

The Nymphet and the Adulteress

Introduction

In compliance with the requirements in the subject of Literary Theory in Teaching Literature, this paper will be a deconstruction of two literary texts using any literary theory we have had the liberty to choose. This serves as a comparative literary analysis, and a rather ambitious one at that. I, the amateur analyst, say ambitious because upon sailing the rich bounding main of written wonders, I cast my hooks on two novels. Two novels which settings stretch centuries apart, and at the end of each stretch dissimilar social and moral perspectives and literary styles. Using the feminist literary theory, we shall resurrect the fallen heroines of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, and bring about a posthumous justice for the former's Hester Prynne, branded as adulteress in 17th century Puritan Massachusetts; and for Dolores Haze, the nymphet of 20th century—sharp and clever and dead before her time.

To organize this undertaking, objectives will be laid, followed by a discussion of the theory we will be using, as in this case, feminism. After that will be the thorough analysis, including excerpts from the novels, and finally, a conclusion to gracefully wrap up our viewpoints.

Objectives

In light of the feminist literary theory, the analyst will first describe the predicaments of the main characters in the novels: Hester Prynne and Dolores Haze. How were they the victims of a society that is built and centered around the needs and wants of men? As Simone de Beauvoir (1949) argued, the female “essence” is defined by the patriarchy, so how was this essence corrupted in the novels? Second, what characteristics did our female characters possess that could have contributed to their downfalls? Most of the feminist theory had been resolute in showing the injustices of men, but if Hélène Cixous (1975) proposed that instead of perpetual opposition, we must aim for unity, then feminists cannot point fingers and blame men forever,

1 so we have to own up to our ladies' shortcomings. Third, significant
 2 supporting female characters will have their own short reviews, so
 3 we can shift perspectives and widen the vistas of our literary theory.
 4 Lastly, all of these literary theorists on feminism agree on the same
 5 understanding, that women are able to rise from their troubling
 6 circumstances, thus the culmination of our deconstruction will be
 7 their redemption.

8 The similarities and differences of the two novels will be
 9 elaborated, drawing out from both the controversial and the feminist.
 10 Actual excerpts will be instituted.

11 12 13 **Discussion of the Theory to be Used**

14
15 Females, in Hélène Cixous' essay "Sorties," are claimed to
 16 always take the inferior side in the binary oppositions that have
 17 existed in literature beginning from the earliest myths and legends. In
 18 the prevailing two-term societal system, women are the passive
 19 against the active, the moon against the sun, the heart against the
 20 head, sensitive against intelligible, pathos against logos. Are they
 21 really that irreconcilable, coercive? Cixous argues that the bond
 22 between the literary, philosophical, and phallogocentrism had run tight
 23 in the course of literary history (Bertens, 2001). Habib (2011)
 24 supports this by bringing up how the ways of Male trace back to
 25 Aristotle. The influential Greek philosopher's laws of identity and
 26 logic have divided the world into "strictly demarcated entities."
 27 "Either one is a man *or* one is a woman, *either* black *or* white, *either*
 28 master *or* slave." Why not unity instead of opposition? Though not
 29 yet a full-blown literary theory, and not yet the use of the term
 30 *feminism*, we have antecedents in ancient Greece who instigated the
 31 cause to counteract phallogocentrism. In *Lysistrata*, a play written by
 32 Aristophanes, a treasury in Acropolis was taken over by women.
 33 Even the male chorus had been taken over by the females' more
 34 physically and intellectually powerful chorus. Christine de Pisan, a
 35 writer and moralist during the time of King Charles IV of France,
 36 circa 1300s, was prominent for entering debates against the male
 37 critics and for defending women in the process. One of her works had
 38 been *The Book of the City of Ladies*, where she depicted women as
 39 being the building blocks of the society.

40 In Showalter's (1999) **A Literature of their Own**, female writers
 41 throughout history were studied, how they fared, and how they wrote.

1 They were bound to take up male personas in their work, even using
2 male pseudonyms. The earlier waves of the feminism theory also
3 addresses the palpable dominance of the male entity in literature and
4 the portrayal of females as being exploited, abused, and tyrannized in
5 many respects: psychological, sexual, and societal.

6 According to Charlotte Gilman, a prominent advocate for social
7 reform and feminism in the late 1800s, women have their own
8 dreams and aspirations, but because of the heavy androcentric quality
9 of the society during those times, they cannot maximize their mental
10 capacity, their intellectual rigor, and potential. Thus, the quality of
11 life and levels of satisfaction of our female predecessors are all shot
12 to hell. Moving onwards through time, modern feminism, starting
13 1960s, have raised the bars from physical and mental abuse, and
14 virtual silence and obedience, to power structure, civil rights, class
15 and race, and the semiotic codes of ideology itself (Habib, 2011).
16 Feminism as a literary theory was an offspring of one of the most
17 significant forces for democratic change in modern history: The
18 political struggle for women's rights.

19 Defined as the conscious desire for equality between the sexes,
20 modern feminism rose alongside industrial capitalism and class
21 formation. High-paying work in newly built factories and guilds were
22 not open to women, barring them from greener pastures. The
23 ideology responsible for this forced domesticity had been called the
24 "cult of true womanhood." Women were expected to be maternal,
25 submissive, passionless, pious, and pure. Naturally, it was the men
26 who prevailed in most vocations, and this trend of social life is
27 tainted with prejudice against the meeker female sex, who also
28 wished for suffrage, divorce rights, and equal education. Modern
29 female literary figures that had been crucial during these times were
30 Hilda Doolittle and Virginia Woolf (Bahr & Bloomfield, 1997). In
31 Simone de Beauvoir's **The Second Sex**, a statement this feminist
32 pioneer produced in 1949, she contended that the "essence" of a
33 woman, who is the Other to the Absolute, had always been shaped by
34 historical developments that adhered only to the convenience and
35 interests of men. To remedy this, moral, economical, sociocultural,
36 and psychological transformations must take place for mutual
37 recognition and the abolition of "slavery of half of humanity" (Habib
38 2011).

39 Who else would spearhead feminism in literature but fellow
40 women? Another interesting perspective in the study of feminism as
41 a literary theory is the inevitable limitations it posed in the contents

1 of the literary pieces owing to the very same oppressive hegemony to
2 which female writers are bound. These writers could not have had the
3 same access to the intellectual culture and discourse as men did, so,
4 according to Julia Kristeva, they expressed this lack through two
5 modes, the *semiotic* and *symbolic* (Brooker & Widdowsoon, 1996).
6 The *semiotic* dwelt on the prosody of language, such as the tone,
7 rhythm, and pre-linguistic elements, which do not mature into
8 denotations and which remained in their poetic, repressed states. This
9 repressed states are associated with femininity. The *symbolic* is just
10 one step higher from the *semiotic*, being a sphere of shared meanings,
11 language development, and establishment of identities. *Symbolic* is
12 associated with masculinity and the ideals it entails, such as law and
13 order. Kristeva postulated that women stagger back and forth from
14 the *symbolic* and *semiotic*, never stabilized, forever in process.
15 Furthermore, we have Jane Austen who “refused to write about
16 anything she did not know,” and this narrowness and limited
17 dimension of her works had surprisingly and unintentionally
18 appeared subversive to the androcentric society (Brooker &
19 Widdowsoon, 1996).

20

21

22 **Analysis**

23

24 *The Scarlet Letter* began in 17th century Massachusetts, part of
25 the New World and an exclusively Puritan community where
26 Christian morals are of utmost value and defiance results to severe
27 punishment. Hester Prynne, a newcomer from Colonial America, was
28 sent ahead by her husband, who never arrived. With the husband
29 presumed dead at sea, Hester continued life on her own, integrated
30 herself in the village, until she got pregnant by an unknown man. Not
31 even the Governor Bellingham could force her into revealing the
32 father’s identity, and the only confidante Hester had was the town
33 minister, Arthur Dimmesdale. Initially, the consequence was
34 imprisonment, but when it wasn’t enough to break her silence, they
35 hoisted Hester into a “pedestal of shame,” gave her a scarlet letter
36 “A,” for *Adultery*, to be worn for the rest of her life. They set her free
37 with her newborn daughter, Pearl. She lived meekly, and, through the
38 years, won the sympathy of her neighbors as she channeled her time
39 and talents to her exquisite dressmaking. Even the sister-in-law of
40 Governor Bellingham, the eccentric Mistress Hibbins, became a
41 frequent encounter.

1 Unbestknown to Hester and to the townspeople, her husband,
2 alive after all, reached Massachusetts under the pretense of a false
3 identity—a doctor by the name of Roger Chillingworth. His sole aim
4 was to exact revenge on the man whom Hester had an affair with, his
5 suspicions directed at one of the most honorable men in the
6 community, Reverend Arthur. The reverend’s mental and physical
7 health had been significantly declining, and Roger took this
8 opportunity to take Arthur under his wing and aid him in
9 recuperation. Roger revealed himself to Hester alone and demanded
10 her silence.

11 It was then affirmed that Arthur indeed fathered Pearl. Unable
12 to take Roger’s threats any longer, Hester, Pearl, and Arthur, whose
13 mental suffering was now bordering on physical anguish, decided to
14 take a ship to Europe to start anew. Roger discovered the plan and
15 booked the same ride. That very day of their supposed cruise, Arthur
16 reached a spiritual point of no return, clambered Hester’s very same
17 “pedestal of shame,” and declares the entire truth. As a final act of
18 release, he ripped his shirt open, revealing a huge, self-inflicted
19 wound by the shape of an “A.” He died in the arms of his only
20 beloved woman and their daughter. Hester and Pearl left the town
21 after Arthur’s death, but years later, the mother came back without
22 the daughter. Hester died an old woman, and buried beside
23 Arthur’s remains. Their graves were marked as one—the fatal “A.”
24

25 *The Scarlet Letter* is told in omniscient third person, with a
26 meandering, ornate narrative that lushly validates the characters’
27 thoughts, feelings, and intentions. This is in opposition to *Lolita*, the
28 wordplay of which is wry, satirical, and riddled with black humor.
29 The entirety of *Lolita* is told in the perspective of Humbert Humbert.

30 Part one of *Lolita* begins with Humbert’s topsy-turvy descent
31 into pedophilia. We can use these parts for a psycholinguistic
32 approach later on, but since we’re talking feminism, we’ll fast
33 forward to his encounters with Dolores Haze. Lolita was Humbert’s
34 pet name for her, but since we are to set her free from objectification,
35 we shall use her real name. Some analysts say that feminism is not
36 the main point of the novel, because never once was Dolores’
37 perspective considered. They argue that what we should be dissecting
38 is Humbert’s “sick” mind. In defense of the chosen theory, why in
39 the first place, are females the subject of inappropriate fantasies?

40 Humbert was into *nymphets*, a term he repeatedly used to
41 refer to young girls who incite his fancy. He had been married to an

1 adult female named Valeria once, but it was a failure of a marriage.
2 He first beheld twelve-year old Dolores when he moved to South
3 America, where Dolores' mother, Charlotte Haze, offered him a
4 room for rent. Humbert was assailed with a soul-drenching, nerve-
5 wrecking infatuation with the girl, and wrote down in ink his
6 obsessions about her and his abhorrence for the mother. The mother
7 and daughter's relationship was strenuous, with Lolita being a strong-
8 headed girl with a sharp tongue and, for her age, in possession of a
9 rather wide vocabulary for insults.

10 Surprisingly, it was Dolores who made the first move. Before
11 leaving for a summer camp, she kissed Humbert on the lips while
12 Charlotte was waiting in the car. The mother, on the other hand,
13 admitted having fallen in love with him. He used this to his
14 advantage and agreed to marry her with the hidden agenda of being
15 closer to Dolores. Charlotte eventually found the scandalous journal,
16 and in a furious daze, sprinted out of the house from a guilty
17 Humbert, to be ran over by a car. This being a fortuitous event for
18 Humbert, he took custody of Dolores.

19 Humbert fetched Dolores from the camp and fabricated a
20 story about her mother falling ill and being confined in a hospital.
21 They checked in at a hotel, where he kept trying to drug Dolores in
22 an attempt to molest her. However, in the morning, Dolores
23 confessed about losing her virginity at age eleven and initiated an
24 intercourse with Humbert.

25 Her mother's death was only revealed to Dolores upon
26 insisting to call her. After that, Dolores and Humbert spent their days
27 crisscrossing the country, driving great distances, and sleeping in
28 cheap motels. For sexual favors, he bribed her with money and gifts;
29 for assurance that she will not run away or turn on him (only turn him
30 on), he scared her with the prospect of orphanages. Dolores, tired of
31 their vagabond lifestyle, persuaded Humbert to settle. They landed in
32 New England, where Humbert enrolled Dolores in school. Paranoia
33 kept seeping in, and he began depriving her of socialization. She was
34 then allowed, halfheartedly, to join a school play written by one
35 Clare Quilty, but this was all for naught, as a fight ensued between
36 Humbert and Dolores, with the latter finally changing her mind about
37 joining the play and asking for another cross-country escape. This did
38 not sooth Humbert at all, as he became increasingly suspicious that
39 somebody was following them, and that Dolores was talking to that
40 stranger behind his back.

1 Dolores ran away from him. He never found her, despite his
2 desperate searching, until two years later. Dolores, now seventeen,
3 married, and heavily pregnant, sent him a letter. She and her
4 husband, Richard Schiller, are in need of money to make ends meet.
5 Humbert realized that he was no longer sexually attracted to this
6 matured version of Dolores, but a stiller form of love now took it's
7 place, to an extent where he asked her to live with him again. Dolores
8 refused, but she gave him the answer to the question that had haunted
9 him for years: It was Clare Quilty who helped her escape back then,
10 but when Clare couldn't convince her to participate in orgies or in his
11 pornographic film, he kicked her out. She lived off a meager salary as
12 a waitress. Humbert still gave her money and they said their
13 goodbyes, never to cross paths again.

14 Humbert tracked down Quilty and shot him to death. He
15 himself died in prison—coronary thrombosis—on November 1952.
16 Dolores followed shortly, dying during childbirth, the baby a
17 stillborn daughter.

18
19 We shall divide our comparative analysis into different themes:
20 The causes of Hester and Dolores' plights, their own imperfections,
21 the other significant women in the stories, and the power they were
22 able to yield against their circumstances.

23 Let's begin with Hester. If there is one perfect word to
24 describe Hester's plight, it would be *ignominy*, inflicted on her by the
25 powerful male officers of their place.

26
27 "In Hester Prynne's instance. . . her sentence bore that she should
28 stand a certain time upon the platform. The scene was not without a
29 mixture of awe, such as must always invest the spectacle of guilt and
30 shame in a fellow-creature, before society shall have grown corrupt
31 enough to smile, instead of shuddering at it."

32
33 Page 42

34
35 ". . . the solemn presence of men no less dignified than the governor,
36 and several of his counsellors, a judge, a general, and the ministers of
37 the town, all of whom sat or stood in a balcony of the meeting-house,
38 looking down upon the platform. The unhappy culprit sustained herself
39 as best a woman might, under the heavy weight of a thousand
40 unrelenting eyes, all fastened upon her, and concentrated at her bosom
41 (where the "A" is attached). It was almost intolerable to be borne. . .
42 she had fortified herself to the stings and venomous stabs of public

1 contumely, wreaking itself in every variety of insult. . . under the
 2 leaden infliction which it was her doom to endure, she felt, at
 3 moments, as if she must shriek out with full power of her lungs, and
 4 cast herself from the scaffold down upon the ground, or else go mad at
 5 once. . . . She turned her eyes downward at the scarlet letter, to assure
 6 herself that the infant (she was holding Pearl) and the shame were real.
 7 Yes these were her realities—all else had vanished!”

8 Pages 44 - 45

9
 10 Being exposed in the town scaffold, her “pedestal of shame,” was just
 11 the beginning. This verdict shall presage the ostracization, the
 12 whispers and stares, that will shortly befall her.

13
 14 “It had set a mark upon her, more intolerable to a woman’s heart than
 15 that which branded the brow of Cain. In all of her intercourse with
 16 society, however, there was nothing that made her feel as if she
 17 belonged to it. Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of
 18 those whom she came in contact with, implied, and often expressed,
 19 that she was banished, and as much alone as if she inhabited another
 20 sphere, or communicated with the common nature by other organs and
 21 senses than the rest of human kind. She stood apart from mortal
 22 interests, yet close behind them, like a ghost that revisits the familiar
 23 fireside, and can no longer make itself seen or felt; no more smile with
 24 the household joy, nor mourn with the kindred sorrow.”

25
 26 Page 65

27
 28 This reflects the deeper, psychological repercussions of what the male
 29 officials subjected our heroine to. Her subconscious’ response to the
 30 alienation of the society had rendered her emotionally numb.
 31 Emotional numbing is the inability to express strong positive or
 32 negative emotions. How could a woman fully participate in life if she
 33 is distant, in this way, to others?

34
 35 “Continually, and in a thousand other ways, did she feel the
 36 innumerable throbs of anguish that had been so cunningly contrived
 37 for her by the undying, the ever-active sentence of the Puritan tribunal.
 38 Clergymen paused in the street to address words of exhortation, that
 39 brought a crowd, with its mingled grin and frown, around the poor,
 40 sinful woman. If she entered a church, trusting to share the Sabbath
 41 smile of the Universal Father, it was often her mishap to find herself
 42 the text of the discourse. She grew to have a dread of children; for they
 43 had imbibed from their parents a vague idea of something horrible in
 44 this dreary woman, gliding silently through the town, with never any
 45 companion but one only child. Therefore, first allowing her to pass,

1 they pursued her at a distance with shrill cries, and the utterances of a
 2 word that had no distinct purport to their own minds, but was none the
 3 less terrible to her, as proceeding from lips that babbled it
 4 unconsciously. It seemed to argue so wide a diffusion of her shame,
 5 that all nature knew of it.”

6 Pages 65-66

7
 8 The mentioned excerpt reeks of human hypocrisy directed at, since
 9 time immemorial, the easiest and defenseless of targets: the woman.
 10 This is how the denizens of the town treated Hester: as a scapegoat, a
 11 convenient projection of their own frailties, even if it may not be as
 12 heavy a sin as adultery. People point fingers at others to appease
 13 themselves, and knowing that they are together in that blame
 14 bandwagon, the sense of belongingness satisfies them. This does not
 15 exclude even the “kind” Reverend Arthur, the real father of Pearl,
 16 accomplice to the crime. Why won’t he take equal responsibility of the
 17 crime like Hester did, at the same time she did? Even if Hester wanted
 18 only to protect him and his reputation by remaining silent and begging
 19 him to do the same, it only shows how virtuous Hester really was. But
 20 what does it say about him?

21
 22 ““They are new to me. I found them growing on a grave, which bore
 23 no tombstone, nor other memorial of the dead man, save these ugly
 24 weeds that have taken upon themselves to keep him in remembrance.
 25 They grew out of his heart, and typify, it may be, some hideous secret
 26 that was buried with him, and which he had done better to confess
 27 during his lifetime.””

28 ““Perchance,” said Mr. Dimmesdale, ‘he earnestly desired it, but
 29 could not.’”

30 ““And wherefore?’ rejoined the physician. ‘Wherefore not; since
 31 all the powers of nature call so earnestly for the confession of sin, that
 32 these black weeds have sprung up out of a buried heart, to make
 33 manifest an outspoken crime?’”

34 ““That, good Sir, is but a fantasy of yours,’ replied the minister.
 35 ‘There can be, if I forbode aright, no power, short of the Divine
 36 mercy, to disclose, whether by uttered words, or by type or emblem,
 37 the secrets that may be buried with the human heart. The heart,
 38 making itself guilty of such secrets, must perforce hold them, until the
 39 day when all hidden things shall be revealed. Nor have I so read or
 40 interpreted Holy Writ, as to understand that the disclosure of human
 41 thoughts and deeds, then to be made, is intended as a part of the
 42 retribution.’”

43
 44 Pages 102-103

1 This conversation was between Reverend Arthur and
2 Hester's husband, the impostor physician Roger. Truth be told,
3 both of them were hiding their own secrets. Roger was trying to
4 provoke Arthur into admitting to impregnating Hester by making
5 a metaphor of the weeds he picked from the forest. Arthur
6 implied, but not directly admitted, that yes, a confession would
7 set him free, but he was not ready for the same fate as Hester's.
8 He even justified this vow of silence by saying that guilt is an
9 enough of a punishment according to the Holy Scriptures; but
10 leaving his beloved woman to bear the brunt of it all is nothing
11 short of cowardice. However, a foreshadowing may be noted
12 when he says, "The heart, making itself guilty of such secrets,
13 must perforce hold them, until the day when all hidden things
14 shall be revealed." This day will indeed come, and this day will
15 be his last.

16

17 Now on to Dolores. If Hester underwent shame, ridicule, and
18 alienation from the chauvinistic society; then Dolores was a
19 victim of rape and prolonged emotional manipulation. No matter
20 how tasteful Humbert, being a well-off holder of an English
21 Literature degree, described his love story (he sees it that way)
22 with Dolores, remove all the sophisticated words, cut off that
23 cultured, genteel tongue and you get an account of rape told in
24 the perspective of a rapist.

25

26 "My child knew he was looking, enjoyed the lechery of his look
27 and was putting on a show of gambol and glee, the vile and
28 beloved slut."

29

30

Page 105

31

32 See how Humbert here described Dolores? He was pertaining to
33 a scene where a strange old man was ogling his "child." In this
34 scene, Dolores was playing by the poolside. Now, a decent father
35 figure, in that instance, would either tell off the old man, or take
36 his daughter away from his view, not call her a *slut*. Humbert
37 represents these kind of men in the society, whom, instead of
38 using the upper hand of being male to protect women from
39 fellow males who actively objectify them, he does what we in the
40 modern days call "victim blaming." He blames Dolores for
41 "putting on a show of gambol and glee," thereby encouraging the

1 old man's indecency. This is what happens to today's rape
 2 victims. "She's wearing only this, she got drunk with males, she
 3 walked down the alley in that ungodly hour, what did she expect?
 4 She might be asking for it."

5
 6 "Her legs twitched a little as they lay across my live lap; I stroked
 7 them. . . and every movement she made, every shuffle and ripple,
 8 helped me to conceal and to improve the secret system of tactile
 9 correspondence between beast and beauty, between my gagged,
 10 bursting beast and the beauty of her dimpled body in its innocent
 11 cotton frock. Under my glancing finger tips I felt the minute hairs
 12 bristle ever so slightly along her shins. I lost myself in the pungent
 13 but healthy heat which like summer haze hung about little Haze.
 14 Let her stay, let her stay. . . her young weight, her shameless
 15 innocent shanks and round bottom, shifted in my tense, tortured,
 16 surreptitiously laboring lap; and all of a sudden a mysterious
 17 change came over my senses. I entered a plane of being where
 18 nothing mattered, save the infusion of joy brewed within my body.
 19 What had begun as a delicious distention of my innermost roots
 20 became a glowing tingle which now had reached that state of
 21 absolute security, confidence and reliance not found elsewhere in
 22 conscious life. With the deep hot sweetness thus established and
 23 well on its way to the ultimate convulsion, I felt I could slow
 24 down in order to prolong the glow. . . . The nerves of pleasure had
 25 been laid bare. The corpuscles of Krause were entering the phase
 26 of frenzy. The least pressure would suffice to set all paradise
 27 loose."

28 Page 25

29
 30 This was a long narrative, but let's pinpoint the keywords: *Tactile*
 31 *correspondence, delicious distention of my innermost roots*
 32 *becoming a glowing tingle, on its way to the ultimate convulsion,*
 33 *slow down in order to prolong the glow, nerves of pleasure,*
 34 *corpuscles of Krause entering the phase of frenzy, set all*
 35 *paradise loose.* Humbert was simply putting into poetry his act
 36 of masturbating while Lolita was sitting close to him.

37
 38 "I had brought up for detached inspection the idea of marrying a
 39 mature widow (say, Charlotte Haze) with not one relative left in
 40 the wide gray world, merely in order to have my way with her
 41 child (Lo, Lola, Lolita). . . . I felt a Dostoevskian grin dawning
 42 (through the very grimace that twisted my lips) like a distant and
 43 terrible sun. I imagined (under conditions of new and perfect

1 Dolores, too, being a human person, had her own identity, blotted
2 out by Humbert's own, constructed version of her as the
3 nymphet.

4
5 "What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation,
6 another, fanciful Lolita. Perhaps, more real than Lolita;
7 overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and
8 having no will, no consciousness indeed, no life of her own. The
9 child knew nothing."

10 Page 26

11
12 "Some local schoolboy she knew, talked about music, and my
13 Lolita remarked: 'You know, what's so dreadful about dying is
14 that you are completely on your own'; and it struck me. . . that I
15 simply did not know a thing about my darling's mind and that
16 quite possibly, behind the awful juvenile cliches, there was in her
17 a garden and a twilight, and a palace gated in and adorable regions
18 which happened to be lucidly and absolutely forbidden to me, in
19 my polluted rags and miserable convulsions; for I often noticed
20 that living as we did, she and I, in a world of total evil, we would
21 become strangely embarrassed whenever I tried to discuss
22 something she and an older friend, she and a parent, she and a real
23 healthy sweetheart. . . might have discussed an abstract idea, a
24 painting, stippled Hopkins or shorn Baudelaire, God or
25 Shakespeare, anything of genuine kind. Good will!"

26 Page 127

27
28 This reflects how Humbert is only after Dolores for
29 carnality. Here we get a glimpse that Dolores had a budding
30 intellect and abstractions in making that statement about dying.
31 Realizing this was a surprising moment for Humbert, but he
32 never was interested in seeing Dolores in a different, dignified,
33 edified light. He was even embarrassed by the thought of having
34 these kinds of conversations with her.

35 Now that we have laid out the unique plights of both Hester
36 and Dolores, what is their common denominator? Sex.
37 Whichever way you put it, women are often times caught
38 between a rock and a hard place. Hester acting on her desire for
39 one man and gets pregnant? She ended up being the victim.
40 Dolores being acted on by the desire of another man? She ended
41 up being the victim.

42 There is also something else they have in common. They
43 were both forced or tricked to stay in a situation dominated by a

1 male presence who neither loved, protected, nor treasured them;
 2 who sidelined their real personalities and identities. We were
 3 clear on this one with Dolores. In Hester's case, this male
 4 presence was her first husband.

5
 6 "I—a man of thought—the book-worm of great libraries—a man
 7 already in decay, having given my best years to feed the hungry
 8 dream of knowledge—what had I to do with youth and beauty like
 9 thine own!"

10 "Thou knowest that I was frank with thee. I felt no love, nor
 11 feigned any."

12 "We have wronged each other," answered he. "Mine was the
 13 first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and
 14 unnatural relation with my decay."

15 Page 61

16
 17 This dialogue was from Hester and Roger, with him
 18 admitting that he placed his intellectual hunger before his own
 19 wife, thus abandoning her physically and emotionally. He chose
 20 his books, his libraries, over her company. He "betrayed her
 21 youth," wasted her time, with the "unnatural relation," meaning
 22 their marriage. We now surmise that Hester, in the first place,
 23 was in a miserable marriage. She felt no love, for she did not feel
 24 loved.

25 Dolores, too.

26
 27 Next comes the sins of our women, conscious or
 28 unconscious alike. Why do we include this? Yours truly, your
 29 analyst, is a young woman, who admits she had not exactly lived
 30 a virtuous life. I have a chock-full of dirty secrets. That is what
 31 you call reality. Hester's sin, so magnanimous it was enough to
 32 launch a novel, was to commit adultery and bear a bastard child
 33 out of wedlock. It was the point of her clawing her way out of
 34 that hellhole into a personal apotheosis. Her story's direction was
 35 clear. First, the sin, and then, her eloquent battle for power and
 36 strength. Dolores is said to be a more complicated character to
 37 deconstruct using feminism, because she is an amalgamation of
 38 contradictions. She never represented a particular virtue, unlike
 39 Hester, who represented womanly strength.

40 That is exactly the point—the challenge we're taking,
 41 because real women are an amalgamation of contradictions.

42

1 “Lo treated me to one of those furious harangues of hers where
 2 entreaty and insult, self-assertion and double talk, vicious
 3 vulgarity and childish despair, were interwoven in an exasperating
 4 semblance of logic. . . . Enmeshed in her wild words (swell
 5 chance... I’d be a sap if I took your opinion seriously. . . Stinker. .
 6 . You can’t boss me. . . I despise you. . . and so forth).”

7
 8 Page 75

9
 10 “Mom was supposed to fill out a kind of inventory at
 11 each of her child’s birthdays. On Lo’s twelfth, Charlotte
 12 Haze had underlined the following epithets, ten out of
 13 forty, under ‘Your Child’s Personality:’ aggressive,
 14 boisterous, critical, distrustful, impatient, irritable,
 15 inquisitive, listless, negativistic (underlined twice) and
 16 obstinate. She had ignored the thirty remaining
 17 adjectives, among which were cheerful, co-operative,
 18 energetic, and so forth.”

19 Page 35

20
 21 “She looked up and dashed back into the house. A moment later I
 22 heard my sweetheart running up the stairs. My heart expanded
 23 with such force that it almost blotted me out. I hitched up the
 24 pants of my pajamas, flung the door open: and simultaneously
 25 Lolita arrived, in her Sunday frock, stamping, panting, and then
 26 she was in my arms, her innocent mouth melting under the
 27 ferocious pressure of dark male jaws, my palpitating darling!”

28 Page 28

29
 30 “I am going to tell you something very strange: it was she who
 31 seduced me. I just did not know what to do. Would she be
 32 shocked at finding me by her side, and not in some spare bed?
 33 Would she collect her clothes and lock herself up in the
 34 bathroom? Would she demand to be taken at once to Ramsdale to
 35 her mother’s bedsideback to camp? But my Lo was a sportive
 36 lassie. I felt her eyes on me, and when she uttered at last that
 37 beloved chortling note of hers, I knew her eyes had been laughing.
 38 She rolled over to my side, and her warm brown hair came against
 39 my collarbone. I gave a mediocre imitation of waking up. We lay
 40 quietly. I gently caressed her hair, and we gently kissed. Her kiss,
 41 to my delirious embarrassment, had some rather comical
 42 refinements of flutter and probe which made me conclude she had
 43 been coached at an early age by a little Lesbian. No Charlie boy
 44 could have taught her that.”

1 “As if to see whether I had my fill and learned the lesson, she
2 drew away and surveyed me. . . . All at once, with a burst of rough
3 glee (the sign of the nymph!), she put her mouth to my ear. . .
4 and gradually the odd sense of living in a brand new, mad new
5 dream world, where everything was permissible, came over me as
6 I realized what she was suggesting. I answered I did not know
7 what game she and Charlie had played.”

8 “‘You mean you have never?’ her features twisted into a stare
9 of disgusted incredulity.”

10 “‘You mean,’ she persisted, now kneeling above me, ‘you
11 never did it when you were a kid?’”

12 “‘Never,’ I answered.”

13 “‘Okay,’ said Lolita, ‘here is where we start.’”

14 “Not a trace of modesty did I perceive in this beautiful hardly
15 formed young girl whom modern co-education, juvenile mores,
16 the campfire racket and so forth had utterly and hopelessly
17 depraved. She saw the stark act merely as part of a youngster’s
18 furtive world, unknown to adults. What adults did for purposes of
19 procreation was no business of hers. I feigned supreme stupidity.”

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Page 60

Dolores was a loose canon, with her vulgar mouth and attention-seeking tendencies. She was not our damsel in distress. In the last two statements where she ran up the stairs to kiss Humbert before she left for the camp; and when she initiated the intercourse, we see Dolores playing a part in her own debauchery. She was an instigator. There is a reason why masculinity and femininity should be discussed together. In reality, we and other people, are a dynamic interplay of each others’ intentions, good and bad. We feed each others’ angels and demons. As we are victims, we are also villains. As we are collateral damages of others internal warfares, so are we ruthless berserkers catapulting people to their ruin.

Hester may be the goal, the stark, established figure of female empowerment; but before we become Hesters, we might have been Doloreses. We could still be Doloreses, on the way to becoming Hesters.

Because, we must not forget that Dolores was just a developing, pubescent girl when she did those things. What she needed were stable parents, decent education and proper discipline, to guide her to the right path, not aimless road trips to evade the law. A twelve year old is not to be yanked from city to

1 city and made to sleep in seedy motels. We still see remnants of
 2 innocence in her when she believed Humbert's claims that adults
 3 don't engage in sexual intercourse, and that he himself never did.
 4 Again, another of Humbert's manipulative tactics to get her to
 5 "teach him" how it's done. "I feigned supreme stupidity."

6
 7 The other significant females in the novels play their own
 8 roles in either contrasting, neutralizing, or supporting our main
 9 characters' stances. The collective voices of our women also
 10 reflects the general feminist tone of the text. Let's take two from
 11 each: *The Scarlet Letter's* Mistress Hibbins and Pearl; and
 12 *Lolita's* Charlotte and Valeria.

13 Mistress Hibbins was mentioned to be one of the
 14 acquaintances Hester made in the course of her life sentence of
 15 donning the "A."

16
 17 "Forth into the sunny day was thrust the face of Mistress Hibbins,
 18 Governor Bellingham's bitter-tempered sister, and the same who,
 19 a few years later, was executed as a witch.

20 "Hist, hist!" said she, while her ill-omened physiognomy
 21 seemed to cast a shadow over the cheerful newness of the house.
 22 'Wilt thou go with us to-night? There will be a merry company in
 23 the forest; and I wellnigh promised the Black Man that comely
 24 Hester Prynne should make one.'"

25 Page 95

26
 27 "And that ugly-tempered lady, old Mistress Hibbins, was
 28 one. And, mother, the old dame said that this scarlet letter
 29 was the Black Man's mark on thee, and that it glows like a
 30 red flame when thou meetest him at midnight, here in the
 31 dark wood."

32 Page 147

33
 34 "Save it were the cankered wrath of an old witch, like Mistress
 35 Hibbins."

36
 37 Page 169

38
 39 This was how Mistress Hibbins had been depicted in the
 40 book from the eyes of different characters. She was a witch who
 41 believed in the Black Man, which we surmise to be Satan.
 42 Shunned by the town, she spent most of her time in the forest

1 communicating with the Black Man. Later on, they inflicted on
2 her the gravest of punishments, execution.

3 She and Hester had similarities. Mistress Hibbins, for her
4 beliefs and practices, was ostracized. Gabriele Schwab (1996),
5 from the University of California, Irvine, made a comment about
6 Hibbin's role in the novel. Our witch-lady is a "rejected
7 possibility of dealing with social stigma." This means that
8 women have different responses to trauma inflicted by the
9 society. Whereas Hester chose to brave the stigma by staying in
10 the community with her daughter and continuing her
11 dressmaking, Mistress Hibbins also accepted the ridicule, but she
12 chose to alienate herself instead of being one with the people. In
13 the dialogue, Mistress Hibbins kept inviting Hester to their
14 benighted merry-makings in the forest, because Hester had
15 sinned, and sinners are very much invited to their gatherings.
16 Sinners are the top priority of the cult as they please the Black
17 Man.

18 However, let us not be too quick to judge, for there is more
19 to her character than haunted excursions:

20
21 "The Black Man sees his own servants, signed and sealed, so shy
22 of owning to the bond as is the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale, he
23 hath a way of ordering matters so that the mark shall be disclosed
24 in daylight to the eyes of all the world! What is that the minister
25 seeks to hide, with his hand always over his heart? Ha!"

26
27 Page 195

28
29 "What is it that haunts and tempts me thus?" cried the minister to
30 himself, at length, pausing in the street, and striking his hand
31 against his forehead. 'Am I mad? or am I given over utterly to the
32 fiend (Satan)? Does he now summon me to its fulfillment?' At the
33 moment when the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale thus communed
34 with himself, old Mistress Hibbins, the reputed witch-lady, had
35 been passing by. She made a very grand appearance; having on a
36 high head-dress, a rich gown of velvet, and a ruff done up with the
37 famous yellow starch, of which Anne Turner, her especial friend,
38 had taught her the secret, before this last good lady had been
39 hanged for Sir Thomas Overbury's murder. Whether the witch had
40 read the minister's thoughts or no, she came to a full stop, looked
41 shrewdly into his face, smiled craftily, and—though little given to
42 converse with clergymen—began a conversation."

1
2 Here, Pearl was a reinforcing symbolism of her mother's fight.
3 She was the model of Hester's clothing handiwork, meaning, her
4 mother's integration in the society.

5
6 "This outward mutability indicated, and did not more than fairly
7 express, the various properties of her inner life. Her nature
8 appeared to possess depth, too, as well as variety; but—or else
9 Hester's fears deceived her—it lacked reference and adaptation to
10 the world into which she was born. The child could not be made
11 amenable to rules. In giving her existence, a great law had been
12 broken; and the result was a being, whose elements were perhaps
13 beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder; or with an order peculiar
14 to themselves, amidst which the point of variety and arrangement
15 was difficult or impossible to be discovered. Above all, the
16 warfare of Hester's spirit, at that epoch, was perpetuated in Pearl.
17 She could recognize her wild, desperate, defiant mood, the
18 flightiness of her temper, and even some of the very cloud-shapes
19 of gloom and despondency that had brooded in her heart.

20 "It was a look so intelligent, yet inexplicable, so perverse,
21 sometimes so malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild
22 flow of spirits, that Hester could not help questioning, at such
23 moments, whether Pearl was a human child. She seemed rather an
24 airy sprite, which, after playing its fantastic sports for a little while
25 upon the cottage floor, would flit away with a mocking smile. . . .
26 Beholding it, Hester was constrained to rush towards the child—to
27 pursue the little elf in the flight."

28 "Heart-smitten at this bewildering and baffling spell, that so
29 often came between herself and her sole treasure, whom she had
30 bought so dear, and who was all her world, Hester sometimes
31 burst into passionate tears. Then, perhaps—for there was no
32 foreseeing how it might affect her—Pearl would frown, and
33 clench her fist, and harden her features into a stern,
34 unsympathizing look of discontent."

35 Page 72

36
37 Mothers and daughters are women, and their dynamics against
38 the backdrop of the cruel world is crucial for each others'
39 protection and personal growth. *The Scarlet Letter's* pattern is
40 the existence of women protecting each other, whether it be
41 subtle and unorthodox (Mistress Hibbins), or overt (Pearl).

42 The statements "wild, desperate, defiant mood, the
43 flightiness of her temper. . . bewildering and baffling. . . stern,

1 unsympathizing look of discontent,” was used to describe our
 2 young Pearl. But, does it remind you of another girl?—Dolores
 3 Haze?

4 Pearl and Dolores were similar as children, defiant and
 5 brooding. Enter the mothers: Hester and Charlotte. What were
 6 the differences in the upbringing that set them apart, the crucial
 7 differences that guided their children to their own fates? Hester
 8 treated Pearl as her “sole treasure, whom she had bought so dear,
 9 and who was all her world.” She would “fly” after Pearl during
 10 the child’s outbursts, pursue her, pacify her.

11
 12 “Never, since her release from prison, had Hester met the public
 13 gaze without her. In all her walks about the town, if the children
 14 gathered about her. . . Pearl would grow positively terrible in her
 15 puny wrath, snatching up stones to fling at them. These outbreaks
 16 of a fierce temper had a kind of value, and even comfort, for the
 17 mother; because there was at least an intelligible earnestness in the
 18 mood, instead of the fitful caprice that so often thwarted her in the
 19 child’s manifestations. Mother and daughter stood together in the
 20 same circle of seclusion from human society; the talk of the
 21 neighboring townspeople; who, seeking vainly elsewhere for the
 22 child’s paternity, and observing some of her odd attributes, had
 23 given out that poor little Pearl was a demon offspring: such as,
 24 ever since old Catholic times, had occasionally been seen on earth,
 25 through the agency of their mother’s sin, and to promote some
 26 foul and wicked purpose. According to the scandal of his monkish
 27 enemies, was a brat of that hellish breed; nor was Pearl the only
 28 child to whom this inauspicious origin was assigned, among the
 29 New England Puritans.”

30 Page 80

31
 32 ““Make my excuse to him, so please you!’ answered Hester, with
 33 a triumphant smile. ‘I must tarry at home, and keep watch over my
 34 Pearl. Had they taken her from me, I would willingly have gone
 35 with thee into the forest, and signed my name in the Black Man’s
 36 book too, and that with mine own blood!’”

37 “Here was already an illustration of the young minister’s
 38 argument against sundering the relation of a fallen mother to the
 39 offspring of her frailty. Even thus early had the child saved her
 40 from Satan’s snare.”

41 Page 91

42

1 “It had reached her ears, that there was a design on the part of
 2 some of the leading inhabitants, cherishing the more rigid order of
 3 principles in religion and government, to deprive her of her child.”
 4 Page 111
 5

6 “The point hath been weightily discussed, whether we, that are of
 7 authority and influence, do well discharge our consciences by
 8 trusting an immortal soul, such as there is in yonder child, to the
 9 guidance of one who hath stumbled and fallen, amid the pitfalls of
 10 this world. Were it not, thinkest thou, for thy little one’s temporal
 11 and eternal welfare, that she be taken out of thy charge, and
 12 disciplined strictly, and instructed in the truths of heaven and
 13 earth? What canst thou do for the child, in this kind?”

14 “I can teach my little Pearl what I have learned from this!”
 15 answered Hester Prynne, laying her finger on the red token.”

16 ““Woman, it is thy badge of shame!” replied the stern magistrate.
 17 ‘It is because of the stain which that letter indicates, that we would
 18 transfer thy child to other hands.’”

19 ““This badge hath taught me,—it daily teaches me,—it is teaching
 20 me at this moment,—lessons whereof my child may be the wiser
 21 and better, albeit they can profit nothing to myself.’”
 22
 23

age 220

P

24
 25
 26 Women should be responsible mothers, and it is a choice to be
 27 made. Hester chose to see her daughter’s impishness as a sign of
 28 some intelligence. Pearl, in return, was fiercely loyal to her
 29 mother and chose to stick by her side despite the aspersions from
 30 other children. We see Hester making excuses to Mistress
 31 Hibbin’s invitation, noting the need to take care of Pearl. She
 32 regarded her daughter as her savior, saving her from the possible
 33 evils of witchery. We see her fighting for the right for her
 34 daughter’s custody, when the authorities tried to take Pearl away
 35 from her, and she had won.

36 Charlotte, on the other hand, failed to appreciate Dolores’
 37 wits disguised as defiance. Instead of drawing Dolores closer to
 38 her like Hester did to Pearl, she kept planning for arrangements
 39 that would assure distance from her daughter, even when the
 40 daughter herself refused.

41
 42 ““She has flatly refused to go, and I confess I left her with the
 43 Chatfields because I dreaded to face her alone just yet. And, you

1 know, I think a summer camp is so much healthier, and well, it is
 2 all so much more reasonable as I say than to mope on a suburban
 3 lawn and use mamma's lipstick, and pursue shy studious
 4 gentlemen, and go into tantrums at the least provocation."

5 "“Are you sure,” I said at last, ‘that she will be happy there?’”

6 "“She'd better,’ said Haze.”

7 Page 27

8
 9 “Oh she simply hated her daughter! What I thought especially
 10 vicious was that she had gone out of her way to to answer with
 11 great diligence the questionnaires in a fool's book she had.”

12 ““The dumb child,’ said Mrs. Humbert, ‘I wish you would not
 13 send her candy without consulting me.’”

14
 15 age 35

16
 17 ““Ah,’ said Mrs. Humbert, dreaming, smiling, drawing out the
 18 ‘Ah’ simultaneously with the raise of one eyebrow and a soft
 19 exhalation of breath. ‘Little Lo, I'm afraid, does not enter the
 20 picture at all, at all. Little Lo goes straight from camp to a good
 21 boarding school with strict discipline and some sound religious
 22 training. And then Beardsley College. I have it all mapped out,
 23 you need not worry.’”

24 Page 36

25
 26 Why was Charlotte prioritizing Humbert (now husband) over her
 27 daughter? This relationship with her daughter will soon lead to a
 28 disastrous string of events just because Dolores had not been
 29 disciplined properly at an early age. Dolores would have known
 30 better than to go with Humbert, seduce him, go to Quilty, seduce
 31 him, work as a waitress when she should be studying, get
 32 impregnated at the delicate age of seventeen, die. She had been
 33 unfairly doomed to an ill-fated end. Whereas Pearl:

34
 35 “And Hester Prynne had returned, and taken up her longforsaken
 36 shame. But where was Pearl? Through the remainder of Hester's
 37 life, there were indications that the recluse of the scarlet letter was
 38 the object of love and interest with some inhabitant of another
 39 land. Letters came, with armorial seals upon them, though of
 40 bearings unknown to English heraldry. In the cottage there were
 41 articles of comfort and luxury, such as Hester never cared to use,
 42 but which only wealth could have purchased, and affection have
 43 imagined for her. There were trifles, too, little ornaments,
 44 beautiful tokens of a continual remembrance, that must have been

P

1 wrought by delicate fingers, at the impulse of a fond heart. And,
 2 once, Hester was seen embroidering a baby-garment, with such a
 3 lavish richness of golden fancy as would have raised a public
 4 tumult, had any infant, thus appalled, been shown to our
 5 somber-hued community.

6 “Pearl was not only alive, but married, and happy, and mindful
 7 of her mother; and that she would most joyfully have entertained
 8 that sad and lonely mother at her fireside.”

9 Page 211

10
 11 Pearl, after all, grew up to love her mother dearly. After
 12 ensuring that her daughter meets her well-deserved fate of a good
 13 marriage and a fruitful life, Hester chose to return to the town
 14 they had left after Arthur’s death. Indications from the text imply
 15 of riches and gifts that Pearl sent to her mother through her
 16 remaining years, and a possibility of a granddaughter. These
 17 were rewards for a hard life that Dolores, who was equally
 18 deserving, was never given the chance to reap.

19 Charlotte, who failed as a mother, was a victim as a wife.
 20 *Lolita* is a cycle of “what comes around, goes around” for our
 21 characters.

22
 23 “There was nobody around except those two tiny very busy figures on
 24 the opposite side. . . . The setting was really perfect for a brisk
 25 bubbling murder, and here was the subtle point: the man of law and
 26 the man of water were just near enough to witness an accident and just
 27 far enough not to observe a crime. They were near enough to hear a
 28 distracted bather thrashing about and bellowing for somebody to come
 29 and help him save his drowning wife. . . .I merely want to convey the
 30 ease of the act, the nicety of the setting! So there was Charlotte
 31 swimming on with dutiful awkwardness (she was a very mediocre
 32 mermaid). . . and as I watched the glossy whiteness of her wet face so
 33 little tanned despite all her endeavors, and her pale lips, and her naked
 34 convex forehead, and the tight black cap, and the plump wet neck, I
 35 knew that all I had to do was to drop back, take a deep breath, then
 36 grab her by the ankle and rapidly dive with my captive corpse. I say
 37 corpse because surprise, panic and inexperience would cause her to
 38 inhale at once a lethal gallon of lake, while I would be able to hold on
 39 for at least a full minute, open-eyed under water. . . .I might come up
 40 for a mouthful of air while still holding her down, and then would dive
 41 again as many times as would be necessary, and only when the curtain
 42 came down on her for good, would I permit myself to yell for help.
 43 And when some twenty minutes later the two puppets steadily
 44 growing arrived in a rowboat. . . poor Mrs. Humbert Humbert, the

1 victim of a cramp or coronary occlusion, or both, would be standing
2 on her head in the inky ooze, some thirty feet below the smiling
3 surface of Hourglass Lake.

4 “She swam beside me, a trustful and clumsy seal. . . and still hell
5 screamed its counsel, and still I could not make myself drown the
6 poor, slippery, big-bodied creature.”

7 Pages 37-38

8
9 “The Haze woman, the big bitch, the old cat, the obnoxious mamma,
10 the old stupid Haze is no longer your dupe.”

11 Page 45

12
13 Charlotte, after being wedded by Humbert to become an instant
14 “father” to Dolores, was even contemplated to be murdered just to
15 get flung out of the way. Even the contemplation of the crime was
16 peppered with insults on her appearance! This trend of disrespecting
17 wives was supported yet by Valeria, a former wife Humbert had
18 before he went to South America. In his recollections:

19
20 “But reality soon asserted itself. The bleached curl revealed its
21 melanic root; the down turned to prickles on a shaved shin; the mobile
22 moist mouth, no matter how I stuffed it with love, disclosed
23 ignominiously its resemblance to the corresponding part in a treasured
24 portrait of her toadlike dead mama; and presently, instead of a pale
25 little gutter girl, Humbert Humbert had on his hands a large, puffy,
26 short-legged, big breasted and practically brainless baba.

27 “Her only asset was a muted nature which did help to produce an
28 odd sense of comfort in our small squalid flat”

29 Page 10

30
31 “Had Charlotte been Valeria, I would have known how to handle the
32 situation; and “handle” is the word I want. In the good old days, by
33 merely twisting fat Valechka’s brittle wrist (the one she had fallen
34 upon from a bicycle) I could make her change her mind instantly; but
35 anything of the sort in regard to Charlotte was unthinkable. Bland
36 American Charlotte frightened me.”

37
38 Page 36

39
40 The only solace Valeria was able to offer her former husband
41 was to be a stable presence inside the house. Homely was the best, or
42 perhaps the most neutral thing that Humbert ever saw in her. The rest
43 were attacks on her physicality. There was also a hint of domestic
44 abuse, not the grand, black-and-blue-bruises scale, but more on

1 manipulation. Humbert could control Valeria by threatening to twist
2 her already injured wrist.

3
4 Women in *Lolita*, together, maintain the drone of misery
5 throughout the novel, and it is not surprising because the narrator
6 (not saying the author) himself is a anti-feminist sociopath. *The*
7 *Scarlet Letter*, pro-feminist, is more forgiving to their women.

8 Hester's redemption was her persevering in the Puritan
9 community, walking the streets with her head held high, and
10 even contributing as a dressmaker. Near the end of her journey,
11 she returned to the same old town, wore the "A" once again, and
12 won the hearts of her people.

13
14 "But there was a more real life for Hester Prynne, here, in New
15 England, than in that unknown region where Pearl had found a home.
16 Here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her
17 penitence. She had returned, therefore, and resumed—of her own free
18 will, for not the sternest magistrate of that iron period would have
19 imposed it—resumed the symbol of which we have related so dark a
20 tale. Never afterwards did it quit her bosom. But, in the lapse of the
21 toil some, thoughtful, and self-devoted years that made up Hester's
22 life, the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world's
23 scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed
24 over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence too. And, as Hester
25 Prynne had no selfish ends, nor lived in any measure for her own profit
26 and enjoyment, people brought all their sorrows and perplexities, and
27 besought her counsel, as one who had herself gone through a mighty
28 trouble."

29 "Women, more especially—in the continually recurring trials of
30 wounded, wasted, wronged, misplaced, or erring and sinful passion—
31 or with the dreary burden of a heart unyielded, because unvalued and
32 unsought—came to Hester's cottage, demanding why they were so
33 wretched, and what the remedy!"

34 "Hester comforted and counseled them, as best she might. She
35 assured them, too, of her firm belief, that, at some brighter period,
36 when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven's own time, a
37 new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation
38 between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness.
39 Earlier in life, Hester had vainly imagined that she herself might be the
40 destined prophetess, but had long since recognized the impossibility
41 that any mission of divine and mysterious truth should be confided to a
42 woman stained with sin, bowed down with shame, or even burdened
43 with a life-long sorrow."

1 “The angel and apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman,
2 indeed, but lofty, pure, and beautiful; and wise, moreover, not through
3 dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy; and showing how sacred
4 love should make us happy, by the truest test of a life successful to
5 such an end!”

6 Pages 211-212

7
8 Redemption came easy for Hester, so it is another challenge to
9 extract from *Lolita* Dolores’ redemption. It may not be as
10 pronounced as Hester persisting throughout the novel, but
11 Dolores *did* save herself.

12
13 “Dear Dad:

14
15 How’s everything? I’m married. I’m going to have a baby. I guess
16 he’s going to be a big one. I guess he’ll come right for Christmas.
17 This is a hard letter to write. I’m going nuts because we don’t
18 have enough to pay our debts and get out of here. Dick is
19 promised a big job in Alaska in his very specialized corner of the
20 mechanical field, that’s all I know about it but it’s really grand.
21 Pardon me for withholding our home address but you may still be
22 mad at me, and Dick must not know. This town is something. You
23 can’t see the morons for the smog. Please do send us a check,
24 Dad. We could manage with three or four hundred or even less,
25 anything is welcome, you might sell my old things, because once
26 we go there the dough will just start rolling in.

27 Write, please. I have gone through much sadness and hardship.

28
29 Yours expecting,
30 Dolly (Mrs. Richard F. Schiller)”

31
32 Page 119

33
34 This letter was written two years after Dolores escaped
35 Humbert’s clutches. She was seventeen now. “I have gone
36 through much sadness and hardship.” This is us hearing her side
37 for the first time, her grown out of the prepubescent malicious
38 and sharp-tongued tone; her speaking from the heart: *Yes, I too,*
39 *have suffered.*

40
41 “‘Lolita,’ I said. . . ‘Come just as you are. And we shall live
42 happily ever after.’”

1 “‘You mean,’ she said opening her eyes and raising herself
2 slightly, the snake that may strike, ‘you mean you will give us that
3 money only if I go with you to a motel. Is that what you mean?’”

4 “‘No, you got it all wrong. I want you to leave your incidental
5 Dick, and this awful hole, and come to live with me, and die with
6 me, and everything with me. . . . Think it over, Lolita. There are
7 no strings attached. Anyway, if you refuse you will still get your...
8 trousseau.’”

9 “I handed her an envelope with four hundred dollars in cash
10 and a check for three thousand six hundred more.”

11 “‘You mean,’ she said, with agonized emphasis, ‘you are
12 giving us four thousand bucks?’ I covered my face with my hand
13 and broke into the hottest tears I had ever shed. I felt them
14 winding through my fingers and down my chin, and burning me,
15 and my nose got clogged, and I could not stop, and then she
16 touched my wrist.’”

17 “‘I’ll die if you touch me,’ I said. ‘You are sure you are not
18 coming with me? Is there no hope of your coming? Tell me only
19 this.’”

20 “‘No,’ she said. ‘No, honey, no.’”

21 “‘No,’ she said, ‘it is quite out of the question. I would sooner
22 go back to Cue. I mean,’ She groped for words. I supplied them
23 mentally (‘You merely broke my Life’).

24 “‘I think,’ she went on ‘oops’ the envelope skidded to the
25 floor. She picked it up. ‘I think it’s oh utterly grand of you to give
26 us all that dough. It settles everything, we can start next week.
27 Stop crying, please. You should understand. Oh, don’t cry, I’m so
28 sorry I cheated so much, but that’s the way things are’”

29 “‘Are you quite, quite sure that well, not tomorrow, of course,
30 and not after tomorrow, but well some day, any day, you will not
31 come to live with me? I will create a brand new God and thank
32 him with piercing cries, if you give me that microscopic hope’”

33 “‘No,’ she said smiling, ‘no.’”

34 Page 125

35
36 “Mrs. Richard F. Schiller died in childbed, giving birth to a
37 stillborn girl, on Christmas Day 1952, in Gray Star, a settlemen in
38 the remotest Northwest.”

39
40
41 age 1

P

42
43 Dolores’ redemption was at the last pages of the novel.
44 Humbert could no longer use money on her, because she learned

1 how to say “no.” Here is a subdued, more perceptive Dolores,
2 even apologizing to Humbert for her own flaws back then; and
3 here—we need to give him the credit too—is also a subdued
4 Humbert, still ready to help Dolores despite being refused.

5 The events of the past two years where her turnabout
6 transpired were hugely omitted because of the limited power of
7 the single person perspective. We know now that she chose to
8 marry a man her age and settle, not elope as a couple on the run.
9 We know now that she chose to stay with that husband, keep the
10 child, and see through the financial struggles, not grab the
11 opportunity of an easier life with Humbert.

12 We know now that few months later, during Christmas time,
13 Dolores died redeemed.

16 Conclusion

17
18 We divided our feminist analysis of *The Scarlet Letter* and
19 *Lolita* into four parts: The predicaments our females faced; their
20 own shortcomings; the other women involved; and their
21 redemption. Hester of *The Scarlet Letter* had to endure wearing
22 the ignominious letter “A” on her bosom as she navigated
23 through the judgmental Puritan community she lived in. Dolores
24 of *Lolita* had been a victim of continuing statutory rape and
25 absence of reliable parental figures. Hester’s downfall was
26 brought about by her affair with Reverend Arthur, and bearing a
27 child out of wedlock. Dolores’ was her devious and wily
28 personality.

29 Mistress Hibbins and Pearl were the other women in
30 Hester’s life. Mistress Hibbins represented the uncouth lifestyle
31 she adapted as response to alienation, to contrast Hester’s
32 steadfastness and pursuance. However, she also showed the
33 readers that despite her eccentricity, she protected Hester in her
34 own way. Pearl, the love child, supported her mother through and
35 through, and they never left each others’ sides despite the child’s
36 impish manners. Hester as a mother was compared to Charlotte
37 of *Lolita*, who was willing to spend money just to send her
38 daughter away. Charlotte was then paralleled to Valeria,
39 Humbert’s ex-wife, both victims of prejudice and shallow insults
40 made by males.

1 Hester's redemption took up most of the novel, while
 2 Dolores only made it in the end. Hester, was able to endure the
 3 society, fight for her child's custody, and live a decent life,
 4 consuming the raw fruit of shame until it ripened inside her into
 5 acceptance. Dolores, only seventeen, managed to build integrity
 6 and a determination to set her life straight no matter how humble
 7 the beginnings. She learned to say "no" for the first. . . and last
 8 time.

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