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Abstract: *This article examines Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen and The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne through a feminist prism with reference to the characters of Elizabeth Bennet and Hester Prynne. Both of the women defy and surpass the social conventions in their respective patriarchal and puritanical cultures. This paper examines how the feminist theoretical positions (especially standpoint theory and embodiment) help Elizabeth oppose the marriage norms, and Hester transform shame into strength in ways that challenge the patriarchal structures that seek to define and marginalize them. The contrast between these two characters shows how the feminist thinking changes and finds its reflection in literature. Elizabeth and Hester are not only defiant of the conventional gender expectations but also demand their independence and re-negotiated identities which can be useful in examining the gendered power structures in their societies. This paper therefore examines how the two characters cross the boundaries which have been placed on them and exhibit feminist concepts of self-determination and self-powering.*

Keywords: Resistance to marginalization; Feminist consciousness; Renegotiated identities; standpoint theory; embodiment; Gendered power structures.

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Introduction

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen 5). This is a Famous line from *Pride and Prejudice*, the primary social expectation in Regency England that entails women to get married to gain security and status. In her turn, the story of Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* starts with her being publicly shamed due to the adultery into which she has engaged and that also questions societal and religious conventions as she has to wear the scarlet letter A on her chest in order to represent her sin. The two characters: Elizabeth Bennet and Hester Prynne are faced with the same social order which aims to define them and to restrict them, although they both resist in different ways, which is influenced by their respective social settings.

Elizabeth goes against the patriarchal roles of a woman as a requirement of a woman to marry so that she can have financial stability by turning down the proposal by Mr. Collins who is a marriage that would offer her financial stability though without love. Elizabeth cherishes love, respect to each other and intellectual match-making, so her refusal is feminist protest to the social and gender convention. Hester, on the other hand, defies the Puritanical domination by turning her punishment, which was inflicted upon her publicly, into a personal source of power. A scarlet letter, which was originally set as a sign of shame, turns into a sign of the strength of Hester and her protest.

In this article, the feminist theories (especially the standpoint one and the embodiment) offer the perspective according to which it is possible to explain the opposition of Elizabeth and Hester to the social conventions. According to the standpoint theory, because of their social status, especially women, are in a position to view and criticize the prevailing institutions of power, where they gain an insight that can be used to sway others. In the case of Elizabeth, it can enable her to criticize marriage as a social institution. In the case of Hester, she sees the hypocrisy of Puritanical society critically because of her marginalized status.

Literature Review

Feminist literary criticism has traditionally been concerned with the definition, limitation or disappearance of women in fiction by patriarchal societies. The idea of 'The Others" as created by Simone de Beauvoir explains the manner in which women in many cases are defined in accordance to

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the subjectivity of men and not as independent individuals and this can be extended to the manner in which both Elizabeth Bennet and Hester Prynne are created as characters in both novels. The theory by De Beauvoir can be used in shaping the way in which both characters oppose the demands of their society by establishing their subjectivity. Critics like Elaine Showalter, by her gynocriticism, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, by their feminist reading of the literary canon, have examined the way in which the characters and authors of the 19th century managed this marginalization. The gynocriticism theory by Showalter and The Madwoman in the Attic by Gilbert and Gubar are concerned with the ways the female writers and characters construct their own storeys, not necessarily shaped by the patriarchal norms, and with how the female writers dwell upon the oppression of women in their literary characters, respectively.

Feminist standpoint theorists Nancy Hartsock and Sandra Harding have claimed that marginalisation of women presents a distinctive viewpoint of power structures critique. The marginal roles of Elizabeth and Hester allow them to gain experience with the rules of gender roles and social lives. Standpoint theory assists in explaining their rebellion to the patriarchal system.

Embodiment theorists, including Iris Marion Young and Judith Butler, stress the way the female body is both oppressive and resistant at the same time. The physical and moral change of Hester and the rejection of the suitor by Elizabeth demonstrate their independence, which is going against the gender expectations of their respective societies. These feminist theories provide a model through which the characters can be discussed in terms of their criticism and opposition to how patriarchal systems attempt to define them.

In the article "The Impact of the Feminist Heroine: Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*," Chang explores the dismissal of the marriage proposal of Mr. Collins by Elizabeth Bennet as a symbolic feminist gesture. Chang writes, "She will not bend to her mother's will and accept a marriage proposal from Mr. Collins due to his conceited nature. Elizabeth's rejection of societal conventions illustrates her feminism" (76).

The reason why Elizabeth turned down Collins is a sign of her rebellion against the social expectations of women having to get married as convenient, especially to gain financial or social protection. Rather, she insists on her individuality and right and wrong, giving her heart and mind what matters more than social norms. This is an indication that she does not succumb to patriarchal pressures and makes Elizabeth a feminist heroine who does not obey the role of women and adheres to her own expectations of marriage and personal integrity.

According to Gesmaloni, the laws governing inheritance in Pride and Prejudice highlights the economic marginalization of women in the first half of the 19th century. In the article "The Power and Discrimination of Women as Seen in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the author writes, "Because women cannot accept the inheritance from their fathers, therefore women are required to marry rich

men to improve social class and economic life" (105). This is a point that underscores the agency in women that was limited with marriage as the only tool that could be used to gain economic and social stability. Elizabeth Bennet however questions this system. The fact that she turned down the proposal of Mr. Collins, even though it provides her with the financial freedom, shows that she is resistant to the societal pressure that women are supposed to get married to provide her with convenience or security. Rather, Elizabeth appreciates love, respecting each other, and intellectual unity. That she ultimately gets married to Mr. Darcy out of love and not financial need is another strong statement of her feminist position as a woman is not measured by her need to be dependent but by the integrity of her character.

In "A Representative of the New Female Image - Analyzing Hester Prynne's Feminist Consciousness in *The Scarlet Letter*", Wang emphasizes how the character of Hester transforms as a condemned woman to a force of women unity in her society. Wong writes that By the novel's conclusion "Hester has become a proto-feminist mother figure to the women of the community" (897), embodying compassion, wisdom, and strength derived from her suffering. This metamorphosis causes her to go beyond marginalization and a role model of collective feminist consciousness. The influence of Hester as interpreted by Wang is related to more universal social transformation, similar to the moral agency of Elizabeth Bennet in Pride and Prejudice since both women help people to question the inhibiting gender role and imagine the more just world.

Methodology

Research Design and Corpus

The research is based on the interpretive, qualitative, and comparative literature approach. It closely reads *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne to discuss the ways of how the characters Elizabeth Bennet and Hester Prynne bargain with the patriarchal power and marginalisation created by society. The novels were selected due to the reason that both females who defy the shackles of gender, yet have emerged against different cultural backgrounds- Regency England and Puritan New England and therefore, are feasible to compare in terms of feminist aspects.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis is performed through two feministic theories: standpoint theory and embodiment theory. It is demonstrated by use of standpoint theory which emphasizes that knowledge is situated and Elizabeth, as a genteel who is economically vulnerable and Hester, as publicly marked adulteress, both adopt a critical approach to gendered power. The scenes where the female body is judged or punished including Elizabeth Walk to Netherfield and Scarlet letter motherhood and needle work use the theory of embodiment where the body is viewed as a location where power, identity and resistance is inscribed or incised.

Analytical Procedure

This analysis identifies and analyses some of the significant scenes of marginalisation and then performs close reading of those scenes using these two frameworks and then relies on secondary feminist literature and historical research to put into context the interpretations. Lastly, the two case studies are then summarised and unified in a comparison discussion, highlighting the fact that Elizabeth is resisting mostly in the inside of the social centre, and Hester is resisting in the outer most as manifested through her marked and labouring body.

Findings and Discussion

Elizabeth Bennet: Transcending Marginalization

Elizabeth Bennet's defiance against societal expectations is the central feminist element of *Pride and Prejudice*. In Regency England, women were often defined by their ability to marry well, and their worth was largely based on securing financial stability through marriage. From the standpoint of a genteel but economically vulnerable woman, Elizabeth is expected to accept any "respectable" proposal that guarantees security, yet she resists this imposed role. In this regard, Elizabeth is even more stubborn when she turns down the proposal of Mr. Collins. Elizabeth says, "You are too hasty, sir, she cried. You forget that I have made no answer. Let me do it without further loss of time. Accept my thanks for the compliment you are paying me. I am very sensible of the honor of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than to decline them" (Austen 158).

Rejecting the offer made by Mr. Collins, although it would have provided practical advantages, is an indication of how Elizabeth is not willing to live up to the social construct that women should get married due to the security it provides and not out of choice. Standpoint theory helps to show that, because Elizabeth experiences the constraints of gender and class from within, she can recognise the injustice of a marriage system that treats women as instruments for economic stability. Her refusal is a clear rebuke to the transactional aspect of marriage in her era, and particularly to women, in which material prosperity could be regarded as a greater value than personal fulfillment.

Although marriage and financial stability are closely interwoven for women of Elizabeth's social status, she resists this social structure as she does not support the convention that marriage is the most important source of female security. Her turn-down of Mr. Collins is a claim of agency and a choice of her own in which she plans not to marry him because of his status or wealth but because she values emotional and intellectual compatibility. From a standpoint-theory perspective, Elizabeth's position as a marginalised yet observant gentlewoman enables her to perceive how such a marriage would erase her individuality and reduce her to a tool for preserving property and status. This becomes even more evident in the way she turns down the initial proposal by Darcy as she criticizes him due to his arrogance and the way he looks down in her family. Darcy proposes to Elizabeth though he is

evidently superior to the social class since he wants to elevate her status. However, Elizabeth's refusal is not merely the rejection of a man of higher rank; it is a denial of the patriarchal marriage market where women are treated as commodities of social and economic profit.

In the terms of the embodiment-theory, Elizabeth does not merely resist the patrilineal norms; she does it on physical level using her body in the space of daily life. Her choice to walk to Netherfield to see Jane when she is ill is one of the most obvious examples. Austen describes her as, "Crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles," arriving with "weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise" (7).

With a culture that has created an ideal of women as delicate and ornamental, the mud-smeared active body of Elizabeth presents a vivid challenge to both class and gender etiquette. The fact that she did not care about her own looks but she preferred her sister wellbeing to be maintained demonstrates that the moral care and autonomy over body are not separate. The embodiment theory contributes to demonstrating that the Elizabeth is not just a thinker who opposes the social norms, she literally walks in the world in a manner that denies the weak, constrained female form dictated by her social standing.

Interference with feminine assumptions of other characters is provoked by the very embodiment. Caroline Bingley and Mrs. Hurst scoff at how Elizabeth has a petticoat half a foot in mud and shuns her walk as a abomination towards covering up her autonomy, when Darcy in his own mind realizes that her fine eyes are brightened by the same activity (Austen 8).

The feminine body here is questioned: on the one hand, in the case of the Bingley sisters, this is the attribute of improper upbringing, and, on the other hand, in the case of Darcy, this is the dynamism and determination that cannot be measured by the traditional successes. Embodiment theory draws attention to how Elizabeth's bodily presence—her walk, her look, her refusal to sit still and behave like an ornament—reshapes desire and authority in the novel. Rather than being a passive object to be looked at, she becomes a subject whose moving, visibly imperfect body expresses her interior autonomy and gradually compels Darcy to revise his own class-bound ideals of feminine perfection.

If Elizabeth's embodied independence unsettles the expectations of those around her, Darcy's later declaration of love shows how that same independence gradually reshapes his understanding of what a wife can be.

A pivotal moment in the story and turning point in the development of Elizabeth occurred following the letter she receives by Darcy, which compels her to face facts that entirely reverse her previous thinking - about Darcy and herself. His description of events forces her to reconsider her behavior and assumptions. In one of his anguished candors, she admits saying, **"**How despicably I have acted!" she cried; I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! …. Till this moment I never knew myself" (Austen 287).

This confession marks a silent yet decisive turning point in the life of Elizabeth. From a feminist standpoint perspective, this scene shows Elizabeth recognising that her earlier judgments were shaped by her limited social position and prejudices; she becomes aware of how her own standpoint has constrained her vision. When she questions herself on her misconceptions she begins to distinguish between her moral judgement on the influence of pride, looks and social norm. This realisation is not meant to make her a fully fledged free human being, however it is the initial step of awakening - a process in which she is studying how to think and feel, on a growing percentage, on her own terms. Her revised standpoint, grounded in greater self-knowledge, also transforms her relationship with Darcy, as she gradually replaces misunderstanding with a vision of equality based on reciprocity and mutual self-understanding.

Through this gradual transformation, Elizabeth moves from a position of marginalisation to one of active agency, redefining what it means to be a woman in her time. By insisting on thinking, feeling and choosing for herself from within her constrained social position, she exposes the limits of patriarchal expectations**.** Her ethical and emotional development becomes a quiet but powerful challenge to these norms, showing that independence does not have to be loud to be radical.

Hester Prynne: Embodying Feminist Defiance

Hester Prynne rebels against the patriarchy of puritanism, but her speech is expressed not by rebellion, but by enduring. The scarlet letter A that she has sewed on her breast is her punishment and was supposed to mend her shame, but Hester reclaims it as an emblem of strength. Hawthorne writes, “Many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification… they said that it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman’s strength” (38).

She makes a moral condemnation into a moral authority by changing a symbol of adultery into a symbol of ability. As a woman publicly marked as a adulteress demonstrates the fact that the very body, which is the subject of Puritan law becomes the object of her authority. Hester is also resistant through her silence. This is the fact that she does not want to tell who Dimmesdale is because it questions the patriarchal dominance of the voice of women. She does not speak in the context that she is meant to speak in but invents her vision of morality. At some point, even her society that humiliated her can see her inner autonomy.

This resistance embodied by Hester is particularly evident in the scene of the forest when she takes off the scarlet letter on her breast in the meantime. Hawthorne writes, "undid the clasp that fastened the scarlet letter" (51). The very physical process of undressing and discarding the letter in that instance makes the meaning of her refusal to leave her marked body as the main locus of Puritan control. Read through embodiment theory, this gesture briefly restores her body to herself: when she removes the symbol, the narrative also emphasizes the change in her posture, the sunlight that suddenly

"glimmers" on her loosened hair, and her renewed sense of vitality. Yet the fact that she must later resume wearing the letter shows how deeply the community's disciplinary power is inscribed on her flesh, suggesting that female bodies in Puritan New England cannot fully escape being read and regulated by patriarchal authority.

Most strikingly, Hawthorne observes that the scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not tread. As Hawthorne wrote, "Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers--stern and wild ones--and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss" (51). Hester acquires a knowledge that others cannot have, a kind of self-sustaining wisdom through her pain, the isolation of her suffering. From a feminist standpoint perspective, the shame and solitude that marginalise Hester also grant her a critical insight into the community that punishes her. The symbol that is meant to bind her down turns out to be the means of her acquiring freedom within the moral frontiers of her society.

The feminist revolt expressed by Hester Prynne appears in the way she is reimagined not simply as a punished woman but as a woman who reclaims her identity on her own terms. Being rejected by the Puritan society, she turns her devotion to her daughter, Pearl, into a kind of symbolic strength. Hawthorne describes Pearl as "Her Pearl--for so had Hester called her; named "Pearl," as being of great price--purchased with all she had--her mother's only treasure!" (17).

Pearl, to Hester, is her penance and her redemption, a living reminder of her strength and her unwillingness to fit in the society. From an embodiment perspective, Pearl is the living result of Hester's condemned sexual body, so that Hester's experience of motherhood turns the mark of her "sin" into a visible source of love and resilience. At the same time, Hester's standpoint as an outcast mother allows her to value Pearl not as a social burden but as a "treasure" that sustains her identity outside Puritan norms.

The alienation of Hester on the outskirts of Boston provides her with the opportunity to re-invent herself. Hawthorne wrote, "Lonely as was Hester's situation, and without a friend on earth who dared to show himself, she, however, did not want. She possessed an art that supplied food for her thriving infant and herself. It was the art of needle-work" (15).

This passage demonstrates that the isolation of Hester is not a helpless form. Rather, she has a means to survive, and even prosper, with her needlework, which enables her to earn her own livelihoods and Pearl. With the progress of time, the work of Hester is more valuable. Her needlework becomes so popular, as Hawthorne writes, that the rich and powerful members of the Puritan society, such as Governor Bellingham, who wears a piece of clothing embroidered by Hester herself, request it. Through this embodied labour, her skilful hands turn stigma into economic independence. From a feminist standpoint perspective, Hester's marginal position as a seamstress on the edge of town allows her to observe the hypocrisy of those who condemn her publicly yet desire her work, exposing the

contradictions at the heart of Puritan patriarchy. Even the very scarlet letter she wears, which was meant to be a sign of her being a fallen woman, comes to symbolize her talent, which is in demand by those people, who despite their evaluative attitude towards her, start admiring her talent and her work.

Comparative Analysis: Elizabeth and Hester's Feminist Defiance

Even though both Elizabeth Bennet and Hester Prynne stand up against the marginalisation the patriarchal societies place on them, the shape in which they do it is very dissimilar. Both women reject the role that the society they live in dictates women should be, but Elizabeth expresses her disobedience more through images of criticism, talk and simple actions in the realm of Regency England, whereas, in the case of Hester, her resistance is marked on her body and acted out in the actual fringes of Puritan Boston. Read collectively they demonstrate how women in various historical and cultural settings oppose gendered power outside and inside their cultures.

Standpoint theory assists in explaining how their various social positions construct the knowledge they acquire. The fact that Elizabeth is a genteel yet economically disadvantaged woman within the English marriage market gives her a chance to see the injustice of a system that uses women as tools of obtaining property and status. The fact that she refused Mr. Collins and the first proposal of Mr. Darcy, and she criticizes herself afterward when she reads the letter that Darcy sent her, demonstrates a growing moral and intellectual autonomy that challenges prejudice based on class and gendered standards in a respectable society. In comparison, the position of Hester as an outcast as an adulteress who had to live in the periphery of Boston and earn her livelihood with the sewing machine provides an outsider with an opinion of Puritan chastity. Shame, Despair, Solitude come to be her teachers and give her a form of knowledge where other women would have been too afraid to explore and enables her to see the duplicity of a society that punishes her yet relies on her work and abilities.

The theory of embodiment also sheds light on the fact that the bodies of both women are challenged as a place of control and resistance. The lively stride of Elizabeth to Netherfield, her muddy petticoat and how her "fine eyes" are made brighter with the exercise break the figure of the fragile, ornamental female body and transform everyday movement into a silent protest against class and gender decency. Her body will not accept to be controlled and even proves her inner power in motion her red chest, the manner that she takes off and puts on the scarlet letter in the forest, her job as a seamstress and her loyalty to the motherhood of Pearl all reveal the fact that her body, the body that the Puritan law attempts to humiliate her with, in

fact becomes a source of power and moral authority over the course of time.. It is her constant presence that turns the scarlet A, which is a symbol of adultery, into a symbol of Able, and her stigmatised body is where the punishment is converted into power.

Elizabeth and Hester bring out two parallel ways of feminist resistance. Elizabeth opposes internally within the social centre through critical judgement, affective autonomy and embodied independence to disturb the culture of courtship and marriage. Hester is a rebel of the margins, who employs her marked, working and maternal body to demonstrate the contradictions of a moral order that attempts to dominate her but cannot eliminate her power. In various but similar aspects, the two women overcome their marginalisation and re-source their identity of being in a female body within a patriarchal society.

Conclusion

Elizabeth Bennet and Hester Prynne are two types of feminist resistance against the patriarchal and societal rules that existed at that period. The fact that Elizabeth does not settle on marriage as a security system and marries eventually out of love and mutual understanding between spouses, breaks the social and gender norms of the Regency England. Her mental and emotional self-sufficiency demonstrates the rejection of the idea of women getting married to get a social and economic status. On the contrary, the resistance against Hester Prynne is more physically marked, as she is forced to show the scarlet letter. Yet, she transforms this status of shame and applies it to her advantage and becomes self-empowered, eventually overcoming the relegation, which the Puritanical society enforces on her.

Using feminist theories like the standpoint theory and the embodiment, this paper shows that both characters rebel against the social structures that attempt to shape and manage them. Elizabeth criticizes the social structure of marriage, and Hester employs her public punishment as one of her means of self-empowerment. The two women are rebellious to the roles that their societies have assigned to them and they claim their independence. Their accounts present analytical information regarding how the role of women has been historically constructed and limited by gendered power structures. In their transcendence of their marginalization, both Elizabeth and Hester are feminist ideals of self-determination, strength and renouncement of social oppression.

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