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# EXPLICATING FEMALE BODY AS A GEOGRAPHY OF MEMORY: THE COMPARATIVE SILENT REBELLION OF THE PSYCHE IN CHOPIN AND HAWTHORNE

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**He has stolen your wisdom from you, he has closed your memory to what you were, he has made of you that which is not which does not speak which does not possess which does not write....He has invented your history....But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent. Monique Wittig, *Les guerilles*, 1969.**

## **1.1. Introduction: Two Women One Life: Carrying The Burden Of The Letter “A” (America): The Entrapment of the Female Body in American Culture: A Social Analysis of Good and Evil**

Chopin and Hawthorne scholarship has always illuminated women’s studies in such a way that while reading the literary works; time, culture, language and region become timeless and borderless for the reader. The reason of this lies under the fact that both

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intellectuals establish a common ground which crystallizes the traumas of being a woman in all ages. In *The Scarlet Letter* and in *The Awakening* the female body as a geography of cultural memory is portrayed, which is an untouched territory that is dangerous to enter as it is both, sinned, evil-like and monstrous. This is the picture of the eighteenth and nineteenth century's American culture which created the seeds of the Puritanic traits of Good vs. Evil. Puritanism serves an ideal border for the female characters which is to be destructed, destroyed, eliminated and subverted in order to reach salvation. Although the two women seem to belong to different stories they have a common geography; their female bodies, their cultural and personal memories which fight against the restrictions of the society. Chopin's and Hawthorne's characters are revolutionary in the sense that they passed the limits of their time and space in such ages in which being a woman was regarded as a psychological and social burden. In such a problematic time, Hester and Edna dare to rebel against the society and serve as an example for other women who have been experiencing similar tragedies in different geographies. The significant point is the fact that their stories have become the story of all women of all ages.

Throughout the history, the female body has always been regarded as evil-like and regarded as a potential source of sin. In American culture, that kind of a doctrine dates back to Puritanism which strictly underlines the distinction between 'Evil vs. Good.'\* This binary opposition sheds light upon eighteenth and nineteenth century American novels which portray the society's social castration of women through psychological and physical marking. In relation, Hawthorne and Chopin illuminates the entrapment of the female body in their works through focusing on the seeds of this problem in American culture which is 'Puritanism.'

In his novel, Hawthorne underlines "Puritanic traits, both good and evil"(2009, p. 9)\*\* which stands at the very center of both novels.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne reflects a real story that he coincidentally found in his visit of a Custom House. He read the story of a woman called Hester Prynne whom "...had flourished between a period of the early days of Massachusetts and the close of the seventeenth century (S 29). She was punished by the society to wear a scarlet letter "A" on her gown in order to mark her adultery as the father of her baby is unknown. Hawthorne shares the story of his first meeting with *The Scarlet Letter* with the following words:

But the object that most drew my attention, in the mysterious package,

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\* American culture experienced Puritanism in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century when English Puritans reached North America. Later, they began to build colonies such as; Massachusetts (1628), New Hampshire (1629), etc... Although Puritanism seems to shape American democracy, self-reliance, individualism in a positive way, Puritan beliefs and values mainly include; intolerance, the idea of election and predestination, the idea of evil vs. innocent. According to the Puritans, an individual is inherently sinful therefore, human beings should follow the guidance of God. However, the strict sense of morality and marking and branding people as evil created social traumas as it is seen in the *Scarlet Letter*. The age has similarities with The Gilded Age which is postulated by Mark Twain and later identified as The Age of Innocence in the nineteenth century in which the so-called moral values are juxtaposed with immorality, social and psychological illusion. For further reading see Perry Miller *The New England Mind. The Seventeenth Century*. Massachusetts: Harvard UP. 1939.

\*\* All quotations from *The Scarlet Letter* are taken from Hawthorne, Nathaniel (2009). *The Scarlet Letter*. Penguin: London and will further be mentioned as "S" in parentheses throughout the text.

was a certain affair of fine red cloth, much worn and faded(S 28)

It was the capital letter A. (S 29)

I happened to place it on my breast. It seemed to me,— the reader may smile, but must not doubt my word, — it seemed to me, then, that I experienced a sensation not altogether physical, yet almost so, as of burning heat; and as if the letter were not of red cloth, but red-hot iron. I shuddered, and involuntarily let it fall upon the floor.(S29).

In *The Scarlet Letter*, a young woman Hester Prynne is accused of adultery. She has a daughter called Pearl and she refuses to give the name of the father. The dramatic point of the novel is the paradox that while the society interprets Hester as an evil-like, sinful woman, the father of the baby is Reverend Dimmesdale, who is one of the most prominent figures of the society. At the end of the novel, the picture completely changes and the evil has turned into Dimmesdale and the angel becomes Hester.

In *The Awakening*, the entrapment and the marking process of the protagonist Edna Pontellier is similar to Hester's. The novel begins with the portrayal of "A green and yellow parrot, which hung in a cage outside the door..."(1972, p. 5).<sup>\*</sup> The entrapment of Edna is just like a bird in a cage which is captivated forcefully by the society. While Hester is forced to wear the letter "A" and marked as an evil-like woman, Edna is marked as an irresponsible woman by the society. Because she does not want to devote her life to motherhood and marriage her husband says: "If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it?"(A 13). While Hester's flow of life is stopped by the letter "A", which is a kind of burden to carry, Edna's flow of life is blocked through 'marriage' which is her burden to carry:

An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day. It was strange and unfamiliar; it was a mood. She did not sit there inwardly upbraiding her husband, lamenting at FATE...(A 14).

In addition, how Edna's natural flow of life is blocked can also be read through her "wicker chair"(A 13) as she always "rock[s] gently to and fro"(A 13). This attitude reflects her inability to move forward in life, just like Hester's "A" which indicates the stability of the 'sinned body.' "Sin caused death, death brought grief, and grief exposed sin – and nobody still in the world could escape, or forget, this endless cycle"(Hammond, 125). It can be said that both women are just like living deaths as in Puritan society, in American culture of the nineteenth century, being sinful is equal to losing all rights in life. Hester's "evil doings"(S 56) her "mark of shame upon her bosom"(S 57), "her sinful hands"(S 75) are all the evidences of her marking as 'Evil' by the society.<sup>\*\*</sup> For Edna,

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<sup>\*</sup> All quotations from *The Awakening* are taken from Chopin, Kate (1972). *The Awakening*. Broadway: Avon Books and will further be mentioned as "A" in parentheses throughout the text.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Michael Kammen in his marvelous work *People of Paradox. An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American*

the case is the same. Her husband visits a professional called Doctor Mandelet” (A 108) as he thinks that his wife is not normal because she does not care about the children and home. He says: “Her whole attitude—toward me and everybody and everything—has changed” (A 109). The diagnosis of the doctor is very crucial to understand how the female body and psyche have tried to be captivated by male ideology: “has she been associating of late with a circle of pseudointellectual women—superspiritual superior beings?” (A 109) It is evident that for women; reading, writing, therefore art are regarded as danger, a kind of illness and an untouched territory for women. However, regardless of the society’s attitude, Hester and Edna dare to enter the forbidden area.

Both Hester’s and Edna’s different attitudes, self-reliance and individualism are regarded as ‘evil-like’ manners. Therefore both “bears the burden of communal evil” (PRYSE 9).<sup>\*</sup> The question that one needs to ask is why both authors try to reflect the Puritanic treats of good and evil through the female body? It can be asserted that the female body becomes the reflector of American culture and the symbolic geography that illuminates the very roots of a nation.

As mentioned by Leslie Fiedler;

Unable to break the limitations of his era or to repress the shame he felt at trifling with them, Hawthorne ended by writing in the form of a love story an elegiac treatise on the death of love... *The Scarlet Letter* is concerned not only with passion but also with America (another possible signification of Hester’s letter)...” (1982, p. 237).

It is clear that the female body serves as a perfect geography for the reflection of a sociological analysis of Puritan culture.

Chopin, like Hawthorne, defines the so-called sinful body through a female character, Edna who is regarded as abnormal by the society.<sup>\*\*</sup> This time the woman is married, however marriage cannot survive her from being shunned by the society. The portrayal of Hester and Edna reminds us the story of Anne Hutchinson in American society.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> As underlined by Ann Kibbey:

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*Civilization* underlines the reality that the very roots of American civilization is paradox through which the clash between the evil and the innocent has been the core issue of all ages as we see in *The Scarlet Letter*. He writes; “We should recognize, as Hawthorne did, the innocence as well as the evil in our natures. We should understand, as William James did, that Americans is a volatile mixture of hopeful good and curable bad (1990, p. 298)

\* “It was Winthrop who had declared in his famous shipboard sermon on the Arbella that “the eyes of all people are upon us” and that the Puritans were called to erect “a city upon an Hill” — a city that would stand as lesson and beacon to the entire world. (Ruland & Bradburry, 2016, p. 10). However, the idea of the city upon a hill fails as the new world could not become the world of tolerance and peace.

\*\* “The vision of innocence and the claim of newness were almost perilously misleading... The vision of innocence stimulated a positive and original sense of tragedy” (Lewis, 9; 1955). Lewis’s study indicates the fact that the definition of the idea of innocence is negatively transformed by the Puritan culture.

\*\*\* Anne Hutchinson was a Puritan woman who lived in the seventeenth century. At her home, she organized weekly sermons to discuss the teaching of Bible. She had many visitors each week and she underlined a different point of view about both religious teachings and the rights of women. However, Puritans found her activities as dangerous and unsuitable for a woman. As a result, she was banished from the community. Later, in 1643 Hutchinson and her children were killed. “The “sainted Anne Hutchinson” of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s writings holds wide currency among those who portray Hutchinson as the tragic proto-liberal heroine of a seventeenth-century morality play, a courageous individual woman standing alone against Massachusetts Bay’s repressive, patriarchal civil and ecclesiastical order” (Hall, 2003, p. 198).

In 1637, the year in which the Puritans banished Anne Hutchinson for her “misshapen opinions” on religion, the Puritans also initiated a genocidal war against the Pequots, a tribe of Native Americans who inhabited parts of southern and central New England....The Puritans surrounded the virtually defenseless Pequots and slaughtered everyone in the settlement, including women and children, by setting it on fire. (1986, p. 1)

The idea of punishment for the so-called evil and the reward system for the so-called moral, like Dimmesdale, is a common ground of American culture. Therefore, “Hope and fear intersect in the holy yearning at the center of Puritan interiority” (Hammond, 1993, p. 22). It can be assumed that ‘Paradox’ has become the central idea of Puritan culture. On one hand they tried to bring freedom to the New World, on the other hand, they became the flesh and blood symbol of restriction and intolerance\*

WHATEVER THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION WAS, IT WAS A STRUGGLE FOR religious liberty, liberty for many from the obligation to drink in the dregs of popery with the cup of gospel ordinance, and for some the liberty from forms and prescribe public acts of worship and witness. By the 1650s it was a struggle about the extent of the liberty to be allowed to every individual to express her or his love of God in his or her own words and manner. There is thus a central irony that for the greater number it was a struggle to secure both liberty for themselves *and* the liberty to impose their own vision on others. It was a doomed struggle, and it ended in tears. And the process itself has recently been characterized as a claustrophobic, self-defeating one. We have returned to an essentially negative and gloomy account of the Puritan mind. (Morrill, 2003, p.27)

The Puritan society successfully transforms the idea of the pursuit of happiness into the idea of punishment and unhappiness. As strictly defined by Hawthorne:

“Hester Prynne...who stood on the scaffold of the pillory, an infant on her arm, and the letter A, in scarlet, fantastically embroidered with gold thread, upon her bosom! Could it be true? She clutched the child so fiercely to her breast, that it sent forth a cry; she turned her eyes downward at *The Scarlet Letter*; and even touched it with her finger, to assure herself that the infant and the shame were real. Yes! —these were her realities,—all else had vanished! (S54).

The natural is turned into unnatural and the unreal is transformed into the real by the Puritan society. What is real is the precious Pearl as a child and Hester who is forced

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\* Michael Kammen underlines the fact that “Puritan policymakers were torn throughout their regime by conflicting social considerations of individualism and collectivism (1990, p. 134) and this is the point where the paradox has begun for the American culture.

to stand at the center of this trauma, at the center of the scaffold. Hester's tears reminds the reader of Edna who "begin[s] to cry a little"(A 13) when her husband forces her to speak. Both women are forced to live a life which does not belong to their true nature. One needs to ask whether liberty, freedom of speech and the pursuit of happiness are fairy tales in American culture or not.

It can be assumed that through the portrayal of the female body, Hester's and Edna's lives illuminate the very roots of American culture which is the Puritan ideals. Therefore, the culture is constructed through the female body which has become a symbolic geography in which the traits of Puritanism clash between the cultural and the personal. While the evil is against the good, the cultural is against the personal.

## **II. Marking the Female Body: Crystallizing the Fight between the Cultural and the Personal Memory**

In *The Awakening* and in *The Scarlet Letter* the female body is transformed into a symbolic geography in order to to illuminate how the cultural memory is forced to be constructed against the personal memory. Through their works, Hawthorne and Chopin achieve to crystallize how the society, the Puritan culture, tries to construct a form of cultural memory in order to suppress and transform the personal. As throughout the history memory has always been associated with the female mind, both authors prefer to reflect the dilemma between the cultural and the personal through focusing on the female body and mind as a geography of this issue. In both works, the protagonists are marked by the society. While Hester is forced to wear The Scarlet Letter "A" which means adultery, on her gown, Edna is forced to wear an invisible mark on her gown. Both Hester and Edna are forced to carry a mark "M" in their minds, which indicates marriage, a kind of burden for both women to carry. Marking the female body, which is a very typical Puritan trait, sheds light upon how the cultural memory has tried to transform the personal memory throughout the history. Therefore, the story of both women becomes the story of all women which makes both works timeless as both Chopin and Hawthorne achieve to build a historical consciousness in their works through constructing a symbolic female geography.

Memory has always been a significant issue for history as how and what we remember makes us who we are. In relation with this, Chopin and Hawthorne portray how the female body and mind is used to illuminate the fight between the personal and the cultural memory in American culture. It is known that

In Western culture, Memory traditionally has a female form—that of the Greek goddess Mnemosyne. Yet women's contributions to cultural memory have scarcely been noted in the twentieth century's explosion of work on that subject: women are almost entirely absent from such key works in the field as Raphael Samuel's *Theatre's of Memory* series and the *Lieux de mémoire* project directed by Pierre Nora.( Chedgzoy in Rossington and Whitehead, 2007, p. 216: 2007)

Chedgzoy's criticism is right in the sense that although memory has a female form women have been socially castrated form this issue. In order to solve this dilemma, Chopin and Hawthorne reflect the story of Hester and Edna both of whom are socially castrated, sinned, marked, shunned, isolated but at the same time are forced to stand at the very center of the society. This is the ideological space where the personal is intersected with the cultural. The question is how does the society enforce a battle between the cultural and the personal?

In *The Scarlet Letter*, memory is a text which is shaped and identified by the society. Hester is forced to wear the letter "A" in order to hypnotize both her and the townspeople to *remember* that she has a sinned body which is marked by *The Scarlet Letter*. As exemplified by Kuhn,

Once voiced, even in 'inner speech', memory is shaped by secondary revision: it is always already a text, a signifying system. This is the first stage at which memory produces meanings. For while it might refer to past events and experiences, memory is neither pure experience nor pure event. Memory is an account, always discursive, always already textual. At the same time, memory can be articulated through a wide range of media and contexts.(Kuhn in Radstone,2000, p. 189)

What is textual is the letter "A" which symbolizes the idea of marking, the very roots of Puritan culture, as symbols and objects were their main cultural codes.\* In addition, "As one observer described it, "Pictures and status and images and for their sakes the windows and walls wherein they stood have been heretofore and of late pulled down and broken in pieces and defaced"(Kibbey, 1986, p. 65). It can be asserted that symbols stand at the very center of Puritan life. Marking the female body through the letter "A" is a very good example of how history has been shaped by collective memory because what we remember shapes our lives. As "Puritanism is a process more than an outcome, and like any cultural process, it represents a struggle to create a system of shared meanings, attitudes, and values and the symbolic forms in which they are expressed and embodied"(Morrill, 2003, p. 28). In both novels through the core ideas of Puritanism such as evil vs. good, moral vs. immoral, etc. Hester and Edna are tried to be labelled by the collective memory. Although Hester is an innocent young lady she is identified as evil through the subliminal message of *The Scarlet Letter*. Therefore, the cultural seems to win the battle against the personal as instead of focusing on their personal opinions, memories and the townspeople remember Hester according to the cultural memory:

...gender is an inescapable dimension of different power relations, and cultural memory is always about the distribution of and contested claims to power. What a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony, and thus with gender.( Hirsch and Smith, p. 225 in Rossington and Whitehead,2007)

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\* "For instance, Cotton's use of metaphoric images in sermons demonstrates that the value he ascribed to imagery went well beyond the homiletic purpose Aquinas had given it"(Kibbey, 1986, p. 72).

It is evident that at first sight the Puritan traits are more powerful than Hester as they are successful at reshaping the memory of the citizens through sharing a common past which supports Hester's marked sinned body. It seems to be impossible for the townspeople to forget Hester's adultery as she always carries the letter on her bosom. As the letter is always present, it transforms itself into a dynamic symbol of collective memory. As mentioned by Hirsch and Smith:

Our own understanding of the term *cultural memory* is indebted to Paul Connerton's notion of an 'act of transfer' (1989,39), an act in the present by which individuals and groups constitute their identities by recalling a shared past on the basis of common, and therefore often contented, norms, conventions, and practices. These transactions emerge out of a complex dynamic between past and present, individual and collective, public and private, recall and etc...(Hirsch and Smith, 2007, p.224 in Rossington and Whitehead,2007)

Similar to Hester, Edna is forced to wear the letter "M" which signifies marriage, and the letter "F" which symbolizes "fate." As underlined by the narrator; "Her marriage to Leoncé Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of FATE"(A 32). From this quotation it becomes evident that society forces many other women to carry the burden of not having the chance of choosing the life they want to live. Therefore, getting married turns out to be an indispensable fate which is a trick of the collective memory. As being a married woman is the sole and ultimate way of being accepted by the society, Edna unconsciously becomes part of that cycle. In that vicious cycle, like Hester's body, her body is shunned, sinned, branded and marked by the society. The significant point is the fact that although both women are socially castrated they are forced to stand at the very center of social life. While Hester is forced to wear the letter "A" to encourage everyone to remember her, Edna has always been a woman who is discussed and followed by other people. It can be assumed that, while the society tries to shape the collective memory through marking both women as evil, the collective tries to shape the personal memory. "Giving examples from Walter Benjamin's work Anne King claims that "Benjamin here suggests that the 'real treasure' hidden within memory consists of 'images' which can only be uncovered by a long process of excavation (2000, p. 14). In addition, Nicola King defines "memory as an archeological excavation"(2000, p.12) giving examples from Freud's *Studies on Hysteria*. In his work Freud identifies curing hysteria with the "technique of excavating a buried city"(Freud and Breuer1983-5:206 in 12-13 King;2000). It can be assumed that in American culture through images and marking the female body, the collective memory is tried to be shaped. In order to suppress the personal memory, the society, the Puritan culture, prefers to brand the female body so as to create the idea that the marked body is sinned and must be isolated.

It should be underlined that both Chopin and Hawthorne focus on how the female body is marked through the collective memory. As a part of Puritan traits, in American culture, symbols and images have always been used to define what is personal. What is



crucial at this point is the reality that while the society tries to personalize the female body through marking, symbols and images it tries to label it as a common symbol of evil which is the dilemma of American culture. The question is how the personal can win the battle against the collective?

## **2.2. Blurring Distinctions: The Silent Rebellion of the Female Body and Psyche**

What a culture remembers and what the psyche remembers are completely different from each other. Therefore, while the body belongs to culture, society, the psyche belongs to the individual. In both novels, the clash between the personal and the collective begins at this point. Hester and Edna create a silent rebellion in order to subvert the definitions of the brands and marks which become their burdens. In relation, they try to suppress the collective memory through strengthening the personal. While the collective defines both women as different, ignorant, evil and dangerous, the protagonists achieve to re-shape and re-define the marks and brands through silence. Their technique to preserve their personal memory help them to remember that they are independent, strong, self-reliant women who are capable of preserving their independence and their pursuit of happiness.

The most obvious obstacle for both women lies under the reality that the collective memory, the Puritan mind, tries to shape the personal memory therefore, aims to re-shape and re-define how the society interprets Edna and Hester. Hester and Edna both make an effort to remember who they are and invent a silent rebellion to suppress the pressure of the collective and their first strategy is silence. While Hester is forced to give the name of the baby's father "she refuseth to speak"(S 57) although she is forced to "to wear a mark of shame upon her bosom"(S57). The say to her "Speak out the name"(S 62) and she responds to them as "Never"(S 62). Hawthorne defines Hester's attitude as a "Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman's heart! She will not speak!"(S 63). Just like Hester, Edna uses the same strategy: "She said nothing, and refused to answer her husband"(A 13). Although their silence seems to be a kind of victory of the collective memory over the personal it is strictly the opposite. Hester and Edna are aware of the fact that The Puritan origins of American culture are prone to marks and brands and are against any kind of different individual or idea.

The female protagonists are the very symbol of ambiguity as Hester is both a lonely mother marked as evil but keeps continuing her life as an independent women. On the other hand, Edna is a married woman who tries to continue her life as an 'individual' who tries to focus on art, entertainment, and social life which are all the men's area.

In order to subvert the collective memory, which imposes the idea that Hester is an evil and Edna is an ignorant, irresponsible woman, they create subtle ways to protect and reshape the personal memory. As underlined by Monique Wittig;

He has stolen your wisdom from you, he has closed your memory to what you were, he has made of you that which is not which does not speak which does not possess which does not write....He has invented your history....But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent.(1985, p. 969)

In order to reshape and redefine the personal memory, Hester prefers a silent rebellion. After she has forced to wear the letter she isolates herself in a cottage on the outskirts of the town. She reflects and subverts her marking through needlework and she isolates herself from the society. At the beginning, the letter “A” symbolizes adultery however, step by step through her silent rebellion the definition of the letter changes. This transformation is a crystal clear sign of how the collective memory, which is tried to be imposed by the Puritan mind, has transformed itself into the personal, the positive and the objective one. Hester never believes that she is a sinner as she interprets Pearl as a gift of God and in order to prevent her personal memory to be sabotaged she follows some steps. The first step is isolating herself from the society. The second step is focusing on ‘art.’ Hester produces needlework and her artistic creativity has begun to be accepted by all the people. “Her needle-work was seen on the ruff of the Governor; military man wore it on their scarfs, and the minister on his band...”(S75) and “many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. They said that it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman’s strength”(S147). The third step is keeping her silence.\* She never rebels against the society but she subverts the definition of the letter “A” through her silent rebellion.\*\* Her self-reliance, her honesty and her bravery help her to reshape the personal memory. R.W.B. Lewis mentions,

But as we move from Cooper to Hawthorne, the situation very notably darkens; qualities of evil and fear and destructiveness have entered; self-sufficiency is questioned through terrible trials; and the stage is set for tragedy. The solitary hero and the alien tribe; “the simple genuine self against the whole world”—this is still the given, for the American novelist.”(1955, p. 111).

As a result of her silent rebellion, she achieves to change the collective memory as “many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. They said that it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman’s strength”(S147). In addition, “Pearl too some eel-grass, and imitated, as best she could, on her own bosom, the decoration with which she was so familiar on her mother’s. A letter,— the letter A,—but freshly green, instead of scarlet!(S 163)”. It is evident that the letter “A” is transformed into; Angel, Art, America, Artist, etc...The collective memory which defines the letter, therefore Hester, with the word “Adultery,” is turned into the personal memory which defines Hester as an angel. R.W.B. Lewis defines this with the following statement:

But if Hester has sinned, she has done so as an affirmation of life, and her sin is the source of life; she incarnates those rights of personality that

\* “Hester Prynne, however, subverts the Puritan-patriarchal laws of meaning in two ways. First, she embroiders and embellishes the community’s representational codes, thereby confusing them....Second, Hester refuses to name her child’s father, thereby placing Pearl—material sign of the mother’s sin—outside the bo(und)s of Puritan ideology”(Benstock, 2000, p.397)

\*\* As mentioned by Frigga Haug: “In their efforts to make their lives meaningful, individuals attempt to resist the encumbrances of the dominant culture. It is however virtually impossible for them entirely to abandon traditional norms and expectations. On the other hand they can — and indeed do— find compromise solutions that extend the limits of their capacity for action. Thus we witness individuals searching for a meaning to life within pre-existing structures, by engaging with those structures, yet at the same time negating them”(Frigga Haug, et al., , 1987, p. 44)

society is inclined to trample upon. The action of the novel springs from the enormous but improbable suggestion that the society's estimate of the moral structure of the universe may be tested and found inaccurate. (1955, p. 112)

Hester achieves to portray how the Puritan mind has tried to blur the personal memory through forcing the townspeople to see the letter "A" on her bosom as a symbol of adultery. On the other hand, Hester manages to subvert its meaning through a self-sabotage. The society thinks that she accepts her marking process as she also believes that she is a sinner. However, she blurs the distinctions between the personal and the collective memory through preserving the remembering process of herself as an angel. "The effect of the symbol—or rather, of the position in respect to society that was indicated by it—on the mind of Hester Prynne herself, was powerful and peculiar. All the light and graceful foliage of her character had ben withered up by this red-hot brand..."(S 148). It is evident that through preserving her personal memory she achieves to subvert the collective. Hawthorne successfully portrays how Hester manages that:

Hester looked, by way of humoring the child; and she saw that, owing to the peculiar effect of this convex mirror, *The Scarlet Letter* was represented in exaggerated and gigantic proportions, so as to be greatly the most prominent feature of her appearance. In truth, she seemed absolutely hidden behind it.(S 96).

Hester uses the letter as a kind of shield so as to protect her personal memory. She successfully wins the battle against the collective.

While Hester's silent rebellion is carrying the letter and focusing on art, Edna creates a kind of escape through spending time in the sea. She spends "all summer to learn to swim"(A 47). According to Edna,

The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting..."(A 25)

"The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace (A 25)

Edna's awakening is the sea where she rebels against the collective memory through liquidity. Unlike the stiff, strict and immoral traditions of Puritan culture, Edna manages to create a space which is smooth, impossible to control and flexible. While she is learning how to swim, she achieves to subvert the collective memory's defining her as an irresponsible woman. She learns to confess; "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I would't give myself"(A 80). She also rejects to wear her wedding ring which is a kind of stamp for her like Hester's letter. "Edna could not help but think that it was very foolish, very childish, to have stamped upon her wedding ring and smashed the crystal vase upon tiles"(A 95). While she is swimming she begins to purify her body and soul from the collective memory that is the reason why "The past was nothing to her...The present alone was significant..."

”(A 76). Apparently, she subverts the past and alters it with the present moment. At the beginning of the novel she is executed at living as a dependent, unhappy women, however, at the end of the novel she just focuses on the personal.

Edna Pontellier appears to reject the domestic empire of the mother and the sororal world of women’s culture. Seemingly beyond the bounds of womanhood, she has neither mother nor daughter, and even refuses to go to her sister’s wedding in *Little Women*, this was shocking indeed. (Showalter, 1991, p. 71).

While the collective memory forces Edna to remember her obligations as a wife and a married woman, she focuses on the present and gives importance to her awakening.

At the end of the novel, Edna decides to let herself free. As she does not want to sacrifice her body and soul for the society, she commits suicide in the sea. Although physically this can be interpreted as death, literally and symbolically that kind of an ending is a kind of purification, freedom, and reaching salvation. The way she rebels against the collective memory is very significant. As underlined by Elaine Showalter;

Drowning itself brings to mind metaphorical analogies between femininity and liquidity. As the female body is prone to wetness, blood, milk, tears, amniotic fluid, so in drowning the women is immersed in the feminine organic element. Drowning thus becomes the traditionally feminine literary death.( 1991, p.81)

The liquidity is the very opposite of the strict moral codes of Puritan culture. In relation, Edna’s silent rebellion throughout the novel also has its reflections at the end.

It can be assumed that both Edna and Hester manage to suppress the power of the collective memory. Although the society forces everyone to remember the protagonists as immoral, evil and sinful, through their silent rebellion two powerful women subvert the marks and brands. At the end of their stories Edna and Hester are free from any kind of restriction. The collective memory is subverted by the personal memory. Hester’s letter ‘A’ no longer signifies ‘Adultery’ but Angel, Art, America, Able, etc...The collective consciousness of the Puritan traits are altered by the personal commitment of the townspeople. Although for Edna, the ending seems to be tragic it is not. She interprets her ending with the following statement: “How few of us ever emerge from such beginning!”(A 25). While she is letting herself free at the sea:

She did not look back now, but went on and on, thinking of the bluegrass meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end (A 190)

She thought of Leoncé and the children. They were part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul”(A 190)

Therefore, her ending is a spiritual freedom and a new beginning. It is evident that the name of the novel *The Awakening* becomes a symbol of both Hester’s and Edna’s

awakening which is the mark they personally prefer to carry. The letter 'A' is now the symbol of their spiritual and physical and social awakening.

### III. Conclusion

In human life, how and what we remember directly affect the way we perceive not only ourselves but also our environment. In *The Scarlet Letter* and in *The Awakening*, the female body is used as a geography of cultural landscape which illuminates how the collective memory tries to shape the personal. In both works the protagonists are centered at the center of strict Puritan moral codes. The codes of Puritanism are reflected through marking and branding the female body. In relation, the female body is used as a landscape which is tried to be invaded by the collective memory. The Puritan culture, with its so-called moral codes, aims to redefine the collective memory through signs, symbols, marks and brands. Hester Prynne is forced to wear the letter 'A' in order to give signals to the collective memory and encourage the townspeople to remember her as an evil, monstrous, immoral woman. For Edna, the case is not different. This time, the married mother woman is socially castrated as she wants to be in control of her personal memory and try to remember her personal rights of freedom to choose and the idea of the pursuit of happiness. Edna also carries a letter 'A' as her awakening becomes the very symbol of immorality according to the collective memory. Through their silent rebellion both women achieve to subvert the meaning of the letter 'A.' In Hester's story, which is the story of America, the reader and the townspeople realize that the Puritan codes do not work and fail at the end. In Edna's story, the reader becomes aware of how the female body and soul should not be sacrificed on behalf of society. The way which both of the protagonists follow works successfully. Silently, they plug into the collective memory and step by step destroy it through focusing on the personal. Both women reject remembering themselves as sinners and forget what the collective memory tries to impose upon them. While Hester concentrates on art, Edna focuses on swimming which help both women to create a new landscape of memory to remember their real selves. At the end of the novels, the burdens of both women become their very victory. The Letter A is no longer the symbol of evil but the awakening of the personal memory which invades the cultural. Through purifying the personal memory from the collective which is created by the Puritan social codes, both women reaches salvation. It can be assumed that both Chopin and Hawthorne whisper the secret codes of how to become free and happy in life. Choosing the female body to tell their stories make the heroines exemplary social figures which surpass their limits as literary characters.

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**ABSTRACT**

**EXPLICATING FEMALE BODY AS A GEOGRAPHY OF MEMORY: THE  
COMPARATIVE SILENT REBELLION OF THE PSYCHE IN CHOPIN AND  
HAWTHORNE**

What is both ideological and magical about ‘memory’ is the fact that it is both singular and plural which acts as a bridge between the personal and the collective. The example of that kind of a bridge is especially represented through literature. In Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899), the female body is used as a text to reflect both cultural and personal memory and to define how ‘memory’ is tried to be shaped by the society. One of America’s first mass-published books, *The Scarlet Letter*’s protagonist Hester Prynne illuminates the geography of the female body that rebels against the cultural memory through wearing the letter ‘A’ on her gown at all times that signifies ‘adultery.’ On the other hand, her silent rebellion has achieved to transform the letter ‘A’ into ‘Angel,’ ‘Artist,’ ‘Art,’ and ‘Able’ that is the declaration of independence of the personal memory over the cultural. Like Hester, in order to escape from the limitations of the cultural memory, Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* rebels against cultural memory and learns to swim in the ocean and focuses on art which immediately overlap the definition of her role in life. The comparative analysis of both of the works underline the fact that the female body has been used as a geography of cultural memory throughout the history. However, Hester and Edna are significant for the fact that, the psychic device of both women is a silent rebellion which creates a social space to fight against cultural memory.

**Key Words:** *The Scarlet Letter*; *The Awakening*, Memory, American Culture, Comparative Literature, Puritanism.

**ÖZET**

**KADIN BEDENİNİN HAFIZA ÜZERİNDEN TEFSİR EDİLİŞİ: SESSİZ DİRENİŞİN  
CHOPIN VE HAWTHORNE ÜZERİNDEN KARŞILAŞTIRMALI OLARAK  
İNCELENMESİ**

‘Hafıza’ kavramı gerek kişisel alanı gerek toplumsal alanı birbirine bağlayan bir köprü olması sebebi ile ideolojik ve sihirli bir yapıya sahiptir. Buna en önemli örneklerden biri Nathaniel Hawthorne’un *Kızıl Damga* (1850) ve Kate Chopin’in *Uyanış* (1890) adlı eserleridir. Yazarlar eserlerinde kadın bedeni üzerinden bir metin yaratmakta ve hafızanın, kişiler ve toplum tarafından nasıl şekillendirildiğini irdelemektedir. *Kızıl Damga* adlı eserinde, Hawthorne kadın bedeni üzerinden kültürel hafızaya karşı isyan eden Hester Prynne’i portrelemekte ve üzerinde taşımak zorunda olduğu ‘A’ harfi ile bireyseli koruma çabası ve başarısını yansıtmaktadır. Romanın başında farklı anlamlar içeren harf, hikâyenin sonunda bambaşka bir yol almaktadır. Sanat, Amerika ve meleksi sembollerle örtüştürülen

harf, Amerikan toplumunun bireylerin hafızaları ve kişileri tanımlama üzerindeki baskısını yansıtmada önemli bir rol üstlenmektedir. Chopin’de, tıpkı Hawthorne gibi, kadın bir karakter olan Edna Pontellier ile sanat ve yüzme aracılığı ile toplumsal hafızaya karşı özünü korumaya çalışan ve hayat yolundaki toplumsal rollerinden sıyrılarak özgürlüğe kavuşan kadın figürünü yansıtmaktadır. İki eserin karşılaştırmalı olarak incelenmesi kadın bedeninin kültürel hafızanın adeta bir coğrafyası olarak kullanılmasının analiz edilmesi açısından önem taşımaktadır. Her iki eserde de kadın karakterler sanat dolayısıyla yaratıcılık aracılığı ile toplumsal baskının üzerine çıkmakta ve bireyselliklerini koruyarak toplumca baskılanan normları yıkmaktadırlar. Karakterler toplumsal hafıza aracılığı ile bireysel hafızanın erozyona uğratılmasına direnerek, kendilerince türlü yöntemler geliştirmektedirler. Yarıttıkları yeni sosyal alanlar sayesinde özgürlüklerine kavuşan Edna ve Hester kadın olmanın zamanın ötesinde bir kavram olduğunu anlatmaktadır. 19. yüzyılda geçen hikâyeler Amerikan toplumunun bir yansıması olmasının yanı sıra günümüze kadar uzanan kadın sorunsalına ışık tutmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, her iki kadın karakter de pasif direniş yolu ile özgürlüklerini ilan etmekte ve zafere ulaşmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kızıl Damga, Uyanış, Hafıza, Amerikan Kültürü, Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat, Püritanizm.