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Comparing Moral Values in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's Miss Sara Sampson and Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter

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Thesis submitted to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences at
West Virginia University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of

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in
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Karsten D. Kleine

This thesis examines the impact of rigid moral codes on women by comparing two works, Lessing's Miss Sara Sampson, (1775), and Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, (1850). Although the works were written in different centuries and continents, they share a common theme: the clash between patriarchal control and women's quest for self-determination. In each work, a beautiful young woman violates the social code by becoming involved in an illicit love affair, and because of this transgression and her refusal to renounce her love, is severely punished. Also in each work, the father-daughter relationship is highlighted and can be seen to symbolize the dominance of patriarchy that characterizes both societies. While women's exemplary moral behavior is supposed to help distinguish both the Puritan and German bourgeois societies for whom the works were written, women are shown to have paid a high personal price for such distinction—a cost they are still paying today.

To my parents and Diana.

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Introduction

Moral values have always and will always influence people's lives. To a large degree they determine how people behave and what happens to people when they misbehave. Literature is one means of both reflecting and shaping moral values, and is often used to educate the public concerning the social morays of the period in which it is written. This is certainly true of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's Miss Sara Sampson, a German bourgeois tragedy that appeared in 1755, and Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, an American novel published in 1850. Though these novels are set in different countries and different centuries, they disclose similar moral standards, not only because the bourgeoisie in both societies is striving to better itself, but also because both societies are patriarchal. Each work presents its society's moral values through the fate of the female protagonist who suffers because she does not conform to the rigid moral constraints her society imposes. In this thesis, I will compare the roles of the women as portrayed in Miss Sara Sampson and The Scarlet Letter in order to examine conflicting societal impulses, namely the clash between patriarchal control and women's quest for self-determination.

In eighteenth-century Germany, educated members of the newly emerging bourgeoisie used the bourgeois tragedy to introduce new moral values they hoped would help distinguish their class from other segments of society. Lessing's Miss Sara Sampson is especially important for the developing self-consciousness of the new middle class, not only because it is the first bourgeois tragedy ever written in Germany, but also because it warns of the suffering that will occur if society's moral values are transgressed. This early bourgeois tragedy is concerned with the private family sphere and emphasizes themes such as love,

forgiveness, virtue and compassion. Of particular importance is the sorrow of the father's experience when faced with the loss of a once virtuous daughter. Beautiful and innocent Miss Sara Sampson, daughter of a loving and honorable man from the landed gentry, is seduced by an older, experienced man from the higher nobility. Though none of the main characters really belong to the bourgeoisie, the contrast between Sara's and her father's upright and forgiving natures and Mellefont's depraved and reckless behavior clarifies to the bourgeois viewers how they should behave. Thus, this drama demonstrates the use of moral values to further the struggle of the bourgeoisie for emancipation. Yet the fact that Sara--like all other heroines of bourgeois tragedies--must ultimately die, indicates that women have had to pay a high price for any social and political gain the bourgeoisie has achieved through its emphasis on moral virtue. Scholar Andreas Huyssen further illuminates this point:

Der bürgerliche Tugendbegriff--darüber ist sich die Forschung einig--war gewiß ein wesentlicher Bestandteil der ideologischen Auseinandersetzung mit dem Adel und muß als progressiv angesehen werden. Im Bereich sexueller Moral half es dem Bürgertum, sich von der Lasterhaftigkeit und Mätressenwirtschaft der Fürstenhöfe zu distanzieren--aber eben auf Kosten der Frau und unter Verzicht auf eine Emanzipation menschlicher Sinnlichkeit überhaupt. (163)

Like the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie in Germany, seventeenth-century Puritans from New England also tried to distinguish themselves through adherence to a rigid moral code. Hawthorne's novel The Scarlet Letter thus reflects numerous themes also common in the bourgeois tragedy, including the portrayal of men as dominators and women as victims who were excluded from public life. While moral values changed somewhat by

the nineteenth-century, the novel's content still "spoke" to Hawthorne's contemporaries. Like Miss Sara Sampson, The Scarlet Letter was very well received at the time it was published. Indeed, according to Nina Baym, it continues to have a profound influence on its readers: "For thousands and thousands of readers today and in 1850, the four important characters in The Scarlet Letter--Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth and Pearl--have become part of their mental landscape"(XX). For my thesis, the roles of the women, Hester and Pearl, are especially important. Because the Puritans' attitudes are depicted clearly in Hawthorne's novel, it is a valuable source for learning about the constraints under which women lived, and lends itself particularly well to an examination of how women were used in order to reflect society's concepts of virtue and depravity.

My interpretation of Miss Sara Sampson is greatly influenced by "Herrschaft und Zärtlichkeit: Der Patriarchalismus und das Drama im 18. Jahrhundert" (1984) by Bengt Algot Sørensen. He focuses on the portrayal of women in patriarchal societies, and his study contains many feminist insights concerning the founding of the German bourgeoisie. Three other authors who have helped me understand the works of Lessing are Wolfgang Mauser, Inge Stephan and Susan Gustafson. In Mauser's article "Lessings Miss Sara Sampson: Bürgerliches Trauerspiel als Ausdruck innerbürgerlichen Konflikts" (1975) and Stephan's "So ist die Tugend ein Gespenst: Frauenbild und Tugendbegriff im bürgerlichen Trauerspiel bei Lessing und Schiller" (1985), Lessing's tragedy is interpreted from perspectives that provide a deeper understanding of the suffering that eighteenth-century women had to endure. Gustafson's work on Lessing, Absent Mothers and Orphaned Fathers: Narcissism and Abjection in Lessing's Aesthetic and Dramatic Production (1995), gave me deeper insight into the role of the father in bourgeois tragedies. My work on Hawthorne was

especially influenced by Nina Baym's The Scarlet Letter, A Reading (1986). Baym, who interprets Hawthorne's novel from a feminist perspective, focuses on the portrayal of Hester and sees her as a heroine who is fighting for liberation in Puritan society. I was also influenced by Louise Desalvo's Nathaniel Hawthorne (1987). Desalvo interprets The Scarlet Letter from a woman's point of view and incorporates many feminist ideas into her interpretation.

In Chapter One, I will first discuss the main historical changes that led to the rise of the bourgeoisie in Germany in the eighteenth century. An understanding of these changes helps to clarify the important role women played in the literature of the period. I will briefly show how Lessing's personal history affected his writing, and I will discuss Lessing's personal view concerning women's liberation. In the third part of this chapter, I will show how patriarchal thinking influenced family values and the lives of bourgeois women. In a discussion about the bourgeois tragedy, I will demonstrate how the bourgeoisie used this genre to express its values and moral standards. In the last part of Chapter One, I will show how the portrayal of women in general, and Miss Sara Sampson and her rival Marwood in particular, indicate the ways in which women were affected by the patriarchal society in which they lived.

Chapter Two will be devoted to a discussion of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter. I will address how living conditions in nineteenth-century New England influenced moral values and general attitudes toward women. In the chapter's second part, I will focus on Hawthorne's personal history as it relates to the creation of the novel. In part three, I will discuss the portrayal of the two main female characters: Hester Prynne and her daughter Pearl, including the position they hold in Puritan society.

In Chapter Three, I will compare the female protagonists in Lessing's and Hawthorne's works. I will discuss similarities in the way they were portrayed and what their roles and positions in the social hierarchy were. I will also examine the way that the society's moral values impacted the female characters' lives generally. I will show how they dealt with these traditional roles to which they were confined.

To my knowledge, there has been no study so far that focuses on similarities in the portrayal of moral values in the works of Lessing and Hawthorne. By examining the demands placed on women from different centuries and continents, I will attempt to shed light on the hardships women had to endure in order to uphold the rigid moral codes. Women were supposed to embody their society's ideal of virtue and suffered dire consequences when they failed to do so. In my opinion, showing these parallels is important in order to clarify the obstacles women encountered in their struggle for emancipation.

Chapter I

The development of the bourgeoisie in eighteenth-century Germany depended in large part on the education of broad sections of the populace. Professionals in various fields carved out their new social positions, located between the peasantry and the nobility. Ute Frevert defines the German bourgeoisie as follows:

Akademisch geschulte Verwaltungsjuristen, Richter, Pfarrer, Professoren und Lehrer, aber auch Ärzte und Advokaten bildeten den Kern des 'neuen Bürgertums', das sich in größeren Städten zu einer besonderen, in Wohnform, Kleidung, kulturellem Habitus und Arbeitsweise von den anderen Stadtbewohnern unterschiedenen sozialen Gruppe entwickelte. (35)

Frevert mentions also that especially salesmen who traveled to other areas of the world experienced a different core of values on their trips. In other parts of Europe, England and France for example, the bourgeoisie developed much earlier than in Germany. In these countries, the bourgeoisie contributed to political change. The traveling salesmen saw this development as an example for social change in Germany:

Gerade die exportorientierten Kaufleute, deren überlokale Geschäftsbeziehungen sie mit anderen Verhaltensweisen und Vorstellungswelten konfrontierten, setzten sich im 18. Jahrhundert immer bewußter von den auf ihren verbrieften Rechten und einer ehrbaren Lebensführung beharrenden Handwerkern und kleinen Krämern ab. (Frevert 34)

The bourgeoisie tried to distinguish itself from other parts of society through a reputable lifestyle. Its members wanted to shape private as well as public life; therefore they participated not only in the development of the German states but founded

during the same time reading clubs to foster pedagogical, technical, and social development. It was remarkable that these new clubs and societal institutions were only designed for men: "Diese modernen, berufsübergreifenden Organisationen, in denen sich die neuen bürgerlichen Schichten ein eigenes Forum sozialer, kultureller und politischer Identitätsfindung schufen, waren beinahe ausnahmslos für Männer" (Frevert 35). Women were generally not allowed to join these groups and had to stay at home to take care of the children: "Nicht nur in den philanthropischen, mit konkreten Reformprojekten befaßten Gesellschaften blieben Männer unter sich; auch die Geselligkeits- und Bildungsvereine schlossen Frauen aus" (Frevert 35).

To play such a secondary role was an entirely new situation for women. In the centuries before, women and men were considered more or less equal. This was due to the fact that before the advent of industrialization, husband and wife worked together to keep the whole "household"--or entire farm--running:

Männer und Frauen arbeiteten Hand in Hand, obschon mit verschiedenen Zugehörigkeiten. Ihr gemeinsames Bezugssystem war der Haushalt, und jede Arbeitsleistung, unabhängig ob sie vom Hausvater oder der Hausmutter erbracht wurde, war wichtig und unverzichtbar für das Gedeihen der Wirtschaft. (Frevert 27)

The rise of the bourgeoisie brought change to both men and women's social positions. Barbara Duden describes this in Das schöne Eigentum as follows:

Außerhalb des Hauses wird der Mann zum Gehaltsempfänger, und mit der zunehmenden Entwicklung der Geldverhältnisse wird dieser Erwerb von Geld zur eigentlichen Erwerbsquelle der Familie, der gegenüber die gebrauchswertschaffende Arbeit der Frau allmählich

an Bedeutung verliert. (133)

As Duden points out, women's work in the house lost its value because men now worked outside the home, and in doing so, earned enough income to take care of all their families' needs. This new situation was limited to the rising new middle class. Though bourgeois women still supervised the servants, helped with cleaning and cooking, and took care of the children, they were not paid for this, and it was no longer considered to be something that contributed to the family wealth. Along with the women's new economic situation, their societal ranking changed as well. Since their work was no longer valued, their position within the family changed:

Die Familie ist nicht mehr der Ort der gemeinsamen Wirtschaft, sondern der--scheinbar von aller Arbeit befreite--Binnenraum, in dem der Mann, von der Arbeit heimgekehrt, eine liebende Dienstleistung an sich und den Kindern erwartete. (Duden 133)

Women had to stay at home and raise the children as well as be the source of love and caring for their husbands.

It is remarkable that, though the old order of rules and regulations were set aside, traditions and moral values became increasingly conservative. The development of the eighteenth-century society was very male-oriented. It almost completely ignored the needs and accomplishments of women:

All jene Kategorien, die das bürgerliche Selbst- und Sendungsbewußtsein begründeten, wie Bildung und individuelle Leistung, galten für bürgerliche Frauen nicht. Sie wirkten still und unauffällig im Haus, in der Familie und schmückten nur dann und wann, am Arm des Gatten eine öffentliche Ball- oder Konzertveranstaltung mit ihrer angenehmen Erscheinung. (Frevert 36)

Women were not only excluded from most aspects of public life, they also had no access to a formal education. Once they reached the age of twelve they were taken out of school and had to help in the household. In 1763, compulsory education was introduced to Prussia, but only for boys. Education for girls did not become compulsory until the nineteenth century. Girls were generally educated by the parents at home. Female teenagers very often had no responsibility whatsoever until they got married and had children of their own. "Etwas rechtes tun, Verantwortung tragen, Entscheidungen treffen--das konnten Frauen erst, wenn sie heirateten. Die Jugendzeit war deshalb ein einziges Warten auf den Zukünftigen, auf die Ehe, auf den eigenen Hausstand" (Frevert 39). Marriages were generally not based on love but were arranged to improve the situation of both families, and were only possible within the same social ranking. Frevert explains:

Ehen waren deshalb auch immer Mittel, Bindungen zwischen Familien zu knüpfen, die einander von Nutzen sein konnten. Ähnlich wie im Adel und bei den Bauern gehorchten sie auch im neuen Bürgertum einem strategischen Kalkül, das der Vergrößerung, Arrondierung und Absicherung von Besitz und Herrschaft diene. (39)

The new German bourgeois family was defined through the dominant role of the father. The father did not only have economic power over the family, but also moral power. Zender's Universal Lexicon, published in 1734, defined the family as follows: "Die Familie ist eine Anzahl von Personen, welche der Macht und Gewalt eines Haus-Vaters . . . unterworfen sind" (qtd. in Sørensen 15). According to Sørensen and other scholars, it was the father who made all the important decisions, such as whether the girls of the family would have access to a formal education, or whether the wife would be able to participate in any social

interaction. The Prussian law of 1794 bound the power of the fathers into law, as Sørensen mentions: "Sein [des Vaters] Entschluß gibt in gemeinschaftlichen Angelegenheiten den Ausschlag" (16). Yet this was even true for women's issues that were of a much more personal and biological nature: "Wie lange die Mutter aber dem Kinde die Brust reichen soll, hängt von der Bestimmung des Vaters ab" (Sørensen 16). Patriarchal law not only interfered with the social rights of women but also with their private rights, such as how long a mother could breast-feed her baby. The power of the father over every aspect of family life reflects the general dominance of men in eighteenth-century German society. Because of their leading role in patriarchal society, bourgeois men were able to define the moral values of the family. Sørensen sees a rigid distribution of roles connected with moral and normative pretension: "Diese patriarchische Herrschaftsform ist als ein Netz von zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen strukturiert, darin zwischenmenschliches Verhalten nach festen Rollenmustern mit moralisch-normativen Anspruch eingeübt und vorgeschrieben wird" (16). Men were the "winners" of this new distribution of power in the bourgeois society. Women were stripped of almost all their rights in both the public and private domains. Karl S. Guthke attributes the dramatic change within the family structure to the German bourgeoisie's lack of political power which, in comparison to the situation in other European countries, was extreme:

Gerade weil das deutsche Bürgertum des 18. Jahrhunderts in der politisch zerklüfteten, dezentralisierten Situation, die Nationalgeist nicht aufkommen ließ und von Nationalaufgaben keine Rede sein ließ, in viel stärkerer Weise als das englische und französische politisch funktionslos war, mußte es sein Selbstbewußtsein und seine Selbstbestätigung statt auf

politisch-öffentlichem kompensatorisch auf moralisch-privatem Gebiet suchen. (41)

Guthke sees the missing political power as the main reason that the bourgeoisie withdraws into the private sphere and tries to distance itself from the nobility and the lower social classes. Emphasis on the private sphere meant that the expression of emotions, such as exclamations of love and the shedding of tears, became highly valued. The new era of *Empfindsamkeit* even allows the fathers to be emotionally sensitive. But this shift towards a more emotional father happens without questioning the patriarchal structure in the family. There is only a shift in perspective:

Für unsere Perspektive bedeutsam ist aber vor allem die Tatsache, daß die Emotionalisierung auf keine Weise den Patriarchalismus in Frage stellt oder aufhebt. Im Gegenteil: Patriarchalismus und Empfindsamkeit vertrugen sich im 18. Jahrhundert ausgezeichnet. Nur verschob sich innerhalb der doppelten Struktur des Patriarchalismus der Akzent von der väterlichen Herrschaft auf die väterliche Liebe. (Sørensen 40)

Lessing himself grew up in a hierarchically structured family. The young, seventeen-year-old Lessing suffered on the one hand from the dominant role of his father, but accepts it on the other hand without further questioning. Although his father did not allow him to do what he thought was right, he still accepted it and did not question the father's authority. In a letter to his father, Lessing's acceptance of that authority is clear:

Ich versichere mich unterdessen, dass Sie mein Wohl besser ansehen werden als ich. Und bei der Versicherung werde ich, wenn Sie auch bei der abschlägigen Antwort beharren sollten, doch, wie ich schuldig bin, noch allezeit Sie als meinen Vater zu ehren und lieben fortfahren. (qtd. in Sørensen 65)

According to this quote and judging by his works, one can assume that Lessing believed in the patriarchal family structure of his time.

Along with the social changes that occurred in Germany in the eighteenth century, a new literary genre also appeared: *das bürgerliche Trauerspiel*. Lessing's play Miss Sara Sampson was the first of its kind in Germany:

Praktisch und theoretisch begründet sich das deutsche bgl. Tr. als eines der Produkte der literarisch fruchtbaren Umbruchszeit um die Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts. 1755 erschien sowohl das erste deutsche Originaldrama, das den Untertitel als bgl. Tr. aufweist, Lessings Miss Sara Sampson, wie auch die erste Abhandlung über die Theorie des neuen Genres. (Guthke 6)

Like all the other dramas produced at this time, Miss Sara Sampson reflects the values and concerns of *Empfindsamkeit*, especially its focus on family life. Sørensen explains:

All diese Dramenformen waren Familiendramen. Ihnen gemeinsam war die private Sphäre eines mehr oder weniger alltäglichen Familienlebens der bürgerlich-adeligen Zwischenschichten, die wir vorhin als die Träger des neuen Familiengefühls identifizierten. Gemeinsam war ihnen vor allem auch der indirekte und stillschweigende Bezug auf das uns bekannte patriarchisch-familiale Wertesystem. (68)

The relationship between father and daughter was particularly important both in these tragedies and in real life: until a woman married, she was bound in love and duty to tend to her father's needs, just as he was bound to protect her from all dangers, be they of physical or moral nature. Because of the importance of the father-daughter relationship, bourgeois dramas often depicted

conflicts that arose between father and daughter, the portrayal of which was certain to attract viewers. A popular cause of father-daughter conflict was the intrusion of a seducer who would steal the daughter's heart from the father. Because of the turmoil this situation created in the seduced daughter's heart, it also illustrates the conflict between her desire for emancipation and her sense of obligation to her father.

As mentioned earlier, the main goal of the new bourgeois family as reflected in the bourgeois tragedy is to show a set of moral values superior to the one exhibited by the nobility. The bourgeoisie tried to elevate itself by adhering to high standards of virtue and honor. The portrayal of superior moral values was, according to Guthke, the only way the bourgeoisie could gain influence and power in society:

[Es] eroberte also die Geistigkeit des Bürgertums trotz seiner Passivität in der politischen Öffentlichkeit im Grunde die anderen Stände; das Bürgertum suchte gesellschaftliche und politische Gleichheit, indem es seine Moral als überlegenes Ethos, als den höheren Adel, und alle Stände als der moralischen Allgemeinmenschlichkeit fähig zeigt. (42)

In a sense, morality was used to equalize the classes. From this perspective, anyone who was morally superior could achieve high social standing. Wolfgang Wittofski substantiates this view:

Die bürgerlichen Dramen führten Kern und Modell der Gesellschaft vor: die bürgerliche Kleinfamilie. Sie war (und ist) angewiesen auf den verinnerlichten Konsensus ihrer Glieder. Sozialisation heißt da, man lernt, sein Rollenverhalten auszurichten nach dem, was von einem erwartet wird im Rahmen des Familien-Wertesystems. (1)

Lessing hoped his works would have an effect on the public and their views of moral behavior. He believed that the lives of the

middle-class people provided material worthy of tragedy and that only bourgeois tragedies in contrast to royal tragedies could influence his viewers. His plays, especially Miss Sara Sampson, focus on the private struggle of family members. This was a new focus and is one of the main characteristics of the bourgeois tragedy:

Einer der wichtigsten Unterschiede zwischen der heroischen Tragödie des Barock und der französischen Klassik einerseits und dem neuen bürgerlichen Trauerspiel andererseits besteht gerade in den grundsätzlich verschiedenen Wertvorstellungen, die in ihnen zum Ausdruck kommen. Auch in der heroischen Tragödie konnten ja familiäre Konflikte eine große Rolle spielen; nur wurden die familialen Gefühle hier grundsätzlich den politischen Öffentlichkeitswerten des Staates und des Vaterlandes untergeordnet und also nicht als die höchsten Werte anerkannt. (Sørensen 71)

Hence the bourgeois tragedy shifted away from the earlier focus on "heroic" kings and queens and towards family concerns and moral values.

This shift from noble to middle class characters reflects the shift in class adherence among the viewing public who were mainly from the developing middle class and could only identify with and learn from people whose lives they understood. Lessing comments on the importance of depicting private conflicts:

Die Namen von Fürsten und Helden können einem Stück Pomp und Majestät geben; aber zur Rührung tragen sie nichts bei. Das Unglück derjenigen, deren Umstände den unsrigen am nächsten kommen, muß natürlicher Weise am tiefsten in unsere Seele dringen; und wenn wir mit Königen Mitleid haben, so haben wir es mit ihnen als Menschen, und nicht als mit Königen. (Hamburgische

Dramaturgie qtd. in Sørensen 70)

Lessing hoped his works would have an effect on the public and their views of moral behavior. In Miss Sara Sampson, Lessing appeals to the emotions by depicting private family conflicts. Although the Sampson family belongs to the lower nobility, the conflict that consumes its members reflect the moral concerns of the emerging bourgeoisie. From the beginning the focus is on the father--on his emotional suffering. He laments the loss of his daughter, his role in her flight, and her current dilemma as expressed in the following comment to his servant Waitwell: "Oh schweig! Zerfleischt nicht das Gegenwärtige mein Herz schon genug? Willst du meinem Martern durch die Erinnerung an vergangene Glückseligkeit noch höllischer machen?" (5) The entire first scene of the play is devoted to the feelings of the father. Hence, the first sentences introduce the reader right away to the feelings of Sir William, who was hurt by his daughter Sara. Sørensen sees in the father's complaints an emphasis on his dominance in the patriarchal family structure. By putting the father in the opening scene, Lessing focuses the reader's attention on him and away from the actual moral conflict in which Sara finds herself. As Sørensen points out, it is the disturbance of the father-daughter relationship that is most important here:

Die Vater-Tochter-Beziehung ist das eigentliche Anliegen des Dramas und zwar so sehr, daß die Schuld Saras und auch Mellefont's nicht die Kränkung der Sexualmoral, sondern die Verletzung des alten Vaters und damit der familiären Wertvorstellungen zu sein scheint. (77)

How does Sara violate those moral standards of the family, and how is Sara portrayed in the tragedy in general? Sara's father and Mellefont both assume responsibility for Sara's flight from her father's home. In conversation with Sara, Sir William

exclaims: "Wenn du mich an mein Vergeben erinnerst, so erinnere du mich auch daran, daß ich damit gezaudert habe. Warum vergab ich dir nicht gleich? Warum setzte ich dich in die Notwendigkeit, mich zu fliehen?" (89). In a different scene, Mellefont laments that he has stolen an innocent maiden from her beloved father, a "crime" he had not previously committed: "Ich hatte noch keine Unschuld aus dem Hause eines geliebten Vaters entwendet und sie gezwungen, einem Nichtswürdigen zu folgen, der auf keine Weise mehr sein eigen war" (9). Sara is not credited for making her own decision to flee with the man she loves, while the pangs of conscience she suffers indicate that she regrets her action: "Es war der Ton meines Vaters--Ich Elende! Kann ich denn nichts von ihm vergessen? Ach! Wo ihm sein Gedächtnis ebenso grausame Dinge leistete, wo er auch mich nicht vergessen kann!--Doch er hat mich vergessen" (13).

Sara lives in a dichotomous conflict from which she can not escape. On the one hand, she is in love with Mellefont and wants to stay with him; on the other hand, she is worried about leaving her home and her father. This conflict is a result of the patriarchy she lives in. Sara feels very bad that she is hurting her father's feelings. According to Susan E. Gustafson, the degree of her suffering reflects the importance she places on her role as loving daughter:

Sara's retreat back to her father marks her general acceptance of his terms, his rule, his demands upon their relationship, and his subversion of her relationship to Mellefont. Her affective reintegration into the patriarchal-symbolic order illustrates her reaffirmation of the father-centered social and psychic structure. (125)

This shows that Sara is not the personification of a modern woman who was ahead of her time. She is more concerned about

maintaining the relationship with her father than she is about her own liberation.

One of Lessing's reasons for writing this bourgeois tragedy was to arouse sympathy within the viewer, since he and other sentimentalists believed that sympathy was an emotion that improved one's character. The fact that most tears are shed for the father indicates the importance of his position in bourgeois society. Gustafson writes:

Sara's crime is not succumbing to the seduction, it is causing her father grief. Each of the tears compounds her transgressions, reinforcing the audience's sympathy for an orphaned father and fueling their consternation with a straying daughter. (Gustafson 135)

Sara has to live with this great conflict, being torn between her love for Mellefont and for her father, without there being a solution in sight. The conflict is worsened by Mellefont's reluctance to marry her. He is afraid of being tied to a woman, i.e., of losing his freedom. Sara's dream about the dagger illustrates the conflict in which she lives:

Hören sie nur, Mellefont; indem ich mich nach dieser bekannten Stimme umsehen wollte, gleitet mein Fuß; ich wankte und sollte eben noch in den Abgrund herabstürzen, als ich mich, noch zur rechten Zeit, von einer mir ähnlichen Person zurückgehalten fühlte. Schon wollte ich ihr den feurigsten Dank abtatten, als sie einen Dolch aus dem Busen zog. (13)

This dream, which foretells Sara's impending death, shows the degree of her torment. It also shows that deep within her psyche, Sara considers her action to be wrong. With the phrase: "einer mir ähnlichen Person" she compares herself to Marwood, Mellefont's former lover, who out of jealousy poisons Sara in the end. The comparison shows that Sara has internalized society's

view that women who are involved with men without the sanctity of marriage eventually become whores. The only way for Sara to get out of this situation is for Mellefont to marry her. She expresses this desire on several occasions. It is especially important to her since it would restore her moral standing. If married she would also be able to combine her love for her father with her love for Mellefont. Sara exclaims to Mellefont:

Eine einzige Handlung, Mellefont, ein einziger Segen, der von einem Friedensboten im Namen der ewigen Güte auf uns gelegt wird, kann meine zerrüttete Phantasie wieder heilen. . . . Erbarmen Sie sich meiner, und überlegen Sie, daß, wenn Sie mich auch dadurch nur von den Qualen der Einbildung befreien, diese eingebildeten Qualen doch Qualen und für die, die sie empfindet, wirkliche Qualen sind. (12)

This one step would take away all of Sara's agonies. Her biggest desire, to have both the love of her father and of Mellefont, would be granted her by this step. She expresses this on several occasions: "Aber ist es denn gewiß wahr, daß ich nunmehr diese Liebe mit der Liebe gegen meinen Vater verbinden darf?" (56), and "Lassen Sie uns nur das Recht brauchen, was es uns schenkt: einen Vater, der mich noch nie nach einer Mutter seufzen lassen; einen Vater, der auch Sie ungenossene Eltern will vergessen lehren" (58). Although Mellefont--stalling for time--offers to marry Sara once they get to France, this is not sufficient for Sara because in eighteenth-century Germany, marriage needed to be consecrated on German soil, on the *Vaterland*.

The only other way for Sara to escape the moral dilemma created by Mellefont's refusal to marry her was for her to elevate her love for him to the level of a binding law which she must obey. Mauser states:

Das Einzige, was sie diesem beängstigenden Vorgang

entgegenzusetzen hat, ist eine abstrakte Vorstellung ihrer Liebe zu Mellefont (Gesetz), die sich vom Gegenstand dieser Liebe fortschreitend löst; nur so kann sie--in einer für Sara fatalen Weise--den abstrakten Tugendvorstellungen entsprechen, mit denen zu leben sie gelernt hat. (11)

These quotes attest to the fact that Sara is not an independent character who had the desire to change society with her actions. She does not deliberately break the rules to challenge her father. Her biggest desire is to maintain the loving relationship she has enjoyed before. Although she defends her action of leaving her father's house for the sake of Mellefont's love, being separated from her father in this way causes her too much suffering. It is too much for her to live outside the patriarchal order.

In contrast to Sara, Marwood is not tormented by her out-of-wedlock relationship with Mellefont. She is not so concerned with what people think of her as is Sara. While one might be tempted to view Marwood's independent nature positively, the overwhelmingly negative light in which she is portrayed--as murderer, whore, Furie, snake--causes one to realize that Lessing had no intention of portraying women's quest for self-determination positively. Instead, Lessing shows--through his portrayal of both Sara and Sir Sampson--that he is opposed to women's independence from patriarchal structures.

Although Mellefont has lured Sara away from her father, he too upholds the patriarchal order by regretting his actions. For he recognizes that Sara is really her father's "property":

Das ist ihre Tochter! Ich bin ihr Verführer! Denken Sie nach, Sir!--Wie soll ich ihre Wut besser reizen? Diese blühende Schönheit, über die sie allein ein Recht hatten, ward wider Ihrem Willen mein Raub! Meinetwegen

vergaß sich diese unerfahrene Tugend! Meinetwegen riß sie sich aus den Armen eines geliebten Vaters! Meinetwegen muß sie sterben!--Sie machen mich mit ihrer Langmut ungeduldig, Sir! Lassen Sie mich es hören, daß Sie der Vater sind. (93)

The father also blames himself both for being so hard on his daughter and for not having protected her. In addition, there is a practical reason for defending Sara's virtue: he might not be able to find a husband for her once the virginity of his daughter has been destroyed. Inge Stephan sees the relationship of the father and the daughter as one of a salesman and his merchandise:

Tatsächlich bemessen sich die Heiratschancen der Tochter danach, ob sie noch Virgo intacta ist oder nicht. Von daher hat der Vater natürlich ein existentielles Interesse daran, die Unschuld der Tochter gegen Verführung abzuschirmen. Wie ein Kaufmann seine Ware, so bewacht der Vater die Tugend seiner Tochter. (12)

This interpretation shows that virtue also has a materialistic value. The daughter's worth is determined by her virtue, or lack thereof.

The father takes responsibility for Sara leaving the house and running off with Mellefont. Sir William believes that he has violated his duties toward his daughter as protector. He believes that it is his fault since he introduced Mellefont to her as a houseguest, as Rolf Werner Nolle explains:

Die in der Familie wohlbehütete Sara bricht nicht etwa aus dem Kreis aus, um dann im 'Getriebe der Großstadt' verführt zu werden, sondern ihr Vater holt den Verführer gastfreundlich ins Haus. Damit nicht genug, macht er sich Vorwürfe, das Unheil durch seine Strenge noch vergrößert zu haben. (263)

Sørensen maintains that the father does not regret his rigid

behavior which causes Sara and Mellefont to flee his home, as much as he regrets his initial lack of strictness. Sørensen points out that had Sir Sampson been even stricter in the first place, he could have protected his daughter from the suffering which followed: "Er lehnt nicht die Strenge ab, sondern nur 'diese zu späte Strenge,' weil sie die Flucht bewirkte, die eine rechtzeitige Strenge hätte verhindern können" (Sørensen 78). The scene when the father reflects on his behavior shows that he never questions his authority and the effect it had on his daughter. He regrets that initially he had not been even more strict with Sara. This shows how engrained the belief in the patriarchal society was, and how the father believes in his rights over his daughter.

Even after the death of the daughter, the father is not willing to realize his mistake. He is not able to accept the role he played in her death. He falls back into the same patriarchal behavior he showed earlier. He tries to keep and expand his power by accepting Arabella as his daughter and Mellefont as his son. Mellefont, who has poisoned himself so he can die with Sara, exclaims:

Wollen sie mich nun Ihren Sohn nennen, Sir, und mir als diesem die Hand drücken, so sterb ich zufrieden (Sir William umarmt ihn.)--Sie haben von einer Arabellen gehört, für die die sterbende Sara sie bat. Ich würde auch Sie bitten--aber sie ist der Marwood Kind als meines--Was für fremde Empfindungen ergreifen mich!-- Gnade! o Schöpfer, Gnade! (93)

By accepting Arabella as his daughter, the father keeps his position of power. By asking Sir William to accept him as his son, Mellefont even extends the father's patriarchal basis. The father appears in a very traditional way, as the ruler over all parts of the family. Sir William plays not only the role of

Sara's father, but is almost portrayed as a divine ruler in the final scene. Sara asks her father to consecrate her, which puts him on the same level with God:

Er ist es doch? Oder ist es eine erquickende
Erscheinung, vom Himmel gesandt, gleich jenem Engel,
der den Starken zu stärken kam?--Segne mich, wer du
auch immer seist, ein Bote des Höchsten, in der Gestalt
meines Vaters oder selbst mein Vater. (88)

This scene gives the father the ultimate authority to judge the daughter by his moral code and to forgive her for what she did. It places the father at the pinnacle of patriarchal authority. His set of moral values and his moral authority are considered the highest. Sara has to pay for her moral infraction with death. She tried to step out of her prescribed role and was punished for it. She did not receive anything she had hoped for. Sara paid with her life for stepping outside of her father's influence. Mellefont, who took her dignity, is also punished by death. Marwood will spend the rest of her life in exile in England. Only Sir William did not lose his influence and his ranking in society. By adopting Arabella, he even gets a "new" daughter, a daughter that he will educate to love him: "Komm, schleunige Anstalt zu machen, und dann laß uns auf Arabellen denken. Sei sie, wer sie sei: sie ist ein Vermächtnis meiner Tochter" (Lessing 94).

The scene when Sara asks her father for forgiveness provides a very important analogy to the moral values of the Puritans. In the following chapter, I will explore similar questions in order to assess Hester's character. I will show how women were portrayed in the Puritan society, how Hawthorne portrayed nineteenth-century values, and how the Puritans punished Hester for stepping out of her prescribed role. I will show the constraints under which women in Puritan society lived, as

reflected in Hawthorne's nineteenth-century novel--a novel in which, as I will also argue, is shaped by the patriarchal attitudes of nineteenth-century new England.

Chapter II

As shown in the first chapter, German women in the eighteenth century were far from liberated. How was life for women in New England? Were they able to climb up the social ladder in the Puritan society of the seventeenth century or in the more industrialized society of the nineteenth century in order to obtain a position of power comparable to what many middle-class men enjoyed? Or, was there an even more oppressive society established in the *New World*?

The publication of The Scarlet Letter and Hawthorne's position as a Custom House officer in Boston, Massachusetts--a position he held between 1846 and 1849--were closely connected. Hawthorne and his wife, Sophia Peabody, did not have much financial security through Hawthorne's writing. The royalties he received barely gave him enough money to survive, even though he was considered a good and influential writer. His critics in the Boston Transcript wrote the following about him: "Mr. Hawthorne has equaled if not surpassed any other writer who has appeared in our country during the last half century" (qtd. in Scharnhorst 11). Since Hawthorne was struggling from day to day, the appointment as a Custom House officer gave the Hawthorne family some financial security. However, Hawthorne was dismissed from his position in the Custom House in June of 1849, due to the success of the Whigs over the Democrats in the election of 1849. This dismissal caused a political scandal, as the position had been assured to Hawthorne regardless of which party was in power. In addition to this misfortune, his mother died in July of 1849, which was a great personal loss to Hawthorne. As becomes clear in the following discussion, all these events influenced the writing of the novel.

Hawthorne started to write The Scarlet Letter in September 1849. He finished it within six months, and it was published in

March 1850 in Boston. The publication of The Scarlet Letter gave Hawthorne wide publicity, especially since he added an introduction to the novel entitled: "Introductory to *The Scarlet Letter*--The Custom House." In this autobiographical introduction, Hawthorne talks about his three years experience in the Custom House. This introductory chapter is considered by critics a valuable explanation of Hawthorne's views of his writing, and it includes some fascinating indirect autobiographical notes as well. However, this introduction outraged critics when it was first published because they felt Hawthorne unfairly portrayed Custom House officers. *The Salem Register* editors, for example, wrote in March 1850:

We were almost induced to throw down the book in disgust, without venturing on *The Scarlet Letter*, so atrocious, so heartless, so undisguised, so utterly inexcusable seemed his calumnious caricatures of inoffensive men, who we could not possibly have given occasion for such wanton insults. (qtd. in Scharnhorst 15)

The reasons why Hawthorne added "The Custom House" as an introduction to The Scarlet Letter can only be speculated upon. Nina Baym suspects that Hawthorne added it in order to increase the novel's chances to sell in great numbers: "it assured that reviews of the book would be widely read, and not only by people interested in literature" (XXXIII). By adding the introductory chapter, Hawthorne caused people who might not otherwise have picked up the book to read it, due to the popularity of the subject matter. People at the time were very interested in what happened at a custom house and wanted to read everything written about it.

Another important aspect of "The Custom House" chapter can be seen in its alleged autobiographical content. The wrapped

piece of cloth Hawthorne finds suggests to the reader that the novel is not fiction, but real. "This rag of scarlet cloth--for time, and wear, and a sacrilegious moth, had reduced it to little other than a rag--, on careful examination, assumed the shape of a letter. It was the capital letter A" (Hawthorne 31). Louise Desalvo interprets the story of the wrapped scarlet letter as follows:

The fictive posture of Hawthorne's editor of an historical document is an attempt to persuade the reader that the story that he tells, though embellished, is in effect an authentic, if not true account of Hester Prynne's fate in Puritan New England. (61)

Hawthorne goes even further with his attempt to convince the reader that he is not writing about fiction but about truth by including reference to real people such as a surveyor from the seventeenth century:

I found the record of other doings and sufferings of this singular woman, for the most of which the reader is referred to the story entitled 'THE SCARLET LETTER;' and it should be borne carefully in mind, that the main facts of that story are authorized and authenticated by the documents of Mr. Surveyor Pue. (33)

By interweaving fact and fiction, Hawthorne may have tricked some contemporary readers into believing that the entire story was true. The readers might have also identified themselves with one of the characters. Others, like the critics from the Salem Register, thought that the introduction should have never been written:

Even where the writer seems to praise, the picture is so overdrawn as to appear intended for a caricature, and the language so extravagant as to wear a strong

tinge of irony. We could wish for Hawthorne's sake, that this chapter had never been written. (qtd. in Scharnhorst 16)

Another reason for Hawthorne to make his novel appear as non-fiction may have been the strong influence his family history had on him. Baym explains: "Fiction indeed had always been despised and condemned by Puritan leaders, who saw it as dishonest and distracting" (XV). Because of his strong connection to his Puritan forefathers, Hawthorne tried to have his novel reflect reality as closely as possible. Whether the book was regarded by Hawthorne's contemporaries more as non-fiction than fiction is not known. But because The Scarlet Letter has had a great influence on the lives of many people, one can assume that it reflects a nineteenth-century set of moral values and beliefs. The question is then, how accurately does it portray the seventeenth-century values of the Puritans? Hawthorne comments on the accuracy of historical times and places in his novel as follows: "I have allowed myself, as to such points, nearly or altogether as much license as if the facts had been entirely of my own invention. What I contend for is the authenticity of the outline" (35). This comment shows that The Scarlet Letter can be seen neither as only fiction nor only non-fiction, but as something in between. Hawthorne used several techniques to make the novel appear as real as possible. For example, he used people and characters who lived around 1650. He was also very accurate with the places he chose as a setting for his novel. Baym mentions that Hawthorne used Caleb H. Snow's work of 1825, A History of Boston, the Metropolis of Massachusetts, as a reference for his historical places. To create a historically accurate picture, he describes places that actually existed, such as the Boston jail:

Certain it is, that some fifteen or twenty years after

the settlement of the town, the wooden jail was already marked with weather stains and other indications of age, which gave yet a darker aspect to its beetle browned and gloomy front. (45)

Hawthorne uses not only real places, but also people from the seventeenth century to give a sense of historical authenticity. "Here, to witness the scene which we are describing, sat Governor Bellingham himself, with four sergeants about his hair, bearing halberds, as a guard of honor" (59). The appendix of the book explains that Richard Bellingham (1592-1672) emigrated to New England in 1634. After several terms as deputy governor, he served as governor of Massachusetts (1641, 1654, 1665) until his death. Another historical date that is mentioned in the book is the death of Governor Winthrop: "The good old minister came freshly from the death-chamber of Governor Winthrop, who had passed from earth to heaven within that very hour" (131). The appendix of the book dates Winthrop's death as 1649. Although Hawthorne uses exact dates and contemporary characters like Governor Bellingham and Governor Winthrop, there are slight inconsistencies in the time line of the historical events Hawthorne cites. Baym speculates that the action of the novel began between 1645 and 1650, and not in 1642, as Hawthorne claims:

Most crucially, since the Massachusetts Bay Colony was settled in 1630, and since we begin 'some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement,' 1642 is simply too early; crude arithmetic shows that the action must start between 1645 and 1650, with the third scaffold scene taking place between 1652 and 1657. (32)

By having chosen a broad time period of twelve years, Baym suggests that "Hawthorne's deviation from the record are designed not to produce specific historical insights, but to generalize

his history into an account of an entire generation's experience" (34).

Hawthorne chose the seventeenth century as a setting not only for The Scarlet Letter, but also for many of his other novels. As Desalvo explains, this was due to his personal interests and family connections:

Again and again in writing fiction, Hawthorne turned to a period in American History, which is extremely important to feminist critics, to the 'early history of his native New England,' and especially, to a period of the Salem witchcraft trials, in which his ancestor, John Hawthorne, has been a judge who had condemned a number of women accused of witchcraft to death. (3)

In "The Custom House," Hawthorne mentions the reason for his "obsession" with his cruel Puritan ancestors:

The figure of my first ancestor, invested by family tradition with a dim and dusky grandeur, was present to my boyish imagination, as far back as I can remember. It still haunts me, and induces a sort of home-feeling with the past, which I scarcely claim in reference to the present phase of my town. (12)

Hawthorne seems to be haunted by his ancestors. Although the ancestors he refers to lived in seventeenth-century New England, the way in which Hawthorne describes the Puritan laws and moral values are from a nineteenth-century perspective. This helps us to understand the nineteenth-century American value system and compare it to the German value system portrayed in the bourgeois tragedy of the eighteenth-century. Desalvo sees Hawthorne's novel as a typical example of patriarchal views during the nineteenth century. Desalvo thinks that neither a historian nor a feminist critic can afford to ignore Hawthorne's literature:

Not only because of the record which it presents of

this period of American history, but also because it records how a man like Hawthorne responded to ancestors who epitomize everything that feminist historians have identified as characteristics of a patriarchy:

repression, intolerance, sadism, tyranny, misogyny. (4)

The way Hawthorne achieves this separation between the seventeenth-century Puritans and a nineteenth-century set of moral values is through the narrator, who comments throughout the novel on the behavior and actions of the Puritans. Baym comments on the effect of the narrator as follows:

The action of the novel may take place in Puritan times, but the act of narrating the story and assessing it definitely takes place in 1850 . . . and in general, nineteenth-century values are shown as superior to Puritan ones, although the Puritans in some few ways were superior to the 'present.' (49)

Hawthorne chose the setting for the book because of his personal connection to the Puritans. His comments as a narrator reflect his position in nineteenth-century society. His narrator comments overtly on the behavior of the Puritans and judges it from a nineteenth-century set of values. Discussing a specific penalty imposed in the seventeenth-century, the narrator writes that "in our days" a penalty which would infer a degree of mocking infamy and ridicule, might then be invested with almost as stern a dignity as the punishment of death itself" (47). Hence, although the novel takes place around 1650 and tries to create a very accurate picture of the early times of the Puritans, it does not reflect the Puritans' moral values as much as it does the values of the nineteenth-century.

Just as the German bourgeois tragedy reflected a social hierarchy whereby men exerted power over women, Hawthorne's novel reflects a social structure in which men in New England's society

dominate women and judge their behavior. Unlike in the early German bourgeois tragedy, they do not only judge women in the family setting, but also in the larger community. The power in Puritan society--as described by Hawthorne--is clearly of a patriarchal nature. These patriarchs stand in sharp contrast to the heroine of the novel, Hester Prynne. They are portrayed as powerful men, while Hester appears as a vulnerable and victimized woman. Governor Bellingham provides a good example of such a patriarch:

He was not ill fitted to be the head and representative of a community, which owed its origin and progress, and its present state of development, not to the impulse of youth, but to the stern and tempered energies of manhood, and the somber sagacity of age. (59)

Hawthorne describes Governor Bellingham as a wise man, a person of great integrity and knowledge. He shows with this comment that all the development of the Puritan society, including its aspirations to build a "City on the Hill," a "New Jerusalem," is due to the "stern and tempered energies of manhood." Women are excluded from this development, and their ways to contribute to the growth of the society are neglected. Rulers like Governor Bellingham did not only try to foster this Puritan society, but they also had to oversee its moral development. In "Passion and Authority in *The Scarlet Letter*," Baym writes about the portrayal of men in the novel: "Power in the community is vested in a group of elders, ministerial and magisterial, who blend its legal and moral strands into a single instrument, and acting as a group, make this power appear diffuse and impersonal" (179). The Puritan leaders, who uphold the laws in the community, are portrayed as a homogeneous group of men. Therefore, the creators of the law appear only in mass scenes, barely as individual characters. These patriarchs are depicted as honorable and majestic "fathers"

of the community:

The train of venerable and majestic fathers was seen moving through a broad pathway of the people, who drew back reverently, on either side, as the Governor and magistrates, the old wise men, the holy ministers, and all that were eminent and renowned, advanced into the midst of them. (216)

Hawthorne describes the Puritans as people who enjoyed the unity of church and state. The novel shows quite well that social power is in the hands of a few men since not a single woman is part of the oligarchical circle. These few men have the absolute power within their small community and often decide the fate of community members and outsiders alike:

It might be, that an Antinomian, a Quaker, or other heterodox religionist, was to be scourged out of the town, or an idle and vagrant Indian, whom the white man's fire water made riotous about the streets, was to be driven with stripes into the shadow of the forest. It might be too, that a witch, like old Mistress Hibbins, the bitter-tempered widow of the magistrate, was to die upon the gallows. (47)

This quote shows that these men were not willing to tolerate anything within their society that did not fit the moral or religious norm, whether it was a lazy Indian or a "bitter tempered widow." Women and others who did not conform to the religious and moral laws of the Puritans had to face violence and exclusion. Baym sees in the Puritans a group that respects authority and does not tolerate any transgression of the laws within their group: "To a nineteenth-century audience, the narrator observes, some of these offenses would seem minor, but to a group that respects authority simply because it is authority, the breaking of any law is a matter of extreme

seriousness, no matter which law it is" (55).

While leaders of the Puritan community are portrayed as wise religious fathers, Puritan women appear as ugly and vindictive people. Hawthorne draws a mostly negative picture of the women in the Puritan community. For, as Louise Desalvo points out, while men created the laws it was the novel's women who demanded the punishment for those who broke these laws: "Hawthorne focuses all his narrative attention, and for several pages, upon the vengeful responses of the Puritan women. . . . In the novel it is not the oligarches, Hawthorne's forebears, who punish, it is the goodwives who demand justice" (68). There are several examples where Hawthorne lets the women appear as particularly vengeful, such as when they ask that Hester Prynne be punished:

Goodwives, said a hard-feathered dame of fifty, I'll tell ye a piece of my mind. It would be greatly for the public behoof, if we women, being of mature age and church-members in good repute, should have the handling of such malefactresses as this Hester Prynne. What think ye, gossip? If the hussy stood up for judgement before us five, that are now here in a knot together, would she come off with such a sentence as the worship magistrates have awarded? Marry, I trow not! (48)

The women are even more unforgiving and expect a tougher sentence than Hester Prynne receives from the community. The father's decision to display Hester on the scaffold and to have her wear a letter "A" on her chest is too lenient, in their opinion. These women suggest instead that

[a]t the very least they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead. Madam Hester would have winced at that, I warrant me. But she,--the naughty baggage--, little will she care what they put upon the bodice of her gown. (49)

This picture lets the men of the Puritan community appear noble and fatherly, at least in contrast to the women who are portrayed as cruel and horrible human beings. The language they speak is very simple and primitive, which is a sign of a lack of education. They appear to be simple-minded people: "There was, moreover, a boldness and rotundity of speech among these matrons, as most of them seemed to be, that would startle us at the present day, whether in respect to its purport or its volume of tone" (48). The women of the Puritan community are described not only as simple-minded and crude, but also as very ugly and pitiful: "What do we talk of marks and brands, whether on the bodice of her gown, or on the flesh of her forehead? cried another female, the ugliest as well as the most pitiless of these self-constituted judges" (49).

Hawthorne creates with this description of the women and their behavior a picture that does not correspond to reality. As Desalvo points out, this reflects Hawthorne's personal views, his nineteenth-century perspective, more than it presents an accurate description of Puritan men and women:

[The women] would have been harsher to adulteresses than his fictional Puritan leaders had been to Hester. Hawthorne therefore creates a romance about judicious Puritan rule, and then he uses the fiction he has created to argue that men are essentially more fair minded than women. (69)

The reason why Hawthorne focuses on the severity of Puritan punishments can be found in his family history, since his ancestors were among the worst witch-hunters of the seventeenth century. Indeed, the following quote provides an accurate description of the brutal and cruel punishment actually chosen by one of Hawthorne's ancestors: "[H]e 'ordered a constable to cut off a convicted burglar's ear and brand the letter B on his

forehead; he sentenced a woman accused of fornication to a whipping, but simply fined a man who routinely beats his wife" (Desalvo 67). Since it was his male ancestors who were so cruel, one must ask why Hawthorne reverses the situation in his novel, making women responsible for his male ancestors' harsh and unjust punishments, while depicting the Puritan men as judicious and noble. The answer seems to lie in Hawthorne's support of patriarchy. Though he is critical of the cruelty his male ancestors are guilty of, he can not bear to blame men for it, since doing so would call into question the soundness of patriarchal rule.

Hawthorne's portrayal of Hester Prynne, however, stands in sharp contrast to his description of the other women in Puritan society. She is depicted in a very positive light. For example, the description of Hester in the first chapter does not fit the portrayal of a woman who sinned and committed a crime:

In a moment, however, wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another, she took the baby on her arm, and, with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her townspeople and neighbors. On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A. (50)

Instead of portraying Hester as the typical Puritan woman, her description rather fits one of the Virgin Mary or the Great Mother. Robert E. Todd comments on the appearance of Hester:

"From the moment when she first appears, a maternal image with the baby at her breast, Hester's kinship with the Great Mother is strikingly evident" (194). In chapter two of The Scarlet Letter, there is a direct analogy to the Virgin Mary: "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 her infant at her bosom, an object to remind him of the Divine Maternity" (53).

As Baym points out, the appearance of Hester in Chapter One shows the reader that she is the heroine of the novel:

Moreover there is no doubt that the manner in which Hester is depicted identifies her as a heroine. Physically, she is a beauty: tall, with a figure of perfect elegance, glossy hair, a marked brow and deep black eyes, ladylike, characterized by stateliness and dignity. Her beauty shines, even in her biggest misfortune. (12)

Judging from how positively she is described, the reader is surprised to learn that Hester committed the sin of adultery and is going to be punished for it. It stands in sharp contrast to the image the reader would normally have of a criminal, suggesting that the nineteenth-century author did not consider her transgression to be as serious as seventeenth-century Puritans would have. Besides reflecting a gradual softening in the rigidity of New England's moral code, critics suggest that another reason Hawthorne portrayed Hester so positively may have been his desire to commemorate in her figure his mother, who had died just before he began writing the novel. Of course, Hawthorne also needed to portray Hester as beautiful, elegant and nurturing so that his heroine would appeal to nineteenth-century readers, thus making his novel more popular.

Hester's beauty is sometimes also addressed metaphorically. For example, Hawthorne describes a wild rose bush that blooms outside the prison where Hester is initially confined. Its appearance makes the reader aware that something very special has happened in and around the prison:

But on one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose bush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he went out. (45)

Baym sees in the wild rose bush a very strong metaphor. She argues "[t]hat this wild rose bush is to be interpreted as a token of nature's sympathy with the prisoner" (6). Additionally, Hester herself is described as being closely connected to nature, as I will explain later.

Another important analogy that Hawthorne makes here is the connection between Hester and Anne Hutchinson. Hawthorne connects Hutchinson on several occasions to Hester and her daughter Pearl. She was one of the first women to question the ideas and moral values of the Puritans, stepping out of her traditional role as a woman, and thereby experiencing a clash with patriarchal control. Hutchinson believed that Christians are not bound by moral law. The Puritans saw in her a big threat which would undermine their society. She was expelled from Massachusetts Bay in 1638 and was killed by Indians in 1643. The Puritans saw this as divine retribution and confirmation of her errors. Hawthorne mentions this connection of the rose bush to Anne Hutchinson right in the first chapter: "[W]hether there is a fair authority of believing, it had sprung up under the footstep of the sainted Anne Hutchinson" (46). The Puritans believed that the rose bush grew in front of the prison after Hutchinson was released from it because she had supernatural power. By mentioning Hutchinson, Hawthorne directs the reader's attention to a woman who was mistreated--like Hester--for her belief and actions in a society dominated by men. But Luise Desalvo sees in the comparison of Hester and Hutchinson Hawthorne's attempt to show that women are

unable to reform society: "Hawthorne's criticism of Hester's behavior suggests not only that women cannot accomplish feminist reform, but also that women, by their nature, cannot ever hope to accomplish reforms of any sort" (6). According to Desalvo, Hawthorne sees women as unable to change due to their very nature. Desalvo writes: "Moreover, not only is it impossible for reformist women to change men's nature sufficiently to accomplish any meaningful reform, but in addition women, by their nature, can not be helped" (6). Hawthorne wrote a biographical sketch about Anne Hutchinson, titled Mrs. Hutchinson (1830), in which he comments on the treatment of Anne Hutchinson:

[T]here are portentous indications that gradually changes take place in the habits and feelings of the gentle sex, which seem to threaten our posterity with many of those public women, whereof one [Hutchinson] was a burden too grievous for our fathers. (qtd. in Desalvo 7)

Like Anne Hutchinson, Hester appears from the beginning as a very strong woman with a free will. This itself makes her different from the other women in the Puritan community and is seen by many as an attempt for emancipation: "[U]ntil, on the threshold of the prison-door, she repelled him [the prison guard], by an action marked with natural dignity and force of character, and stepped into the open air, as if by her own free will" (Hawthorne 49). The opening scene is one of the reasons why Marilyn Mueller Wilton sees in Hester a very strong heroine:

In the heroic tradition, Hester demonstrates a personal moral strength that transcends her suffering and transforms her punishment into self-designed grace. Even as she is initially placed on public display on the scaffold, Hester discloses a haughty demeanor, as

if refusing to allow the punishment to chasten her.

(224)

By portraying Hester as a strong-willed and independent heroine, Hawthorne did something rather unusual, especially since Hester committed a crime according to Puritan law. I have already discussed some of the reasons for portraying Hester in such a positive light. In view of the stark contrast in the way the different female characters are depicted, it does seem that Hawthorne himself is conflicted. On the one hand, he sympathizes with women who find themselves in Hester's situation, on the other hand, he continues to uphold patriarchal values. This is also evident in the fact that, though Hawthorne explains to the reader the reasons for Hester's fall, he does not condone her behavior. Hester, whose husband sent her to the Puritan colony in advance of his own arrival, did not hear anything from him in that entire time and eventually fell in love with the minister. Though sympathetic to Hester, Hawthorne regards her behavior as a sign of moral weakness. Baym sees this as a reflection of nineteenth-century standards:

In Hawthorne's nineteenth-century, sex outside marriage was, though not a criminal act, still generally accepted as a sign of moral defect, and the nineteenth-century narrator is careful not to praise Hester, even when he suggests that a Catholic might have been reminded of Divine maternity by the spectacle of Hester and the child. (13)

Although Hawthorne often portrays Hester as an independent woman, he at other times depicts her in a very traditional light. One of these instances is when he draws a connection between her and Mother Nature. After she is released from prison, Hester lives close to nature in a very small cottage:

On the outskirts of the town, within the verge of the

peninsula, but not in close vicinity to any other habitation, there was a small thatched cottage. It had been build by an earlier settler, and abandoned, because the soil about it was too sterile for cultivation, while its comparative remoteness put it out of the sphere of that social activity which already marked the habits of the emigrants. (73)

By placing Hester on the outskirts of town, Hawthorne puts her close to wilderness. He stresses with this the wild aspect of her character and the nature of women in general. Monica M. Elbert sees a connection between Hester's psyche and nature: "Natural landscapes, the forest and the sea, typify Hester's psyche, and so she is linked to Mother Nature, who knows no rules outside her own" (226). Another landscape in which Hester feels at home, and which is the setting of several chapters, is the forest. She returns on several occasions to the woods, and the second love scene between Hester and Dimmesdale also takes place there. The forest--and with it the nature--is a representation of Hester's passionate character, as well as a representation of sexuality. Hawthorne connects sexuality and textuality at this point: "It was a little dell where they had seated themselves with a leaf-strewn bank rising gently on either side, and a brook flowing through the midst, over a bed of fallen and drowned leaves" (162). Todd sees a very strong analogy between the "dell" and the female genitalia: "Little imagination is required to grasp the symbolic analogue between the description of the 'dell,' with its 'leaf-strewn bank rising gently on either side,' and the female orifice or womb-tomb of the Great mother" (54). By characterizing Hester as very close to nature, Hawthorne uses a very traditional approach to describing women. He portrays women as connected with wilderness and thus as difficult to control. Because of their natural wildness, they had to be removed from culture and public

life.

Hester did not commit adultery to rebel against society, but out of love for Dimmesdale, who is the reverend of the community. He is a well respected man and Hester's pastor. The community feels it is his responsibility to make Hester name the father. In the second forest scene, she reminds Dimmesdale of the love they had felt for each other when they had been together the first time. "What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so! We said so to each other! Hast thou forgotten it?" (170). Mary Suzanne Schriber sees in the Hester's "sin" the force of love, which again conforms to the traditional role of women:

Hester's act of adultery transgressed against the system, but Hester does not challenge the values on which the system stands. She does not reject the system itself. . . . He [the author] achieves this by referring Hester's motives to her womanly love. (51)

One of Hawthorne's statements about the nature of women shows his perception of their future role in society. Hawthorne comments in The Scarlet Letter on women's inability to address social problems through the power of thinking:

A woman never overcomes these problems by any exercise of thought. They are not to be solved, or only in one way. If her heart chance to come uppermost, they vanish. Thus Hester Prynne, whose heart had lost its regular and healthy throb, wandered without a clue in the dark labyrinth of the mind. (145)

Hawthorne sees women as being lost when they stray from socially determined roles. For such women, life becomes almost intolerable, for they are shunned from society and all their rights are taken away. In general, Hawthorne has only little hope for a societal change that will benefit women:

As a first step, the whole system of society is to be

torn down, and built up anew. Then the very nature of the opposite, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to become modified, before women can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. (144)

Although Hawthorne chose a strong and independent female character as a heroine for his book, he does not believe that a change in the social position of women is likely to occur. Not only does he not believe in women's ability to reason, he sees that the belief system of the entire society is so habituated that it would be very difficult to change.

The only way Hester can survive in the Puritan society is by valuing her love without questioning the Puritan laws. She uses skills expected of women. She raises her daughter Pearl and earns her living with sewing. Because her work is of such fine quality, the townspeople are eager to purchase it despite their disdain for Hester:

Vanity, it may be, chose to mortify itself, by putting on, for ceremonials of pomp and state, the garments that had been wrought by her sinful hands. 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 moulder away, in coffins of the dead. (75)

Although Hester is neither accepted as a person, nor as a woman, she gets acceptance through her needlework. Because of this work, she does not have to suffer the same fate as Anne Hutchinson. Hester is branded by the letter "A," but she is not expelled from the colony. Nina Baym sees Pearl as Hester's savior. Because of Pearl she wants to live in Boston, close to Dimmesdale, and in a quiet way. She wants to be a good mother to her child and have

her grow up close to her father:

And she wants to live unmolested so that she can bring up Pearl. Staying in Boston on account of Dimmesdale, and living there as she does on account of Pearl, Hester's behavior is appropriate to her role as representative of individual, rather than social power.
(65)

The role of women is confined to the private realm. Women are accepted as long as they stay within their boundaries. As soon as women question the social order and step out of their position in Puritan society, their life is threatened. Monika Elbert sees in Hester's acceptance of her role her will to survive:

Hester's acceptance as a woman saves her; moreover, as a woman, she does not have to contend with the patriarchal system which defines the self by one's career, social standing and politics. Hester does not have to compromise herself, because she has nothing left to lose, and she is not participating in the power struggle which drives Dimmesdale and Chillingworth.
(225)

Hester survives by concentrating on Pearl's education, her needlework, and her womanly love. These characteristics are considered typical for women and enable Hester to live in a seventeenth-century society. Although Pearl is a difficult child, Hester never questions her role as a mother. She also never questions her social role as a woman, so she decides to sew for the entire community. Hester never tries to justify her actions. This is another key to her survival. On the other hand, society never accepts Hester; she was not only branded with the scarlet letter "A," but she was also excluded from any social activity:

In all her intercourse with society, however, there was nothing that made her feel as if she belonged to it.

Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact implied and often expressed that she was banished, and as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere or communicated with the common nature by other organs and senses than the rest of human kind. (Hawthorne 76)

On the one hand, Hester's life is never threatened, and she is allowed to continue living in the same community. She does not have to die for her sin, as Miss Sara Sampson did. On the other hand, Hester is still an outcast after many years. She does not belong to the society, and everyone tries to avoid her. The Puritan society is not willing to forgive her for what she did, although she has all the good traits a woman can have.

At the end of the novel, when the truth about the scarlet letter is revealed, Hester decides to return to Europe. Dimmesdale shows to the public in his dying scene the big letter "A" he has on his chest and by doing this he reveals the truth to the public. After the deaths of Dimmesdale, Pearl's father, and Chillingworth, Hester's husband, Hester sees no reason to stay in the Puritan community any longer: "But in no long time after the physician's death, the wearer of the scarlet letter disappeared, and Pearl along with her" (Hawthorne 226). Baym sees in her return to Europe, the place of her origin, a reverse of the American dream: "Hester then takes her child from the Puritan community into a society where she may better fulfill herself--an ironic reversing of the American dream, for the American is sent backwards in time and space to a more advanced enlightened Europe" (191). Hester sees no future for her child in America, since she is afraid that she is also stigmatized. By taking Pearl to England, Hester shows that she believes her daughter can live a more free life in "enlightened" Europe. Hester herself decides to return to New England to help people, especially women, cope

with situations similar to the one Hester had to live through:

Hester conformed and counseled them as best she might. She assured them, too, of her firm belief, that, at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness. (Hawthorne 227)

Hester has a romantic but firm belief that there is a place where men and women can be together in "mutual happiness." She hoped that she and Dimmesdale would finally be able to be together in heaven.

In many ways, Hester's daughter Pearl is like her mother: on the one hand, she is a beautiful woman, very different from the other Puritan women Hawthorne describes; on the other hand, she is a social outcast.

Pearl cannot be seen as an independent character until the last chapter of the novel, when she goes to England and gets married. Until then she serves, like the scarlet letter, as a symbol of Hester's transgression:

The character of the scarlet letter is as much, or more, a symbolic function as she is representative of a human child. In all descriptions of Pearl, her affinity with the scarlet letter is stressed. She is its symbol, its double, its agent. (Baym 56)

Pearl is a very wild little scarlet figure. She is difficult to control. She is everything the Puritans reject in their society:

The child could not be made amenable to rules. In giving her existence, a great law had been broken; and the result was a being, whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder; or with an order peculiar to themselves, amidst which the point

of variety and arrangement was difficult or impossible to be discovered. (Hawthorne 81)

This passage shows that Pearl has a wild and difficult personality. This supports Baym's view that Pearl is not an independent figure, but an abstraction of elements that are part of Hester's character, but that in her have mostly been repressed. Baym writes that Pearl is: "[a] kind of 'double,' or 'other self.'" This means that character analysis of Pearl is really an analysis of Hester, and that the child's lawlessness shows how superficial Hester's quiet and subservient public demeanor is" (57). By creating such a rebellious character, Hawthorne actually shows the reader the true side of Hester. He shows how she would be if she were not oppressed by the laws of the Puritan society. This allows a very different picture of Hester to take shape, one we would not otherwise be aware of. In other ways, too, Hawthorne's portrayal of Pearl resembles his portrayal of Hester. For example, he also associates her with Anne Hutchinson:

After putting her finger in her mouth, with many ungracious refusals to answer the question, the child finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother of the bush of wild roses, that grew by the prison-door. (Hawthorne 99)

Mentioning that Pearl was plucked from a rose bush, Hawthorne connects her to Anne Hutchinson and thus, to a woman who was accused of being a witch. With this portrayal of Pearl, Hawthorne follows Puritan traditions of connecting the sin of the mothers to the children, as Desalvo explains:

In the context of the Puritan cosmology developed in The Scarlet Letter, Hester Prynne is enormously concerned about what will happen to her child Pearl, as well she should be because the children of miscreants

were not treated well in Puritan New England. (69)
Pearl as well as Hester are secluded from the Puritan society. This society connects not only the mother with the sin, but also the daughter:

Mother and daughter stood together in the same circle of seclusion from human society; and in the nature of the child seemed to be perpetuated those unique elements that had distracted Hester Prynne before Pearl's birth, but had since begun to be soothed away by the softening influences of maternity. (Hawthorne 85)

Although Pearl is being raised and educated by her mother, she receives her salvation through her father. The father, who was absent and not willing to admit to his sin, visits Pearl shortly before his death. The visit allowed Pearl to shed past burdens and develop into a loving woman:

Pearl kisses his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor for ever to do battle with the world, but be a woman in it.

(Hawthorne 222)

This incident shows that Hawthorne also believed in a very male-dominated society where only fathers have the ability to save their daughters. Even though Dimmesdale contributed nothing to Pearl's upbringing, he is allowed to play the role of the savior while the mother is pushed back into the second position. This is very similar to the role of the father in Miss Sara Sampson. Fathers are in both works responsible for the salvation of their daughters. Desalvo discusses the one-time visit of Pearl's father that saves her from persecution:

It is not all the years of Hester's toil which saves Pearl from a life of evil in Puritan New England, or from being persecuted as a witch, like Mistress Hibbins. Rather, Pearl becomes a happy woman because of the single moment that she shares with her father Dimmesdale which unlocks the ability to feel grief.

(71)

Hester's husband Chillingworth is also given more responsibility for saving Pearl than her own mother. It is not the motherly love or the value system Pearl gets handed on from her mother that saves the child, but the wealth she inherits from Chillingworth:

At old Roger Chillingworth's decease [which took place within the year], and by his last will and testament of which Governor Bellingham and the Reverend Mr. Wilson were executors, he bequeathed a very considerable amount of property, both here and in England, to little Pearl, the daughter of Hester Prynne. (225)

This method of securing Pearl's future fits very well into the portrayal of women and their dependence upon men. Desalvo sees in this portrayal a failure on Hawthorne's part to value Hester's many efforts to raise and educate her daughter: "And even the reprehensible Chillingworth, in leaving Pearl a very considerable amount of property, here and in England, is even more responsible for Pearl's good future than all the years of Hester's toil as a single parent, raising her child alone" (71). Thus, the way Pearl is depicted corresponds closely to Hawthorne's negative portrayal of women in general. She does not appear as an independent character until her father kisses her. Hawthorne places little importance on the many years the mother devoted to Pearl's upbringing, attributing her successful maturation instead to brief encounters with the child's father and stepfather.

Chapter III

In this chapter, I will draw a comparison between the moral values portrayed in Miss Sara Sampson and in The Scarlet Letter. I will prove that the nineteenth-century society Hawthorne lived in and the eighteenth-century bourgeois society Lessing lived in based their moral values and beliefs on similar ideas, and that therefore the effect on women in both societies was similar. I will show how women were excluded from public life and how this influenced their desire for liberation and emancipation.

Religious freedom in the Puritan society and an increase in education and financial security in eighteenth-century Germany and nineteenth-century New England did not translate into an increase in rights and freedom for women. As I have shown in Chapters One and Two, the opposite is the case for Sara and Hester. Their freedom to express themselves through their actions as well as their ability to live fulfilling lives was very limited. In addressing eighteenth-century Germany, Ute Frevert describes how men distanced themselves from the traditional order, while women were supposed to uphold it:

Während sie [die Männer] sich von der 'alten Ordnung,' ihren Konventionen und Beschränkungen Schritt für Schritt verabschiedeten, sollten Tradition und Herkunft für Frauen weiterhin Gültigkeit haben. All jene Kategorien, die das bürgerliche Sendungsbewußtsein begründeten, wie Bildung und individuelle Leistung, galten für Frauen nicht. (36)

Middle-class women were to maintain social order by adhering to its rules, which the bourgeoisie used to distinguish itself from the peasantry and the nobility. The emphasis was on virtuous behavior and a patriarchal family structure. The bourgeoisie eventually tried to gain political influence in this way. Guthke

sees the bourgeoisie's desire for emancipation largely as a reason for new moral values. The bourgeois tragedy was used as means educate the public about the need for change: "Das bürgerliche Drama, das den Menschen als standeslos, allgemeinmenschlich, als Mensch an sich vorführt, war insofern ein Kampfmittel der Emanzipation des Bürgertums" (42).

The new bourgeois drama, which portrayed the new bourgeois family, relied heavily on the dominant role of the father and a patriarchal family structure.

What was true for the German bourgeoisie applies also to the Puritan society. The Puritans tried to distinguish themselves from their surroundings through their harsh religious laws, which had a strong influence on their moral values. In The Scarlet Letter, the Puritans are shown to live in a rather classless society. Therefore, they did not need to distinguish themselves from lower or higher classes, but from the in their view wild and savage Indians they had to live near, from people who adhered to other religions, such as Quakers, and from 'Old World' influences. The Puritans, as described by Hawthorne, lived in secluded towns, which they themselves established. The life of the Puritans can be compared in its isolation to that of the Amish in twentieth-century America. While the Puritans gained religious freedom by coming to the United States, the members of their community did not gain personal freedom due to the strictness of their moral codes. Women who transgressed social expectations were treated particularly harshly. In an instance similar to Hester's, a woman is put to death. This is the treatment many townspeople desired for Hester:

Now, good Sir, our Massachusetts magistracy, bethinking themselves, that this woman is youthful and fair, and doubtless was strongly tempted to her fall;--and that, moreover, as is most likely, her husband may be at the

bottom of the sea--they have not been bold to put in force the extremity of our righteous law against her.

The penalty therefore is death. (Hawthorne 58)

Women were punished by the most severe means and had to die upon the gallows. There was no excuse for any behavior outside the religious laws. The eighteenth-century German bourgeois society forced similar rules and regulations upon their members. Although Sara was killed by Marwood in a fit of jealousy, Sara was very afraid of being punished for breaking the moral codes of her time. Her conscience shows to the reader the conflict Sara is struggling with and the fear that results from her having broken the law.

Both the German bourgeoisie and the Puritans wanted to build a more perfect world. The Puritan's utopian goal is often referred to as 'The City on the Hill'--a notion of a Jerusalem in the New World. This idea, which still affects the idea of the American Nation even at the dawn of the millennium, was based on the belief that the Puritans were God's chosen people. While they believed it was their responsibility to create a more perfect society, they also regarded themselves as morally superior to others. The bourgeoisie in Germany also tried to build a better society in which one's worth was not determined by one's social standing but by one's moral behavior.

As I discussed at length in Chapter One, the patriarchal constraints under which women lived affected their lives tremendously. The power the fathers enjoyed within the family was upheld by Prussian law. This power over every aspect of the family is best reflected in Mellefont's comment to Sir William, in which he reminds the father that he alone has rights over his daughter. Thus, even Sara's seducer believes that only her father has the right to possess her. Women's fate in the Puritan society were also in the hands of a few men. The hangman personifies the

laws of the Puritan community and stands as an example of the power of men: "This personage prefigured and represented in his aspect the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law, which it was his business to administer in its final and closest application to the offender" (Hawthorne 49). The Puritans considered their moral codes to be both law and truth. Since they regarded themselves as direct descendants of God, they felt completely justified in applying their laws to everyone. They were, in Hawthorne's words, "[p]eople amongst whom religion and law were almost identical" (47).

In both societies, the seventeenth-century Puritan and eighteenth-century German men had the absolute power over women. They influenced every single part of the women's lives. In the Puritan society, men in general had the power, whereas in the bourgeois society, as described in Miss Sara Sampson, all the power lay in the hands of the fathers and the husbands. The fathers had to hand the power over to their daughters' husbands once they allowed them to marry.

Breaking the rules resulted in very drastic punishment in both societies. The way of punishment was different, as I have shown in Chapters One and Two, but the results for the women were very similar. The Puritans decided to punish Hester for breaking the law by displaying her on the scaffold in the middle of the town. In addition, she has to wear the letter "A" upon her bosom. However, in the eyes of the Puritan women, Hester is not punished enough. For committing the sin of adultery, some women even ask for her death. With this desire, they come close to the punishment which Sara received for her action of running away from the father's home. Though Sara is punished by Marwood out of jealousy, the outcome for Sara and the punishment some desired for Hester are the same.

Even more severe for Hester is not the immediate punishment

of putting her on the scaffold and making her wear the scarlet letter on her chest, but her exclusion from public life:

She stood apart from mortal interests, yet close beside them, a ghost that revisits the familiar fireside, and can not longer make itself seen or felt; nor more smile than the household joy, nor mourn with the kindered sorrow; or should it succeed in manifesting its forbidden sympathy, awakening only terror and horrible repugnance. (Hawthorne 76)

For a much shorter time, Sara has to cope with conditions that are similarly isolating. She has to leave her father's house, which is the place that gave her social acceptance, and flee to a "miserable inn." She has to leave in order to be close to Mellefont and would certainly be shunned by society were she to continue living with him without being married. Waitwell comments on the inn where Sara and Mellefont stay, which is also a reflection of the general situation in which Sara and Mellefont find themselves: "Ohne Zweifel hat Mellefont mit Fleiß das allerelendeste im ganzen Städtchen zu seinem Aufenthalte gewählt. Böse Leute suchen immer das Dunkle, weil sie böse Leute sind" (1). Because they are going against societies expectations, both Sara and Hester are forced to live on the fringes.

The only way these two female protagonists can restore their dignity and gain acceptance in their society is through marriage. Married women are much more accepted in patriarchal societies than single women or women who live with a man out of wedlock. Thus when Mellefont refuses to marry Sara, she is shattered. She needs to marry not only because society expects her to, but also so that she will know she has God's blessing. For Sara, the marriage needs to take place on German soil because of the connection she perceives between God and the fatherland. Perhaps most importantly, if her relationship with Mellefont is

sanctified by marriage, she will in good conscience be able to retain her relationship with Mellefont and restore her relationship with her father.

The reasons why Hester is not able to marry Pearl's father are different, but the effect on Hester's life is similar. She has to meet Dimmesdale in the woods because she is not allowed to show her affection in public. She is also not allowed to tell anyone who the daughter's father is. She is not able to marry the man of her desires both because she is already married to Chillingworth and because Dimmesdale is a minister who must remain single. The Puritan society would have never accepted a marriage between Hester and Reverend Dimmesdale, nor the truth about Pearl. The following quote describes the reaction of the community towards Hester's sin. Even after many years the Puritan community did not forgive Hester:

All the world had frowned on her,--for seven long years had it frowned upon this lonely woman--and still she bore it all, nor ever once turned away her firm, sad eyes. Heaven, likewise, had frowned upon her, and she had not died. (Hawthorne 170)

While she bore society's disapproval stoicly, she and Dimmesdale could never fulfill their desire for a marriage--for a lasting and open relationship. Dimmesdale succumbs to the Puritan interpretation of God's laws, and accepts the impossibility of marrying Hester: "It may be, that, when we forgot our God,--when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul,--it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion" (Hawthorne 222). They cannot even hope for a reunion in the afterlife, since Dimmesdale interprets their love as something sinful.

The Puritans and the German bourgeoisie had very similar moral codes that women had to follow. Hawthorne had almost the

same ideas about the nature of women as Lessing. Women are characterized with the same attributes in both novels. Both authors created the same picture about the nature of love. Since Mellefont refuses to marry Sara, her only solution for this situation is to accept her love as law. For Sara, the sanctimony of love justifies her social transgression, and she has no intention of renouncing her love for Mellefont even if it means losing her father:

Ich, Mellefont, denke darauf nicht, weil in der Welt weiter von keiner Ehre wissen will als von der Ehre, Sie zu lieben. Ich will mit Ihnen nicht um der Welt willen, ich will mit Ihnen um meiner selbst willen verbunden sein. (Lessing 14)

Like Sara, Hester also revered love so much that she was able to justify her social transgression because of it. Both women became involved in illicit relationships because of the love they felt for a man, and not because they hoped their acts of independence would change society. According to Hawthorne, women always rely on love rather than reason in relationships. In view of how Hester's and Sara's positions in society were portrayed, it is clear that eighteenth-century Germany and nineteenth-century America were not yet able to grant women a more independent and influential role. The societies they lived in were not ready for women's quest for self-determination. An emancipated role was not even accepted in personal decisions related to their love life. This shows again that patriarchy ruled over every aspect of women's lives.

Although women were devoted in both societies to raising their children, men still acted as if they were the ones in charge. In both works, the offspring of the women, Arabella and Pearl, get saved by men. Hawthorne gives the father all the credit for saving Pearl in the one scene where the father and

daughter meet. Similarly, Chillingworth, Hester's husband, passes on money to Pearl and secures through this her financial well-being: "So Pearl--the elf-child,--the demon offspring, as some people, up to this epoch, persisted in considering her--became the richest heiress of her day, in the New World" (225). The two men--Chillingworth and Dimmesdale--appear as Pearl's saviors, while Hester's hard work and devotion is forgotten. This shows that Hawthorne was ultimately concerned with upholding the patriarchal order.

Similarly, in Miss Sara Sampson it is Sir William who will save Arabella: "Komm, schleunige Anstalt zu machen, und dann laß uns auf Arabellen denken. Sie sei, wer sie sei: sie ist ein Vermächtnis meiner Tochter" (Lessing 93). Marwood is shown to be a horrid mother; Sara, who would have been Arabella's step-mother, dies at Marwoods hands. Only the father can do the job. As Susan Gustafson points out, missing mothers are a common theme in the bourgeois tragedies of the eighteenth century. This is certainly true of Miss Sara Sampson, where the only thing one learns of Sara's mother is that she died in childbirth. According to Gustafson, mothers are a threat to the close relationship between father and daughter, as well as to the continuing dominance of the patriarchal order (86).

Another important similarity between the Puritans and the German bourgeoisie was the close connection drawn between man and God. Men were the mediators between God and women, and based their actions on the rights they supposedly inherited from God. In The Scarlet Letter, this is illustrated through the fact that the Puritan leaders always appear with ministers. The Puritan society did not, unlike many modern democratic societies, have a separation between church and state: "[T]here was very much the same solemnity of demeanor on the part of the spectators; as befitted a people amongst whom religion and law were almost

identical" (Hawthorne 47). This picture of patriarchal society, where God and the fathers of the Puritan community appear as one, is prevalent throughout the novel. A similar association is made in Lessing's Miss Sara Sampson, when the father consecrates Sara in the dying scene. As already discussed, the father is portrayed as a person who has the power to save her soul. By doing this, Lessing puts the father on almost the same level with God. The father appears as the savior: "Ein Bote des Höchsten, in der Gestalt meines Vaters oder selbst mein Vater" (88).

As my comparison of Lessing's bourgeois tragedy and Hawthorne's novel demonstrates, women of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in both Europe and the United States, had little chance to work towards their own emancipation. At least this is the picture of women male intellectuals such as Lessing and Hawthorne wanted to paint. They did not choose to let their female protagonists play an influential role in shaping society. Instead, the heroines were confined to traditional family roles and were punished for any attempt to break out of the limitations set by patriarchal society.

Conclusion

Despite living in different countries and centuries, the German bourgeoisie and the Puritans had very similar moral values. I have shown that women of both societies had to live under the same constraints, forced upon them by men. Their quest for self-determination was made impossible due to patriarchal moral values and harsh religious laws. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's Miss Sara Sampson, the female protagonists experience similar difficulties. Hester and Sara both lack the ability to express their needs and desires freely, and they are excluded from active participation in their respective societies. Hester is banned from almost any interaction with society and her transgression is made visible to everybody by the scarlet letter "A" she has to wear. Sara, being seduced by her lover Mellefont, has to leave the house of her father. When she does this, she sets herself up for social ridicule. If Sara had lived and Mellefont had continued to refuse to marry her, she, too, would have been ostracized by society. Only relationships sanctified by marriage were acceptable for women of the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie.

Both the bourgeois and the Puritan societies use their moral codes to help define themselves. The Puritans wanted to be different mainly from the countries they had originated from, whereas the German bourgeoisie used the new moral code as a means to morally elevate themselves above the nobility. Thus, women had to pay a high price for their class or religion's desire to distinguish itself.

Men also appear in similar positions in both books. They are the ones in positions of power. Only Sir William's willingness to forgive Sara gives her the opportunity to re-enter society; the Puritans, on the other hand, are never willing to do this. Therefore, Hester never enjoys the freedom of living a self-determined life. A close connection between men and God as

described in Hawthorne's novel, shows that Puritan patriarchs felt their rights were given to them directly by God. They considered their religious, God-given laws justification for cruel behavior. Both female protagonists, Sara and Hester, accept the punishment inflicted upon them. Although they once transgressed the social order, they do not strive for further emancipation.

In both cases, the fathers act as their daughters' saviors. By doing this, Hawthorne and Lessing ignored the influence of the mothers on the daughters' education. Pearl is saved financially as well as emotionally by her father and stepfather, and Arabella is saved by Sir William, who is going to take her in as his new daughter. Also, Sir William would have been willing to save his own daughter by accepting her back into his house, had she not died.

Although the books are set two to three centuries ago and moral constraints placed on women today are no longer so severe, women's emancipation is still far from accomplished. Even at the dawn of the twenty-first century, equal rights and opportunities for women in Germany and the United States have not been attained. Women's political power and influence is still not equal to men's. For example, there are relatively few women in the United States Congress and there has not yet been a female president. In German politics, women are also still a minority and no important ministries are led by women. Also in the world of business, there is still a tremendous inequality between men and women. According to a survey conducted by the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1997, women who worked full-time were paid only 74 percent of every dollar men earned. Women not only earn less for the same work, but also have more low-wage jobs. In 1997, according to the above-mentioned survey, 33 percent of working women held low-wage jobs, compared with 20 percent of men. Once women reach

retirement age, the situation gets even worse for them. Only 26 percent of all older women get a pension, compared with 47 percent of men.

This gap in equality between men and women extends also into the households. Women usually raise the children and sacrifice their own career to do this. Housework and raising children is still considered less valuable than working outside the home. When mothers have a career, they often have the triple burden of performing not only their wage-earning job, but also the housework and the child-rearing. Most men still regard housework and childcare as "women's work" and consequently are often not as overworked as many women are.

To change the gender inequities I have described as well as many others that still exist, men must be willing to share power equally with women so that the differences between the genders can be appreciated rather than ranked. It is my hope that this thesis will have illuminated some of the suffering women have had to endure at the hands of men and thereby will have contributed at least a small way to the elimination of patriarchal domination.

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