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Hawthorne and Joffé: *The Scarlet Letter and its cinematic adaptation*

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Introduction

The American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne is known for being part of the Dark Romanticism in North American Literature, and his short stories present metaphors, more specifically, allegories, with a Puritan inspiration. Hawthorne had his works centered on evil and sins of humanity and his stories have a complex psychological narrative, with emphasis on human failures on judging people and leading these characters to destruction. Nathaniel Hawthorne had a past related to the history of Puritanism. His ancestors, William Hathorne, an influential figure in the administration of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and his son, John Hathorne, one of the prosecutors during the Salem witch trials of 1692, were both involved in the history of Puritans in New England. It is speculated that the author added a letter “w” in his last name to distant himself from these ancestors, especially John Hathorne, his great-great grandfather. (Moore 18)

Hawthorne’s first work was a novel named *Fanshawe*, published in 1828. He also published several short stories, such as, “Young Goodman Brown”, “The Birthmark”, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and others. One of his most famous work was the romantic novel *The Scarlet Letter*, published in 1850. One year later, in 1851, he published another book, the Gothic novel *The House of the Seven Gables*. Hawthorne’s works are very important for the American Literature. “As being a dark romantic, he seems to criticize the past, which is marked with Puritanism. He takes particular interest in human psychology and the nature of evil like his contemporaries Melville and Poe. Evil is coincided with Puritanism.” (Dincer 223) Furthermore, he always provoked readers to reflect on the nature of humankind and human behavior.

The novel *The Scarlet Letter*, like many other literary works, was adapted to the cinema a few times. In 1995, the English director, producer and screenwriter Roland Joffé released his own cinematographic adaptation of Hawthorne’s masterpiece. Joffé is also known for other works; he was nominated for The Academy Awards as Best Director for the films *The Killing Fields*, in 1984,

and *The Mission*, in 1986. He began his career on television, as a TV director, later on becoming a very important name in the cinematographic industry until nowadays.

Puritanism, which was an inspiration to many of Hawthorne's works including *The Scarlet Letter*, is a religious reform movement from the 16th and 17th centuries that sought to "purify" the Church of England from the remaining Roman Catholic practices. This religious movement is defined, according to American Heritage Dictionary, as having "the principles and practices of the Congregationalist members of the religious movement who, having migrated to America in 1620, attempted to set up a theocratic state in which clergy had authority over both religious and civil life." (703) As Marty explains, "puritans became known in the 17th century for their moral and religious values which informed the Puritans whole way of life, they sought through church to reform their lifestyle adapting to the government as well." (2) The Puritans saw all honorable work as a way of glorifying and worshiping God and believed they could be purified through Him and the church.

The novel written by Hawthorne points out the way in which women are treated in the puritan world and the way in which earthly sins are severely punished. The same way, the homonymous film also details life in colonial America and it touches on the sense of guilt that the Puritan lifestyle stressed so deeply. Despite many similarities with the novel, the adaptation from 1995 also shows important divergences, such as a completely different end for Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale. They move away with their daughter Pearl to live happily ever after. This Hollywoodian ending was criticized at the time and this version of Hawthorne's novel was even seen as a not very good one for not bearing fidelity to its original work.

Based on the above discussion the purpose of this work is to compare and contrast Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel and Roland Joffé's homonymous film, and to interpret how both works perceive and criticize Puritanism. In this way, I analyzed the different choices made by the director of the movie in relation to the original story. With this objective, the study focuses on answering some questions: 1) How is the theme of Puritanism seen and comprehended in the novel and film? 2)

How are characters represented in both works? 3) How did the film director adapt some major passages of the novel? 4) How did the director Roland Joffé interpret and change some perspectives from the original literary work? This paper aims to study and analyze the novel *The Scarlet Letter* and its homonymous cinematographic adaptation from 1995. Both works share differences and similarities. Although they criticize Puritanism, their endings are completely different, and this is one aspect that is going to be highlighted in this work.

1.1 Significance of the study

Nathaniel Hawthorne is a very important name in American Literature. “He struggled throughout his career to make a living as a writer and to create an American literary tradition.” (Marshall 21). The author is also instrumental in the evolution of American gothic fiction. “For anyone familiar with the body of Hawthorne's fiction, even the briefest reflection reveals that it is virtually impossible to discuss many of his works without having at the center of the discussion the Gothic elements in those works.” (Francis 2). He is still studied in universities all over the world, for being considered a master in allegory and symbolism and his fictional characters’ actions and dilemmas express the problems of human society.

This author, who is largely studied, has been adapted to cinema more than once. It is known that “there have been eight film versions of *The Scarlet Letter* and one mini TV series since 1904. Five of the films were silent versions (1907, 1911, 1917, 1926), the 1934 and 1995 adaptations were American, and the remaining one was Wim Wender’s *Der Scarlachrote Buchstabe* (March, 1973)” (Bromley 71). Moreover, other stories from Hawthorne were also adapted to film, such as: *The House of the Seven Gables*, “Rappaccini’s Daughter”, and the short story “Feathertop” which inspired the film *Scarecrow* from 1972.

Cinematographic adaptation studies have been increasing lately and as Correa (151) points out, adaptations and metaphorical parallels with other arts imply the possibility of some form of ‘translation’ between literature and other forms of art; yet, at the same time, adaptations draw attention to what is unique about each particular medium. Our thoughts and meditations on what a film director, a composer or a painter have made of a literary text frequently prompt judgements about the adaptation’s authenticity and faithfulness in relation to the original work. Since the film adaptation by Roland Joffé does not present fidelity to its original as many viewers expected, it is important to analyze the topic to comprehend that both works are independent, a ‘translation’ from a literary work to another media.

Review of Literature

Puritanism is the main theme of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel *The Scarlet Letter*, however this was not the first time the author criticizes the Puritan Society. In one of his previous short story, “Young Goodman Brown”, Hawthorne had already brought up this theme when he wrote the story in 1835. The story takes place in Salem, Massachusetts, which was founded by Puritans seeking religious tolerance. The symbolic tale tells the story of this city that became a very repressive society where those who did not follow a determined behavior were severely punished.

One of Hawthorne’s ancestors participated on trials and sentenced many women to death. This was one of the reasons that may have influenced his interest in writing about the Puritan Society. According to Claridge “ he sought to understand the New England past that shaped so much of his character and his sense of his country’s mission in the world: he was of Puritan descent, had immersed himself in the early records of Puritan America, and could trace his paternal line back to William Hathorne, an influential figure of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.” (8)

Puritanism was a religious movement from the late 16th and 17th centuries. “The basis of Puritan psychology lies in the contrast between personal responsibility and individualism.”

(Bercovith 17). According to Shawn Kelly, the Puritans had an enormous effect on the American culture. (1) As a political, social, and cultural power, Puritanism lasted until approximately 1728.

According to Daniel Peddle in “Puritanism, Enlightenment And The U.S. Constitution”:

Within Puritanism there occurs a division between reason and nature which is manifest in a general way in the division between the practices and doctrines of Massachusetts and Connecticut. What is crucial in this development as in Enlightenment thought is that the object of faith has been thoroughly inwardized and thus an object of reason and experience. (127)

The “Age of Reason” or “Age of Enlightenment” came after Puritanism, a period that begun in the 18th century, and which was characterized by a critical approach to religious, philosophical and social matters seeking to reject beliefs that were not based on explainable or justifiable reasons. This period was also introduced by European social philosophy; however, in the Age of Reason, Americans started to seek for answers and to put their faith in reason instead of putting their faith in God.

The Romantic Movement, in which Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter*, was a reaction to the Age of Enlightenment, and a period in which he criticizes the Puritan way of life. “The Puritan past was the raw material for Hawthorne's romance, partly because it gave him a language and metaphor both congenial to his own ideas and familiar to the public at large.” (Imene 32) The Romantic Movement was more focused on the individual, without falling into the society's judgments, and that is how Hawthorne censures the treatment the puritan society has towards Hester Prynne. For Puritans, “their thoughts turned to God on every occasion” (Thompson 15). Their social, political and personal lives were all centered in God and His lessons.

For the Puritan imagination, as pointed out by Ruland and Bradbury,

It was acknowledged a central influence to the American writers since the first texts published in America. One reason for this was that it brought to the New World not only a Judaic sense of wonder and millenarian promise, the "American dream " that is still recalled in so much modern literature, but a vision of the task and nature of writing itself. Puritan narratives defined a shape for the writing of America, but they also questioned how and whether language could reveal the experience. As a result, from the very beginnings America became a testing place of language and narrative, a place of search for providential meanings and hidden revelations, part of a lasting endeavor to discover the intended nature and purpose of the New World. (2)

Sacvan Bercovitch (1975) in his book *The Puritan Origins of The American Self* , defines how Puritanism helped to shape the American way of life, more specifically the self-made man concept. The author stated that, “the Puritan myth prepared for the re-vision of God’s Country from the “New England of the type” into the United States of America.” (136). For Bercovitch, “the Puritans conceived the American paradise as the fulfillment of scripture prophecy.” (137). In relation to this Puritan nation created in New England, Bercovitch mentions that “the puritans were concerned with mobilizing society in support of an established creed. Gradually, they rewelded the sundered bonds of grace and works, through the notion of mutual obligation. The elect must repay God in time, they argued, for what He had granted them from eternity.” (80)

Both Hawthorne’s and Joffé’s works show a criticism in relation to Puritanism. In the story Hester Prynne is an adulterous woman, forced by the Puritan community to wear a scarlet letter A on the breast of her gown. Arthur Dimmesdale, the minister and the secret father of her child, Pearl, struggles with the agony of conscience and his own weakness. Differently from Arthur, Hester is a very strong woman; she also has a good and brave heart, and it is possible to see in both narratives that she does not hold her head in shame or seem remorseful, leading many of her critics to believe that she did not see the need to be sorry for her actions.

According to Richardson (214), the Puritan children were born into the sins of their fathers and mothers, in the case of Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter*, the girl is born from the act of Hester's and Arthur's sin. Women were expected and educated to take care of the domestic duties and chores. They were also expected to be good wives and good mothers according to the Puritan beliefs. In Hawthorne's novel, Hester did not impose any of those rules to her child, she had no intentions on allowing the church to raise Pearl and take her away, which demonstrates that the author portrays Hester as a woman with a certain authority and a very strong personality. This can also reveal that Hawthorne may have wanted to convey the idea that female characters can also be intense and profound, since Hester Prynne was and she is still perceived as a heroin in classic literature until the present moment.

As it was mentioned before, despite this criticism of Puritanism in both book and movie, highlighted by the writer and film director, respectively, Roland Joffé decided to change a few passages in his adaptation, especially the end of the story, which is a happy one in the film. This decision led readers and spectators wonder why he did it, perhaps to please and delight a different audience from 1995 and to fit into the Hollywood industry? Perhaps because the story of the film is told and seen by a different narrator?

2.1 Cinematographic adaptation of literary work

According to Correa "for literary researchers, the study of other media affords new insights into literary texts and cultures that produce them. Inevitably, allusions to other media within literary texts also tend to provide explicit or implicit commentary on the writer's own art." (149) What happens to film adaptation is that despite the fact that people recognize the literary work as something apart from the visual media of cinema, spectators tend to search for authenticity and fidelity in film adaptation, but some works are only based on literary work. Besides that, all filmmakers and screenwriters present their own readings of a literary work they admire very much,

and different adaptations should not be regarded as bad ones simply because they are different from the originals.

In his text “What novels can do that films can’t”, Seymour Chatman pointed out:

writer, filmmaker, comic strip artist, choreographer- each finds his or her own ways to evoke the sense of what the objects of the narrative look like. Each medium has its own properties, for better and worse usage, and intelligent film viewing and criticism, like intelligent reading, needs to understand and respect both the limitations these create and also the triumphs they invite. (Chatman 140)

When a film is adapted from a novel, it is often seen as a dependent work from the original story, however, as Corseuil (295) pointed out that “there is a culture of faithful adaptations that can be extremely problematic, once many adapted films empty themselves out of individual meaning, when they tend to simply repeat endless dialogues.” This kind of source can also be problematic in the sense that many people prefer to watch the adapted film instead of having the experience of reading the novel, perhaps due to their lack of time or due to the enormous offer of adaptations we have nowadays. This tendency of “faithful” adaptations can damage a film that ends up being just a copy of the book, when it could had been an independent work with its own characteristics and peculiarities.

In her book *Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon wrote “an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing.” (9) The author reinforces the idea that adaptations should be treated as adaptations and that they are a kind of intertextuality between two different works; therefore, fidelity is not the best criterion for judgment.

Literary texts and films have their own limitations and, in the case of *The Scarlet Letter*, the movie director decided to make a few changes in his adaptation, his own ‘translation’ of this book.

Perhaps due to the fact that the movie was released more than one hundred years later or because Joffé wanted to give a different end, a fair one for a change. It is difficult to judge and know for sure why the director made such decisions, this led readers and spectators to imagine. The purpose of this work is not to explain why the adaptation has changed, but to discuss the consequences of these changes for the plot, characters and central theme of the story.

2.2 Puritanism in America

The Puritan religion was originated in England during the 1600s. Between 1630 and 1643, nearly 9.000 Puritans migrated to the Massachusetts Bay colony in the United States of America. “The Puritan migration was much more rapid than any other group migration in the colonies at the time. Once they arrived in New England, the Puritans established towns and farms. Most Puritans settled in towns near their extended families and created churches and schools”, (Deering 2014)

In “Puritanism and Its Impact upon American Values”, Ning Kang wrote:

The Puritans brought strong religious beliefs to bear in all colonies north of Virginia. New England became their stronghold, where they sought to found a holy Commonwealth. Puritanism remained the dominant religious force in that area throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. During the whole colonial period Puritanism had direct impact on both religious thought and cultural patterns in America. (148)

Those Puritans who settled in New England laid the foundation for a nation unique in world history. Their beliefs had a most significant influence on the subsequent development of America. The basis for the Puritan’s beliefs, according to Vaughan, “was an emphasis on the righteousness and sovereignty of God. God, they believed, directed all things by exercise of his will and directed all things to an intelligent end. The Puritans were partial to the teachings of the Old Testament.”

(305) As the author mentioned, Puritans believed human beings were sinners, and only some of them would deserve to be saved by God, this predestination for only few people in the Puritan Religion is evidenced since most of these people were seen as not deserving any kind of mercy. Even the ones who were chosen by God and were predestinated to salvation could not escape the divine laws and its traditions.

According to Heimert and Delbanco, Puritans used to avoid the discrepancy so called doctrine of means – “the conviction that God was likeliest to dispense his predetermined grace through a gospel preacher. This was God’s preferred way of awakening sinners to their condition, and, should he choose to release them from their bondage to sin, to their obligations as his regenerate children.” (13) Puritans needed to feel God’s will. The essence of their movement did not come from a peculiar doctrine nor from specific prophecies, but in this need to feel the will of God.

In the “Key Concepts Of Puritanism and the Shaping of the American Cultural Identity”, Andreea Mingiuc points out:

As a consequence of Adam and Eve’s fall, everyone was essentially marked by corruption and perversity. It followed that no one was able to find salvation on his/her own; only God decided who was going to stay by His side. Related to this, the concept of unconditional election stressed upon the fact that God saved those he wished and this was directly connected to the idea of predestination. No one knew whether or not election was his/ her part; the only thing man could do was looking for signs and the most important of these was material success. (4)

The signs were very important for the Puritan society, and even the ones who received the signs for salvation were supposed to pray continuously in order to keep their souls away of a sinful life. Besides the signs sent by God, the symbols were also very important.

The main symbol in Hawthorne's novel is the scarlet letter A, which changes its meaning throughout the narrative. "The townspeople, who once condemned her, now believe her scarlet A stands for her ability to create beautiful needlework and for her unselfish assistance to the poor and sick. The letter is the symbol of her calling." (Hawthorne 43) Despite being firstly used by Hester to remind her constantly of her sin, ironically, the letter A does not symbolize the same thing until the end of the novel. For Hawthorne "Such power to help and sympathize made many people to refuse to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. The A no longer stands for Adulteress." (43)

According to Eckman, "The major problem with Hester's punishment is that the precise meaning of the sign, in spite of its apparent simplicity, is neither fixed nor transparent. Even though her error may be evident to everyone, the word "adulteress" is not once mentioned in the course of the novel." (57) On the other hand, another symbol appears to take the letter A place. As Pearl grows up, she becomes the living symbol of her parents' adultery. "God, as a direct consequence of the sin which man thus punished, had given her a lovely child, whose place was on the same dishonoured bosom, to connect her parent for ever with the race and descent of mortals."(Hawthorne 67)

The story of the novel and film takes place in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in New England, therefore, this is the background of this romance that goes around Puritanism, religion beliefs and especially on how women were treated in this Puritan world.

2.3 Puritanism portrayed in both works

In the introduction of the book *The Scarlet Letter*, Claridge points out: "Hawthorne's reluctance to treat an adult sexual relationship in anything like the way in which we expect such relationship to be conducted had frequently been imputed to a Protestant, especially Puritanical, distaste for its formative enactment." (11) Throughout the novel, Nathaniel Hawthorne questions whether the beliefs and punishments of this Puritan society are really justified. The author implies that the main conflicts in the novel are a result of the severity and strictness of Puritan beliefs.

According to Claridge, “Hawthorne sees such orthodoxy as unjustified and morally questionable is apparent from his attitude to the society he depicts. His opening remarks insist on us the intolerance and repressiveness of Puritan New England.” (12) Hawthorne depicts the intolerant and hypocritical characteristics of the Puritan Religion. The novel not only talks about Hester’s sin but also is mainly about the harsh treatment this Puritan society has towards her sin.

In the second chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*, it is already possible to see how the author wants to convey the idea that Puritans were very quick to judge and blame the others. No one considers or thinks about Hester Prynne’s feelings or the reasons for her actions. The society is also very prompt to punish her with no mercy or forgiveness. “On the other hand, a penalty which, in our days, would infer degree of mocking infamy and ridicule might then be invested with almost as stern a dignity as the punishment of death itself.” (Hawthorne 37)

Hawthorne also criticized the intolerance Puritans had towards other religions; even the children were disrespectful in relation to that. In one passage, the author describes Pearl observing the other children:

She saw the children of the settlement on the grassy margin of the street, or at the domestic thresholds, disporting themselves in such grim fashion as the Puritanic nurture would permit; playing at going to church, perchance, or at scourging Quakers, or taking scalps in a sham-fight with the Indians, or scaring one another with freaks of imitative witchcraft. (70)

The author continued, stating how cruel the Puritan children could be. They were also merciless, as many adults. Probably learnt from them and their Puritan beliefs:

The truth was, that the little Puritans, being of the most intolerant brood that ever lived, had got a vague idea of something outlandish, unearthly, or at variance with

ordinary fashions, in the mother and child, and therefore scorned them in their hearts, and not unfrequently reviled them with their tongues. Pearl felt sentiment, and requited it, with the bitterest hatred that can be supposed to rankle in a childish bosom. (71)

The Puritan kids in the novel seemed to be taught by their parents to be intolerant and judgmental regarding other religions. They perceived Hester and her child as sinners as well. Despite the fact that Pearl is in fact the greatest victim in the entire story, she also suffers all the consequences of her parents' sin.

Pearl is portrayed as a very intelligent girl with a fierce temperament and vivid imagination. Besides being an important and real character, she also represents her mother's sins and triumph. She is the real living symbol of the scarlet letter 'A' that keeps always reminding Hester of her sin; however, she is also the greatest symbol of her parents' love. As for the society, the illegitimate child symbolizes shame; the infant does not have a place among the other puritan children.

In many other passages of the novel it is possible to see how Hawthorne criticizes the whole society and the terrible treatment the Puritans gave Hester and her child. The author also criticizes and mocks the fact that the minister, a very respectful and holy man, is the one responsible for the most terrible sin among this society. "The minister well knew- subtle, but remorseful hypocrite that he was!" (Hawthorne 98). Dimmesdale is depicted as a coward man who does not confess his sin because he is of such high rank in the church. The Reverend "hid a guilty heart through life". (Hawthorne 65)

Laura Guebert in her paper "A Critique of Puritan Values and Social Restrictions" stated:

Puritanism operated largely on the idea that man was inherently evil, lacking God's grace in light of the Fall of Man. This concept was emphasized to encourage the necessity of a close relationship with God as the only source of salvation. Sexuality

within the Puritan social-scape and the relationship between man and wife depended on the submission of woman before God and her husband. Sex outside of marriage was stringently and expressly forbidden, with punishment being highly public and degrading. It was into this suppressive and bleak society that Hawthorne placed his story of a lone mother condemned for the love that brought life within her. (4)

Nathaniel Hawthorne's point of view about this society was disclosed in many passages of the novel. The author said: "All were characterized by the sternness and severity which old portraits so invariably put on; as if they were the ghosts, rather than the pictures, of departed worthies, and were gazing with harsh and intolerant criticism at the pursuits and enjoyments of living men." (Hawthorne 79). Hawthorne provided an interesting atmosphere to his novel about guilt and sorrow. Using the Puritan New England as the backdrop for his story, he highlighted and censured the society's behavior, judging a woman whose only sin was actually done in name of true love.

According to Guebert, "Rather than rewrite the morals of sexual freedom as many of his contemporaries feared, Hawthorne was much more concerned with displaying the hypocrisy and innate wrongness of a society that condemns love, free will, and self-possession and attempts to instill subservience, uniformity, and unnatural order in its place." (9) He wrote a novel about adultery, its consequences and mainly about judgment and bigotry towards that.

Not different from the novel, written in 1850; the film, produced in 1995, carries the same criticism in relation to Puritanism. The director Rolan Joffé freely adapted this film, which presents many differences regarding the original work, but has kept the same gist in portraying the hypocrisy of society at that time, since in both works is possible to see a society that claims to live upon the word of God, but harshly punishes instead of forgiving or trying to comprehend. Right in the beginning of the film, it is possible to see how the Puritan New England perceives the newcomer Hester Prynne, played by Demi Moore. The beginning of the film in fact is not the same as the book. Spectators can see how the whole story starts and develops, and how Arthur Dimmesdale and

Hester Prynne fall in love – which is not narrated in the novel. Joffé showed in his film how the Puritans already saw Hester as an awkward woman with different customs. Even before her involvement with the minister, people talk behind her back and gossip about the way she behaves and speaks.

The director also portrayed a society that was fast to judge and punish. Without knowing anything about Hester and her past, they already thought she was a woman ahead of her time, but not in a good way. In one of the first scenes, after Hester's arrival to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the New England Puritans welcome her, invite her to dinner and want her to stay in their houses; however, at the same time, it is very clear and evident that they want her to follow their rules strictly.

For the Puritans, “God, Who never left mankind to guess at the way of salvation, has seen fit to propose conditions to men, and to give them assurance of the benefit in that way. Although He offers grace as a singular and absolute Promise, yet we must enter into a covenant state with him and comply with the condition required on our part”. (Bercovitch 80) What Bercovitch suggested is that Puritans never abandoned the principal tenets of Calvinism; they used to worship God and believe in His real presence.

According to David Peddle in “Puritanism, Enlightenment And The U.S. Constitution”:

Puritanism as it developed in England and New England drew subjective moments back into relation to an objective divine providence. However, the Puritan concept of the relation between God and humanity achieved a more determinate comprehension of reason and nature than did Calvinism, conceiving this relation, in its 'federal' theology, in terms of covenant. (130)

In the film, some of the Puritans that had welcomed her before, the couple Horace and Meredith, go to Hester Prynne's house to take her to church and they seem annoyed and upset to see

that she was in the woods and had forgotten about the “Sabbath”. She quickly tries to make amends and tell them to go first, that she will meet them there. This is just the beginning of the judgmental treatment against her; they seem to know already that she is not part of this society.

Roland Joffé explained after the film’s premiere that Hester was a “Puritan heroine conceived by a Victorian writer”. He had chosen Demi Moore because she had a strong sexual presence and Hester’s sexuality is what makes her so interesting for him. He continued: “I wanted to present her as a very sensual woman living in a rigid, Puritan world. I felt if I did not deal with that sensuality in the film, then I was being the Puritan.” (Crisafulli 1) Many of Joffé’s additions to the novel raise reflections on social issues. “The destructive powers of racism are touched on in a new subplot involving the simmering tensions between the colonists and the Native Americans they have displaced. And questions of sexism and religious intolerance are raised in scenes of a village witch trial.” (Crisafulli 1)

After the scenes in which the villagers already know Hester is pregnant, things get even worse. In this crescendo of violence and intolerance, she had to deal with the narrow-minded Puritans and their punishments. The same couple who had invited her to church were the same people who were trying to punish her until the day she dies. “Freeing this woman will be an invitation to every wife to defy her husband; every child its parent”, says the man to his wife. Then she answers him, saying: “No, she should be released. Horace, you do not put her in the prison. You put the prison in her, so each time someone sets eyes on her, her sin will be marked into her soul afresh.” It is possible to see that their intentions and ideas of punishment go beyond that, they are very cruel and want to humiliate Hester and make her feel regret for the rest of her life.

The novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne “is structured around the conflict between culture (rational, ordered, male) and nature (inchoate, evil and irrational, female), with society’s very survival in the wilderness depending on the outcome of the struggle, according to those responsible for governance.” (Bromley 64) According to Bromley, Hawthorne wrote about Puritanism in a period of Romantic thought. Domestication was an essential part of the Puritan discourse,

contrasted with the wild and wilderness, the bodies and pleasures. People could not know each other's bodies; everything seemed to be a sin before the eyes of God, or the eyes of the Puritans.

In the film adaptation, Joffé probably wanted to go beyond the Puritan fundamentalism. Since it is a film from the 90's, the director showed the love scenes between Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne as a beautiful act of love, never as a sin. They are two young people in love who want to be free to live it despite what society believes, but of course, they hide their affair because they are afraid of the Puritan punishment. Another very interesting aspect in the film is that Joffé depicts his criticism in relation to Puritanism in a more audacious way. As mentioned previously, since the film was made in the twentieth century, the director could portray the cruelties of this society in different ways.

In one scene, after already knowing about Hester's involvement with the minister, one of the men in the village, Brewster, goes to Hester's house at night and tries to rape her. He says several obscenities to her, and he thinks he has the right of forcing her to have sex with him because in the mind of the Puritans, she was the "dirty woman", full of sin and lust - Joffé showed how cruel this man was, taking advantage of this situation to do something that he always wanted to do since he saw Hester Prynne for the first time.

Another aspect that is more emphasized in the film is the conflict between the Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the Native Americans in the area. "The opening sequences represent the very strong presence of nature, the wilderness, and people it with Native Americans whose culture and territory were threatened by the Puritans." (Bromley 72) Differently from Hawthorne, who makes little mention of Native Americans in the novel, Joffé wants also to criticize the fact that Puritans were taking over the Indians land. Besides that, Roger Chillingworth, Hester's husband, murders a man and later on tries to frame one of the American Indians as the author of the crime. Therefore, the film portrays Puritans as cruel, hypocrites, criminal and liars, and still they think or want to believe they are the right ones before the eyes of God.

3. Analysis of the novel and the film *The Scarlet Letter*

The author and film director studied in this work were chosen due to their significance and representativeness in Literature and Cinema, respectively, also for presenting considerable information about the topic being analyzed. The narratives analyzed in this work are Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* from 1850 and the homonymous film released in 1995 by the British director Roland Joffé.

3.1 The novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne

The novel published in 1850 is a work of fiction, which takes place during the years of 1642 to 1649. Set in the 17th century, Nathaniel Hawthorne presents in *The Scarlet Letter* a strict society with its Christian-like rules and principles. "This was a close representation of the actual society. The town of New England consisted mostly of immigrants who came to America, as it was named, from England. Their numbers were so large they ended up forming what is known today as the Massachusetts Bay Colony." (Richardson 2). The Puritans had distinct degrees of beliefs concerning society, religion and family structure.

An omniscient narrator, in the third person, narrates the story. This narrator knows the thoughts, feelings and acts of all characters in the story. One example is this passage: "She had wandered, without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness; as vast, as intricate and shadowy, as the untamed forest, amid the gloom of which they were now holding a colloquy that was to decide their faith". (Hawthorne 71)

Before the beginning of the novel, Hawthorne wrote an introductory chapter, named "The Custom-House". This introductory section was written in order to "present the historical-social context in which the author/narrator is situated, which is different from the historic universe of

Hester Prynne, the protagonist of the story.”(Corseuil 298) Hawthorne wrote “The Custom-House” as a preface, showing the readers autobiographical information and also to explain that he found the scarlet letter A among some sheets of parchment in the Salem Custom House that contained the original manuscript on which the story was based. As mentioned by Levin: “In the sketch that introduces *The Scarlet Letter* – where he discusses the book he will not be writing, a novel concerning the daily routine and political intrigue of the Salem Custom-House – Hawthorne visualizes the black-browed ghosts of his puritanical ancestors.” (16)

The novel begins in a Puritan settlement. Hester is conducted out of the town prison with her baby in her arms and the scarlet letter “A” stitched on her breast. She had embroidered it herself very beautifully. “It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel that she wore, and which was splendor in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony”, (Hawthorne 6). Against all odds, Hester’s inner strength is unwavering; she does not show feelings of defeat or shame, on the contrary, she demonstrates resilience.

According to Melissa Pennel, “unable to deny her own participation in adultery, Hester is forced to accept a punishment that will perpetually remind her and those around her of her act. The scarlet letter, while not a brand upon her flesh, still marks her as a criminal” (129). When Hester was questioned regarding the father of her child in front of the crowd, she refused to say who he was. Once more, the reader can understand how strong she was, especially because she was living in such difficult times for women. Pennel continues, stating that: “she rejects the social systems that govern woman’s place and believes that her exile gives her the opportunity to ignore them. Out of this thinking comes her strength, so that Hester believes herself more capable of meeting the challenges that confront her.” (131)

In the end of the novel, Hester's compassion, strength and honesty, carried her through a life she could not have imagined. Arthur Dimmesdale died after his public confession and

Chillingworth, died consumed by his own anger and revenge. On the other hand, Hester lived on, very quietly, and became sort of a legend in the Massachusetts Bay colony of Boston. “The scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world’s scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence too.” (Hawthorne 196) The scarlet letter A was already part of what she became, in the end; the letter was part of her own self. She grew stronger through all her suffering, dealing with everything peacefully. After her death, she was buried next to Dimmesdale. Between their tombs, there was a gravestone with the inscription: “On a field, sable, the letter A, gules.” (Hawthorne 197)

3.2 The film directed by Roland Joffé.

The film *The Scarlet Letter* released in 1995 is an American romantic drama film “freely adapted” from Hawthorne’s novel. “In the 1980s and early 90’s, the adaptation of classic novels became a virtual industry in itself, not least because it became clear that the films struck a chord with American audiences.” (Duguid 2003) At this time, several adaptations of Jane Austen and Oscar Wilde were being released, among other adaptations from many important writers. Perhaps Joffé saw a great opportunity in releasing his film in the 90’s. Consequently, besides honoring Hawthorne’s work he would benefit from commercial factors since the Hollywood industry works with cycles of production, in this specific scenario, the literary adaptations were becoming more and more popular. In Joffé’s adaptation, the actors Demi Moore, Gary Oldman and Robert Duvall played Hester Prynne, Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale and Roger Chillingworth respectively.

Director Roland Joffé said "the book is set in a time when the seeds were sown for the bigotry, sexism and lack of tolerance we still battle today" (Barlowe 110). Different from the novel, the film seems to have removed the character's sense of guilt, and therefore part of the story's drama. ("Do you believe what we did was wrong?" asks Hester to Dimmesdale). The character of Hester Prynne in the film, just like in the novel is also a very strong and brave woman, but she

seems more confident than the character in the novel. In a specific scene from the movie it is possible to see Hester's curiosity upon the charming new pastor in town. She observes Arthur Dimmesdale swimming naked in the forest lake without knowing he is actually the new pastor, later on they meet and instantly feel attracted to each other.

The film begins with a discussion between the town's magistrate and some Indians. The spectator can already see one of the main characters talking to the Indians; it is Arthur Dimmesdale. After this very first scene, Hester Prynne arrives from England. While the novel starts with Hester already in prison, the film adaptation starts before her arrival to New England. The film continues with a linear narrative, from the beginning to the end. As Corseuil pointed out: "the film presents a linear story, omitting the 'The Introduction' (*The Custom-House*) which introduces Hawthorne's novel." (298) It is also important to mention that differently from the novel, which has an unknown narrator, the film from 1995 is narrated by Hester and Arthur's daughter, Pearl. She is the one who tells the story in the third person.

The fact that Pearl is the one who tells the story, makes a great difference in the way the story is told. She is not an omniscient narrator like the one from the novel. The adult Pearl narrates the story that happened with her parents since the moment her mother arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, before she was even born. Thus, spectators know she is telling a story that she heard from her parents combined with her own memories and mementos from her childhood.

The film also presents a voice over technique. According to Sarah Kozloff, "Voice-over narration can be formally defined as oral statements, conveying any portion of narrative, spoken by an unseen speaker situated in a space and time other than that simultaneously being presented by the images on the screen."⁽⁵⁾ The young adult Pearl narrates scenes in which she does not appear and scenes in which she appears only as a child. The spectator never has the chance to see the adult Pearl, who is telling the whole story.

As mentioned before, despite the very same criticism on Puritanism and hypocrisy presented in both works, the film's ending is completely "hollywoodian", Hester, Arthur and their daughter

Pearl leave the village and depart to Carolina to live happily ever after. Although the film was freely adapted, as Joffé pointed out, it still received some negative reviews from critics due to its changes in relation to the original work. Perhaps some of the critics thought the director should not change Hawthorne's work, which is truly a masterpiece. They might have seen the film trying to find the fidelity mentioned before, not as an independent work, retold and translated by director Roland Joffé.

According to Chatman, "close study of film and novel versions of the same narrative reveals with great clarity the peculiar powers of the two media. Once we grasp those peculiarities, the reasons for the differences in form, content, and impact of the two versions strikingly emerge." (123) In other words, what the author means is that one should watch movie's adaptations with this idea in mind, of seeing a work separated from its original one, since a film adaptation is an entirely different narrative in other kind of media.

3.3 Analyzing the characters

In both works, the essence of the main characters is the same. Their major features remain the same in the film adaptation, although it is possible to see some differences and variations in their behavior and actions.

Hawthorne's Hester Prynne is a beautiful woman, as the author described in the second chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*, The Market-Place:

The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale. She had dark abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam; and a face which, besides being beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow and deep black eyes. She was lady-like, too, after the manner of the feminine gentility of those days;

characterized by a certain state and dignity, rather than by the delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace which is now recognized as its indication. (Hawthorne 40)

Besides being a very beautiful woman, Hester Prynne is also a very good person. She has a very strong character; she is honest, kind and very humble. She worries about the other people and devotes much of her time to charity. She uses her abilities in needlework to help the ones in need; however, even the people helped by Hester do not show the same kindness and generosity to her in return. In addition to the qualities mentioned before, and her compassion towards the others, she is also a brave woman, she is aware of her sin and she accepts it. She accepts her punishment and the child God gave her with courage and complacency.

Hester's strength and natural dignity make the reader feel very compassionate towards her. It is unfair to see this woman in such terrible situation; she is a great human being; nevertheless, she has to endure the whole situation by herself. "In spite of the torments and agony she undergoes, Hester Prynne has, to a certain degree, always possessed the fortitude and mental power which the minister lacks." (Eeckman 23). Her character is also much more courageous than Dimmesdale's. Her inner force is unwavering, different from the minister. "She possesses the strength, selflessness, and positive influence attributed to the heroines of domestic novels" (Kreger 310)

Joffé's Hester Prynne follows the same characteristics as the heroine from Hawthorne, but she is even more courageous and audacious. In the film, she is portrayed for spectators in 1995; obviously, the director took the liberty to add the love and nude scenes; furthermore, her character also seems more physically strong. She works alone around her house, rides horses, drives her carriage by herself and lives with no man in a distant house, near the woods with her little daughter, Pearl and her slave, Mituba.

Right after Hester's arrival in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Hester goes to a public market to search for a slave, a male one. The salesman questions her if she does not have a husband or father to do business with him instead of her, which she responds quickly, simply asking if her

money is no good to him. The man answers saying the money is fine, but he sells a mute female slave to her, Mituba. He finds her behavior very odd for a Puritan woman, negotiating slaves at the market all by herself. Another example of her strength in the movie is the scene in which Brewster Stonehall tries to rape her. She does not think twice, she sticks a lit candle in one of his eyes, takes her gunshot and threatens him, demanding him to leave; otherwise, she will shoot and kill him.

Another aspect of Joffé's character is her sexual appealing; in fact, the director said that this was the reason why he chose Demi Moore for Hester's role. In the film adaptation, her figure is much more sexualized and daring. In the scene when she first sees the Reverend, he is actually swimming naked in a lake inside her property. Dimmesdale thinks he is completely alone, but she observes him with curiosity and admiration, she does not feel intimidated at all, she continues watching him until somebody interrupts it by calling her name.

Arthur Dimmesdale in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel is a fragile and sorrowful man. He does not present the same inner strength as his beloved one. The author described him in chapter three, *The Recognition*:

A young clergyman, who had come from one of the great English universities, bringing all the learning of the age into our wild forest-land. His eloquence and religious fervor had already given the earnest of high eminence in his profession. He was a person of very striking aspect, with a white, lofty, and impeding brow, large, brown, melancholy eyes, and a mouth which, unless when forcibly compressed it, was apt to be tremulous, expressing both nervous sensibility and a vast power of self-restraint. (Hawthorne 49)

As the author mentioned, the Reverend's devotion to God is evident. He is very passionate about his religion and a very well educated young man. The people in the village say that his speech "affected them like the speech of an angel" (Hawthorne 50). He is a much-respected man in the

colony, and as a minister, he is supposed to be the best example of the Puritan customs and beliefs, but ironically, he is the most sinful of them all, preaching the opposite of what he is doing while all the Puritans worship him as a role model.

Dimmesdale's character in relation to Hester's is much weaker and insecure. He does not share the same vigor and boldness that Hester Prynne does. "He lacks mental strength and a certain force of character to endure the torments of his hypocritical life" (Kreger 321). Throughout the novel Hester is the one who seems to take over the whole situation, she does not seem a vulnerable creature in need of male protection. On the other hand, Arthur is the one who always tends to have more feelings of hopelessness and despair, like a pitiful victim.

According to Levin, "Arthur Dimmesdale is an unwilling hypocrite, who purges himself by means of open confession." (76) He is exemplary in performing his duties as a minister; however, he knows he has sinned and he considers himself a hypocrite. Just like all the Puritans, he does not believe that only good works or moral living would bring him salvation. The Puritans reasoning was that if one could earn one's way to heaven, then God's sovereignty would be diminished, and the elected by God, like Dimmesdale, could not commit any kind of evil acts. Probably that is why the Reverend feels so desperate and sees no way out of this situation.

The minister secretly executes his own punishment by fasting and whipping himself. His internal torments result in physical and mental illness. He also deliberately starves himself and denies himself sleep as a way of punishment. In one passage, Roger Chillingworth notices a letter 'A' in Arthur's chest, maybe he had carved his own scarlet letter to comply with his own sentence. Yet these punishments are done in private rather than in public and they do not provide the forgiveness the minister seeks.

Dimmesdale's illness gets worse and worse. "Sadly, in spite of his excessive introspection, the priest's mental unsteadiness goes hand in hand with utter confusion. Dimmesdale's mental instability weakens him further." (Eeckman 23) His guilty conscience overwhelms him like a

plague, and since Hester does not want him to reveal anything, this guilt devours him, leading him to madness.

After seven years, Arthur Dimmesdale confesses his sin, but it was already too late. “Hawthorne rejects an alternative he ironically suggests, whereby the supposedly blameless pastor dies in the arms of the fallen woman in order to typify Christian humility.” (Levin 76) The minister does not resist all the suffering and probably would not bear the shame and disgrace that were coming. “By portraying the character as he did, Hawthorne persuades the reader once more to condemn the minister by linking him to the “physically drooping” and “ethically weak” (Kreger 311)

In the film adaptation, spectators are presented to a much more masculine and stronger Dimmesdale, interpreted by Gary Oldman. In the first scenes of the movie is possible to see that he is not only a much-respected man by the Puritans, like in Hawthorne’s book, but he is also an essential figure in the communication with the Indians. In the first scenes of the film, the Reverend is attending an Indian funeral with another man of the village. He speaks “Algonquin” with one of the Indians, Metacomet, the son of the recently deceased. Metacomet tells him that he is the only who comes to them with an open heart, but his people had murdered his father with their lies. In this first scene is possible to see the power he exerts among the Indians as well, he is the bridge between these two worlds.

Roger Bromley pointed out in his essay “Imagining the Puritan Body”:

For all her independence, Hester is dependent throughout on Dimmesdale as rescuer, scholar, pastor, lover, and ultimately, companion. In contrast to the novel, Dimmesdale is the active figure; even when weakened by Chillingworth, Dimmesdale’s vulnerability exercises a certain power over Hester. After their initial clandestine meeting, Hester keeps on being ‘introduced’ to Dimmesdale and their ‘forbidden’ romance takes shape. (75)

The minister appears in the movie several times as someone who saves her or someone who has much power over her. He is the one who helps her when her carriage is stuck in the mud, showing he is very virile and manly. Arthur also reprimands her when she talks about his sermon. She says: “When your fist struck your hand and sliced through the air like a sword, I found myself wondering what manner of pain lay beneath such forceful oratory”. The minister severely says that Hester’s tongue knows no rules. Despite the fact that Hester says what she thinks without worrying with other people’s opinion, she seems a bit constrained with his comment. This corroborates the fact that usually she is the one who exercises power over people, but when talking about Dimmesdale, in the film, he seems to exercise this power over her, representing the active male figure.

More importantly, in the final scenes, when Hester is waiting to be hanged in the scaffold, he rescues her, being the hero. He takes out the rope from her neck and says out loud to the entire village that he is the father of her child and that he loves her very much. He puts the rope in his own neck saying that he is the one who should be hanged, and not her. Different from Hawthorne’s Dimmesdale, he had the courage to not only save her but to show his secret, proudly, to all Puritans who were watching them, astonished.

The character of Roger Prynne, later Roger Chillingworth because he was ashamed by Hester’s sin and did not want to reveal his true identity, does not suffer as many changes as the two mentioned before; nevertheless, there are a few passages in the novel and film in which is possible to see some distinctions.

Chillingworth is the representation of revenge and obsession. In the novel, in order to get closer to his enemy, Chillingworth uses his scientific knowledge to treat Dimmesdale’s disease.

As pointed out by Hena Maes Jelinex in “Roger Chillingworth: An Example of the Creative Process in The Scarlet Letter” ,

Roger Chillingworth persecutes Dimmesdale in the same way as Hester is persecuted for some time by the Puritan community. He never allows Dimmesdale to forget his sin, and he is determined to pursue him as long as he lives. And all the time, he is supposed to be taking care of Dimmesdale's health and calls himself his friend. When Hester tells him that he is sufficiently avenged and asks him to leave Dimmesdale alone, Chillingworth answers that he is fulfilling a 'dark necessity' and acting in accordance with his fate, a calvinistic interpretation of his behaviour which is considered by several critics as a mere excuse for the evil he has done. (2)

Physically, Roger Chillingworth is described as a man who was “small in stature, with furrowed visage, which, as yet, could hardly be termed aged.” (Hawthorne 46). He is much older than Hester, and a very ugly man. Moreover, he is a very thin man and has a slight deformity; one of his shoulders is higher than the other. After spending one year in captivity with the Indians, he seems even more hideous, he does not seem a civilized man anymore.

Chillingworth is not a Puritan, and while he spends time with the Indians, instead of trying to convert them, like the Puritans would do, he learns about medicine and herbs. He is a science man, with no human compassion. Even when he was married to Hester, he was always pursuing his scholarly studies, shutting himself off from his beautiful young wife. He was never a kind man or husband, but throughout the story, the reader can see a Chillingworth who gets more and more evil.

As well as Nathaniel Hawthorne's Chillingworth, the character from Roland Joffé's film, which is interpreted by Robert Duvall, is also a cruel man looking for revenge after discovering that his wife had a child with the handsome Reverend Dimmesdale. In fact, in the film he seems even crueller than the one from the novel. He also spends some time in captivity with the Indians; however, besides learning about medicine and herbs, he seems to have learned the most terrible forms of cruelty from them as well. In several scenes, he appears as a savage man; he even dresses

and puts ink in his face, shaves his chest and body with a razor, imitating the Indians customs and appearance.

In Joffé's adaptation, as mentioned before, the director probably wanted to give a greater tone to Chillingworth's savagery. The character uses one of the most terrible Indian methods after killing a man from the village. After stabbing the man, he took off his scalp with a knife, taking it with him as a trophy. In this passage, he thought he was killing Dimmesdale, it was very dark, he could not see very well and he was hidden in the woods, but instead of murdering Dimmesdale, he killed the man who tried to rape Hester, Brewster. After that, he shows even more cruelty, by framing one of the Indians, so he would take the blame.

Another act of his cruelty presented to spectators is the torture of Mituba, Hester Prynne's slave, which leads to her suicide. After being forced to mime her mistress' adultery to Chillingworth she feels she betrayed her mistress and commits suicide, which in the eyes of Hester was a murder committed by Roger Chillingworth.

The character of Pearl, Hester's and Dimmesdale's daughter, is portrayed in the novel as the symbol of their passion and love. "The child had a native grace which does not invariably co-exist with faultless beauty; its attire, however simple, always impressed the beholder as if it were the very grab that precisely became it best." (Hawthorne 68). She is a very beautiful and intelligent little girl, but she is also a constantly reminder of her mother's sin. While Pearl grows up, she develops a more difficult temper. She is obstinate and determined sometimes, even though she is just a child.

In Joffé's work, Pearl is the narrator of the story. In the first scenes we are presented to Hester Prynne's arrival to the Massachusetts Bay Colony being narrated by the adult Pearl. "The film uses Pearl as a voice-over narrator relaying her mother's story in retrospect, although we never see the mature Pearl and are uncertain as to where she is located. The main burden of Hester's narrative is the quest for independence, and she is portrayed as actively transgressive of the rules and order of the community." (Bromley 75). Besides being the narrator, it is possible to see the

infant Pearl in several scenes of the movie, but she is too little to speak. Pearl's greatest relevance in Joffé's adaptation is her narration of the story.

In the film adaptation there is also the introduction of a new character, Mituba, who does not exist in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel. She is a mute black slave who is completely loyal to Hester Prynne. She is also very innocent and susceptible. In one scene, she watches through the keyhole, Hester and Arthur making love in the barn, but not voyeuristically, on the contrary, she is just curious about it.

Finally, in the film version there is a larger development of Mistress Hibbins' character, played by Joan Plowright. In Hawthorne's novel she is not friends with Hester, she is more an acquaintance. In the film, besides being Hester's very good friend, "she is the center of 'outcast' women, condemned as witches living between the Puritan community and the wilderness." (Bromley 75). She reinforces the criticism to Puritanism in both works, but she has a deeper role in the movie. In the final scenes, she is in the same scaffold with Hester and the other women, waiting to be all hanged.

3.4 Selected Scenes

According to Hutcheon, "given the large number of adaptations in all media today, many artists appear to have chosen to take on this dual responsibility: to adapt another work and to make of it an autonomous creation." (85) Every piece of work, a novel or a film, has its own peculiarities. Films are able to convey different things from the books and nowadays they can reach a larger number of people. Hutcheon continues, stating, "when filmmakers and their scriptwriters adapt literary works, in particular, we have seen that a profoundly moralistic rhetoric often greets their endeavors." (85)

Some scenes of the film adaptation from Roland Joffé were selected to show the main differences it presents in relation to the original work by Nathaniel Hawthorne.



Figure 1: Dimmesdale is introduced to spectators in the first scenes of the film

In the first scenes, we are presented to a powerful and respected Dimmesdale, well seen by the residents of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and by the native Indians (as it can be seen in Figure 1). The Reverend speaks the Indians' language, showing he is a very important link between Indians and Puritans. In the novel, readers do not see an emphasis in this conflict. Probably the director Roland Joffé immediately wanted to present a different Arthur Dimmesdale, so spectators could see he is an important and strong man in the village.



Figure 2: The couple's first love scene

It is important to highlight that Joffé wanted to present a beautiful love scene when Hester and Arthur had their first night together, as it is presented in Figure 2; he wanted to convey something pure and not sinful. Although this specific scene happens at night, in a dark place, which is the barn, and usually most of the characters wear only black clothes, in this specific scene, they have bright and off-white colors underneath their black costumes. This seems to represent the purity of their mutual feeling. “Like setting, costume can have specific functions in the total film, and a range of possibilities is huge”. (Bordwell 119). As Bordwell pointed out, costumes are an essential part of *the mise en scène* in a film. In the case of *The Scarlet Letter* they represent the way Puritans were and lived, and nothing is more symbolic than the letter ‘A’ that Hester must wear as a symbol of her sin. The letter ‘A’ is the most important symbol of her costume.



Figure 3: The hanging scene

This scene, presented in Figure 3, is the high point of the film. Finally, Dimmesdale takes over the situation as the male hero, rescuing Hester Prynne when she had no longer hope and then, after saying he loves her and that he is Pearl's father, he switches place with his beloved one, sacrificing himself for her.



Figure 4: The ending scene, their departure to the Carolinas

In the final scene, presented above in Figure 4, Arthur, Hester and Pearl can have a fair and happy ending after so much suffering. Completely different from the tragic end in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel, in this film version, they move away to the Carolinas. While they are in the carriage leaving the village, they are being observed by the astonished eyes of the Puritans.

4. Results and Discussion

After analyzing both novel and film, it was possible to see that in general the film bears a great similarity with Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel, despite the fact it was 'freely adapted' by Roland Joffé. Different from other adaptations of *The Scarlet Letter*, the director wanted to change things in order to give a righteous closure to the same story.

As Linda Hutcheon pointed out, "an adaptation's double nature does not mean, however, that proximity or fidelity to the adapted text should be the criterion of judgment or the focus of analysis. For a long time, - "fidelity criticism," - as it came to be known, was the critical orthodoxy in adaptation studies." (7) In some occasions film critics and/or spectators tend to criticize negatively what does not show fidelity to the original work, forgetting that each kind of media has its own distinctions.

The film is more focused on Hester and Dimmesdale's love story than on matters of guilt and punishment; however, it touches contemporary issues, such as racism, religious intolerance and sexism. The symbology of the letter A is not as explored in the film as it was in the novel. Hawthorne shows a more complex criticism in relation to that, while Joffé mentions it more closely to the end of the film. In one of the final scenes, Hester talks to Dimmesdale, takes out the letter from her bosom, and says that the letter had served a purpose, but not the one the Puritans wanted. Pearl takes the embroidered letter and then throws it away while the carriage takes her and her parents to a different place where they can begin a whole new life.

This film was badly reviewed at the time of its premiere, almost as if Nathaniel Hawthorne's masterpiece had been destroyed by the director because he decided to make his own changes. Joffé only left his own mark, conveying to his spectators what he believed to be a fair ending for this couple. The most important theme in both works is preserved, a criticism to Puritanism and to the

Puritan way of life. Hawthorne and Joffé touched in a very relevant issue, criticizing how people can be cruel and hypocrites, even if in name of religion.

5. Conclusion

It is possible to conclude, as mentioned before, that when comparing different media, such as novel and film, one must have in mind all their variations, peculiarities and possibilities. Novels and films are distinct genres of work.

Perhaps fidelity might be more harmful than a free adaptation. A film that is an entire copy of a book sometimes lacks the magic and the surprise that cinema can bring with free adaptations, creating new meanings or new endings like Joffé did. This work could have never been written if Roland Joffé did not leave his own marks in his version of *The Scarlet Letter*, if instead of freely adapting, he had simply copied all the details from the novel. Releasing this film in 1995 was also a good way to inspire people to read this excellent novel, if it were an exact copy of the novel, people would not bother to read, because it would be simply the same. If the director released it to pay tribute to Hawthorne's work or for matters of commerce, the important factor is that he brought up an outstanding novel with a very relevant issue to spectators of the 90's.

The novel written in 1850 is a remarkable Gothic Romantic novel presenting this great woman that Hester Prynne is. The film produced in 1995 is a fine and relevant work that reinforces the same criticism that Hawthorne had brought a long time ago, honoring the author and story. In addition, the film also presents Nathaniel Hawthorne to new generations that might not be aware of his works. It is a way of perpetuating his work and bring it immortality.

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