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

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

Discussion of the Theory to be Used

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

In Showalter’s (1999) A Literature of their Own, female writers throughout history were studied, how they fared, and how they wrote.
They were bound to take up male personas in their work, even using male pseudonyms. The earlier waves of the feminism theory also addresses the palpable dominance of the male entity in literature and the portrayal of females as being exploited, abused, and tyrannized in many respects: psychological, sexual, and societal.

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

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

Who else would spearhead feminism in literature but fellow women? Another interesting perspective in the study of feminism as a literary theory is the inevitable limitations it posed in the contents
of the literary pieces owing to the very same oppressive hegemony to which female writers are bound. These writers could not have had the same access to the intellectual culture and discourse as men did, so, according to Julia Kristeva, they expressed this lack through two modes, the *semiotic* and *symbolic* (Brooker & Widdowsoon, 1996). The *semiotic* dwelt on the prosody of language, such as the tone, rhythm, and pre-linguistic elements, which do not mature into denotations and which remained in their poetic, repressed states. This repressed states are associated with femininity. The *symbolic* is just one step higher from the *semiotic*, being a sphere of shared meanings, language development, and establishment of identities. *Symbolic* is associated with masculinity and the ideals it entails, such as law and order. Kristeva postulated that women stagger back and forth from the *symbolic* and *semiotic*, never stabilized, forever in process. Furthermore, we have Jane Austen who “refused to write about anything she did not know,” and this narrowness and limited dimension of her works had surprisingly and unintentionally appeared subversive to the androcentric society (Brooker & Widdowsoon, 1996).

### Analysis

*The Scarlet Letter* began in 17th century Massachusetts, part of the New World and an exclusively Puritan community where Christian morals are of utmost value and defiance results to severe punishment. Hester Prynne, a newcomer from Colonial America, was sent ahead by her husband, who never arrived. With the husband presumed dead at sea, Hester continued life on her own, integrated herself in the village, until she got pregnant by an unknown man. Not even the Governor Bellingham could force her into revealing the father’s identity, and the only confidante Hester had was the town minister, Arthur Dimmesdale. Initially, the consequence was imprisonment, but when it wasn’t enough to break her silence, they hoisted Hester into a “pedestal of shame,” gave her a scarlet letter “A,” for *Adultery*, to be worn for the rest of her life. They set her free with her newborn daughter, Pearl. She lived meekly, and, through the years, won the sympathy of her neighbors as she channeled her time and talents to her exquisite dressmaking. Even the sister-in-law of Governor Bellingham, the eccentric Mistress Hibbins, became a frequent encounter.
Unbeknownst to Hester and to the townspeople, her husband, alive after all, reached Massachusetts under the pretense of a false identity—a doctor by the name of Roger Chillingworth. His sole aim was to exact revenge on the man whom Hester had an affair with, his suspicions directed at one of the most honorable men in the community, Reverend Arthur. The reverend’s mental and physical health had been significantly declining, and Roger took this opportunity to take Arthur under his wing and aid him in recuperation. Roger revealed himself to Hester alone and demanded her silence.

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

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

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

Humbert was into nymphets, a term he repeatedly used to refer to young girls who incite his fancy. He had been married to an
adult female named Valeria once, but it was a failure of a marriage. He first beheld twelve-year old Dolores when he moved to South America, where Dolores’ mother, Charlotte Haze, offered him a room for rent. Humbert was assailed with a soul-drenching, nerve-wrecking infatuation with the girl, and wrote down in ink his obsessions about her and his abhorrence for the mother. The mother and daughter’s relationship was strenuous, with Lolita being a strong-headed girl with a sharp tongue and, for her age, in possession of a rather wide vocabulary for insults.

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

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

Her mother’s death was only revealed to Dolores upon insisting to call her. After that, Dolores and Humbert spent their days crisscrossing the country, driving great distances, and sleeping in cheap motels. For sexual favors, he bribed her with money and gifts; for assurance that she will not run away or turn on him (only turn him on), he scared her with the prospect of orphanages. Dolores, tired of their vagabond lifestyle, persuaded Humbert to settle. They landed in New England, where Humbert enrolled Dolores in school. Paranoia kept seeping in, and he began depriving her of socialization. She was then allowed, halfheartedly, to join a school play written by one Clare Quilty, but this was all for naught, as a fight ensued between Humbert and Dolores, with the latter finally changing her mind about joining the play and asking for another cross-country escape. This did not soothe Humbert at all, as he became increasingly suspicious that somebody was following them, and that Dolores was talking to that stranger behind his back.
Dolores ran away from him. He never found her, despite his desperate searching, until two years later. Dolores, now seventeen, married, and heavily pregnant, sent him a letter. She and her husband, Richard Schiller, are in need of money to make ends meet. Humbert realized that he was no longer sexually attracted to this matured version of Dolores, but a stiller form of love now took its place, to an extent where he asked her to live with him again. Dolores refused, but she gave him the answer to the question that had haunted him for years: It was Clare Quilty who helped her escape back then, but when Clare couldn’t convince her to participate in orgies or in his pornographic film, he kicked her out. She lived off a meager salary as a waitress. Humbert still gave her money and they said their goodbyes, never to cross paths again.

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

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

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

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

“. . . the solemn presence of men no less dignified than the governor, and several of his counsellors, a judge, a general, and the ministers of the town, all of whom sat or stood in a balcony of the meeting-house, looking down upon the platform. The unhappy culprit sustained herself as best a woman might, under the heavy weight of a thousand unrelenting eyes, all fastened upon her, and concentrated at her bosom (where the “A” is attached). It was almost intolerable to be borne... she had fortified herself to the stings and venomous stabs of public
contumely, wreaking itself in every variety of insult. . . under the leaden infliction which it was her doom to endure, she felt, at moments, as if she must shriek out with full power of her lungs, and cast herself from the scaffold down upon the ground, or else go mad at once. . . . She turned her eyes downward at the scarlet letter, to assure herself that the infant (she was holding Pearl) and the shame were real. Yes these were her realities—all else had vanished!”

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

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

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

“Continually, and in a thousand other ways, did she feel the innumerable throbs of anguish that had been so cunningly contrived for her by the undying, the ever-active sentence of the Puritan tribunal. Clergymen paused in the street to address words of exhortation, that brought a crowd, with its mingled grin and frown, around the poor, sinful woman. If she entered a church, trusting to share the Sabbath smile of the Universal Father, it was often her mishap to find herself the text of the discourse. She grew to have a dread of children; for they had imbibed from their parents a vague idea of something horrible in this dreary woman, gliding silently through the town, with never any companion but one only child. Therefore, first allowing her to pass,
they pursued her at a distance with shrill cries, and the utterances of a
word that had no distinct purport to their own minds, but was none the
less terrible to her, as proceeding from lips that babbled it
unconsciously. It seemed to argue so wide a diffusion of her shame,
that all nature knew of it.”

Pages 65-66

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

See how Humbert here described Dolores? He was pertaining to a scene where a strange old man was ogling his “child.” In this scene, Dolores was playing by the poolside. Now, a decent father figure, in that instance, would either tell off the old man, or take his daughter away from his view, not call her a slut. Humbert represents these kind of men in the society, whom, instead of using the upper hand of being male to protect women from fellow males who actively objectify them, he does what we in the modern days call “victim blaming.” He blames Dolores for “putting on a show of gambol and glee,” thereby encouraging the
old man’s indecency. This is what happens to today’s rape
victims. “She’s wearing only this, she got drunk with males, she
walked down the alley in that ungodly hour, what did she expect?
She might be asking for it.”

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

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

“I had brought up for detached inspection the idea of marrying a
mature widow (say, Charlotte Haze) with not one relative left in
the wide gray world, merely in order to have my way with her
child (Lo, Lola, Lolita). . . . I felt a Dostoevskian grin dawning
(through the very grimace that twisted my lips) like a distant and
terrible sun. I imagined (under conditions of new and perfect
visibility) all the casual caresses her mother’s husband would be
able to lavish on his Lolita. I would hold her against me three
times a day, every day.”

In one paragraph, Humbert plotted on using one woman in order
to use another. He knew that Charlotte was in love with him, and
he was willing to play with those affections to act out his
fantasies on Dolores. 21st century romance is nothing different.
Since women are more free to express their affection to men, and
are more willing to give in to what men want, this gives them the
controlling power over women, and the ego trip, such as this:

“Let me repeat with quiet force: I was, and still am, an
exceptionally handsome male. . . I could obtain at the snap of my
fingers any adult female I chose; in fact, it had become quite a
habit with me of not being too attentive to women lest they come
topping, bloodripe, into my cold lap.”

The next excerpts show how Dolores was being manipulated
through bribery using money, material things, and an illusion of
compromise:

“In the gay town of Lepingville I bought her four books of
comics, a box of candy, two cokes, a manicure set, a travel clock
with a luminous dial, a ring with a real topaz, a tennis racket,
roller skates with white high shoes, field glasses, a portable radio
set, chewing gum, a transparent raincoat, sunglasses, some more
garments swooners, shorts, all kinds of summer frocks. At the
hotel we had separate rooms, but in the middle of the night she
came sobbing into mine, and we made it up very gently. You see,
she had absolutely nowhere else to go.”

“In those days, neither she nor I had thought up yet the system of
monetary bribes which was to work such havoc with my nerves
and her morals somewhat later.”
Dolores, too, being a human person, had her own identity, blotted out by Humbert’s own, constructed version of her as the nymphet.

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

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

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

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

There is also something else they have in common. They were both forced or tricked to stay in a situation dominated by a
male presence who neither loved, protected, nor treasured them; who sidelined their real personalities and identities. We were clear on this one with Dolores. In Hester’s case, this male presence was her first husband.

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

‘Thou knowest that I was frank with thee. I felt no love, nor feigned any.’”

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

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

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

That is exactly the point—the challenge we’re taking, because real women are an amalgamation of contradictions.
“Lo treated me to one of those furious harangues of hers whereentreaty and insult, self-assertion and double talk, vicious
vulgarity and childish despair, were interwoven in an exasperating
semblance of logic. . . . Enmeshed in her wild words (swell chance... I’d be a sap if I took your opinion seriously. . . Stinker. .
. You can’t boss me... I despise you. . . and so forth).”

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

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

“I am going to tell you something very strange: it was she who
seduced me. I just did not know what to do. Would she be
shocked at finding me by her side, and not in some spare bed?
Would she collect her clothes and lock herself up in the
bathroom? Would she demand to be taken at once to Ramsdale
to her mother’s bedsideback to camp? But my Lo was a sportive
lassie. I felt her eyes on me, and when she uttered at last that
beloved chortling note of hers, I knew her eyes had been laughing.
She rolled over to my side, and her warm brown hair came against
my collarbone. I gave a mediocre imitation of waking up. We lay
quietly. I gently caressed her hair, and we gently kissed. Her kiss,
to my delirious embarrassment, had some rather comical
refinements of flutter and probe which made me conclude she had
been coached at an early age by a little Lesbian. No Charlie boy
could have taught her that.”
"As if to see whether I had my fill and learned the lesson, she drew away and surveyed me. . . . All at once, with a burst of rough glee (the sign of the nymphet!), she put her mouth to my ear. . . . and gradually the odd sense of living in a brand new, mad new dream world, where everything was permissible, came over me as I realized what she was suggesting. I answered I did not know what game she and Charlie had played.”

"'You mean you have never?' her features twisted into a stare of disgusted incredulity."

"'You mean,' she persisted, now kneeling above me, 'you never did it when you were a kid?'"

"'Never,' I answered."

"'Okay,' said Lolita, 'here is where we start.'"

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

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

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

Mistress Hibbins was mentioned to be one of the acquaintances Hester made in the course of her life sentence of donning the “A.”

“Forth into the sunny day was thrust the face of Mistress Hibbins, Governor Bellingham’s bitter-tempered sister, and the same who, a few years later, was executed as a witch. ‘Hist, hist!’ said she, while her ill-omened physiognomy seemed to cast a shadow over the cheerful newness of the house. ‘Wilt thou go with us to-night? There will be a merry company in the forest; and I wellnigh promised the Black Man that comely Hester Prynne should make one.’”

Page 95

“And that ugly-tempered lady, old Mistress Hibbins, was one. And, mother, the old dame said that this scarlet letter was the Black Man’s mark on thee, and that it glows like a red flame when thou meetest him at midnight, here in the dark wood.”

Page 147

“Save it were the cankered wrath of an old witch, like Mistress Hibbins.”

Page 169

This was how Mistress Hibbins had been depicted in the book from the eyes of different characters. She was a witch who believed in the Black Man, which we surmise to be Satan. Shunned by the town, she spent most of her time in the forest
communicating with the Black Man. Later on, they inflicted on her the gravest of punishments, execution.

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

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

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

“‘What is it that haunts and tempts me thus?’ cried the minister to himself, at length, pausing in the street, and striking his hand against his forehead. ‘Am I mad? or am I given over utterly to the fiend (Satan)? Does he now summon me to its fulfillment?’ At the moment when the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale thus communed with himself, old Mistress Hibbins, the reputed witch-lady, had been passing by. She made a very grand appearance; having on a high head-dress, a rich gown of velvet, and a ruff done up with the famous yellow starch, of which Anne Turner, her especial friend, had taught her the secret, before this last good lady had been hanged for Sir Thomas Overbury’s murder. Whether the witch had read the minister’s thoughts or no, she came to a full stop, looked shrewdly into his face, smiled craftily, and—though little given to converse with clergymen—began a conversation.”
“The next time, I pray you to allow me only a fair warning, and I shall be proud to bear you company. Without taking overmuch upon myself, my good word will go far towards gaining any strange gentleman a fair reception from yonder potentate you wot of.”

“I profess, madam,” answered the clergyman, “on my conscience and character, that I am utterly bewildered as touching the purport of your words!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” cackled the old witch-lady, “Well, well, we must need talk thus in the daytime! You carry it off like an old hand! But at midnight, and in the forest, we shall have other talk together!” She passed on with her aged stateliness, but often turning back her head and smiling at him, like one willing to recognize a secret intimacy of connection.”

Page 178

In short, Mistress Hibbins knew all along that Arthur was the lover of Hester. Perhaps looking into the communal life from the point of view of an outcast had granted her an apperception no self-righteous Puritan possesses. She knew she was a sinner, but unlike the rest, she never denied her own truths, never pointed fingers. Despite Hester and Arthur’s wariness of her, she was a secret ally. She never told the public, nor anyone, of Arthur’s secret, in a way respecting the doomed couple’s decisions. This is what unchains her as a character.

Pearl had been designed to support Hester and stay by her side despite a growing awareness of their social status. As a child, she was honest in her dealings with the world. Deemed as a fruit of sin, she knew, in her naive ways, how to fight for her mother and herself.

“But little Pearl was not clad in rustic weeds. Coming between bought the richest tissues that could be procured, and allowed her imaginative faculty its full play in the arrangement and decoration of the dresses which the child wore, before the public eye. So magnificent was the small figure, when thus arrayed, and such was the splendor of Pearl’s own proper beauty, shining through the gorgeous robes which might have extinguished a paler loveliness, that there was an absolute circle of radiance around her.”

Pages 68-69
Here, Pearl was a reinforcing symbolism of her mother’s fight. She was the model of Hester’s clothing handiwork, meaning, her mother’s integration in the society.

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

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

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

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

The statements “wild, desperate, defiant mood, the flightiness of her temper. . . bewildering and baffling. . . stern,
unsympathizing look of discontent,” was used to describe our young Pearl. But, does it remind you of another girl?—Dolores Haze?

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

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

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

“Here was already an illustration of the young minister’s argument against sundering the relation of a fallen mother to the offspring of her frailty. Even thus early had the child saved her from Satan’s snare.”
“It had reached her ears, that there was a design on the part of
some of the leading inhabitants, cherishing the more rigid order of
principles in religion and government, to deprive her of her child.”

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

‘‘I can teach my little Pearl what I have learned from this!’
answered Hester Prynne, laying her finger on the red token.’’
‘‘Woman, it is thy badge of shame!’’ replied the stern magistrate.
‘‘It is because of the stain which that letter indicates, that we would
transfer thy child to other hands.’’
‘‘This badge hath taught me,—it daily teaches me,—it is teaching
me at this moment,—lessons whereof my child may be the wiser
and better, albeit they can profit nothing to myself.’’

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

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

‘‘She has flatly refused to go, and I confess I left her with the
Chatfields because I dreaded to face her alone just yet. And, you
know, I think a summer camp is so much healthier, and well, it is
tall so much more reasonable as I say than to mope on a suburban
lawn and use mamma’s lipstick, and pursue shy studious
gentlemen, and go into tantrums at the least provocation.”

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

“She’d better,” said Haze.”

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

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

Page 27

Page 28

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

“And Hester Prynne had returned, and taken up her longforsaken
shame. But where was Pearl? Through the remainder of Hester’s
life, there were indications that the recluse of the scarlet letter was
the object of love and interest with some inhabitant of another
land. Letters came, with armorial seals upon them, though of
bearings unknown to English heraldry. In the cottage there were
articles of comfort and luxury, such as Hester never cared to use,
but which only wealth could have purchased, and affection have
imagined for her. There were trifles, too, little ornaments,
beautiful tokens of a continual remembrance, that must have been
wrought by delicate fingers, at the impulse of a fond heart. And, once, Hester was seen embroidering a baby-garment, with such a lavish richness of golden fancy as would have raised a public tumult, had any infant, thus apparelled, been shown to our somber-hued community.

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

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

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

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

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

Pages 37-38

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

Page 45

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

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

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

Page 10

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

Page 36

The only solace Valeria was able to offer her former husband
was to be a stable presence inside the house. Homely was the best, or
perhaps the most neutral thing that Humbert ever saw in her. The rest
were attacks on her physicality. There was also a hint of domestic
abuse, not the grand, black-and-blue-bruises scale, but more on
manipulation. Humbert could control Valeria by threatening to twist
her already injured wrist.

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

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

“But there was a more real life for Hester Prynne, here, in New
England, than in that unknown region where Pearl had found a home.
Here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her
penitence. She had returned, therefore, and resumed—of her own free
will, for not the sternest magistrate of that iron period would have
imposed it—resumed the symbol of which we have related so dark a
tale. Never afterwards did it quit her bosom. But, in the lapse of the
toil some, thoughtful, and self-devoted years that made up Hester’s
life, 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. And, as Hester
Prynne had no selfish ends, nor lived in any measure for her own profit
and enjoyment, people brought all their sorrows and perplexities, and
besought her counsel, as one who had herself gone through a mighty
trouble.”

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

“Hester comforted and counseled them, as best she might. She
assured them, too, of her firm belief, that, at some brighter period,
when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven’s own time, a
new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation
between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness.
Earlier in life, Hester had vainly imagined that she herself might be the
destined prophetess, but had long since recognized the impossibility
that any mission of divine and mysterious truth should be confided to a
woman stained with sin, bowed down with shame, or even burdened
with a life-long sorrow.”
“The angel and apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman, indeed, but lofty, pure, and beautiful; and wise, moreover, not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy; and showing how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest test of a life successful to such an end!”

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

“Dear Dad:

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

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

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

“‘Lolita,’ I said . . . ‘Come just as you are. And we shall live happily ever after.’”
“‘You mean,’ she said opening her eyes and raising herself slightly, the snake that may strike, ‘you mean you will give us that money only if I go with you to a motel. Is that what you mean?’”

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

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

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

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

“‘No,’ she said. ‘No, honey, no.’”

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

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

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

“‘No,’ she said smiling, ‘no.’”

Page 125

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

Dolores’ redemption was at the last pages of the novel. Humbert could no longer use money on her, because she learned
how to say “no.” Here is a subdued, more perceptive Dolores, even apologizing to Humbert for her own flaws back then; and here—we need to give him the credit too—is also a subdued Humbert, still ready to help Dolores despite being refused.

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

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

Conclusion

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

Mistress Hibbins and Pearl were the other women in Hester’s life. Mistress Hibbins represented the uncouth lifestyle she adapted as response to alienation, to contrast Hester’s steadfastness and pursuance. However, she also showed the readers that despite her eccentricity, she protected Hester in her own way. Pearl, the love child, supported her mother through and through, and they never left each others’ sides despite the child’s impish manners. Hester as a mother was compared to Charlotte of Lolita, who was willing to spend money just to send her daughter away. Charlotte was then paralleled to Valeria, Humbert’s ex-wife, both victims of prejudice and shallow insults made by males.
Hester’s redemption took up most of the novel, while Dolores only made it in the end. Hester, was able to endure the society, fight for her child’s custody, and live a decent life, consuming the raw fruit of shame until it ripened inside her into acceptance. Dolores, only seventeen, managed to build integrity and a determination to set her life straight no matter how humble the beginnings. She learned to say “no” for the first. . . and last time.

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