

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE NOVELS 'FLAWED' BY CECELIA AHERN AND 'THE SCARLET LETTER' BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Carolyn Malsawmtluangi

Assistant professor, Department of English, St.Philomena's College, Bannimantap, Hanumanthanagar
Mysore-570015, India.

Received: September 22, 2018

Accepted: November 03, 2018

ABSTRACT: *This paper attempts to provide a comparative study of two novels woven around the wheel of societal judgement, and the underlying themes of deception, search for an identity as well as from a feministic lens. Both the characters in the novels of Cecelia Ahern and Nathaniel Hawthorne presented women who are labelled a sinner and an outcast, branded with the mark of the guilty. The evolution of the characters and their transition throughout the novels bring to light the clash between society and the individuals, sin and forgiveness. Both these writers belong to a completely different era; Hawthorne being a 17th century dark romantic writer and Cecelia Ahern a contemporary writer. Even though the settings are different, the message it intends to portray is of the same taste that further shows the relevance of the themes about to be mentioned.*

Key Words: *Deception, Identity, Feministic, Outcast, Branded, Societal, Individuals.*

Cecelia Ahern is an Irish Writer who rose to fame with the publication of *P.S. I Love You* (2005), which was later adapted into a movie in 2007. The novel *Flawed* (2016) which was published a decade later raised a number of issues that spark a similarity with that of Nathaniel Hawthorne's masterpiece *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). Celestine North is an ordinary seventeen-year-old girl who lives in a society that judges people by their flaws and the mistakes that they commit. A society of Perfection under the supervision of the Guild, that strongly resembles 'Big Brother' from George Orwell's *1984* (1949). As in Nathaniel Hawthorne's epic novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, where the inhabitants of the society are branded on their body as a sign of their sin, Ahern's *Flawed* has a similar context; the one who commits a sin are branded with the letter "F" in different parts of their body- their temple to indicate a bad decision, their chest over their heart to indicate disloyalty to the Guild (which plays the role of the Court or the Judge), their right palm to indicate stealing from the society, their tongue to indicate lying, and the sole on the right foot for collusion with the flawed. Celestine North was accused of aiding an old man in a bus and so was branded on her right foot. Her perfectly shaped world has collided in the blink of an eye, and her innocent teenager in her evolved into a woman with fire in her eyes; a woman who is flawed. She writes:

"Courage does not take over, it fights and struggles through every word you say and every step you take.....It takes courage to overcome, but it takes extreme fear to be courageous"

A girl who has never dreamt of her body scarred with the stigma of having sinned, who only knew courage and fear like words found in the dictionary stir her life in a different direction and she stood for what she felt was right even if it meant being an outcast.

"There's the person you think you should be and there's the person who you really are. I've lost a sense of both. I'm flawed. But I'm a survivor. And I'm not to give up"

Although she is branded with six marks on her body by the end of the novel, the sixth being a secret procedure with people of the society being aware with only five brands; she reminds herself that she is a 'survivor' and this carries a strong message for all women. Ahern has undoubtedly raised the issue that women can be their own heroes.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was an American Novelist and Short Story Writer whose works are mostly inspired by Puritanism and is often reflected in his writings including *The Scarlet Letter*. He reveals the true nature of humanity that indulges in sin, and betrayal ever since the loss of the Garden of Eden that has shunned man forever. The novel narrates the story of Hester Prynne, a young woman who conceives a baby from an affair with an unknown, which was a taboo or a sin in the society she dwells in, a society that never fails to punish the guilty. She is, therefore, branded with the letter 'A' on her chest which stands for 'Adulteress'. It is written:

"The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where women dared not tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers- stern and wild ones"

Celestine and Hester prynn both committed a sin like all other creature that has lived on earth. They are exposed of all their faults and are judged by the same human beings that make the same error. On the contrary, they embraced their so-called 'sin' and accepted their pains. It taught them a lesson and help them see mankind in all it's shallowness. Celestine's words, "*I can't be afraid of someone whose human side I see and know*" shows that she has unveiled the hidden nature of humans and it did not arouse fear anymore. For her, being flawed is her strength because it is from her mistakes that she learns as the scarlet letter is a passport and a cloak of confidence for Hester.

These two novels have a similar feministic approach as it has in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*(1982), where Celie, the protagonist became a transformed woman after having realised her true potential and identity as an individual. The awareness that she is built with the same honor, dignity and potential as any male being that ever existed altered her mental outlook. Hester, Celestine and Celie would have been surprised to see their dependent and desperate self at the beginning of the novels. It takes a whole new level of courage to step out of the safety realm and change one's outlook towards life. These three women are their own heroes in a world dominated by men. Especially in *The Scarlet Letter*, the plight of the 17th century women is evidently shown. For the case of Hester's punishment, the men were given a lighter punishment and it was the women who wore the scar of adulteress even if the men are as involved as they are. In *Flawed* Celestine was tortured more than any person that has ever been branded because they want to silence her, and she was given a sixth brand on her spine.

The theme of deception rings in the novel of Hawthorne with the character of Arthur Dimmesdale, the father of Hester's daughter, Pearl, who is also a Puritan Minister. The fact that Hester refuses to stain his name on her judgement day made him utterly guilty it created an emotional preacher out of him. His cowardice to confess his sin tortures no one else but himself. His deceptive nature barred him from a peaceful life. The mask of a preacher he has to wear while witnessing his own daughter growing up and denied the life of an ordinary child. His identity crisis is vividly mentioned here;

"I have laughed in bitterness and agony and heart, at the contrast between what I seem and what I am"

Only he knows the helpless man who comes home in regret for denying himself. He could no longer wear his mask of deception at the end and dies with the letter 'A' inscribed on his chest as a mark of his sin after confessing it to Hester.

Ahern, at the beginning of the novel wrote;

"I am a girl of definitions, of logic, of black and white"

Celestine was the kind of girl who sees everything and black and white owing to the fact that she loves Math. Her life was defined and perfect at the beginning, but once she strayed away a little she could feel the logic muffled from her view and she no longer knows the answer to the questions around her. Her quest for an identity into embracing her shattered self revealed to her the people that wore the mask of deception when things turn blue, especially Judge Crevan whom she used to worship and admire- the father of her boyfriend and a man was perfect right to the bone. In the end, his true nature is exposed and revealed and he had to accept the consequences.

"I know the difference between right and wrong. I understand the rules. But today I feel that the rules have been blurred..."

'The Guild' which was the main body in the society where Celestine lives and the only one that is not 'flawed' could be identical with The Puritans in Hawthorne's Novel. For the Puritans, sin and redemption plays an important role and they have strict rules and punishments for the offenders. It stands as the Judge that decides the guilt and the innocent. The Guild, on the other hand, was owned by Judge Bosco Crevan, it labels people into the flawed and the perfect while it had done so many wrongs itself that lies hidden and buried.

The idea of branding a letter as a sign or a mark of sin to be carried forever questions on the concept of forgiveness. To expose and punish and to leave a reminder of that incident does not very well follow the pattern of 'sin, forgiveness and redemption' of the Puritans nor does it agree to the definition of an un-flawed or 'perfection' of The Guild.

Conclusion:

Though these writers and their works are separated by almost three centuries, the content and concept they convey exhibit a striking similarity in a way they represent the society as deceitful, it questions on the idea of sin, the individual's mentality and human nature. It either proves the universal relevance of these similarities or the unchanging human nature defined by sin, guilt and deception.

WORKS CITED:

- Ahern, Celelia. Flawed. 2016. Harper Collins Publishers Limited. 2016. Print
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. The Scarlet Letter. 1850. Ticknor and Fields. 1850. Print
- Walker, Alice. The Color Purple. 1982. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 1982. Print
- Orwell, George. 1984. Secker and Warburg. 1949. Print
- Hulse, E.The Story of the Puritans. USA:Chapel Library. Web.