resurgence of woman's empowerment and feminism. They must struggle not only with their own personal obstacles but with the expectations and requirements of an unjust and sometimes dangerous culture surrounding them. When analysing the basic ingredients in a socio cultural analysis of gender we realized that specific features of culture influence specific aspects of the lives of women and women who are the protagonists in the novels under study. Key elements of culture are described and illustrated. These include norms, roles, social status, stereotypes, ideology and values. This means that being a woman or man depends on the person's sociocultural context. The lives of women and men are shaped in crucial ways by the social and cultural worlds they inhabit.

Today, American women have seen few changes in their lives in spite of their multiple efforts. Unless they have found that their subjugation goes far beyond the formal denial of civil rights, they have discovered that again and again, liberation still lay ahead. Industries and some institutions support a subtle conspiracy which undermines women's social and economic advance.

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