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THE AMERICAN JEREMIAD: A CRITIQUE OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S *THE SCARLET LETTER*

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Abstract

This study examines Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter through the lens of American Jeremiad theory to explore how the novel critiques the concept of Americanness. Rooted in Puritan ideology, the American Jeremiad traditionally combines lamentation over moral decline with a call for social renewal and the restoration of founding ideals. Employing a qualitative research methodology, this study utilizes American Jeremiad as its theoretical framework, textual analysis as its method, and close reading as its primary analytical technique. Through a detailed examination of the novel's characters, themes, symbols, and narrative structure, the study investigates Hawthorne's representation of Puritan society and its influence on the formation of American identity. The findings reveal that Hawthorne exposes the contradictions embedded within early American ideals, particularly those concerning morality, justice, individual freedom, and communal conformity. The novel critiques the hypocrisy of a society that claims moral superiority while practicing exclusion, public shaming, and rigid social control. Furthermore, Hawthorne employs the jeremiadic mode not merely to condemn societal shortcomings but also to suggest the possibility of moral reflection and reform. By portraying the tensions between individual conscience and collective authority, The Scarlet Letter challenges idealized notions of America as a divinely chosen and morally exceptional nation. The study concludes that Hawthorne uses the American Jeremiad to offer a profound critique of Americanness, revealing the gap between America's professed ideals and its social realities while encouraging a re-evaluation of national identity and moral values.
***Key words**: Americanness, American jeremiad, exceptionalism, sin and redemption*

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Americanness emerged gradually through the interaction of historical, political, religious, economic, and cultural forces that shaped the United States. Since the colonial era, America has been imagined as a "New World" offering escape from the poverty, religious intolerance, and rigid social hierarchies that characterized much of Europe. The Puritan settlers, in particular, viewed the American colonies as a divinely ordained space where a morally superior society could be established. This vision was later reinforced by the ideals articulated in the Declaration of Independence, which emphasized liberty, equality, democracy, and individual rights as foundational national values. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, industrialization, territorial expansion, and large-scale immigration further strengthened a distinct American identity. Consequently, America came to be represented as a land of opportunity where personal success could be attained through hard work, determination, and self-reliance. These beliefs eventually crystallized into the notion of the American Dream, which promised upward mobility, prosperity, and individual freedom (Bercovitch & Patell, 1994; Cullen, 2004).

The development of Americanness profoundly influenced major social institutions, including politics, education, religion, media, and the economy. Politically, democratic governance and national exceptionalism became defining features that distinguished the United States from monarchies and colonial regimes. Educational institutions reinforced these ideals by promoting patriotism, self-sufficiency, and individual achievement. Similarly, capitalism emerged as a central component of American identity, encouraging competition, entrepreneurship, and the pursuit of material success. Religious discourse also played a significant role in constructing Americanness by portraying the nation as morally chosen and entrusted with a special historical mission (Bellah, 2017). Through media, literature, and popular culture, these values were disseminated both domestically and globally. Nevertheless, the narrative of Americanness has remained deeply paradoxical. While it celebrates freedom and equality, many groups—including Indigenous peoples, African Americans, immigrants, and other marginalized communities—have historically experienced exclusion, discrimination, and unequal access to opportunities. As a result, Americanness embodies not only aspirations of freedom and success but also enduring tensions related to race, class, and social identity (Sirvent & Haiphong, 2019; Anderson, 2020).

American literature has been instrumental in constructing, promoting, and interrogating the idea of Americanness. Seeking to establish a cultural identity distinct from European traditions, American writers frequently celebrated values such as individualism, democracy, self-reliance, and freedom. Authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman envisioned America as a unique social and spiritual experiment grounded in human potential and democratic ideals. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), for instance, presents America as a vibrant and inclusive nation characterized by diversity, optimism, and boundless possibility. Likewise, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) captures elements of the American spirit through regional experiences and ordinary individuals. During the twentieth century, immigrant, minority, and African American writers further expanded the discourse on Americanness by exposing the inequalities and exclusions embedded within national ideals. Consequently, literature became a crucial site where the promises of America were both celebrated and contested, revealing the complexities of national identity and the gap between ideology and lived reality (Bhutto & Ramzan, 2021)

Many American authors contributed to the representation of America as a promised land offering opportunities for self-improvement and social advancement. Writers such as Horatio Alger, John Steinbeck, and F. Scott Fitzgerald explored themes of ambition, success, mobility, and the pursuit of happiness. In *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Fitzgerald portrays the allure of the American Dream through Jay Gatsby, a self-made man who rises from poverty to immense wealth in pursuit of social acceptance and personal fulfillment. Gatsby's transformation, extravagant lifestyle, and relentless ambition reflect the widespread belief that America enables individuals to reinvent themselves and achieve success regardless of their origins. However, Fitzgerald simultaneously exposes the limitations of this ideal by revealing how materialism, inherited privilege, social stratification, and illusion undermine the promise of equal opportunity.

Similarly, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) offers a critical examination of Americanness when interpreted through the lens of the American Jeremiad. Traditionally, the American Jeremiad combines criticism of societal decline with a call for moral renewal and a return to foundational ideals. Hawthorne appropriates this rhetorical tradition to expose the contradictions underlying Puritan America, a society often regarded as the ideological foundation of American identity. Through the public shaming of Hester Prynne and the rigid moral codes enforced by the

Puritan community, Hawthorne reveals the gap between the nation's professed commitment to moral righteousness and its practices of intolerance, hypocrisy, and social exclusion. Rather than celebrating America as a divinely chosen land, Hawthorne critiques the oppressive structures that emerge when religious and social conformity suppress individual freedom and human compassion. In doing so, *The Scarlet Letter* functions as a Jeremiadic critique of early Americanness, warning that America's promise can only be realized through self-examination, moral reform, and a more humane understanding of justice and community.

1.1. Significance of the Study

This study is significant from a literary perspective because it offers a deeper understanding of how Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* engages with the construction and critique of Americanness in early American literature. By employing the American Jeremiad as a theoretical framework, the study examines how Hawthorne appropriates a foundational American rhetorical tradition to expose the moral contradictions and social injustices embedded within Puritan society. It contributes to Hawthorne's scholarship by moving beyond conventional readings centered on sin, guilt, and redemption and instead foregrounding the novel's critique of the cultural, religious, and ideological foundations of American identity. Furthermore, the study enriches American literary studies by demonstrating how *The Scarlet Letter* simultaneously reflects and challenges national myths of moral exceptionalism, divine mission, and communal unity. Through this analysis, the research highlights the role of literature as a critical medium through which dominant narratives of nationhood are questioned, revised, and reimagined. Ultimately, the study provides valuable insights into the ways nineteenth-century American fiction participated in broader debates about the promises and limitations of the American social and moral order.

2. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study adopts qualitative research methodology as it focuses on understanding meanings, experiences, and social realities rather than measuring numerical data. It relies on interpretive methods such as textual analysis and observations with subjective shades (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010) to explore how the novelist constructs, negotiates or propagate the phenomenon of American ideals or Americanness. For the conceptual guidance, the study draws its inspiration from the concept of Americanness, which is rooted in the idea of immigrants and settlers who have come to the United States in search of a new life and a new identity. For the theoretical interpretation of the selected texts, the study utilizes the theory of the American Jeremiad proposed by Sacvan Bercovitch (1978). For the textual analysis, this study adopts Catherine Belsey's textual analysis technique (Griffin, 2005), which critically examines, synthesizes, and interprets both the explicit and implicit meanings to create new meanings within the text(s). Through critical readings of the selected text, the relevant data have been taken in the form of words and quotations that will be analysed using the theoretical markers of the selected theoretical framework.

3. Analysis of *The Scarlet Letter*

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is set in 17th-century Puritan New England, a society that viewed itself as an exceptional moral community chosen to uphold God's laws. In this rigid environment, Hester Prynne is condemned to wear the scarlet "A" after bearing a child out of wedlock. The Puritan settlement embodies the early American belief in building a virtuous "city

upon a hill," where spiritual purity was central to communal identity. However, Hawthorne reveals the tension between this ideal and the harsh reality of judgment and exclusion, questioning whether true American exceptionalism can exist without compassion and justice.

3.1. American Exceptionalism, A covenant with God

Sacvan Bercovitch, in The American Jeremiad (1978), argues that the Puritans ideology largely framed American experience in the New World, positioning America as a chosen nation with a unique destiny. This rhetoric presents America's struggles as part of God's plan and perpetuates the belief that America was exceptional. This rhetorical pattern kept alive the conviction that America was not just another nation but a divinely chosen experiment destined to guide humanity.

In the same context, "*A blessing on the righteous colony of the Massachusetts, where iniquity is dragged out into the sunshine!"* (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 83), this quote from *The Scarlet Letter* demonstrates the theme of American exceptionalism. This line expresses praise for the Puritan colony of Massachusetts, emphasizing its commitment to publicly exposing and punishing sin. The idea that *"iniquity is dragged out into the sunshine"* suggests that the colony does not tolerate moral corruption. Instead, it believes in confronting wrongdoing openly and cleansing the community through public shame and correction. This reflects a core idea of American exceptionalism: the belief that America, from its founding, is a morally superior, divinely guided society, unlike Europe, which is often seen as corrupt and decadent. By declaring Massachusetts a "righteous colony," the line celebrates the American Puritan ideal of a moral community that holds individuals accountable in the public square, striving to build a godly and exemplary society like a "city upon a hill" that the rest of the world should look up to. It shows the collective righteousness that the entire community is involved in maintaining moral order. Thus, the line illustrates how early America, especially Puritan Massachusetts, saw itself as exceptional and chosen by God to establish a new moral order. Publicly exposing sin was not just justice; it was a symbol of the nation's sacred mission to lead the world in righteousness.

In the context of the American Jeremiad, it reveals how Puritan ideology shaped American identity through a rhetoric of moral superiority, exceptionalism, moral warning, and national purpose. The line praises Massachusetts as a "righteous colony" and a society chosen by God to uphold and demonstrate moral order. This reflects the first part of the Jeremiad: the belief that America has a special destiny to be morally pure and exemplary. The act of exposing sin is seen as purifying, not just punishing. It serves as a public call to righteousness, which fulfills the third part of the Jeremiad: a renewal of the moral covenant and return to founding values. Hester Prynne's public punishment, then, isn't just about her personal sin; rather, it's part of a larger ritual through which the colony reminds itself of its covenant with God and seeks to renew it.

There is another passage from *The Scarlet Letter* "*… it must gladden your heart, after your troubles and sojourn in the wilderness," said the townsman, "to find yourself at length in a land where iniquity is searched out and punished in the sight of rulers and people…*" (Hawthorne, 1850, pp. 93-94) that captures the Puritan vision of a uniquely moral and divinely ordained society that is the core idea of American exceptionalism. The speaker contrasts the "wilderness" associated with lawlessness and spiritual danger with "a land wherein iniquity is searched out and punished"—that is, a structured, godly society built on moral vigilance and divine justice. In Puritan ideology, Massachusetts Bay Colony was not just a place of refuge but a "city upon a hill"—an exemplary community meant to lead the world by its righteous example. The public punishment of sin (as seen

in Hester Prynne's case) reflects this sense of communal moral purpose and reinforces the belief that this society had a sacred duty to uphold virtue. Thus, the townsman's statement reflects pride in living in a land unlike others, that is spiritually superior, governed by godly rulers, and held accountable before both God and community. It represents American exceptionalism at its theological root.

The American Jeremiad as a rhetorical tradition blends lamentation, criticism, and renewal. This line, while not overtly lamenting, functions as a celebratory part of the Jeremiad framework. The contrast between the wilderness and the righteous colony celebrates the ideal of a new society that was meant to be a place where sin is actively addressed. The line reflects American exceptionalism by portraying New England as a moral utopia, uniquely committed to public justice and divine law. While the passage does not include the "lament" or "warning" phase directly, it fits the first stage of the Jeremiad by reaffirming the Puritan community's exceptional moral purpose.

This quote "*The other eminent characters by whom the chief ruler was surrounded were distinguished by a dignity of mien, belonging to a period when the forms of authority were felt to possess the sacredness of Divine institutions*" (Hawthorne, 1850, pp. 97-98) highlights how Puritan leadership was perceived not merely as political or civic but as divinely sanctioned. It directly supports the idea of American exceptionalism, particularly in its Puritan roots. The phrase *"forms of authority... possess the sacredness of Divine institutions"* suggests that the government and its leaders were believed to be executing God's will on earth. This reinforces the idea that the colony was not an ordinary political entity but a covenant community, set apart and entrusted with a divine mission. This belief in a divinely guided society is a cornerstone of American exceptionalism. The Puritans perceived themselves as chosen people, forming a godly society that would serve as a model for the rest of the world. The "dignity of mien" (dignified appearance or bearing) of the rulers reflects not only their authority but also the moral seriousness and religious commitment associated with their roles. Their leadership is framed not as political power alone, but as moral stewardship—governance tied to religious values and spiritual accountability. By referencing a time *"when the forms of authority were felt to possess..."*, the phrase romanticizes the founding era as one of higher moral and spiritual integrity. This aligns with the foundational myth of American exceptionalism that the early colonies were spiritually superior and guided by a higher purpose compared to other nations. Thus, the line embodies American exceptionalism by portraying the early American (Puritan) leadership as divinely ordained, morally superior, and sacred, serving as a moral model to the world.

Sacvan Bercovitch, in his theory of the American Jeremiad, has shown how this structure shaped not just Puritan sermons but American literature, politics, and national identity, reinforcing the myth of American exceptionalism. This line looks back nostalgically to an earlier time when political and religious authority were seen as one and the same—sacred. This reverent tone aligns with the first stage of the American Jeremiad, the ideal of a righteous society rooted in divine will. The narrator idealizes the Puritan founders and magistrates, portraying them as morally upright figures chosen to carry out God's purpose on earth.

Pearl, Hester's daughter, though born of sin, is described in such a unique and exceptional way. *"...the infant was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden: worthy to have been left there to be the plaything of the angels after the world's first parents were driven out"* (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 134).

Hawthorne describes her as so physically perfect, graceful, and beautiful that she seems fit to have

been born in Eden, the Biblical paradise. Even after Adam and Eve were expelled, Pearl would have been so pure and delightful that she could have remained there, playing with angels. Eden, in American literature and Puritan theology, is often seen as a symbol for America itself, symbolizing a new beginning, a second chance at purity, innocence, and divine destiny. To say Pearl is worthy of Eden suggests that she represents a kind of new creation, untainted by the past, much like the way early Americans viewed their society as a moral and spiritual renewal of human history. The idea that Pearl could remain in Eden with angels sets her apart from ordinary humanity. This mirrors the Puritan belief in being God's "elect" and later American exceptionalist ideas that Americans, like Pearl, were specially chosen, spiritually superior, and destined to lead or guide humanity toward a moral future. Despite being born of "a guilty passion," Pearl is described in exalted terms. This reflects the American Jeremiad structure: acknowledging sin and failure while still holding on to hope of redemption and divine purpose. This line suggests that Pearl, like America, is a paradoxical figure—born in sin but visibly touched by grace, beautiful, exceptional, and worthy of a divine legacy. Her imagined place in Eden reflects America's belief in its unique moral destiny, spiritual calling, and chosen status among nations.

The Edenic imagery frames Pearl as exceptional, pure, and divinely touched—a figure symbolic of America's own myth of moral beginnings. Just as Pearl is imagined as worthy of paradise, America was imagined as a new Eden, a chosen land where a higher moral order could be built. This reflects the first stage of the Jeremiad: a vision of sacred potential. Pearl is paradoxically born of a "guilty passion," just as America's actual history is—colonialism, slavery, and social injustice. Even though Pearl's existence stems from sin, she is described in such exalted terms that she embodies the potential for redemption. Like the Jeremiad's third phase, this line suggests that moral renewal is possible, even after transgression. Pearl may still bring about a higher purpose, just as America, despite its flaws, might yet fulfill its divine mission.

It was, indeed, a majestic idea that the destiny of nations should be revealed, in these awful hieroglyphics, on the cope of heaven. A scroll so wide might not be deemed too expensive for Providence to write a people's doom upon (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 233).

This passage reflects the theme of American exceptionalism by portraying America's destiny as divinely ordained and significant. The idea that God reveals the fate of entire nations through celestial signs reinforces the belief that America holds a special, spiritual role in history. This aligns with American exceptionalism, which views the U.S. as chosen by Providence to fulfill a unique mission in the world—often moral, redemptive, and world-changing. The metaphor of the sky as a vast scroll on which Providence writes suggests that America's story is so important, its rise or fall deserves to be recorded on the very "cope of heaven"—as though the heavens themselves participate in American history. This reflects the idea that America is not just another nation but a moral example for all humanity. The mention of "doom" implies that America's exceptional status comes with judgment and responsibility. If America fails its divine mission, even its punishment will be recorded by God in the heavens, implying America's moral failure is of cosmic consequence. The heavens become a moral mirror, revealing whether people are living in accordance with God's laws. This reflects the Puritan belief that America was a "city upon a hill," a society meant to model spiritual righteousness. In this context, America is more than a nation, giving it the status of a moral project.

The passage also resonates with the concept of the American Jeremiad. The idea that Providence might "write a people's doom" in the heavens is a direct warning that if the nation strays from its

moral path, it will face divine retribution. At the same time, the grandeur of a nation being written into the heavens reinforces the belief that America has a divine purpose. This is the hopeful side of the Jeremiad, giving the sense that America is exceptional, under God's close watch, and still has the potential to return to its spiritual covenant. America is portrayed as a sacred land whose fate is determined not by earthly power, but by moral fidelity to divine law.

3.2. Land of Material and Spiritual Development

The American Jeremiad (1978), also highlights how the Puritan vision of America as a "city upon a hill" merged material progress with spiritual destiny, presenting the New World as a land uniquely chosen for both prosperity and divine fulfillment. Thus, America was framed as a land where material success and spiritual renewal were inseparably linked. Through this rhetorical strategy, Bercovitch shows that the American Jeremiad transformed prosperity into a sacred duty, reinforcing the belief that this new land was destined to achieve both material greatness and spiritual leadership in the world.

As these lines from *The Scarlet Letter* "*Morally, as well as materially, there was a coarser fibre in those wives and maidens of old English birth and breeding than in their fair descendants, ... character of less force and solidity than her own*" (Hawthorne, 1850, Pp. 76-77) reflect the theme of America as a land of both material and spiritual development by contrasting the coarser, more physically and morally resilient nature of the early English settlers' *"wives and maidens of old English birth"* with their more refined but physically and spiritually delicate American descendants. This suggests that the original settlers were morally and materially strong—they possessed a kind of spiritual and physical endurance needed to survive the harsh conditions of life. This moral "coarseness" isn't a flaw but rather a necessary toughness. The newer generations, now fully American, are softer and more refined and have been shaped by the relative material comfort that came with generations of settlement and progress in the New World. This shows how America has developed materially and life has become easier and more elegant. But it also implies a spiritual softening—that the inner strength and force of character have diminished as life grew more comfortable. This line also contrasts early English settlers (Puritan women) with their American descendants. The "coarser fiber" refers to their moral and material strength and shows that they were morally resilient, having strong religious and ethical convictions. They endured hardships, physical labor, and frontier challenges. So, this reflects America's material development from hardship to comfort and spiritual evolution from rigid Puritanism to a more fragile, individualistic spirituality.

The American Jeremiad is a rhetorical tradition in which writers and preachers praise the nation's divine origins, such as being chosen people with an exceptional mission, while lamenting its moral decline. In this context, the line *"Morally, as well as materially, there was a coarser fiber in those wives and maidens of old English birth and breeding…"* demonstrates the glorious past. It represents a morally and materially strong foundation, like tough, faithful, and enduring. On the other hand, it is also a lament on decline. The later generations lack that "coarser fiber," and they are spiritually and physically softer, suggesting degeneration of American character.

This dialogue *"Good Master Dimmesdale,' said he, the responsibility of this woman's soul lies greatly with you. It behoves you; therefore, to exhort her to repentance and to confession, as a proof and consequence thereof*" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 100) spoken by Governor Bellingham to Reverend Dimmesdale reflects the deep Puritan belief that America was a sacred space where spiritual

reformation and soul-cleansing were central to both individual and societal purpose. The responsibility for the soul implies that the community and its leaders are charged not only with law and order but also with the spiritual care of its people. The governor calls for repentance and confession, viewing public acknowledgment of sin as a necessary step toward spiritual redemption. The phrase "proof and consequence" indicates that true repentance must be outwardly visible, linking spiritual truth to social accountability. It portrays America as a moral laboratory, where souls are disciplined, sin is addressed, and salvation is the communal goal. Thus, the line emphasizes that spiritual development is not merely private; rather, it is a public and collective responsibility, rooted in the belief that the new world was destined to become a redeemed, godly society.

The American Jeremiad, as defined by scholars like Sacvan Bercovitch, is a rhetorical form rooted in Puritan sermons. In the context of the American Jeremiad, the "sacred purpose" is moral purity and spiritual responsibility. The call to repentance and confession is a clear expression of the Jeremiadic warning and hope: if she repents, she may be spiritually restored, and the community's covenant with God maintained. Thereby, this line exemplifies the American Jeremiad's function of using individual moral failure as a lens to reflect on collective spiritual health, with the hope of communal renewal through repentance.

Mr. Dimmesdale— young clergyman, who had come from one of the great English universities, bringing all the learning of the age into our wild forest land. His eloquence and religious fervour had already given the earnest of high eminence in his profession (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 100).

This passage highlights a symbolic transfer of spiritual authority and enlightenment from the old world (Europe) to the new world (America). Dimmesdale, trained in one of the most prestigious English institutions, represents the highest intellectual and theological ideals of the time. When he enters the American "wild forest land," he brings with him not just knowledge but a moral and religious mission. The "wild forest land" temporarily signifies America as untamed and raw, yet full of potential for moral and spiritual growth. The fact that someone of Dimmesdale's background chooses to work in this environment illustrates the Puritan view of America as a chosen land—a sacred place meant for the development of a new, purified Christian society. Dimmesdale is not just a teacher or preacher; he is a symbol of America's spiritual aspirations. Thus, this line reflects the transformative potential of America from wilderness to a spiritually elevated society and shows that spiritual development is not just inherited in the old world but must be actively cultivated through moral struggle and divine mission in America. In this context, Dimmesdale is initially considered the ideal embodiment of the Puritan mission who brings learning and fervor to help create a godly society. His presence signals hope and potential for fulfilling the covenant with God in America. Thus, this line presents America as a land where spiritual ideals are refined.

Live, therefore, and bear about thy doom with thee, in the eyes of men and women—in the eyes of him whom thou didst call thy husband—in the eyes of yonder child! And, that thou mayest live, take off this draught (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 111).

There is another quote from *The Scarlet Letter* that demonstrates and presents America as a land of spiritual development. Roger Chillingworth, speaking to Hester, urges her to live on not for comfort, but to endure and grow through the burden of public shame. He insists to Hester that she should carry her "doom"—the scarlet letter—visibly before the community, her former husband, and her child. In Puritan society, sin was not a private affair; rather, it was public, communal, and meant to produce visible moral consequences. "Bear about thy doom." It suggests that Hester's

punishment is not only legal but also spiritual, requiring her to live with her guilt and undergo inward transformation through long-term suffering, rather than through death or escape. America's Puritan society is shown as a spiritually charged community, where every gaze is a moral judgment. The public nature of Hester's shame is essential to her spiritual growth. She is to be a living sermon, evolving under society's constant scrutiny. "That thou mayest live" suggests that life, in this context, is not a blessing but a burden eventually leading to moral development. These lines show that America, especially Puritan society, was conceived as a land where spiritual truths are lived out physically and socially. Rather than exile or execution, Hester is sentenced to remain alive and spiritually accountable, embodying the transformative potential of public guilt, reflection, and possibly redemption.

This form sees America as a divine place with a spiritual mission, a land designed to forge, refine, and redeem the soul through trial. Hester's suffering is not meaningless; rather, it is a spiritual warning to others, a central idea in the Jeremiad tradition where one's sin instructs the whole body of believers. Instead of escaping punishment through death, Hester is condemned to live and visibly bear the consequences of her sin. Chillingworth ensures her physical survival not out of mercy, but so she may undergo spiritual refinement through prolonged shame and repentance. Thus, America, through this lens, becomes a land where souls are tested, purified, and sometimes redeemed through hardship and exposure.

Here, she said to herself had been the scene of her guilt, and here should be the scene of her earthly punishment; and so, perchance, the torture of her daily shame would at length purge her soul, and work out another purity than that which she had lost: more saint like, because the result of martyrdom (Hawthorne, 1850, Pp. 120-121).

These lines present America as a land of spiritual development and moral transformation. This passage shows Hester Prynne's conscious choice to remain in the place of her shame, not to escape her guilt but to transform through it. Her decision reflects the belief that suffering and moral trials can lead to spiritual redemption, a core idea in the Puritan tradition and in the broader myth of America as a land where the soul can be purified. Hester ties her redemption to the very land where she sinned. She treats America not just as a physical location but as a spiritual one, where inner growth is forged through struggle. Here, "the torture of her daily shame...purge her soul" emphasizes spiritual cleansing through public humiliation and endurance, aligning with the Puritan ethic that suffering can be redemptive. The phrase "another purity...more saint-like, because the result of martyrdom" suggests a new, higher moral and spiritual state achieved not by innocence, but by enduring suffering with dignity. Hester's moral growth transforms her into a spiritual figure—a martyr rather than a sinner. This scene supports the idea that America is not just a land of material opportunity but a land of moral testing and spiritual elevation as well. The new world is portrayed as a place where individuals are stripped down and rebuilt, where one can achieve a "saint-like" transformation through perseverance and inner strength.

Hester Prynne's experience can be read as a personalized version of the American Jeremiad, reflecting national themes of sin, suffering, and spiritual rebirth. Hester's adultery violates Puritan moral laws. Her fall represents a loss of spiritual purity, paralleling the Jeremiad's lament for communal sin and backsliding. Her punishment for wearing the scarlet letter is not just social but spiritual correction, as in Jeremiad sermons, suffering is necessary to awaken conscience and restore lost purpose. Hester does not flee. She embraces her shame as a path to inner purity, echoing the Jeremiad's call to repentance. The segment "another purity… more saint-like" shows that

through suffering, one may gain deeper moral insight, even surpassing prior innocence.

By degrees, not very slowly, her handiwork became what would now be termed the fashion…. Her needlework was seen on the ruff of the governor; military men wore it on their scarfs, and the minister on his band; it decked the baby's little cap; it was shut up, to be mildewed and moldered away, in the coffins of the dead (Hawthorne, 1850, pp. 123-24).

This passage from *The Scarlet Letter* portrays America as a land of material development by highlighting how individual skill and labor, even when performed by a socially outcast woman like Hester Prynne, can find economic value and widespread demand in the New World. "…*her handiwork became what would now be termed the fashion*" shows that Hester's work gained popularity quickly. In the American setting, market demand is responsive, and social status does not fully block economic success. Her skill becomes a source of livelihood and even social influence, despite her public shame. This line, "*Her needlework was seen on the ruff of the Governor; military men wore it on their scarfs, and the minister on his band*..."

emphasizes that her products reached all levels of society, from political leaders to religious figures. America is depicted as a society where merit-based contribution can cross class boundaries. Material value is recognized, even if the person behind it is morally condemned. Her handiwork is present from birth to death, suggesting how deeply her labor becomes embedded in the material culture of the colony. Even if her personal identity is shunned, her economic output becomes indispensable.

The passage is an ideal critique of America as a place of moral and material promise. Hester, though shamed, is still part of the society that imagines itself as a "city upon a hill." Her ability to contribute materially to that society through her skilled labor reflects a redeemable promise. She becomes a living symbol of moral failure, exactly the type of decline that the Jeremiad critiques. But rather than destroying her, this burden becomes a source of discipline and reform. Despite being marginalized, Hester becomes economically useful and respected through her labor. In Jeremiad terms, her suffering leads to moral refinement, and her material contribution reflects personal and communal renewal. By portraying Hester's rise in material significance despite her moral fall, Hawthorne aligns her narrative with the Jeremiad's redemptive structure.

This passage *"The unlikeliest materials—a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower—were the puppets of Pearl's witchcraft, and, without undergoing any outward change, became spiritually adapted to whatever drama occupied the stage of her inner world"* (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 142) beautifully reflects the theme of America as a land of spiritual development, particularly through the symbolic power of the imagination and the inner life. Here, Pearl's imagination transforms common, material objects into spiritual symbols, enacting the personal dramas of her inner world. This transformation speaks directly to the American ideal of spiritual self-reliance and transcendence, the belief that spiritual truth and meaning are not bound to external authority or wealth but can arise from within, even in humble surroundings. Pearl does not need churches, rituals, or sacred objects to engage with the spiritual realm. Her innate creative energy brings spiritual significance to sticks, rags, and flowers, symbolizing the American belief that spiritual awakening can happen anywhere, especially in the New World, where old hierarchies and forms were to be left behind. Pearl's "witchcraft" is not evil here; rather, it is metaphorical, representing a spontaneous spiritual power rooted in personal experience. Pearl's inner world and her ability to spiritualize the ordinary objects symbolize the American capacity for moral and spiritual invention. Thus, in the American context, spiritual development is not confined to only churches or doctrine but emerges through the

individual's imaginative engagement with the world, even with its "unlikeliest materials." Pearl thus embodies the spirit of a new land, where the soul must shape its own meanings in the face of isolation, suffering, and moral complexity.

Pearl's ability to spiritualize ordinary objects—sticks, rags, and flowers—embodies the Puritan aspiration to see sacred purpose in all things, even in the wilderness. It reflects America's founding idea that the New World would be a place for spiritual renewal, unbound from the corruption of Europe. The "unlikeliest materials" becoming "spiritually adapted" mirrors America's self-potential: a land that must forge meaning and transcendence from the raw, broken, or discarded elements of the past, always moving toward renewal. Through this passage, Hawthorne aligns with the structure and spirit of the American Jeremiad but reinterprets its message. He affirms America's spiritual potential, not through rigid Puritanism, but through imaginative, inner spiritual resilience, as seen in Pearl.

In the same strain, this dialogue *"…this badge hath taught me—it daily teaches me—it is teaching me at this moment—lessons whereof my child may be the wiser and better"* (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 165) comes from Hester Prynne's emotional plea to retain custody of Pearl. It powerfully expresses the theme of spiritual development. Hester is referring to the scarlet letter she is forced to wear, which was once a mark of shame and is now transformed into a source of spiritual learning. She says it "teaches" her—daily and presently—implying that through suffering and shame, she has gained insight, strength, and moral wisdom. In the American context, this reflects the idea that spiritual growth is not static but an ongoing journey, often shaped by individual struggle and inner conscience rather than by formal religious authority. The New World (America), for Hester, becomes a space where her sin leads to self-awareness and inner reformation, while social condemnation becomes a path to spiritual independence. She hopes that Pearl, born of sin but raised in the light of this hard-earned wisdom, will be "*wiser and better*," a symbolic next generation refined by the spiritual trials of the first.

The American Jeremiad, as defined by scholars like Sacvan Bercovitch, is a rhetorical form that laments a community's moral decline and warns of its consequences while also expressing hope for renewal or redemption through a return to the founding principles or spiritual mission. The scarlet letter she is wearing is the result of her fall—her moral "decline" in the eyes of society. Her daily shame and marginalization serve as the "punishment" or "chastisement" phase. She views her suffering not as meaningless but as spiritually productive, *"teaching me… lessons."* The goal is moral renewal, not just for herself, but for Pearl, the next generation. In this way, Hester's life aligns with the Jeremiad—her personal spiritual journey mirrors the larger American Puritan narrative, in which the erring soul is called to reflect, repent, and reform in pursuit of a higher moral purpose. Thus, Hester's declaration illustrates how *The Scarlet Letter* portrays America as a land where spiritual development arises from trial and reflection, rather than just from inherited doctrine.

3.3. Pursuit of happiness, Fair play and Egalitarianism

The rhetoric of the Jeremiad helped to root ideals such as the pursuit of happiness, fair play, and egalitarianism in the nation's cultural imagination by linking them to a divine mission. The Jeremiad framed social and political struggles, whether for liberty, equality, or justice, not as threats to national identity but as necessary stages in fulfilling the nation's covenant. In the context of this rhetoric, America began to be imagined as a land of fair play and egalitarianism. The jeremiad tradition portrayed inequality and injustice as temporary failures that help nation to reform and live

up to its ideals of fairness and equality. As this quote from *The Scarlet Letter* "*Mistress Prynne shall be set where man, woman, and child may have a fair sight of her brave apparel from this time till an hour past meridian*" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 83) refers to the public shaming of Hester Prynne, who is to be placed visibly before the entire town, marking her as a moral lesson for all to witness. "...where man, woman, and child may have a fair sight..." is the key phrase that touches on the theme of fair play and egalitarianism. The punishment is meant to be visible to all classes and genders—men, women, and even children. No one is excluded from witnessing this act of public justice, symbolizing that all members of the community are equal regardless of rank or age. Justice is performed transparently and publicly, not behind closed doors, giving the sense that every culprit will be treated equally as per the established law. Her public punishment is turned into a moment of visibility, agency, and confrontation of power, highlighting the theme of fair play and egalitarianism. The punishment, though harsh, is not arbitrary; it is regulated, a hallmark of a fair judicial process. It perfectly illustrates how justice in Puritan society was meant to be impartial and communal.

In the theoretical framework of the American Jeremiad, the line upholds the Puritan ideal that justice must be public and equal, serving as a moral compass for the community. The setting of Hester, "where man, woman, and child" may see her, reflects the ideal of communal righteousness. Hester's public shame is part of the lament over moral failure. Her act of adultery threatens the purity of the "city upon a hill"—a term used by Puritan leaders to describe their model society. While witnessing Hester's punishment, the community is reminded to reflect on its failings and recommit to virtue.

I yearned to ignite a fire!" It seemed not so wild a dream—old as I was, and sombre as I was, and misshapen as I was—that the simple bliss, which is scattered far and wide, for all mankind to gather, might yet be mine **(**Hawthorne, 1850, p. 112).

Roger Chillingworth is the speaker of these words. In this moment of emotional vulnerability, he reveals that even a man of intellect and deformity, nearing the end of his prime, yearns for one of the most basic human desires, which is happiness through love and companionship. The "simple bliss" he refers to is ordinary human happiness—a warm home, emotional fulfillment, and connection. He calls it a "dream," but one not so wild, as he believed, or at least hoped, that happiness was still within reach, even for someone like him. His longing is universal: "scattered far and wide, for all mankind to gather." This implies that happiness is not reserved for the privileged, beautiful, or young; rather, it's a birthright, a human ideal. This dream of happiness links directly to the American ideal of individual fulfillment, liberty, and the hope that every person can seek and find happiness regardless of their background. Chillingworth, as a learned man who had spent years in "the dream of knowledge," now seeks emotional contentment, showing a transition from intellectual ambition to emotional yearning.

Chillingworth speaks to the promise of happiness that is supposedly available to all mankind, echoing the democratic ideal that every individual, regardless of circumstances, can attain a meaningful life. In the American context, this mirrors the foundational belief in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. However, the fact that Chillingworth feels excluded from this bliss reveals a fall from that promise. In short, these lines reflect Chillingworth's yearning for the American ideal of personal happiness, a goal he believes is meant for all. Nevertheless, his inability to attain this dream illustrates the moral and spiritual failure central to the Jeremiad tradition.

I have greatly wronged thee," murmured Hester. 'We have wronged each other,' answered he. 'Mine

was the first wrong, when I betrayed your budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay. Therefore, as a man who has not thought and philosophized in vain, I seek no vengeance and plot no evil against thee. Between thee and me, the scale hangs fairly balanced (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 113).

These lines from *The Scarlet Letter* capture a powerful moment of moral reflection between Hester Prynne and Roger Chillingworth. When Hester admits, "*I have greatly wronged thee*," Chillingworth does not simply accept the blame as hers alone. Instead, he asserts mutual wrongdoing: "We have wronged each other." This is a moment of moral fairness—not revenge, not condemnation, but a recognition that relationships involve shared responsibility. He specifically notes his betrayal in marrying Hester, acknowledging the injustice of binding her youthful vitality to his aging, decaying self. This act speaks to a fair assessment of power and agency, a value central to the American sense of justice. "*I seek no vengeance, plot no evil against thee*." This act of renouncing personal revenge reflects the ideal of legal and moral restraint. In a society that upholds individual rights and due process, this statement shows a man trying to act with dignity and fairness by not taking justice into his own hands, an American ideal rooted in the rule of law over personal judgment. The image of the balanced scale is a classic symbol of justice, particularly in the American legal tradition. By declaring that their emotional and moral debts to each other are now equal, Chillingworth sets a tone of moral equilibrium. In American ideology, this symbol reinforces the concept that justice means restoring balance—not punishing without reflection or compassion. Chillingworth's words reflect the American ideal of fair play, where justice requires mutual recognition of guilt, renunciation of revenge, and moral balance.

These lines mark a private confession of individuals and shared moral failure. Both the characters do not blame society but own their faults, mirroring the Jeremiad's demand for inward moral accounting. By saying *"the scale hangs fairly balanced,"* Chillingworth gestures toward a redemptive balance—not legal justice, but spiritual fairness. This anticipates the possibility of renewal after honest self-reckoning, echoing the Jeremiad's final movement toward hope and moral correction. These lines show fair play through mutual acknowledgment of guilt and the refusal to seek revenge. The idea delicately aligns with the context of American Jeremiad: highlighting personal and moral failure, while gesturing toward restoration and spiritual justice, not punishment.

Similarly, this quote *"But she named the infant, Pearl, as being of great price—purchased with all she had—her mother's only treasure!"* (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 133) resonates with the theme of pursuit of happiness. In naming her daughter *Pearl*, Hester Prynne emphasizes that the child was "purchased with all she had," suggesting immense personal sacrifice in the form of social rejection, shame, and isolation. Nevertheless, despite the cost, Pearl is described as her "only treasure," symbolizing the deep emotional and existential fulfillment Hester gains through motherhood. This mirrors the American ideal of the pursuit of happiness that even when happiness is difficult, costly, or unconventional, individuals have a right to seek personal fulfillment on their own terms. Hester's love for Pearl is not sanctioned by society, yet she defiantly treasures her child, reclaiming joy outside societal approval. Just as many in America historically pursued happiness through self-determination, resistance to authority, or founding new lives despite hardship, Hester's naming of Pearl affirms her right to joy, even when born of suffering.

The American Jeremiad as a literary and political sermon evolved over time and became a structure through which American writers explored the nation's moral conscience, especially regarding sin, justice, and hope. "Purchased with all she had" evokes the deep suffering and personal cost Hester

endures. Like the early Jeremiads that mourned a fallen covenant with God, Hester's life is marked by moral failure and social punishment. Society has branded Hester with the scarlet letter, reflecting the Puritan impulse to publicly punish sin. Yet, naming her daughter *Pearl*, a "treasure," suggests that even in moral fallenness, something precious and redemptive can be born. Pearl symbolizes not only the personal pursuit of happiness but also the hopeful future that follows suffering, a classic Jeremiadic turning point where renewal becomes possible.

Full of concern, therefore—but so conscious of her own right that it seemed scarcely an unequal match between the public on the one side and a lonely woman, backed by the sympathies of nature, on the other—Hester Prynne set forth from her solitary cottage (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 150).

These lines reflect the theme of pursuit of happiness in *The Scarlet Letter* by presenting Hester Prynne as a figure of individual dignity and determination in the face of overwhelming social condemnation. The phrase "*full of concern*" suggests that Hester is aware of the difficulties and dangers that lie ahead, especially given her status as a social outcast. However, this concern does not paralyze her. Hester's internal conviction and her belief in the legitimacy of her choices and dignity provide her strength. This consciousness is key to the American ideal of individual self-determination and moral autonomy, both essential to the pursuit of happiness. Despite being just one individual against the entire public opinion, Hester's moral strength and self-belief allow her to stand as a worthy opponent. This idea reflects a fundamental American principle of democratic egalitarianism that even a single voice, armed with conviction and natural rights, can challenge the collective. "*Backed by the sympathies of nature*" symbolizes a moral universe outside of society's judgments, suggesting that natural law and conscience may offer support when societal laws suppress happiness. It suggests that happiness is found by following one's inner truth in harmony with nature. Thus, the passage supports the theme of the pursuit of happiness by portraying Hester's journey not as a passive endurance of punishment but as an active quest for dignity, purpose, and inner peace, even when the entire society is set against her. Her courage to step out from her "*solitary cottage*" despite public scorn is a metaphor for the American ideal of carving one's own path to fulfillment, no matter the odds.

Hester believes in a deeper moral truth, "*her own right*," which reflects the American ideal of individual liberty and the pursuit of happiness. She acts as if she has a natural right to seek fulfillment and live by her conscience, aligning with America's founding vision of moral self-determination. Hester, in her quiet dignity and refusal to collapse under shame, becomes a visionary figure, modeling the possibility of moral renewal. Her journey is a personal jeremiad as she bears the burden of sin and suffering but also embodies hope for a more compassionate society that might yet honor its founding principles.

Feeling alone in the world and cast off by it, Hester held onto this sole treasure to keep her heart alive, believing that she possessed indefeasible rights against the world and was ready to defend them to the death. 'God gave me the child!' cried she. 'He gave her in requital of all things else which ye had taken from me. She is my happiness… (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 168).

These lines vividly portray Hester Prynne's pursuit of happiness in the face of social rejection and personal suffering. This segment, "*Alone in the world, cast off by it,"* emphasizes Hester's social alienation. She is abandoned by her community due to her sin. Yet in that isolation, she finds Pearl, her daughter, to be her only source of emotional fulfillment. Pearl is not just a child but the embodiment of hope, purpose, and personal joy, her "sole treasure." Hester asserts a natural and inviolable right—*"she possessed indefeasible rights against the world"*—to her happiness, even

when society seeks to strip it away. This echoes the American ideal that every individual is entitled to the pursuit of happiness, regardless of social judgment or institutional authority. *"God gave me the child!"* This powerful declaration places divine justice above human punishment. Hester sees Pearl not as a curse but as divine compensation, a reward or counterbalance to the suffering inflicted by others. The word "requital" implies that where society took away her status, honor, and peace, God returned something greater—a living symbol of joy and love. Pearl becomes the manifestation of her mother's pursuit and attainment of happiness in a hostile world.

Hester's rejection by society reflects the critique of a community that has strayed from true moral principles. While the Puritans claim to uphold God's will, they deny Hester's humanity and right to joy. She, the sinner, becomes a mirror reflecting society's cruelty and hypocrisy, a central element of the Jeremiad tradition. Hester's assertion that "God gave me the child" places divine mercy and purpose above earthly judgment. Like a jeremiad preacher, she reminds her accusers that their understanding of justice is flawed and even sinners may be instruments of divine purpose and grace. By claiming Pearl as her happiness, Hester introduces a redemptive note. In the tradition of the American Jeremiad, the future is not doomed; rather, it can be redeemed through suffering, repentance, and perseverance. Pearl is the symbol of that potential future, where spiritual joy is still possible amid social rejection.

3.4. Sin and Redemption

In The American Jeremiad (1978), the author explains that the Jeremiadiac tradition did not simply condemn sin as a sign of failure or divine abandonment; rather, it transformed sin into a catalyst for renewal, portraying moral lapses, social corruption, or national crises as opportunities for rededication to the covenant. By recasting sins as warnings, the Jeremiad sustained optimism that redemption was not only possible but inevitable if the nation heeded its spiritual and moral responsibilities. Thus, Bercovitch shows that the cyclical pattern of sin and redemption was essential to American culture; affirming its exceptional role as a land always moving toward greater fulfillment of God's purpose.

It might be that a sluggish bond servant, or an undutiful child, whom his parents had given over to the civil authority, was to be corrected at the whipping-post. It might be that an Antinomian, a Quaker, or other heterodox religionist, was to be scourged out of the town, or an idle or vagrant Indian, whom the white man's firewater had made riotous about the streets, was to be driven with stripes into the shadow of the forest (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 75).

Like, these lines from *The Scarlet Letter* reflect how the Puritan society defines and deals with sin, revealing a rigid system that emphasizes public shame and exclusion over true redemption. When read in light of the theme of sin and redemption, the passage critiques a society where redemption is denied to certain groups and sin is measured more by social conformity than moral depth. The phrases like "sluggish bond servant" and "undutiful child" suggest that even minor or involuntary failings like laziness or youthful disobedience were treated as serious sins. In Puritan society, sin is not always moral wrongdoing but a breach of order or obedience, especially against authority. The public punishment at the whipping post implies that redemption must come through physical suffering, not spiritual repentance. Here, "...an Antinomian, a Quaker, or other heterodox religionist" mirrors that religious dissent is labeled as sin. Rather than offering these individuals a chance for redemption, the society literally drives them out. Redemption is made impossible for those who commits sin by believing differently.

This passage reflects the first two stages of the American Jeremiad—moral complaint and threat of punishment—but undermines the third stage, redemptive renewal, especially for the marginalized. The Puritan society, here shown as obsessed over moral order, viewed any deviation, such as religious dissent, laziness, or ethnic otherness, as a sign of societal decline. These behaviors are treated as sins, not just private flaws but threats to the covenant community—a classic Jeremiad move. The public punishments reinforce the second stage of the Jeremiad: that if sin persists, there will be suffering and exclusion. Unlike the Jeremiad's third phase, there is no call to reconciliation or spiritual renewal for these people.

Had there been a Papist among the crowd of Puritans, he might have seen in this beautiful woman, so picturesque in her attire and mien, and with the infant at her bosom, an object to remind him of the image of Divine Maternity, … (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 85).

Similarly, this quote relates powerfully to the theme of sin and redemption in *The Scarlet Letter*. The term *"Papist"* refers to a Roman Catholic. Catholics venerate the image of the Virgin Mary (often called "Divine Maternity")—the holy mother of Christ who represents purity, grace, and redemption. Hester, though publicly shamed for sin (adultery), stands visually and symbolically similar to the Virgin Mary, a woman holding her child. The image is sacred and maternal, even redemptive, yet in direct contrast to how the Puritan society views her. The Puritans see Hester as a sinner, disgraced and degraded, while a Catholic onlooker might see her as sacred, invoking redemptive imagery through her maternal posture and quiet dignity. This contrast of views questions the absolutism of Puritan morality and opens a space for redemptive interpretation of Hester's role. Though she has sinned, the narrator subtly suggests that there is grace and dignity in her. Her motherhood, though condemned, is still visually noble, hinting that she is more than her sin that sets the stage for Hester's journey from public shame to moral strength.

The American Jeremiad is both a critique and a hopeful warning, combining condemnation with the promise of redemption if repentance and moral reformation are embraced. Puritan America envisioned itself as a "City upon a Hill," a righteous, godly society free from the corruption of the old world. The line evokes this religious vision by indirectly invoking the image of Divine Maternity—a symbol of moral and spiritual purity, representing the high ideal. The narrator subtly challenges the harsh Puritan interpretation by comparing Hester to the Virgin Mary. This Catholic image introduces the possibility that grace can still emerge from sin and redemption is not only possible but already underway, even if society is too blind to see it. She embodies the reformative hope the Jeremiad ultimately calls for—not in society's judgment, but in her own spiritual transformation and moral resilience.

Another important dialogue, "*Thus she will be a living sermon against sin, until the ignominious letter is engraved upon her tombstone*" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 95), is spoken by Roger Chillingworth, Hester Prynne's estranged husband, after hearing about her punishment. Hester is transformed into a symbol of moral instruction by making her life a walking cautionary tale. Rather than being executed, as the law originally required, she is forced to live out her punishment visibly and permanently. Her continued existence with the scarlet letter "A" on her chest is designed to teach others not to sin. She becomes a tool of collective moral discipline. The punishment is lifelong and even beyond death—there is no worldly escape or absolution. Redemption, in the eyes of this society, is not a fresh start but rather constant suffering and humiliation meant to humble and purify the sinner. However, as the novel progresses, Hester's resilience, humility, and acts of kindness redeem her morally, if not in the eyes of all Puritans. Therefore, the line highlights a

distorted view of redemption, the one that comes not from forgiveness but from enduring punishment (Ramzan & Khan, 2024b).

Hester becomes a living Jeremiad as her body, marked with the scarlet "A," is the visual sermon that warns others of what happens when God's covenant is broken. This line reflects the Jeremiad's core function as it reinforces social order by holding up an example of punishment for deviance. It calls the community to spiritual vigilance by warning of the consequences of sin. Hester's existence as a "living sermon" is not just a personal punishment; rather, it is a collective force. Her presence is meant to inspire the community to reflect on their covenant with God and strive toward moral purity, as in traditional jeremiads (Ramzan & Javaid, 2025).

In the same strain, here "*If thou feelest it to be for thy soul's peace, and that thy earthly punishment will thereby be made more effectual to salvation, I charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow sinner and fellow* sufferer!" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 102), Reverend Dimmesdale urges Hester Prynne to confess the name of her fellow adulterer. He frames the appeal as a matter of spiritual health and salvation, linking the idea of confession and truth-telling to peace of soul and ultimate redemption. Here, sin is portrayed not just as an act but as a burden on the soul. Dimmesdale suggests that confession can transform earthly punishment into a means of spiritual cleansing. The phrase *"more effectual to salvation"* underlines the Puritan belief that redemption is possible, but only through a combination of punishment, repentance, and confession. The line is deeply ironic as well, because Dimmesdale himself is a fellow sinner. His inability to confess, while urging Hester to do so, reveals his moral cowardice and deep inner conflict. He is seeking redemption through Hester's confession, rather than his own. Thus, this line reflects the spiritual struggle between concealment and confession and between public shame and personal redemption, which are central tensions in the novel (Ramzan & Khan, 2024a).

He urges Hester to confess her sin, implying that such admission is the only path to individual salvation and the restoration of moral order. Dimmesdale's speech highlights the Puritan obsession. He wants public confession as a model for others; that is a core Jeremiadic strategy—using personal sin as a warning and lesson to the whole community. The idea that earthly punishment could become "effectual to salvation" reflects the jeremiad's emphasis on redemptive suffering. This line is the best example of how Hawthorne weaves the theme of sin and redemption into the structure of the American jeremiad.

I have thought of death," said she—"have wished for it—would even have prayed for it, were it fit that such as I should pray for anything. Yet, if death be in this cup, I bid thee think again ere thou beholdest me quaff it. See! It is even now at my lips (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 110).

Hester Prynne, under the burden of her sin (adultery), speaks these words during a moment of deep anguish and despair. "I have thought of death, have wished for it." reveals Hester's profound suffering under the weight of her sin and public shame. Death here symbolizes an escape from the consequences of her moral transgression and the relentless social punishment. It shows her inner torment and hopelessness. The segment "would even have prayed for it, were it fit that such as I should pray for anything" shows Hester's deep feeling of being unworthy of divine mercy or prayer, reflecting her internalized guilt and sense of spiritual alienation. She questions whether someone in her sinful state deserves the grace or forgiveness that prayer might bring, highlighting the harsh moral codes of her society and her own self-condemnation. Despite *her moment of despair, the phrase "Yet, if death be in this cup, I bid thee think again, ere thou beholdest me quaff it" illustrates Hester's* resilience and her will to live. She warns the physician not to offer her a potion that will

cause death. This phrase shows her ambiguous relationship with death and redemption—while she contemplates ending her suffering, she still clings to life, possibly hoping for redemption or change. This underscores the immediacy of her crisis, the tension between surrender and survival. The fact that the cup is “at her lips” symbolizes the threshold between death (escape) and continued life, leading perhaps to eventual redemption.

Hester’s despair and wish for death reflect the “lament” stage of the Jeremiad. Hester embodies the consequences of sin and moral failure. Her anguish is a vivid example of how sin disrupts spiritual peace and social harmony, which Jeremiads emphasize as warning signs of communal decline. Her questioning of whether she should pray underscores the sense of spiritual crisis. Her hesitation to drink the death potion, despite her suffering, symbolizes hope for redemption. This is the turning point where, even amid prevailing despair, there remains a possibility of spiritual renewal.

Her sin, her ignominy, was the root that she had struck into the soil. It was as if a new birth, with stronger assimilations than the first, had converted the forest-land, still so uncongenial to every other pilgrim and wanderer, into Hester Prynne’s wild and dreary but lifelong home (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 119).

These lines reflect the theme of sin and redemption by portraying how Hester Prynne's shameful past becomes the foundation for a new, morally transformed existence. This metaphor, *"Her sin, her ignominy, was the root which she had struck into the soil,"* compares Hester’s sin and shame to a root planted in the earth. It suggests that her moral fall is not something superficial or temporary; rather, it has deeply anchored her to this place and to her identity. Rather than escaping or denying it, she accepts her guilt and lets it shape her existence. *"It was as if a new birth, with stronger assimilations than the first..."* suggests that through her suffering, Hester experiences a spiritual rebirth, a transformation that is deeper and more meaningful than her original identity (before the sin). The wilderness, symbolizing both spiritual testing and social exile, becomes Hester’s true place of dwelling. While others see it as uninviting or alien, Hester accepts it as her home because it represents her moral journey. For her, redemption is not about returning to comfort or society's approval, but about finding inner peace and moral purpose even in isolation and hardship. Hester’s continued presence in the place of her guilt represents her commitment to penance and, ultimately, her moral evolution.

The rhetoric of the American Jeremiad shaped American literature by combining moral critique with the promise of renewal, often through suffering, humility, and recommitment to communal values. Hester embodies the fall from moral purity that is not only personal but symbolic for the Puritan community. Her sin becomes the basis for her social exclusion and public shame. This is the declension phase of the jeremiad. *"It was as if a new birth"* shows that rather than being destroyed by shame, Hester begins a process of inner transformation. Her endurance of punishment and isolation allows her to rebuild her moral identity. This aligns with the jeremiad’s redemptive core—suffering as a means of spiritual renewal. Hester chooses to remain in the place of her sin and transform it into the place of her redemption. This reflects the jeremiad’s final phase, which is hope for renewal, not by erasing the past, but by reclaiming it through moral strength. Thus, this passage critiques how an individual has fallen from that ideal (covenant with God) with a hopeful call for repentance and moral regeneration.

Except for that small expenditure in the decoration of her infant, Hester bestowed all her superfluous means in charity, on wretches less miserable than herself… a real sacrifice of enjoyment in devoting so many hours to such rude handiwork (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 125).

The passage highlights the theme of sin and redemption by showing Hester Prynne's efforts to atone for her past through acts of self-sacrifice and charity. Hester allows herself a small personal indulgence, adorning her child, but otherwise avoids luxury or comfort. She donates all her extra income to people who are "less miserable than herself," even though many of them insult her due to the shameful reputation attached to her sin (adultery). This selflessness shows her moral growth in that despite public scorn, she chooses to help others. Hester dedicates her time and skills not to fashionable or lucrative work, but to creating simple clothing for the poor, thinking to suffice their needs. *"There was an idea of penance in this mode of occupation…"* shows that her actions are not just kind but also spiritual, an inner effort to redeem herself through labor and sacrifice. "*She offered up a real sacrifice of enjoyment*…" gives the idea that she consciously forgoes personal pleasure, suggesting that her charity is a sincere effort to find redemption through suffering and self-denial. Though society marks her as a sinner, her humble acts of kindness suggest a personal moral redemption. Her sin becomes the starting point for a lifelong journey of atonement, showing how redemption can be earned not through words, but through actions and quiet service to others.

Hester Prynne, through her public punishment and inner guilt, embodies the moral fall at the center of the Jeremiad. Her conscious "sacrifice of enjoyment…" shows her awareness of guilt and the need for penance, mirroring the Jeremiad's call to acknowledge sin. Hester doesn't just suffer punishment; instead, she embraces moral self-discipline, charity, and humility. She chooses a redemptive path through labor and self-denial. Her personal redemption mirrors the jeremiad's third phase—renewal through suffering. Even though she is marginalized, Hester gradually becomes a figure of quiet dignity and healing in the community.

she felt, or fancied, then, that the scarlet letter had endowed her with a new sense. She shuddered to believe, yet could not help believing, that it gave her a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts. She was terror-stricken by the revelations that were thus made (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 129-30).

These lines reflect a deep connection to the theme of sin and redemption through Hester Prynne's evolving inner life and moral awareness. "…*the scarlet letter had endowed her with a new sense*" suggests that Hester's public punishment has given her a kind of moral and spiritual insight. Whether real or imagined, she begins to feel that this symbol of shame allows her to perceive things she could not before, especially the hidden sins of others. This line, "*She shuddered to believe, yet could not help believing, that it gave her a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts*," powerfully connects to the American Puritan belief in universal sin—the idea that all humans are inherently sinful. Through her suffering, Hester comes to a kind of redemptive awareness: her own fall has made her more empathetic and perceptive. She now recognizes that sin is not unique to her but is secretly present in many others, even those who appear righteous. This insight terrifies her. Redemption, in this case, is not about comfort or self-justification. Instead, it's a painful awakening to the hypocrisy and hidden guilt within her community. She now sees the unacknowledged sins of others, a burden that isolates her further, even as it enriches her understanding.

In the context of the American Jeremiad, Hester, through her experiences, embodies that structure. She becomes a symbol of society's failings but also of potential redemption. Her own suffering in the form of her public shaming through the scarlet letter highlights the moral failings of the Puritan society that condemns her. But rather than being destroyed by her shame, she grows spiritually and morally, gaining insights into human sin that others in her community are blind to. Hester's new

awareness represents a realization of the moral hypocrisy within her society that is a "fall" from the Puritan ideal of a visibly righteous community. Although Hester is marginalized, her pain leads to wisdom and moral growth. This mirrors the jeremiad's final phase: that suffering becomes the means of moral regeneration.

God, as a direct consequence of the sin for which man was thus punished, had given her a lovely child, whose place was on that same dishonored bosom, to connect her parent forever with the race and descent of mortals, and to be finally a blessed soul in heaven! (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 133).

This passage from *The Scarlet Letter* profoundly illustrates the theme of sin and redemption. While society (man) punishes Hester for her adultery by branding her with the scarlet letter, God responds differently as He gives her a "lovely child," Pearl. The phrase *"as a direct consequence of the sin"* suggests that Pearl is both the result and the response to the sin that is not a curse but a living symbol of potential redemption. Pearl's constant physical closeness to Hester reminds her and others of her sin. However, it also binds her to her humanity and motherhood, placing her in a space not just of shame but of love, care, and responsibility. The *"dishonored bosom"* symbolizes sin, but Pearl's presence there begins to transform it into something sacred as the site of a redemptive bond. Hester's sin could have spiritually alienated her from others, but Pearl keeps her tied to the human world, to the struggles, relationships, and imperfections of being mortal. This connection prevents Hester from retreating entirely into despair or isolation and grounds her humanity. This phrase *"...and to be finally a blessed soul in heaven*!" suggests the redemptive climax of the statement. Despite being born of sin, Pearl is envisioned as destined for salvation. Hawthorne implies that God's grace transcends human judgment; what man condemns, God may sanctify. Pearl is not damned by her origins but may be blessed and redeemed, and perhaps redeem Hester as well.

Hester's sin represents a fall from grace, a breach in the moral covenant she shares with her community and with God. Just as the Jeremiad tradition laments a people's deviation from their divine mission, Hester is punished and marked as a symbol of that decline. Then, the narrator sharply distinguishes between man's punitive justice and God's providential grace. While society marks Hester with a scarlet letter, God gives her Pearl, a child who ultimately may become "*a blessed soul in heaven*." Pearl, born of sin, becomes a symbol of redemptive hope. Her very name, "of great price," suggests that sufferings may yield grace and transformation. This aligns with the third part of the Jeremiad: the call to moral renewal. Hester doesn't just bear punishment; rather, she gradually transforms into a figure of strength, compassion, and quiet dignity, modeling the redemptive arc that the Jeremiad calls for in American life.

Hester's first motion had been to cover her bosom with her clasped hands. But whether from pride or resignation, or a feeling that her penance might best be wrought out by this unutterable pain, she resisted the impulse and sat erect, pale as death, looking sadly into little Pearl's wild eyes (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 145-46).

Here is another important passage that captures a powerful moment in *The Scarlet Letter* where sin and redemption intersect through Hester's conscious suffering and her role as a mother. This instinctive gesture "to cover her bosom with her clasped hands" shows Hester's continued shame and vulnerability. Her hand moves reflexively to hide the scarlet letter, the symbol of her public sin, a sign of adultery and moral transgression. But, instead of shielding herself, Hester consciously chooses to endure the emotional pain, showing the belief that by suffering silently and openly, she might earn redemption. Looking into Pearl's wild eyes, Hester sees both the living consequence of her sin and possibly the promise of redemption—a child who forces her to confront the past but also

gives her a purpose to endure and seek meaning in suffering. Hester's refusal to shield herself suggests a moral awakening. She does not seek to avoid pain; instead, she allows herself to feel it fully, as a form of atonement. By doing so, she aligns herself with the Puritan ideal of repentance, but on her own terms; not out of submission to the community, but as an individual making peace with her actions. This moment reflects Hester's redemption arc: a woman once shamed, now enduring her punishment with resolve, using her pain to refine her character.

Hester embodies the fallen individual. Her act of adultery, marked physically by the scarlet letter, aligns with the "declension," or spiritual backsliding, that the Jeremiad laments. By refusing to hide the letter, Hester accepts her moral responsibility and submits to pain as a redemptive process. This reflects the Jeremiad's call to repentance, not just confession, but transformation through suffering. Her solemn gaze at Pearl suggests a future beyond the shame, a generational possibility of grace. Pearl, though born of sin, might symbolize a new spiritual beginning, echoing the Jeremiad's third stage: hope and renewal.

Therefore it is good for this poor, sinful woman that she has an infant immortality, a being capable of eternal joy or sorrow, confided to her care—to be trained up by her to righteousness, to remind her, at every moment, of her fall, but yet to teach her, as if it were by the Creator's sacred pledge, that if she brings the child to heaven, the child also will bring its parents thither! (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 171).

This dialogue, spoken by Reverend Dimmesdale, powerfully encapsulates the intertwined theme of sin and redemption. Here, Dimmesdale argues that Pearl, though born from Hester's sin, is not merely a consequence of that transgression but also a means to redemption. She is described as an *"infant immortality*,*"* meaning a soul with an eternal destiny, who has been entrusted to Hester by God. Her presence constantly reminds Hester of her fall, her sin, yet also represents a sacred opportunity for moral restoration. If Hester can raise Pearl to be righteous, then that act can become a path to her own salvation. Pearl acts as both a living punishment and a means of grace. Every moment with her reminds Hester of her shame but also keeps her morally and spiritually engaged. This sentence, "*If she brings the child to heaven, the child also will bring its parents thither!"* emphasizes that redemption comes not through avoidance of sin, but through living righteously in the wake of it—through accepting consequences and responding with love and duty.

The idea that raising Pearl in righteousness can redeem Hester and potentially her partner reflects a hopeful, moral mission, a redemptive possibility built into personal suffering. It echoes the Puritan ideal that even in sin, God's providence offers a path back to grace. He openly calls Hester a *"poor, sinful woman,"* recognizing the fall from moral standing. Her condition represents the decline or moral crisis that is central to the Jeremiad: people or individuals straying from the covenant with God. Rather than condemnation alone, Dimmesdale calls for moral renewal through Hester's actions. It suggests that repentance is not passive but lived daily, especially through her care of Pearl. This aligns with the jeremiad's core that reinforces reform and spiritual revival in response to moral failure.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* serves as a profound meditation on the evolving identity of America through its exploration of American exceptionalism, the promise of material and spiritual development, and the enduring themes of sin and redemption. Through the character of Dimmesdale, the narrative constructs the image of a divinely chosen, morally burdened

figure, reflecting the belief in America's providential role and moral mission that is central to the idea of exceptionalism. Simultaneously, Hester Prynne's journey, from public shame to spiritual resilience, mirrors the American promise of individual growth, self-reliance, and inner transformation, underscoring the land's dual nature as both a wilderness of trial and a garden of renewal. The novel's engagement with the theme of sin and redemption reinforces the Puritan legacy and anticipates the American jeremiad tradition, where national identity is continually shaped through cycles of moral failure, public reflection, and hopeful regeneration.

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