

**(Not) Fitting In: Feminine Individuality and Its
Perception by American Society in Hawthorne's
The Scarlet Letter and Alcott's *Little Women***

Dana Jašková

Bachelor Thesis
2015



Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně
Fakulta humanitních studií
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur
akademický rok: 2014/2015

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Dana Jašková**
Osobní číslo: **H12835**
Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**
Forma studia: **prezenční**

Téma práce: **Jak (ne)zapadnout: Ženská individualita a její vnímání americkou společností v *Šarlatovém písmenu* Nathaniela Hawthorna a *Malých ženách* Louisy May Alcottové**

Zásady pro vypracování:

Shromáždění odpovídajících odborných materiálů k tématu ženské individuality a autorům Nathanielu Hawthornovi a L. M. Alcottové
Nastudování vybraných děl – *Šarlatového písmena* a *Malých žen*
Formulace cílů práce dle získaných informací z odborných sekundárních zdrojů
Analýza zvolených děl v kontextu s tématem
Vyvození a formulace závěrů práce



Rozsah bakalářské práce:

Rozsah příloh:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**

Seznam odborné literatury:

Alcott, Louisa May. *Good Wives*. London: Penguin Books, 1995.

Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*. London: Penguin Books, 1994.

Gabler-Hover, Janet, and Robert Sattelmeyer, eds. *American History through Literature, 1820–1870. Vol. 2: Harpers Ferry to Quakers*. Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 2006.

Gray, Richard. *A History of American Literature*. Malden: Blackwell, 2004.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. London: Collector's Library, 2003.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

Mgr. Vladimíra Fonfárová

Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Datum zadání bakalářské práce:

28. listopadu 2014

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce:

7. května 2015

Ve Zlíně dne 6. ledna 2015



doc. Ing. Anežka Lengalová, Ph.D.
děkanka





PhDr. Katarína Nemčoková, Ph.D.
ředitelka ústavu

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ABSTRAKT

Záměrem této bakalářské práce je dokázat, že ačkoliv jsou Hester Prynne a Jo March na začátku románů *outsidery*, nakonec se jim oběma podaří stát se respektovanými a přínosnými členkami americké společnosti, aniž by v průběhu této transformace obětovaly svou individualitu. Aby mohla být daná hypotéza prokázána, je cílem první kapitoly nejprve uvést, jak tato práce nahlíží na ženskou individualitu, a také představit, jak byl americkou společností v devatenáctém století vnímán individualismus. Druhá kapitola si pak klade za cíl okomentovat, jak je ženská individualita vnímána v *Šarlatovém písmenu* a *Malých ženách*. Poslední částí práce je analýza, která se snaží zachytit proces přeměny, během něž se z Hester a Jo místo *outsiderů*, kterými jsou na začátku, stanou uznávané a produktivní členky jejich komunit, a přitom dokázat, že Hester ani Jo v průběhu této transformace nepřijdou o svou individualitu.

Klíčová slova:

Šarlatové písmeno, *Malé ženy*, Hester Prynne, Jo March, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Louisa May Alcottová, ženská individualita, individualismus, americká společnost

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that even though being outsiders at the beginning of the novels, at last Hester Prynne and Jo March become respected and productive members of American society without sacrificing their individuality in the process of their transformation. In order to prove this hypothesis, the first chapter aims to introduce how feminine individuality is viewed in this thesis and how individualism was perceived by American society in the nineteenth century. The second chapter then should suggest how feminine individuality is portrayed in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Little Women*. Finally, the analysis attempts to describe the process of Hester's and Jo's transformation from not fitting in outsiders up to fitting in members of their communities, while arguing that neither Hester nor Jo lose their individuality during this process.

Keywords:

The Scarlet Letter, *Little Women*, Hester Prynne, Jo March, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Louisa May Alcott, feminine individuality, individualism, American society

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all people who are not afraid to follow their dreams, secondly, to everybody who supports me in following my dreams, and lastly but not least, to my supervisor Mgr. Vladimíra Fonfárová as a big thanks for support and inspiration she provided me with during my studies.

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INTRODUCTION

According to The Library of Congress, *The Scarlet Letter* and *Little Women* belong among “Books That Shaped America.”¹ Hawthorne and Alcott both longed to write a novel which would make them acknowledged authors and thanks to *The Scarlet Letter* and *Little Women* they achieved this goal. Ever since the novels were published, they became subjects of discussions. Furthermore, their strong feminine protagonists, Hester Prynne and Jo March, seem to have served as role models in times of emerging suffrage movement.² They continued to inspire women in search of their individuality even in the twentieth century which is observable for example in feminist literary criticism.³ Especially Jo inspired many girls and young women to follow their dreams even if those dreams did not confirm to established social standards.⁴ Nowadays, *The Scarlet Letter* and *Little Women* are recognized as the nineteenth century classics and are valuable part of American literary canon. In addition, they are considered to be the best pieces of the authors. Thus when examining recommended summer reading lists of various American high schools,⁵ it is not surprising that one can usually find both novels among suggested titles. This way the novels, being established as an important part of American cultural heritage, continue to spread their key values among new generations of readers.

Even though it might not seem so without a deeper analysis, there are many features connecting Hester Prynne and Jo March. Firstly, both of them do not fit in their communities at the beginning of the novels. Hester for she is ‘a sinner’ who via adultery committed a crime against her society, and Jo for being ‘a tomboy’ refusing to become a young lady. However, not only their strong individuality makes them outsiders. Usually, it is the way how others perceive the individuals what decides whether they fit in or not. Yet

¹ See Library of Congress, “Books That Shaped America,” accessed November 20, 2014, <http://read.gov/btsa.html>.

² See for example Nina Baym, “Feminism,” in *American History through Literature, 1820-1870. Vol. 1: Abolitionist Writing to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Janet Gabler-Hover and Robert Sattelmeyer (Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 2006), 414-20.

³ See for example Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark, eds. *“Little Women” and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays* (New York: Garland, 1999).

⁴ See for example Harriet Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman behind “Little Women,”* (New York: Picador, 2009), 372.

⁵ See for example English Department, “2012–2013 Summer Reading Requirements,” Unionville High School, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://uhs.ucfsd.org/documents/summer-reading-current.pdf>; LREI, “Middle School Summer Reading Assignments and Lists,” last updated June 16, 2014, <http://libresources.lrei.org/mssummerreading>; LuAnn Schindler, “Summer Reading List,” Acton-Agua Dulce Unified School District, accessed January 20, 2015, <http://aadusd.k12.ca.us/hds/languagearts/summer%20reading%20list.pdf>.

neither Hester nor Jo keep their roles of outsiders, and it is their transformation, in other words, their way of becoming productive members of their communities, what occurs to connect these two heroines. Moreover, none of them seems to give up their individuality during this process. Therefore the aim of this thesis is to prove that although being outsiders at the beginning of the novels, in the end Hester Prynne and Jo March find their place in American society they do fit in, and most of all, that they do not sacrifice their individuality by doing so.

1 FEMININE INDIVIDUALITY AND ITS PERCEPTION BY AMERICAN SOCIETY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

According to one of definitions of Cambridge Dictionaries Online, individualism means “the quality of being different or original.”⁶ When applying this definition to *feminine individuality*, one might interpret feminine individuality as specific qualities which make a woman different from other women or even men; and when expanding the interpretation further, feminine individuality can be seen as will of a woman to develop her personality in her own specific way without surrendering to pressure of society. To comprehend how American society viewed the concept of individualism in the nineteenth century, it is necessary to introduce some of the key factors which influenced perception of individuality, especially feminine individuality, by the nineteenth century American society. For even if in the seventeenth century Puritan values were pillars of American society and therefore the main role of women mostly included taking care of the family and its economy,⁷ it appears that two centuries later some women found their own voice and decided to follow it. Moreover, they often had support of their families in doing so, as for example Louisa May Alcott (1832-88). This reflected in recognition of first truly popular American women writers as Alcott,⁸ and also in creation of strong female characters such as Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Hester in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) or Alcott’s Jo March in *Little Women* (1868, 1870) who have been admired ever since. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to introduce some aspects of the nineteenth century social and cultural context which influenced the authors of the novels this thesis is dealing with as much as the perception of individualism by American society.

Without a doubt, *Puritan values* played an important role in forming American society. According to Elliot, being passed on from one generation to another, family, community, church, hard work, and many others became values relevant to most Americans. In addition, faith of the American nation in being ‘a City upon a hill’ made people believe that they are capable of anything in case they work hard enough to achieve

⁶ Cambridge Dictionaries Online, s.v. “individualism,”
<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/individualism>.

⁷ See Alan Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Brief, Interactive History of the American People* (McGraw-Hill: New York, 2005), 40.

⁸ See for example Hillary S. Crew, “Louisa May Alcott: The Author as Presented in Biographies for Children,” *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children* 10 no. 3 (2012): 33.

their goal.⁹ This belief seems to have given some people strength to follow their dreams and to become outstanding, despite the fact that, as Pennell suggests, at the very beginning of American Puritan society everything was done for wealth of community and therefore individuality and extraordinariness were not welcomed.¹⁰ As a result, being an individual and disagreeing with the rest of the community in the seventeenth century might have caused one's excommunication as in case of Anne Hutchinson.¹¹ Still the tendency to work hard and the faith in being rewarded after, passed on for many generations at that time and therefore rooted in mentality of most Americans, could have been some of the factors which helped many individuals to follow their own beliefs and to fight for their rights in the nineteenth century.

Another factor which affected the perception of individuality by American society was the *frontier*. According to Turner, the frontier was a place where individuals did not have to limit themselves, where they could cross boundaries of the common social structure, where they could start over, and most of all, where they had to rely on themselves. Therefore living at the frontier usually resulted in a shift in people's values. No longer was wealth of the community in the first place as everything was a matter of survival and own needs thus mattered the most.¹² Moreover, Reynolds argues that a role of a woman living at the frontier distinguished from a role of a woman living in comfort of any city. 'Frontier women' must have been more self-sufficient and therefore were less dependent on men. This reflected in popular newspapers and also in novels as a new type of a strong woman character developed.¹³ In addition, it seems that American society was more democratic and American women were not under such pressure as their European contemporaries who must have lived according to strict rules of European aristocratic society.¹⁴ Furthermore, thanks to reform effort to create a public education system, literacy rate of the United States was the highest in the world by 1860¹⁵ and as American women were becoming

⁹ See Emory Elliott, "The Legacy of Puritanism," *Divining America*, National Humanities Center, accessed January 24, 2015, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/eigheten/ekeyinfo/legacy.htm>.

¹⁰ See Melissa McFarland Pennell, "The Scarlet Letter," in *American History through Literature, 1820-1870. Vol. 3: "The Raven" to "Young Goodman Brown,"* ed. Janet Gabler-Hover and Robert Sattelmeyer, (Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 2006), 1029-30.

¹¹ See Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*, 24-25.

¹² See Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1921), 1-38.

¹³ See David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 345.

¹⁴ See Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 341.

¹⁵ See Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*, 187.

more educated, also their interest in current events seemed to grow.¹⁶ When combining these factors with the influence of frontier, it appears it was only natural that increasing numbers of women often participated in discussing diverse contemporary issues, such as slavery, and that more of them were trying to find their way to independence and their own voice. In consequence, their effort often brought them admiration and support by even male members of their communities as in case of Margaret Fuller¹⁷ or Louisa May Alcott.¹⁸

Once having been free from Britain, thus from Europe, the American nation was trying to discover its own identity in the first half of the nineteenth century and it seems that no other movement could have served this purpose better way than *Romanticism*.¹⁹ There are various reasons for that, one of them occurs to be that Romanticism emphasizes value of an individual who often stands in opposition to restrictions of major society. As Robinson implies, in the nineteenth century, American society was full of tension which had its basis in rapid growth of the economy resulting in social changes, as much as in questions of slavery and women's rights, or in dissatisfaction with religion. Furthermore, he suggests that the period of American Romanticism inspired individuals to begin their own search for answers they needed and were not provided with. Therefore finding own answers through self-exploration might have been the only way to receive their required responses. As a result, Romantic principles gave people what they were longing for, belief that it is in power of individuals to choose their own path and that all their choices are relevant.²⁰ This appears to have reflected in literary pieces of the period through creation of a strong romantic hero or a heroine who through his or her individual perception of the world reveals corruption of society, as for instance Hawthorne's Hester in *The Scarlet Letter*.²¹ Romantic characters are often complex, they are not pure and have their faults, and usually have to struggle a lot to deserve their place in society which often does not provide them with understanding they wish to gain. Actually, this diversity and struggle of

¹⁶ See for example Louise Stevenson, "Little Women? The Female Mind at Work in Antebellum America," *History Today* 45, no. 3 (1995): 26-31.

¹⁷ Margaret Fuller was a nineteenth century feminist and the author of a famous work *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845).

¹⁸ This is implied in various Alcott's biographies; see for example Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott*.

¹⁹ See Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*, 180.

²⁰ See David M. Robinson, "Romanticism," in *American History through Literature, 1820-1870. Vol. 3: "The Raven" to "Young Goodman Brown,"* ed. Janet Gabler-Hover and Robert Sattelmeyer (Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 2006), 1000-2.

²¹ See Robinson, "Romanticism," 1002-4.

the characters might be what makes them emotionally closer to readers and thus makes them popular and admired by masses. As in case of Hester who, thanks to being “a character bringing unity to the fragmented women’s roles in antebellum America and dreaming of a revolution in religious interpretation and relations between men and women,”²² became “a proto-feminist heroine.”²³ In other words, American Romanticism was a period that inspired individuals to search for their own identity which resulted in creation of some of the most popular characters of American literature, Hawthorne’s Hester being one of them.

Another movement connected with the nineteenth century America and its way to individualism is *Transcendentalism*, the first American movement which was not a parallel to any European movement. Transcendentalists were a small group of writers and philosophers that formed around Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1836 in Concord, Massachusetts. Except Emerson, some of the members were Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-64), Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, or Louisa May Alcott’s father Bronson Alcott. They believed that a spiritual power is present in nature as much as in every human being. Emerson therefore claimed that the aim of an individual should be overcoming all the restrictions adopted by people when living according to social rules and given social patterns, and instead embracing one’s instincts and emotions so one could individually build their own connection with the Universe.²⁴ However, as Gray suggests, their Club was not only about theology, they used to meet to discuss also matters of philosophy and literature, and some of the current social and political issues.²⁵ To spread their ideas among wider public, they published *The Dial*, which except having been their literary and theological magazine, also included reflections on the current social and political situation. In the years of its publication (1840-44), *The Dial* happened to be one of the most influential cultural and literary American magazines.²⁶ Transcendentalism was also relevant in respect to perception of feminine individuality. According to Gray, the members embraced democratic principles and believed in gender and race equality, in

²² Amy Cummins, “Seneca Falls Convention,” in *American History through Literature, 1820-1870. Vol. 3: “The Raven” to “Young Goodman Brown,”* ed. Janet Gabler-Hover and Robert Sattelmeyer (Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 2006), 1053-54.

²³ Robinson, “Romanticism,” 1003.

²⁴ See Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*, 182.

²⁵ See Richard Gray, *A History of American Literature* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 131.

²⁶ See David M. Robinson, “Transcendentalism,” in *American History through Literature, 1820-1870. Vol. 3: “The Raven” to “Young Goodman Brown,”* ed. Janet Gabler-Hover and Robert Sattelmeyer (Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 2006), 1175.

addition, many women were part of the Club. Having been one of them, Margaret Fuller, inspired by Emerson and Bronson Alcott, established so called 'Conversations' in Boston. The purpose of these conversational classes, which took place from 1839 to 1844, was to make women realise their potential. Even though the Conversations were for women only at first, soon they became so popular that Fuller allowed even men to join.²⁷ Through effort of Transcendentalists to spread their ideas among wider public, their values, such as considering all the human beings as equals, seem to have influenced the perception of individualism in the nineteenth century.

Thanks to Transcendentalists, Concord became an important cultural centre of the nineteenth century America²⁸ and since both Nathaniel Hawthorne and Louisa May Alcott were part of the Concord community, it is possible to view Concord and its influence on them as a connecting element between these two authors. Even though one might suggest that Alcott was much younger than Hawthorne and therefore the difference between their generations must have created a significant chasm between them, one should also consider that Louisa was growing up surrounded by all the big figures of Transcendentalism, one of them, Bronson Alcott, having been her father, and therefore their values were affecting her since her early childhood.²⁹ As Reisen implies in Alcott's biography, for few years the Hawthornes and the Alcotts even used to be neighbours and Louisa seemed to be quite close with Hawthorne's son Julian.³⁰ In the biography Reisen also suggests that Hawthorne and Louisa did not have any kind of closer relationship such as she had with Emerson or Thoreau who she considered as both friends and mentors.³¹ Nevertheless, when examining *The Scarlet Letter* and *Little Women* one can notice one important similarity between these two pieces as in Hester Prynne and Jo March they created complex and strong female individuals. Thus, if taking into consideration how Transcendentalists viewed women, it appears that values of the Concord community might have been one of the factors which influenced the perception of the feminine individuality by the authors and that way also their writing.

²⁷ See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 136.

²⁸ See Robert E. Burkholder, "Concord, Massachusetts," in *American History through Literature, 1820-1870. Vol. 1: Abolitionist Writing to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Janet Gabler-Hover and Robert Sattelmeyer (Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 2006), 264.

²⁹ See for example John Matteson, "Little Woman: The Devilish, Dutiful Daughter Louisa May Alcott," *Humanities* 30, no. 6 (2009), 12-13.

³⁰ Julian Hawthorne even accompanied Louisa to Washington when she was leaving to nurse during the Civil War; see Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott*, 210.

³¹ This is implied more times in the biography; see for example Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott*, 194.

As Gray implies, another aspect which affected Nathaniel Hawthorne's work was his Puritan ancestry. His ancestors from both sides belonged among prominent Puritan families of New England. This reflected in his concern with the influence of Puritanism on individuals.³² According to Canning, the Puritan influence is observable also in common themes of his writing such as "shame, guilt, secrecy, intellectual pride, moral strength and weakness."³³ *The Scarlet Letter* then appears to be embodiment of the conflict between the Puritan society and individuals which reflects all the themes Hawthorne was dealing with in his writing for almost two decades before its publication in 1850. Therefore, as Easton points out, *The Scarlet Letter* can be seen as "the outcome of [his] continuous work."³⁴ Once published, the novel became immediately popular and made Hawthorne a famous author.³⁵ When it comes to influential elements of Hawthorne's writing, his relation to Puritanism explains the setting of his many pieces. The conflict between individuals and restrictions of society, observable in the nineteenth century, then provides one with a possible explanation why in his pieces individuals struggle with the community they are part of. However, what still remains unmentioned is the reason why the main protagonist of his most famous novel is a woman. As Eaton and Pennell imply, one of the reasons might be that since his childhood, when his father died and his mother was raising him on her own, women seemed to have key roles in his life. Except female family members of Hawthorne's early life, one of the most important women was his wife Sophia Peabody who became his supporter and also an inspirational figure for some of his female characters. The list continues with his daughter Una who as a child fascinated Hawthorne and thus inspired the character of Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter*. Also women outside his family, for instance Elizabeth Peabody or Margaret Fuller, affected his writing. Eaton and Pennell even argue that Fuller might have served as a model for his strong and rebellious female characters,³⁶ perhaps even as a model for Hester herself.

Also Louisa May Alcott's family deeply influenced her writing. Not only that they supported her 'scribbling' since her childhood, they also became role models for the March

³² See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 201-2.

³³ Richard Canning, "Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 1804-1864," *Literature Online Biography*, accessed January 21, 2015, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.k.utb.cz/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:ref:BIO003063:0.

³⁴ Alison Easton, *The Making of the Hawthorne Subject* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 4.

³⁵ See Canning, "Hawthorne, Nathaniel."

³⁶ See Cathy Eaton and Melissa Pennell, "Women in Hawthorne: Introduction," *Hawthorne in Salem*, accessed November 9, 2014, <http://www.hawthorneinsalem.org/page/10010/>.

family in *Little Women*. As for instance Matteson implies, she wrote the novel on repeated request of a publisher and an editor Thomas Niles who saw big potential in a novel which would be written based on lives of Alcott sisters.³⁷ His instinct proved to be right for thanks to *Little Women* Alcott became one of the most popular American authors of her time, moreover, since its publication the novel has never been out of print.³⁸ However, based on Alcott's biography by Reisen, the image of the Alcotts represented as the Marches seems idealised. Even Jo, being Alcott's alter ego, gets married which does not reflect the real life of the author. Despite that *Little Women* is otherwise considered as an autobiographical novel. When having been a child, Louisa was quite like Jo March, her temper seemed to be out of control, she loved climbing trees and running in the forest, she was a tomboy who deep down in her heart was willing to be a boy. Even later on, as a grown up woman, she preferred company of boys and she claimed that except her sisters she actually never liked and understood girls.³⁹ According to Elbert, in her younger years Alcott was a Romantic individual as is observable for instance in her early writing. However, she did not remain a Romantic throughout her whole life, especially thanks to the Civil War which made her become a Realist.⁴⁰ Based on Reisen's biography, it seems that the Civil War would not have had such an influence on her if she personally did not work as a nurse in one of the hospitals in Washington. Even if from one point of view it was her dream come true as she "often longed to see a war,"⁴¹ her Romantic ideals of war disappeared once she was nursing all the hurt and dying soldiers. Since she got ill, she did not finish her service and her father must have come to take her home,⁴² ever since she considered herself a war veteran.⁴³ Elbert also states that Alcott's Civil War experience affected her values for "Romantic individualism seemed painfully impossible in a world of huge social problems."⁴⁴ However, things she considered important such as rights of individuals, helpful community, democratic principles, and a right of women to keep both their home and their individuality,⁴⁵ did not alter.

³⁷ See Matteson, "Little Woman," 10.

³⁸ See Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott*, 2.

³⁹ See for example Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott*, 1-5.

⁴⁰ See Sarah Elbert, *Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott's Place in American Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), xvii.

⁴¹ Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott*, 197.

⁴² See Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott*, 197-220.

⁴³ See for example Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott*, 285-86.

⁴⁴ Elbert, *Hunger for Home*, xviii.

⁴⁵ See Elbert, *Hunger for Home*, xviii.

A concern about social position of women was one more thing Nathaniel Hawthorne and Louisa May Alcott had in common. Eaton and Pennell claim that in his writing Hawthorne discussed for example how domesticity affected women or the circumstances of relations between men and women in his time and also in the Puritan past. In other words, through his pieces he explored “the complexity of women’s lives at times of profound social change.”⁴⁶ They also argue that the range of female characters Hawthorne created is wide. However, not all of them were as strong as Hester Prynne, most of them were unfortunate women who either became victims of their communities or were destroyed by men.⁴⁷ Moreover, as Baym suggests, Hester seems to be his only female character that does not end up defeated in her struggle to keep her individuality and to become an acknowledged member of her community at the same time. It is also important to mention that Hawthorne’s focus on women in his writing makes him the only male author of American Renaissance who dealt with the topic of feminine individuality.⁴⁸ When taking all this into consideration, Hawthorne occurs to be an early feminist. Even Louisa May Alcott belonged among feminists of the nineteenth century. According to Elbert, she believed that women deserved to affect the public sector as much as men did. In addition, she felt that a woman should have a right to have her home and keep her individuality at the same time. This is also what her alter ego, Jo March, believes in *Little Women*.⁴⁹ Finally, there is one more element connecting Hawthorne and Alcott. It is a person, Margaret Fuller, who both of them considered as their inspirational figure. To Hawthorne, Fuller was a respected friend who he truly valued,⁵⁰ and to Alcott, she was a role model who she looked up to.⁵¹ Yet this should not seem surprising since Hawthorne admired strong women and for Alcott Fuller represented the possibility that a woman could have had a private life and a career at the same time.⁵² Thus one may argue that Margaret Fuller, with her rebellion against expectations of society, could have given Hawthorne and Alcott the impulse they needed to create such characters as Hester Prynne and Jo March.

⁴⁶ Eaton and Pennell, “Women in Hawthorne.”

⁴⁷ See Eaton and Pennell, “Women in Hawthorne.”

⁴⁸ See Baym, “Feminism,” 419.

⁴⁹ See Elbert, *Hunger for Home*, xiii-xviii.

⁵⁰ See for example Eaton and Pennell, “Women in Hawthorne.”

⁵¹ See Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott*, 200-2.

⁵² See Elbert, *Hunger for Home*, xiii.

2 PERCEPTION OF FEMININE INDIVIDUALITY IN *THE SCARLET LETTER* AND *LITTLE WOMEN*

As the main distinction between *The Scarlet Letter* and *Little Women* one might consider the period of their setting. For whereas *The Scarlet Letter* is set in the seventeenth century Puritan society, the setting of *Little Women* begins in the middle of the Civil War and ends fifteen years after. This reflects especially in the way feminine individuality is perceived by society in the novels. According to Pennell, the role of women in Puritan society was simple, to bear children, to take care of their home, and to respect their husbands. In order to secure survival of community, Puritan society followed strict rules which sometimes might have seemed even inhuman from the perspective of a nineteenth century author, such as Hawthorne. Moreover, Puritan society was theocratic and therefore laws of God must have been respected. Thus showing any traces of individual thoughts, which would be in contradiction to what the community believed in, might have cost one their life.⁵³ Nevertheless, *The Scarlet Letter* is not only a historical novel, it is a historical romance⁵⁴ and therefore the Puritan community of Boston is romanticized as much as Hester herself. If Hawthorne followed precisely the way adulteresses were treated in the seventeenth century, Hester would probably not have survived the very beginning of the novel since her punishment would have been execution.⁵⁵ In contrast, American society of the nineteenth century was based on democratic principles and even though women, especially middle class women, were expected to cultivate themselves based on the Cult of Domesticity,⁵⁶ they seem to have been more free and respected than in the past. Furthermore, thanks to the Abolitionists, most of whom believed in equality of women, the suffrage movement was gaining more supporters and thus belief that women have rights to express their individuality and to influence the public sphere of life was spreading.⁵⁷ All this was emphasized thanks to the Civil War since women got a chance to show their

⁵³ See Pennell, "The Scarlet Letter," 1029-32.

⁵⁴ See Michael J. Davey, "The Romance," in *American History through Literature, 1820-1870. Vol. 3: "The Raven" to "Young Goodman Brown,"* ed. Janet Gabler-Hover and Robert Sattelmeyer (Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 2006), 994-1000.

⁵⁵ See Charles Boewe and Murray G. Murphey, "Hester Prynne in History," *American Literature* 32, no. 2 (1960): 203-4.

⁵⁶ See Catherine J. Lavender, "Notes on the Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood," (prepared for Students in HST 386: Women in the City, Department of History, College of Staten Island, CUNY, 1998), accessed March 5, 2015, <https://csivc.csi.cuny.edu/history/files/lavender/386/truewoman.pdf>.

⁵⁷ See for example Baym, "Feminism," 418.

capabilities as nurses as Louisa May Alcott did.⁵⁸ Even though the Civil War is not described in detail in *Little Women*, Alcott's choice to set the first part of the novel in the middle of the Civil War is important for development of the March sisters. In addition, it demonstrates that women, and even girls like the March sisters, were left alone to struggle in their everyday life while men were fighting.⁵⁹ In other words, thanks to the Civil War American society appeared to have become more aware of strength and capabilities of women who were no longer perceived only as weak and corruptible counterparts of men.

Puritan values are another element influencing perception of feminine individuality in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Little Women*, however, in both novels their role differs. As Lowance implies, *The Scarlet Letter* is a criticism of rigid Puritan society,⁶⁰ whereas *Little Women* captures a purer view on Puritanism, mostly via highlighting Christian principles portrayed in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), a novel to which one can find various intertextual references especially in the first part of *Little Women* (see for instance 3-22). As examples of the Puritan values emphasized in *Little Women* can serve importance of family and strong bonds among its members, as seems to be visible since the beginning of the novel (see 3-22). Yet Hawthorne does not only criticise Puritanism since he also demonstrates importance of family in *The Scarlet Letter* via showing a strong bond between Hester and Pearl. This is observable for example in the chapter "The Governor's Hall"⁶¹ where Pearl's education is doubted and where Hester refuses to give up Pearl. Thus, as it was stated previously, emphasis on good relations among family members is one of the aspects *The Scarlet Letter* and *Little Women* have in common. In addition, in both novels, one can observe how important it is to keep others in mind. For instance Hester always seems to find somebody who is poorer than her and therefore needs her help (see *TSL*, 98), while the Marches do the same when supporting the Hummels (see *LW*, 15-16). This implies that even care for wealth of the community is considered as a virtue in both pieces. As it was mentioned in the first chapter, there is one more value which Puritans appreciated and that is hard work. Working hard and making sacrifices without

⁵⁸ See Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott*, 197-220.

⁵⁹ See for example Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 3-12. Hereafter cited in text as *LW*.

⁶⁰ See Mason I. Lowance Jr., "Puritanism," in *American History through Literature, 1820-1870. Vol. 2: Harpers Ferry to Quakers*, ed. Janet Gabler-Hover and Robert Sattelmeyer (Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 2006), 943.

⁶¹ See Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (London: Collector's Library, 2003), 115-34. Hereafter cited in text as *TSL*.

selfish reasons is valued in *The Scarlet Letter* (see 96-98) as much as in *Little Women*.⁶² In connection with this, one can observe that the characters doing so are rewarded for their effort by gaining esteem of their community. For instance, in *Little Women* the Marches receive fine dinner from the Lawrences as reward for giving their Christmas breakfast to poor Hummels (see *LW*, 20-21). This can be considered as one more aspect of Puritanism visible in both novels. For after all the struggles Hester and Jo undergo, Hester ends up being a comforter and advisor of those in need, especially vulnerable women, while Jo is happy and respected thanks to having a school for boys at the end of *Little Women*.⁶³

As it is suggested in the previous paragraph, one of the aspects connecting *The Scarlet Letter* and *Little Women* is high importance of family. Family occurs to play a crucial role in development of every individual as through family one usually acquires basic values based on which one later perceives the world. Therefore one might claim that family determines the ability of an individual to socialize. As Lavender argues, in the nineteenth century, growing American industry contributed to emergence of a new type of the middle class which led to creation of a new family type. No longer all the family members had to work to secure their survival, thus middle class families stopped being dependent on wealth of their community. Therefore a middle class family could prefer its own needs to wealth of the community. This enabled individuals to prefer their own needs to needs of others. In addition, women could stay at home and instead of being part of the ‘wild public sphere,’ which was perceived as an inappropriate place for pious women, they could become in charge of the ‘private sphere’ – their family homes. This way a so called *Cult of Domesticity* emerged. As a result, a woman became an angel of the home who was expected to cultivate her husband via securing atmosphere of a warm and safe home where the husband could forget about evils of industrial society.⁶⁴ Thus the main duty of a nineteenth century middle class woman became fulfilling a new “ideal of womanhood”⁶⁵ via cultivating her “piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness.”⁶⁶

⁶² See Elbert, *Hunger for Home*, 200-1.

⁶³ See Louisa May Alcott, *Good Wives* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 302-14. Hereafter cited in text as *GW*; This is a second part of *Little Women* which was published in 1869. In Britain these two volumes are still published separately even though in America they have been published as one book under the title *Little Women* since 1880.

⁶⁴ See Lavender, “Notes on the Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood.”

⁶⁵ Lavender, “Notes on the Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood.”

⁶⁶ Lavender, “Notes on the Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood.”

The emphasis on domestic values reflected in literature in many ways. For instance some authors were interested in the relation between society and family, Nathaniel Hawthorne was one of them. In *The Scarlet Letter* he captured how weak a bond between family and community could have been sometimes.⁶⁷ The setting of the novel in the strict Puritan society of the seventeenth century then appears to highlight the struggle some individuals had to undergo to deserve sympathy of other members of society. According to Alcana, Hawthorne implies in *The Scarlet Letter* that “the site where individual learns social attachment is the family and the interpersonal force that binds people together in society is an attenuated version of family love.”⁶⁸ Even Louisa May Alcott seems to emphasize in *Little Women* that love and strong bonds among the family members can help individuals to overcome their struggle in order to fit in. In other words, it appears that united family can help individuals win their inner battle and also can soothe harm caused by a traumatic experience such as the Civil War.⁶⁹ Based on this, one might claim that Hester Prynne and Jo March are never left to tackle their burdens completely on their own. Hester has her daughter who appears to be her driving force as she is responsible for her own life as much as for Pearl’s. Moreover, Pearl’s purity of a child who is growing up separated from the society while having no father, makes her an outstanding individual who is unable to fit in as Hester herself⁷⁰ and thus Pearl seems to provide Hester with a feeling of not being alone against the majority. Jo then has her whole family and other friends who support her while she trying to tackle her burdens. This is visible for example in the first chapter of *Little Women* (see 3-12) when Jo and her sisters discuss their burdens while suggesting how they could deal with them, or when the girls with their mother, Marmee as the sisters often call her, are reading a letter they received from Mr March after which the girls decide to start their journey to their ‘Celestial City.’

Domestic values are reflected even in portrayal of female characters. However, a moral and pious woman, being a typical character of sentimental domestic fiction, was only one type of female characters observable in antebellum literature. As Reynolds states, at the time when Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter*, there was a wide spectrum of female

⁶⁷ See Joseph Alcana, “Psychology,” in *American History through Literature, 1820-1870. Vol. 2: Harpers Ferry to Quakers*, ed. Janet Gabler-Hover and Robert Sattelmeyer (Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 2006), 934.

⁶⁸ Alcana, “Psychology,” 934.

⁶⁹ See Alcana, “Psychology,” 934.

⁷⁰ See Easton, *The Making of the Hawthorne Subject*, 203-7.

characters. Some of them were strong and powerful, others were victims representing fragile sides of feminine personality, and some even embodied all the vices which one could find in a woman. This variety of characters was a result of perception of diverse women's roles in the middle of the nineteenth century. Moreover, it seems that the complexity of women's roles helped to establish a new ground for creation of a complex female heroine like Hawthorne's Hester.⁷¹ When examining her, it appears that Hester embodies almost all the roles which might have been subscribed to a nineteenth century woman. She is an adulteress and that makes her a fallen woman, a sinner. At the same time she can be perceived as a victim who surrendered to her male seducer. On the other hand, Hester is also a woman devoted to her domestic duties such as taking care of her daughter or financially securing their life standard while doing a respectable work. And most of all, she is a strong female individual who accepts her punishment, who does not surrender when being judged by Bostonian community, and who devotes her life to regaining a status of respected person via helping those who need her help. Even Jo March is a complex character who seems to embody various women's roles in the course of the novel. Although *Little Women* is classified as a domestic novel, Jo is not a typical domestic fiction character.⁷² There are more reasons for that. Firstly, she is full of Romantic dreams and desires. Secondly, unlike her sisters, she does not care much about etiquette and proper behaviour even while being in public, and for quite a long time she prefers being a tomboy to becoming a respectable young lady. Moreover, having a home and a husband does not seem to her as something what on its own could sufficiently fulfil her life. Also her personality is wild and certainly not typical for 'a little woman' of the nineteenth century. Being complex characters that do not fit in the expected standard, is thus something Hester and Jo have in common, and it seems that this complexity makes them timeless characters who attract attention even of twenty-first century readers.

In other words, what this chapter implies is that the portrayal of feminine individuality is an important feature connecting *The Scarlet Letter* and *Little Women*. For even though the story lines and settings of the novels may seem not to have much in common without deeper analysis, Hester Prynne and Jo March certainly represent role models which the

⁷¹ See Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 339-40.

⁷² See for example Lisa M. Logan, "Domestic Fiction," in *American History through Literature, 1820-1870. Vol. 1: Abolitionist Writing to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Janet Gabler-Hover and Robert Sattelmeyer (Farmington Hills: Thomson Gale, 2006), 348.

nineteenth century women needed.⁷³ Through exploring both bright and dark sides of their personalities, Hawthorne and Alcott created heroines became inspirational figures. For instance, Hester can be perceived as a single mother who handles to tackle her burdens and to take care of her daughter. On the other hand, Jo proved to the nineteenth century female readers that it is possible not to give up their individuality and yet to find a husband and become a respected person (see *GW*, 302-14). In a way, Hester and Jo are both Romantic individuals who appear to be misunderstood, who are trying to fit in, and yet who at the same time are not willing to betray themselves by doing so. When it comes to Hester, she has to fight her battle on her own for she refuses to announce Arthur Dimmesdale as her partner in sin (see *TSL*, 79-83). Unlike Hester, Jo has her family, Laurie, and later Mr. Bhaer who function as her judges and supporters at the same time. Her family is always present when she needs to discuss her burdens. Laurie then seems to represent somebody with whom she can feel ‘boyish freedom.’ Yet simultaneously he evokes in Jo maternal duties for example when he is sick and seems to lack somebody to cheer him up (see *LW*, 44-54). Lastly, Friedrich Bhaer becomes her advisor and friend when Jo is far away from her family and thus needs some (see *GW*, 135-52). For instance he helps Jo to realise that sensational stories can never have such a value as a story written from the bottom of her heart (see *GW*, 146-52). Nevertheless, the real battle of transformation from a tomboy to a respected young woman she has to win on her own for it is always the individual who must be the main agent of this change. To simplify, Hester and Jo can be considered as strong female individuals who keep trying to resolve their inner struggles, and it seems that thanks to this they are heroines who still deserve respect of contemporary readers.

⁷³ See for example Baym, “Feminism.”

3 HESTER AND JO: FROM NOT FITTING IN UP TO BECOMING PRODUCTIVE MEMBERS OF SOCIETY

Both Hester and Jo are referred to many times in the previous two chapters; however, they have not been fully introduced yet. At the beginning of *The Scarlet Letter* Hester Prynne is presented as a woman who committed adultery and thus is a sinner who committed a crime against her community. Moreover, by not willing to announce the name of her partner in sin she shows disrespect to authorities. All this leads to her living in seclusion from Bostonian society together with her daughter Pearl, who being a consequence of Hester's sin, is actually perceived as an embodiment of this sin. Hester accepts her ordeal with bravery, being left alone to deal with her burdens as her husband who now calls himself Roger Chillingworth makes her keep his presence in Boston a secret, and as she cannot meet with her partner in sin, a Puritan minister Arthur Dimmesdale, to protect him from public exposure. Thus skilled with her needle Hester provides herself and her daughter with means of living, and in seclusion of her cottage tries to live her life according to principles she believes are right. In contrast, Jo March is only a fifteen years old girl at the beginning of *Little Women*. She is one of four March sisters who live with their mother and servant Hannah in a modest house. As it is time of the Civil War their father, being too old to fight, is a chaplain of the Northern soldiers fighting for freedom of slaves and therefore he is not present to help his daughters to tackle their burdens. However, his absence during Christmas and especially receiving his letter inspire Jo and her sisters, Amy, Beth, and Meg, to start their Pilgrim's journey which is a metaphor for becoming the girls their father and even their mother could be proud of. Since they are girls and cannot fight, and are not rich and thus cannot even financially support the soldiers, they decide to benefit their community at least by becoming better people and by making small sacrifices they can afford, such as giving their whole Christmas breakfast to poor Hummels (see *LW*, 15-16). It seems that the decision of Hester to overcome her hardships on her own and the decision of Jo to start her own Pilgrim's journey at the beginning of the novels, are defining moments on their way to exploring their strong and unique selves.

3.1 Being Outsiders

When Hester Prynne firstly appears in person in *The Scarlet Letter* she is presented as a woman who being led out of prison to public humiliation repels the town-beadle "by an action marked with natural dignity and force of character" (*TSL*, 64), after which she steps "into the open air as if by her own free will" (*TSL*, 64). Thus since the very beginning

Hester appears to be as a strong female individual who, although being an adulteress paying for her sin, did not lose her dignity. Nevertheless, this seems to make her in eyes of the seventeenth century Puritan society even bigger outsider than if she was ‘only’ an adulteress. In addition, her inner strength cannot protect her from her punishment of facing the crowd while standing on the scaffold bearing a little baby and while having a scarlet letter ‘A’ shining on her breasts. Public humiliation of this kind was proven “to be as effectual an agent, in the promotion of good citizenship, as ever was the guillotine among the terrorists of France” (*TSL*, 68), and thus it seemed that the whole Boston came to the marketplace to have a look at Hester that day. Yet, she appears to face the whole situation as calmly as possible, still protecting the father of her baby, even though it all makes her feel like “as if she must needs shriek out with the full power of her lungs, and cast herself from the scaffold down upon the ground, or else go mad at once” (*TSL*, 70).

In contrast, Jo March is presented as moody, boyish, and ‘topsey turvy’ character who loves running and feeling free at the beginning of *Little Women*. In a way, she is a Romantic individual who loves Romantic ideals and writes stories about them, and would be willing to do anything so she would not have to change and grow up. When her sister Meg tells her “you should remember that you are a young lady” (*LW*, 5), she strongly resists while exclaiming:

“I hate to think I’ve got to grow up, and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim as a China Aster! It’s bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boy’s games and work and manners! I can’t get over my disappointment in not being a boy; and it’s worse than ever now, for I’m dying to go and fight with Papa. And I can only stay home and knit, like a poky old woman!” (*LW*, 5)

In other words, Jo is a tomboy which in the context of the nineteenth century social standards meant being an outsider. Yet it does not seem that her family would despise her as the Marches are tolerant and they occur to be aware that everybody has specific features of their personality and therefore it is alright to be an individual if one has their individuality under control. For instance, Elbert claims that the Marches are a democratic family based on “domestic cooperation”⁷⁴ and that “the girls must learn how to shape their individualities in harmony with the interests of the family.”⁷⁵ Thus it seems that even though the parents support their girls in becoming individuals, they know that in order to become productive members of their community, they have to learn their lesson and make

⁷⁴ Elbert, *Hunger for Home*, 200.

⁷⁵ Elbert, *Hunger for Home*, 200.

their sacrifices. From one point of view, Jo's family is supporting her in being herself. For example Beth encourages Jo to at least play their brother since she cannot make herself be a boy (*LW*, 5). However, at the same time Jo's parents and also her sisters often suggest that Jo should try to control her temper and her behaviour for some day her inability to do so might cost more than she is willing to admit. Despite this, Jo considers herself "the man of the family" (*LW*, 6) and feels that it is her responsibility to protect her sisters and her mother as their father is gone. Nevertheless, once they receive the letter from their father where he encourages his daughters to "do their duty faithfully, fight their bosom enemies bravely, and conquer themselves so beautifully that when [he] come[s] back to them [he] may be fonder and prouder than ever of [his] little women" (*LW*, 10), Jo decides that she will try to stop being so "rough and wild" (*LW*, 10) and will try to deserve being called "a little woman" (*LW*, 10) by her father.

It seems that appearance of Hester and Jo described in the first chapters of the novels even highlights their roles of the adulteress and the tomboy, thus in a way emphasizes their roles of outsiders. Hester has "figure of perfect elegance" (*TSL*, 65), and in general, she appears to be a beauty. Moreover, what might seem outrageous to the observers of her humiliation, especially to judgemental women who are waiting for Hester to come out of the prison while gossiping and complaining that the magistrates were too kind when having chosen Hester's punishment, is that "never had Hester Prynne appeared more ladylike... than as she issued from the prison" (*TSL*, 66). How astonishing her appearance may seem to some of the Bostonians waiting for her at the marketplace is visible especially in following extract:

Those who had before known her, and had expected to behold her dimmed and obscured by a disastrous cloud, were astonished, and even startled, to perceive how her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped. It may be true that, to a sensitive observer, there was something exquisitely painful in it. (*TSL*, 66)

However, as the description continues it occurs that this whole impression is not caused by public knowledge of Hester's sin, nor is it a result of the time Hester spent in prison. Instead it is a consequence of the scarlet letter which makes all the women and men present feel like they have encountered Hester for the first time that day. As the scarlet letter "had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself" (*TSL*, 66), it seems that Hester's appearance at this moment sealed her role of the sinner and therefore also sealed her seclusion from society.

When it comes to Jo, the description of her appearance in the first chapter seems to suggest that Jo's wish to be a boy reflects also in the way she looks:

Fifteen-year-old Jo was very tall, thin, and brown, and reminded one of a colt, for she never seemed to know what to do with her long limbs, which were very much in her way. She had a decided mouth, a comical nose, and sharp, gray eyes, which appeared to see everything, and were by turns fierce, funny, or thoughtful. Her long, thick hair was her one beauty, but it was usually bundled into a net, to be out of her way. Round shoulders had Jo, big hands and feet, a flyaway look to her clothes, and the uncomfortable appearance of a girl who was rapidly shooting up into a woman and didn't like it. (*LW*, 6)

For example her inability to cope with her own body which for various reasons is all the time “in her way” (*LW*, 6) might be perceived as an expression of her dissatisfaction with having a body of a girl instead of a boy. What suggests this even more is the very last sentence of this extract, which appears to be precise depiction of how uncomfortably Jo must feel about her own body. In other words, this extract highlights Jo's role of a tomboy. This seems to be also what Elbert implies since according to her, “Jo's strong sense of self is established in part by her rejection of fashion, which she perceives as a sign of dependency and sexual stereotyping.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, the extract can be considered as reflection of Jo's personality as is visible mainly in the sentence including description of her eyes. Only one sentence might seem as too short for depiction of the main characteristics of one's personality. Nevertheless, it appears that this one sentence demonstrates what Jo is like at the beginning of *Little Women*. In addition, its meaning seems to be symbolic for Jo's character is portrayed via description of Jo's eyes, and according to a common folklore belief, eyes are considered as reflection of one's soul. Thus based on few sentences one gets a vivid image of Jo's individuality.

Yet it is not Hester's or Jo's individuality as such what makes them outsiders. For what usually makes one be an outsider is the conviction of others that one is ‘weird’ or simply ‘different.’ Therefore whether one is or is not considered as the outsider, depends on the perception of individuality by the majority. Thus what makes Hester and Jo outsiders, are the social standards which were common in the periods of settings of *The Scarlet Letter* and *Little Women*.

At the beginning of *The Scarlet Letter*, it seems that especially women judge Hester harshly. They even criticise the magistrates for making Hester's punishment to be ‘only a public humiliation’ when, according to them, she would deserve execution (see *TSL*, 63-64). This might be actually perceived as reference to the historical custom, according to which Hester would probably have been executed for her actions. However, it also implies that the magistrates showed empathy when having chosen Hester's punishment as is visible

⁷⁶ Elbert, *Hunger for Home*, 205.

in the situation when a townsman is answering Chillingworth's questions about Hester while she is standing on the scaffold:

“Now, good Sir, our Massachusetts magistracy, bethinking themselves that this woman is youthful and fair, and doubtless was strongly tempted to her fall, and that, moreover, as is most likely, her husband may be at the bottom of the sea, they have not been bold to put in force the extremity of our righteous law against her. The penalty thereof is death. But in their great mercy and tenderness of heart they have doomed Mistress Prynne to stand only a space of three hours on the platform of the pillory, and then and thereafter, for the remainder of her natural life to wear a mark of shame upon her bosom.” (*TSL*, 76)

Mercy given to Hester by the magistracy might mean that the magistrates themselves knew that it may be hard to avoid committing a sin sometimes. Yet Hawthorne might have wanted to imply by this that even some acknowledged Puritan men were corrupted and had their sins too. Thus one could claim that when showing mercy to Hester, they were showing mercy to themselves. This seems to be suggested also later in the novel once Hester, thanks to being influenced by the scarlet letter, seems to be able to recognize sins of others (see *TSL*, 101-3). In addition, even Dimmesdale being a worshipped minister who one day is expected to have a high post and is perceived as an angel by Bostonians, appears to demonstrate that being respected and admired person does not secure one's purity since he Hester's partner in sin.

Although Hester's punishment may seem as merciful, on the other hand, it is meant to be constant penance for the rest of her life. Therefore one can argue that constant facing one's guilt and judgement of others is much worse than any physical punishment. In Hester's case it seems to be so at the beginning for, being marked by the scarlet letter, she is secluded from the rest of her community. This reflects in following extract:

In all her intercourse with society, however, there was nothing that made her feel as if she belonged to it. Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact, implied, and often expressed, that she was banished, and as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere, or communicated with the common nature by other organs and senses than the rest of human kind. She stood apart from mortal interests, yet close beside 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; or, should it succeed in manifesting its forbidden sympathy, awakening only terror and horrible repugnance. (*TSL*, 99)

Moreover, not only rich and distinguished people despise Hester, also the poor ones to whom she is a benefactor “often reviled the hand that was stretched forth to succour them” (*TSL*, 99), which demonstrates that during the first few years of her penance Hester cannot escape from judgement of others, except when being in solitude of her cottage. Otherwise she is constantly pointed out by parents who warn their children about “something horrible in this dreary woman” (*TSL*, 100), by strangers who being curious about the scarlet letter keep asking questions while staring at her, and even by ministers who often make her “the

text of the discourse” (*TSL*, 100) at their sermons. In other words, Hester is the outsider, somebody different and outstanding, the unwelcomed individual and appears to be constantly reminded of this fact at all circumstances.

As stated previously, Jo’s family supports her in being herself. Yet they are also trying to show her that in order to be accepted by the larger world, she must adjust her wild self and get her temper under control. Moreover, unlike Hester, Jo seems to be surrounded by many people who sympathize with her unique and ‘topsy turvy’ self. Laurie, the boy from next door, is one of them. Instead of judging her at the party at Mrs. Gardiner’s house where they finally get to know each other properly, he seems to be amused by “Jo’s gentlemanly demeanor” (*LW*, 28). When talking to him, Jo forgets to “keep the bad breadth out of sight” (*LW*, 25) as she must have promised to Meg before they came to the party. Last time Jo had burned her dress on the back, therefore Meg forbade her to dance and have fun so nobody could see the damaged dress. Still, when chatting with Laurie, Jo stops controlling herself and becomes “her merry self again, because her dress was forgotten and nobody lifted their eyebrows at her” (*LW*, 28), and finally begins to enjoy the party for she no longer has to pretend that she is somebody else. Also Laurie’s grandfather, Mr. Lawrence, likes Jo and considers her to be a good companion for Laurie after their first encounter “for her odd, blunt ways suited him, and she seemed to understand the boy almost as well as if she had been one herself” (*LW*, 51). In contrast to those who embrace Jo for whom she is, there are others who do not thoroughly approve of Jo’s behaviour, Aunt March being one of them. Aunt March “needed an active person to wait upon her” (*LW*, 36) and she decided that Jo would be the right person as “something in her comical face and blunt manners struck the old lady’s fancy” (*LW*, 36). This implies that Aunt March wanted Jo to be her companion for she liked Jo’s individual manners, yet, she tends to give Jo lectures “on her sins” (*LW*, 39) when she considers Jo’s behaviour inappropriate and thus tries to teach Jo how a proper young lady should behave. How beneficial Jo’s experience of working for Aunt March proves this quotation:

Jo’s ambition was to do something very splendid. What it was, she had no idea as yet, but left it for time to tell her, and meanwhile, found her greatest affliction in the fact that she couldn’t read, run, and ride as much as she liked. A quick temper, sharp tongue, and restless spirit were always getting her into scrapes, and her life was a series of ups and downs, which were both comic and pathetic. But the training she received at Aunt March’s was just what she needed, and the thought that she was doing something to support herself made her happy in spite of the perpetual “Josy-phine!” (*LW*, 36-37)

Thus it seems that Jo’s position is different from the position of Hester. For Hester’s individuality makes her live in seclusion, whereas Jo’s individuality, even though being the

cause of her struggles, seems to be accepted by the closest members of her community. All the suggestions and warnings people give to Jo do not occur as criticism of Jo's individuality itself, but rather as criticism of her inability to control herself and to adjust her behaviour when it is required. Therefore this criticism may be considered as embodiment of social expectations which were connected with being 'a little woman' in the nineteenth century, expectations of which Jo's relatives and friends are aware as much as Jo herself. Yet, in the first volume of the novel Jo refuses to submit to these expectations and to give up her "queer performances" (*LW*, 45) by which she often scandalizes even her own family.

3.2 Transformation

On their way to becoming productive members of society, Hester and Jo have to develop and it seems that the complex process of their transformation proves that neither of them sacrifices their individuality while finding a place in their communities they do fit in. Thus the aim of this subchapter is to point out key moments and key agents of their development, in order to demonstrate that it is possible to develop without losing one's true self, and to explain what role some members of their community play in this process.

It occurs that there is always one element reflecting Hester's and Jo's development. In Hester's case it is the scarlet letter, whereas when it comes to Jo it seems to be her writing. Thus the scarlet letter and Jo's 'scribbling' may be perceived as symbols reflecting important moments of Hester's and Jo's transformation. The way others perceive these symbols changes simultaneously with the way they perceive the heroines. In other words, when observing the perception of the scarlet letter by others and also by Hester herself, it appears that how the scarlet letter is viewed at certain moment is reflection of a change Hester underwent until that moment. When it comes to Jo's writing, who Jo is in some situation does not reflect so much in how others perceive her writing for the true mirror of Jo's personality seems to be rather her 'scribbling' as such.

As stated previously, at the beginning of the novel the scarlet letter is the symbol of Hester's sin and thus seals her seclusion from society. It might seem that once she is free and walks out of the prison door, the sequence of trials of upcoming days would make Hester give up her individuality as "she would become the general symbol at which the preacher and moralist might point, and in which they might vivify and embody their images of woman's frailty and sinful passion" (*TSL*, 93). Nevertheless, in real the scarlet letter helped her begin transformation to a strong and admired woman. In addition, what

seems defining about the moment when Hester is set free is her decision to stay in Boston and, moreover, her motive of staying itself:

Here, she said to herself had been the scene of her guilt, and here should be the scene of her earthly punishment; and so, perchance, the torture of her daily shame would at length purge her soul, and work out another purity than that which she had lost: more saint-like, because the result of martyrdom. (*TSL*, 95)

Thus her decision to stay is important for it shows that she is strong enough not to escape from her ordeal. Furthermore, it is defining for it enables Hester's transformation to happen. If she left, she would not face all the consequences of her actions, which seem to be the force forming her, as she would simply start over and therefore she could not develop the way she does when staying in Boston. As a result, Hester could not become "a Sister of Mercy" (*TSL*, 183) which is a social role she earns during seven years of her penance thanks to being a patient nurse which always appears in a home "darkened by trouble" (*TSL*, 183). Her new social role even reflects in interpretation of the scarlet letter by her community:

The letter was the symbol of her calling. Such helpfulness was found in her – so much power to do, and power to sympathise – that 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. (*TSL*, 183)

Thus it seems that even though the scarlet letter is originally the symbol of Hester's sin, it does not mean that its interpretation cannot change and since Hester is there for people who need her, it occurs natural that by some of them the scarlet letter is no longer read as Adulteress, and instead, is perceived as "Able" (*TSL*, 183). However, townsfolk occur to be more forgiving than the magistrates who need more time to acknowledge Hester's contribution to her community.

Yet the effect of the scarlet letter on how Hester feels and perceives herself does not seem positive for years of her penance deprived her of her femininity as demonstrates this extract:

Some attribute had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman. Such is frequently the fate, and such the stern development, of the feminine character and person, when the woman has encountered, and lived through, an experience of peculiar severity. If she be all tenderness, she will die. If she survive, the tenderness will either be crushed out of her, or – and the outward semblance is the same – crushed so deeply into her heart that it can never show itself more. The latter is perhaps the truest theory. She who has once been a woman, and ceased to be so, might at any moment become a woman again, if there were only the magic touch to effect the transfiguration. (*TSL*, 185-86)

Nevertheless, as the last sentence suggests this transformation does not have to be permanent. In addition, the scarlet letter also benefits Hester for thanks to her life in seclusion she is not dependent on society anymore which leads her to the point when "the

world's law" (*TSL*, 186) stopped being "law for her mind" (*TSL*, 186). According to Eaton and Pennell, Hester's isolation provides her with time "for introspection, during which she engages in independent thinking, allowing herself to consider ideas that the Puritans would label antinomian, as she places faith and love above obedience and moral law and social custom."⁷⁷ Hawthorne even suggests that if Hester did not have Pearl and did not have to fulfil her maternal duty, she might have become another Anne Hutchinson (see *TSL*, 186-87). All this seems to prove that even though wearing the scarlet letter might have deprived Hester of her womanhood, at the same time her ordeal strengthened her individuality as it made her free of restrictions of her community since she no longer believes in the Puritan moral law. Moreover, her life in penance occurs now as Hester's personal decision for once Chillingworth tells her that the magistrate discussed that she might stop wearing the scarlet letter, she refuses doing so while claiming that it is not up to them to decide when or whether her penance will end.

Even Pearl's perception of the scarlet letter is important for, according to her, Hester is not herself when not wearing the symbol. This might be caused by Pearl being accustomed to Hester wearing the scarlet A since she was a baby. It even occurs that Pearl views the scarlet letter as a connecting element between herself and her mother. Later, once Dimmesdale agrees to escape and to accept his role of a father in their family, Pearl seems to perceive the scarlet letter as a symbol connecting their whole family and she wants to know whether Dimmesdale will "always keep his hand over his heart" (*TSL*, 239), which is an equivalent of his invisible mark of the scarlet letter. Furthermore, Pearl refuses to come back to Hester and Dimmesdale in the forest unless Hester puts back on her breasts the scarlet letter she threw away once she and Dimmesdale decided to flee. This moment is important for it emphasizes how Hester's womanhood which reappeared once she put away the symbol of her penance, disappears again as the scarlet letter is on her breasts where it belongs according to the Pearl. Once the scarlet A is back, Pearl is satisfied and exclaims: "Now thou art my mother indeed! And I am thy little Pearl!" (*TSL*, 238) Thus it seems that Pearl is aware of the connection between herself, Hester, and the scarlet letter. Yet, the cause of Pearl's reaction might be also that she has never seen Hester without the scarlet A, and therefore she does not recognize her mother after transformation she

⁷⁷ Cathy Eaton and Melissa Pennell, "Introduction to Hester and Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne," Hawthorne in Salem, accessed November 9, 2014, <http://www.hawthorneinsalem.org/page/10186/>.

undergoes when throwing it away. This situation emphasizes how important part of Hester's identity the scarlet letter became since the time she went out of the prison seven years ago, for in Pearl's eyes Hester without wearing it occurs to be a stranger. Moreover, it makes Hester realise that while being in Boston she cannot simply let the scarlet A in the forest as only the "ocean shall take it from [her] hand, and swallow it up for ever" (*TSL*, 237). This implies that while living at the place of her sin and penance, Hester cannot free herself of the scarlet letter. Yet it does not mean that the symbol cannot transfer its meaning and instead of bringing doom to Hester it cannot help her to fulfil her transformation, and thus help her become an acknowledged person and a productive member of the Bostonian community.

One might argue that Jo's writing has nothing in common with Hester's scarlet letter. However, it is an important symbol of Jo's development as much as the scarlet A is for Hester. At the beginning of *Little Women*, Jo is a Romantic individual struggling with her topsy-turvy self, craving to be a boy and it is Jo's 'scribbling' what enables her to transform her Romantic ideals into plays which the March sisters perform after. Moreover, while being 'on stage' she can become a man at least for a while, for she always performs the male roles as "no gentlemen [are] admitted" (*LW*, 17). Thus Jo's plays, like *Operatic Tragedy* performed by the sisters on Christmas day, give her a chance to express her true self while not being judged by anybody and while getting praise for her artistic imagination. In addition, her writing appears in the middle of one of the biggest lessons of Jo's pilgrimage in the first part of *Little Women*. In the chapter "Jo Meets Apollyon" one learns more about Jo's impulsive nature:

Although the oldest, Jo had the least self-control, and had hard times trying to curb the fiery spirit which was continually getting her into trouble. Her anger never lasted long, and having humbly confessed her fault, she sincerely repented and tried to do better. Her sisters used to say that they rather liked to get Jo into a fury because she was such an angel afterward. Poor Jo tried desperately to be good, but her bosom enemy was always ready to flame up and defeat her, and it took years of patient effort to subdue it. (*LW*, 70)

When reading this extract and understanding how hard it is for Jo to control her temper and when considering how important her 'scribbling' is to her, it is not surprising that Amy's revenge for Jo "being so cross yesterday" (*LW*, 71) and not letting her go with them to theatre, makes Jo furious as Amy burned her book, which "was the pride of her heart, and was regarded by her family as a literary sprout of great promise" (*LW*, 72). After such a loss Jo is not able to forgive Amy and she does not even want to. Nevertheless, the upcoming events make her reconsider everything for Amy, willing to go skating with Jo and Laurie, almost gets drowned as Jo refuses to pay attention to her and does not warn

Amy that Laurie told her about ice being too thin. Jo is shaken by this event and although thanks to Laurie they get Amy safely home, Jo is afraid that she might “do something dreadful some day, and spoil [her] life, and make everybody hate [her]” (LW, 76). Thus she asks her mother for help. Marmee explains to Jo that she is also struggling with her passions and temper which seems to calm Jo down as she finds in Marmee a role model and a confidante who is able to understand her. After this episode Jo decides to continue with her pilgrimage “for in that sad yet happy hour, she had learned not only the bitterness of remorse and despair, but the sweetness of self-denial and self-control” (LW, 77).

What occurs as crucial for Jo’s ‘scribbling’ is the support of her family. Of high importance is that her family and Laurie consider her writing as promising and believe that one day she might be a successful writer. Moreover, the way the March sisters spend their free time appears to support Jo’s imaginative and creative spirit. As examples of that can serve the plays Jo writes and later performs with her sisters or their newspaper *The Pickwick Portfolio* which the sisters, later together with Laurie, publish every week. Also their Busy Bee Society is significant part of Jo’s chasing her dream of becoming a successful writer. This reflects for instance in her castle in the air which is supposed to be a promise of who she wants to be in ten years:

“I want to do something splendid before I go into my castle, something heroic or wonderful that won’t be forgotten after I’m dead. I don’t know what, but I’m on the watch for it, and mean to astonish you all some day. I think I shall write books, and get rich and famous, that would suit me, so that is my favorite dream.” (LW, 133)

Even though all these activities of March sisters seem only as playing, they are important factor providing Jo with stimulation in making her dream come true. In addition, her life inspires her to write a story she can be proud of later on. The first step to fulfilling her dream is that she decides to bring two of her stories to a local publisher. One of them “The Rival Painters” is published after a week which gives Jo hope that “in time [she] may be able to support [herself] and help the girls” (LW, 145).

This is exactly what she achieves in *Good Wives*. At the beginning one finds out that after Beth’s illness Jo “never went back to Aunt March” (GW, 9) and “devoted herself to literature and Beth” (GW, 9) in the meantime. This makes Jo satisfied for she gets paid “a dollar a column for her ‘rubbish’” (GW, 9) which makes her feel “a woman of means” (GW, 9). What seems to be as even more promising start of her ‘literary career’ is that Jo decides to write a sensation story “for the hundred-dollar prize offered” (GW, 44). Even though she is not used to write sensational stories, she finds out that “her theatrical experience” (GW, 45) serves her well as it provides with inspiration she needs to gain the

prize. After six weeks of waiting Jo receives a letter with “a cheque for a hundred dollars” (*GW*, 45), and it is the encouraging letter Jo values most for “after years of effort it was so pleasant to find that she had learned to do something, though it was only to write a sensation story” (*GW*, 46). The main reason of Jo’s success appears to be her honest motivation to “send Beth and Mother to the seaside for a month or two” (*GW*, 46). After her first big success Jo, “satisfied with the investment” (*GW*, 47), devotes herself “to work with a cheery spirit” (*GW*, 47) and since her motivation is honest, Jo’s wish to be able to support her family comes true as is visible in following extract:

She did earn several [cheques] that year, and began to feel herself a power in the house, for by the magic of a pen, her ‘rubbish’ turned into comforts for them all. ‘The Duke’s Daughter’ paid the butcher’s bill, ‘A Phantom Hand’ put down a new carpet, and the ‘Curse of the Coventrys’ proved the blessing of the Marches in the way of groceries and gowns. (*GW*, 47)

Since Jo’s stories sell, Jo resolves “to make a bold stroke for fame and fortune” (*GW*, 47) and thus she decides to try publishing her novel. Nevertheless, publishers want her to cut the novel. After her initial doubts and after calling “a family council” (*GW*, 47), Jo decides to accept the terms. However, she ends up disappointed and bewildered by the contradictory reviews for none of them seems true to her and they only make her confused. Still in the end she feels “herself the wiser and stronger for the buffeting she had received” (*GW*, 50) and thus it appears that thanks to the whole situation Jo learned her lesson.

Her writing of sensational stories provides Jo with one more important lesson. Even though after her experience with publishing the novel, she stops writing for a while, she starts with her ‘scribbling’ again once being in New York. Yet willing to do anything to satisfy the market, Jo’s writing and searching for inspiration in crimes and bad events begins to affect Jo’s personality negatively as “unconsciously she was beginning to desecrate some of the womanliest attributes of a woman’s character” (*GW*, 140). She does not realise this until the day when Mr. Bhaer criticises all the papers publishing sensational stories. Jo tries to defend the papers at first, yet, after she starts feeling ashamed for being one of the contributors. Therefore she resolves to stop writing sensational stories and starts with another extreme which results in her writing moral pieces reminding of sermons. As that does not suit her either, she tries writing for children, nevertheless, finding out that she lacks inspiration for that, Jo decides to give up writing completely for a while.

Later, as Beth is dying, Jo must promise Beth to take over her place in the family. Beth even asks Jo to stop with her ‘scribbling’ for their parents will need Jo to take care after them. Moreover, Beth believes that Jo can “be happier in doing that than writing splendid books or seeing all the world” (*GW*, 224). Thus by saying “I’ll try, Beth” (*GW*, 224), Jo

“renounced her old ambition, pledged herself to a new and better one, acknowledging the poverty of other desires, and feeling the blessed solace of a belief in the immortality of love” (GW, 224). This appears to be one of the most important moments of Jo’s transformation for losing Beth teaches her that love is more important than money and success. Furthermore, it seems that Beth’s death deprives Jo of her initial motivation to write as making life more beautiful for Beth seemed to be the main reason why Jo enjoyed being “the man of the family” (LW, 6). Nevertheless, her parents, noticing Jo’s dissatisfaction in doing nothing except fulfilling the domestic duties Beth used to do, encourage Jo “to write something for [them]” (GW, 245). Doing so brings Jo success as Jo finds her “style at last” (GW, 246) in writing simple domestic fiction stories. According to Zwinger, Jo’s writing of domestic stories and her way of doing so proves that Jo’s long journey of transformation was successful.⁷⁸ The best way to demonstrate this is to compare Jo’s attitude to domestic stories with her “vortex” (GW, 42) at the beginning of *Good Wives* which appears to be mirror of Jo’s Romantic temper as is visible in this extract:

She did not think herself a genius by any means, but when the writing fit came on, she gave herself up to it with entire abandon, and led a blissful life, unconscious of want, care, or bad weather, while she sat safe and happy in an imaginary world, full of friends almost as real and dear to her as any in the flesh. (GW, 42-43)

However, it is not the writing of sensation stories, reflecting Jo’s desires, what brings Jo true success. Instead, as Zwinger claims, Jo achieves her goal of writing something splendid via writing “a domestic sentimental tale with a suspicious resemblance to *Little Women*.”⁷⁹ Jo at first does not understand why that “small thing” (GW, 246) earns such admiration. Yet Marmee provides her with simple explanation: “You wrote with no thoughts of fame and money, and put your heart into it” (GW, 246). Thus it occurs that Jo must have changed for sooner when writing about things close to her heart, her stories were full of murders, treachery, and Romantic craving. In contrast, her new stories are written with motherly care (see GW, 246) and therefore it seems that Jo has grown into womanhood which reflects even in her writing. Moreover, as Keyser implies,⁸⁰ it is Jo’s writing which brings Friedrich Bhaer and Jo together, as one of sentimental poems Jo wrote after Beth’s death found its way to him and made him realise that Jo has changed

⁷⁸ Lynda Zwinger, “*Little Women*: The Legend of Good Daughters,” In *Daughters, Fathers, and the Novel: The Sentimental Romance of Heterosexuality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 55-56.

⁷⁹ Zwinger, “*Little Women*,” 56.

⁸⁰ See Elizabeth Lennox Keyser, ““The Most Beautiful Things in All the World”? Families in *Little Women*,” in “*Little Women*” and the Feminist Imagination: *Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays*, ed. Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark (New York: Garland, 1999), 93.

and needs somebody who would provide her with solace and support. Thus Jo's poem, giving hope to Bhaer, enables the final step of Jo's transformation to happen.

As important as the key moments of Hester's and Jo's transformation are also the key agents of that process. For one's interaction with society is an important element influencing one's development and thus even one's identity. Although Hester and Jo are outsiders at the beginning of the novels, it does not mean that their social interaction is not forming them. Even if living in seclusion, Hester Prynne still has her social roles, for example the role of being a public nurse. In addition, she needs townspeople to secure herself and little Pearl while working for them. Thus avoiding social intercourse is impossible for Hester. Even Jo March cannot avoid her social life and social duties at all circumstances. She might prefer being a tomboy and may not care what others think of her at the beginning of *Little Women*, however, she still seems to feel her duty to her family and therefore she knows she should control her behaviour at least in public. For instance, when being at the party at Mrs. Gardiner's house, she does not behave inappropriately when seen by others, except by Laurie, as she promised this to Meg and does not want to spoil the evening for her. Since neither Hester nor Jo can cease to be members of their community, it is necessary to comment on the key agents of their transformation for they affect the process of Hester and Jo becoming acknowledged members of society.

According to Eaton and Pennell, Hester's and Pearl's relationship is "a central component"⁸¹ of *The Scarlet Letter*. As it is suggested previously, Pearl is Hester's only companion in her seclusion. Moreover, she provides Hester with the role of mother, one more social role in which Hester's individuality is reflected. For example, Pennell claims that instead of raising Pearl according to strict Puritan rules, Hester lets Pearl explore the world freely on her own.⁸² In other words, it seems that Hester lets Pearl be a pure Romantic child. However, this almost deprives her of Pearl for the magistrates do not approve such nurturing. Thus Hester must ask Dimmesdale for help as her arguments, being arguments of a woman, are not taken seriously.⁸³ Nevertheless, also Hester's relationships with Arthur Dimmesdale and Roger Chillingworth are important part of the story and significant part of Hester's development. What seems to be crucial about her relationship with them, according to Easton, is that thanks to Hester's individuality which

⁸¹ Eaton and Pennell, "Introduction to Hester and Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter*."

⁸² See Pennell, "*The Scarlet Letter*," 1033.

⁸³ See Pennell, "*The Scarlet Letter*," 1033.

reflects in the form of her love for these men, she does not seem to “fit Chillingworth’s idea of a wife, nor Dimmesdale’s notion of the self-sacrificing woman.”⁸⁴ In a way, it appears that the misfortune of their ‘love triangle’ had started even before Hester came to Boston since Chillingworth was not able to provide Hester with the kind of love she needed even when they were still together overseas. Moreover, she did not love him when they got married which seems unfortunate as Hester is a passionate female individual. However, perhaps she did not mind what their marriage was like until she met Dimmesdale and experienced different kind of love which then might have made Hester view her marriage with Chillingworth as empty and gloomy. Therefore it appears natural that Hester did not feel as waiting any longer for her presumably dead husband and that she needed to find her comfort somewhere else. Finding it in arms of a young minister who was adored by the whole Bostonian community may be considered as logical since he was her confessor and thus her only comfort in her loneliness at a moment when she believed that her husband is either dead or still overseas. Nevertheless, these arguments do not change the fact that Hester’s adultery was a crime against the law of the seventeenth century Puritan community.

Yet when examining further events, Hester appears to be the only one of their ‘triangle’ who is able to deal with the situation while developing in a positive way. For Chillingworth’s craving for revenge transformed him “to a fiend” (*TSL*, 196) who having been consumed by his hatred for seven years lost his former “earnest, thoughtful and studious” (*TSL*, 195) self. Thus his life, once having been “peaceful and innocent” (*TSL*, 195), became full of gloom and evil. Neither did Arthur Dimmesdale handle the situation. When Hester meets him in the forest, after she decided that she does not want to keep Chillingworth’s secret anymore in order to protect Dimmesdale from Chillingworth’s evil influence, the minister is broken and tells Hester that he is “most miserable” (*TSL*, 215). Based on their conversation it appears that his guilt brought him near insanity. One of the best demonstrations of his misery seems to be this extract:

“Happy are you, Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon your bosom! Mine burns in secret! Thou little knowest what a relief it is, after the torment of a seven years’ cheat, to look into an eye that recognises me for what I am! Had I one friend – or were it my worst enemy! – to whom, when sickened with the praises of all other men, I could daily betake myself, and be known as the vilest of all sinners, methinks my soul might keep itself alive thereby. Even thus much of truth would save me! But now, it is all falsehood! – all emptiness! – all death!” (*TSL*, 216-17)

⁸⁴ Easton, *The Making of the Hawthorne Subject*, 224.

The extract also highlights that avoiding one's guilt and not dealing with it properly, in Dimmesdale's case by public confession, prevents one from moving on. For Dimmesdale might have kept his public role, however, for seven years he lived in a lie thus he committed another sin which for a godly man like him is something he is incapable to overcome on his own. Moreover, it appears that he lacks the courage to do so for he still cares about his public status. Thus the only solution for him is to pass the responsibility to Hester and Hester is then the one who decides that they will flee together and will become a family overseas. Their whole forest meeting implies that Hester is the stronger one of them two, the one who developed during the past seven years and became free of the social laws and restrictions. Nevertheless, it appears that Hester too needs Dimmesdale for their talk is what inspires her to throw away the scarlet letter and gain her femininity again. Thus, no longer being bound by the law of their community, she becomes free as "her sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty, came back from what men call the irrevocable past, and clustered themselves with her maiden hope, and a happiness before unknown, within the magic circle of this hour" (*TSL*, 228), even if only until she puts the scarlet letter back on her breasts. It seems that Dimmesdale's craving for change and wish for Hester to provide him with a solution give Hester hope for a new beginning and for their new meaningful future.

Each member of Jo's family belongs among the key agents influencing Jo's development. Although many crucial situations with them are stated previously, there are others which should be commented on in order to complete the image of Jo's transformation. Firstly, it is Beth's sickness for which Jo blames herself as she refused to visit Hummels instead of Beth even though Beth asked her to do so. Moreover, Marmee being gone to nurse their ill father in Washington makes the whole lesson even tougher since Jo lacks her role model which obviously results in Jo not watching her temper and actions as carefully as she should. Nevertheless, Beth's sickness makes from Jo a patient nurse and it teaches her that preferring her own interest to needs of others can have terrible consequences. Even if Beth recovers in the first part of *Little Women*, the whole situation seems to make Jo sober, probably even more than when Amy almost got drowned, for Beth is the angel of their household and she is also dearer to Jo than Amy. Second event after which Jo appears shaken is Meg's engagement to John Brooke. It makes Jo feel like if she has "lost [her] dearest friend" (*LW*, 216). According to Jo, the ideal solution of this situation would be if she "could marry Meg [herself], and keep her safe in the family" (*LW*, 187). Therefore once again Jo feels that being a man would be the best solution to all her

troubles. However, in the end she resigns as she does not have “heart to be jealous or dismal” (*LW*, 215) when seeing Meg happy with Brooke. At the end of the first volume, Jo herself appears to be satisfied for after the tough pilgrimage they all successfully underwent during last year, the family is united again and everybody seems happy. Despite it being a hard year and despite Jo’s struggling, her effort to become a ‘little women’ her family could be proud of was successful. This is observable in Mr March’s comment on Jo’s transformation once he is finally back home:

“I don’t see the ‘on Jo’ whom I left a year ago,” said Mr. March. “I see a young lady who pins her collar straight, laces her boots neatly, and neither whistles, talks slang, nor lies on the rug as she used to do. Her face is rather thin and pale just now, with watching and anxiety, but I like to look at it, for it has grown gentler, and her voice is lower... I rather miss my wild girl, but if I get a strong, helpful, tenderhearted woman in her place, I shall feel quite satisfied.” (*LW*, 205)

Therefore, as the extract proves, Jo’s pilgrimage during that year was successful and all the hardships which were part of it helped her develop and thus also helped Jo successfully begin the journey of becoming a respected member of her community.

Jo’s development continues in the second volume of *Little Women* and her family keeps playing key role in it. One of the lessons Jo learns is connected with her unwillingness to control herself during calls which Jo promised Amy to attend. Jo strictly follows any orders Amy gives her about every particular visit and behaves inappropriately every time. This makes Amy resign and agree that Jo can be herself while they pay a visit to Aunt March. Still before they go there, Amy warns Jo that she should try to control herself and should not “worry Aunt with [her] new ideas” (*GW*, 81). However, Jo refuses to behave properly, instead she is cross during the visit and states:

“I don’t like favours, they oppress and make me feel like a slave. I’d rather do everything for myself, and be perfectly independent.” (*GW*, 82)

Since Aunt March and Aunt Carrol are trying to decide whether Amy or Jo should be given the opportunity to visit Europe, thanks to her inappropriate behaviour Jo unintentionally deprives herself of the option. Perhaps if she had known what was in stake, she would have behaved properly. However, she did not know and she does not find out until the decision is made. Thus it is too late for Amy is the one who is asked to go. It appears that the whole situation finally provides Jo with the lesson all members of her family considered as inevitable. Jo did not take their well-meaning advice as a sufficient reason to control her “blunt manners and too independent spirit” (*GW*, 95). She seems to have needed this experience to realise that perhaps Amy was right when telling her that “women should learn to be agreeable, particularly poor ones; for they have no other way of repaying the kindnesses they receive” (*GW*, 80). If Jo had taken her advice seriously before they went to

Aunt March, Jo would have been given the option of spending marvellous time in Europe. Nevertheless, Jo's transformation could not continue as it is supposed to since if Jo left, it would prevent her from staying with Beth and her parents when she is needed. In other words, without going through "The Valley of Shadow" (*GW*, 219-25) with Beth Jo would probably never become the woman she does in the end.

There are two more key agents of Jo's transformation and those are Laurie and Friedrich Bhaer. It appears that Laurie fits in life of Jo the tomboy, whereas Professor Bhaer is the one who can complete Jo's life once her transformation is finished. Nevertheless, both of them play important roles in Jo's development. As it is suggested in the second chapter, Laurie is the one who supports the masculine part of Jo, with whom she can run in the streets, and who makes her feel free. On the other hand, he also evokes in Jo feeling of maternal duties as is visible in her trying to make him become a respectable gentleman they all could be proud of. Jo often even calls Laurie "my boy" (*LW*, 167). In a way, Laurie's lacking his mother seems to make Jo feel a need to provide him with one and thus Jo's taking care of him helps her in becoming 'a little woman.' In other words, as Keyser argues, "Laurie not only accepts, encourages, and provides a model for the development of Jo's masculine side he also elicits and nurtures the feminine."⁸⁵ At the end of the novel, Jo even pronounces him as a role model for her future pupils as she considers Laurie as the first boy she successfully brought up "to be a pride and honour to his family" (*GW*, 305). In addition, if Laurie had not fallen in love with her and if Jo had not realised that, she might not have left to New York and therefore she would have missed the experience of being independent which is crucial a part of her journey to becoming her better self. As a result, she would not have met Professor Bhaer who is the other significant male figure of Jo's transformation. Friedrich Bhaer does not only fill the emptiness which Jo feels while being so far away from her home, he also becomes her friend and her mentor. Thanks to him Jo begins "to see that character is a better possession than money, rank, intellect, or beauty" (*GW*, 145). Thus it appears that his kind nature inspires Jo to want to become a better person once again. She values his opinions and takes his advice seriously, in other words, he becomes her role model at a moment when her family is too far away to look after her. What an important role Professor Bhaer played in Jo's winter in New York is visible when Jo is leaving, for she feels satisfied while having a "happy

⁸⁵ Keyser, "The Most Beautiful Things in All the World?" 87.

though” (GW, 152) in her mind: “Well, the winter’s gone, and I’ve written no books, earned no fortune, but I’ve made a friend worth having and I’ll try to keep him all my life” (GW, 152). Based on this quotation, it seems that Jo’s New York experience helped her realise that there are more important things than doing something marvellous and becoming famous, for love or friendship can often provide one with greater satisfaction.

Moreover, Friedrich Bhaer proves to have more crucial role in Jo’s life than being her friend and her mentor as he appears to be the one who seals her transformation. For once he finally comes to provide Jo with solace after Beth’s death, Jo realises that she needs somebody to fill the empty space in her life since Beth is gone and her other sisters are married. Thus when he asks her to marry him Jo agrees while declaring: “I’m to carry my share, Friedrich, and help to earn the home” (GW, 300). This signals that she is willing to enter the marriage if she is treated as an equal partner. At this moment it appears that Jo’s transformation is complete and she is ready to start another period of her life, different from the one she led as the tomboy. Nevertheless, Jo still has her democratic ideas about what marriage should look like and therefore when deciding to enter the marriage, she does not surrender her individuality to her future husband for she wants to preserve her individuality in order to bring her own share to their union.

3.3 Becoming Productive Members of American Society

The ending of *The Scarlet Letter* seems to emphasize Hester’s individualism. For if events proceeded the way Hester had hoped and if their family had become united and if they had started new life overseas, Hester might have never become the respected advisor of women in need as she does at the end of the novel. Thus it seems that Dimmesdale’s public confession and his death enable Hester to follow the path which was subscribed to her by the scarlet letter. It may seem surprising that Hester comes back to Boston. However, it appears that Hester still feels that “here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her penitence” (TSL, 293). Therefore of her own free will she again starts wearing the scarlet letter. Yet, it is no longer the same symbol as it used to be for it “became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence too” (TSL, 293). Thus the scarlet letter, once having been the symbol of her role of the outsider who did not deserve to be a part of Bostonian society, becomes the symbol of Hester earning a respectful place in her community. Especially, she becomes a comforter of women who are lost and in need of comfort and advice as is visible in this extract:

Hester... counselled them, as best she might. She assured them, too, of her firm belief that, at some brighter period, when... a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness. (*TSL*, 293)

Nevertheless, in the Puritan community of the seventeenth century the change described in the last sentence of this extract could not have happened as the Puritan community was patriarchal and the main roles of a woman were being a good wife and a good mother.⁸⁶

Moreover, Hawthorne suggests that Hester is not the woman who could be a prophetess of such a change as is visible in this extract:

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. (*TSL*, 294)

This seems to be a reference to the nineteenth century women and the Cult of Domesticity. It appears that Hawthorne believed that establishing new relationship between men and women was possible only through a woman who embraced her female virtues. According to Pennell, Hawthorne was against radicalism of reform movements and therefore he was convinced that this sort of change can happen only if a woman “finds balance between her individual needs and her obligations to the community.”⁸⁷ When considering this it seems that Hawthorne perceived Hester’s individualism both as positive and negative. Positive is that her individuality gives Hester strength and makes her independent and free of the strict Puritan rules. However, it is also the cause of her burdens for thanks to her individuality Hester is unable to adapt at the beginning which occurs as the negative consequence of her being such an outstanding individual.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, in the end it is Hester’s individuality and her inner strength what helps her earn the place of a productive member of Bostonian society. In other words, Hester finds her way to fit in without betraying her true self as, unlike Dimmesdale, she uses her penance to become a better person.

Many readers of various generations were outraged by the ending of *Little Women*, mainly by the fact that Jo marries Friedrich Bhaer. For instance, a lot of girls wrote Alcott letters expressing hope for Jo marrying Laurie before the second volume of the novel was published.⁸⁹ However, if Jo had married Laurie, it seems that none of them could further develop for together they could not have a functional relationship. This is what Marmee suggests when Jo is discussing with her that she wants to spend winter in New York:

⁸⁶ See Pennell, “*The Scarlet Letter*,” 1032.

⁸⁷ Pennell, “*The Scarlet Letter*,” 1035.

⁸⁸ See Pennell, “*The Scarlet Letter*,” 1035.

⁸⁹ See Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott*, 271.

You are too much alike and too fond of freedom, not to mention hot tempers and strong wills, to get on happily together, in a relation which needs infinite patience and forbearance, as well as love. (GW, 117)

Therefore one can argue that refusing Laurie's proposal after Jo comes back from New York is actually the best decision Jo could have made in order to continue with her transformation. In contrast, some feminist critics argue that when adopting the womanly behaviour and successfully finishing her journey to womanhood, Jo ceases her individuality for she adjusts to social norms and stops being the wild tomboy.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, one can also perceive the change of Jo's personality as a natural part of becoming mature and, as Stimpson implies, one can consider transformation of her "strong-willed love of personal freedom in to a patriotic love of national freedom"⁹¹ as a positive aspect of her development. Moreover, without transforming Jo would not become a productive member of her community who is capable to prefer needs of others to her own.

In addition, it does not seem that Jo would have given up her individuality in the process of reaching her womanhood. On the contrary, one can argue that she did not as she is surrounded by boys at Plumfield, is an equal partner in her marriage, and sometimes she even uses strong words as "living among boys, [she] can't help using their expressions now and then" (GW, 313). Furthermore, Jo's castle in the air may be different from the one she planned for herself fifteen years ago, yet Jo does not seem to regret it:

"Yes, I remember, but the life I wanted then seems selfish, lonely, and cold to me now. I haven't given up the hope that I may write a good book yet, but I can wait, and I'm sure it will be all the better for such experiences and illustrations as these," and Jo pointed from the lively lads in the distance to her father, leaning on the Professor's arm, as they walked to and fro in the sunshine, deep in one of the conversations which both enjoyed so much, and then to her mother, sitting enthroned among her daughters, with their children in her lap and at her feet, as if all found help and happiness in the face which never could grow old to them. (GW, 312)

It occurs that having Plumfield, her home and a school for boys, and living in the equal marriage provides Jo with her little utopia where she has a social role suiting her. Moreover, being supported by all the people she loves, Jo feels "far happier than [she] deserves" (GW, 313). Therefore it seems that Jo has finally found a place in her community she fits in and that way became a productive member of American society.

⁹⁰ This is implied for example by the editors Alberghene and Clark as they comment on diverse approaches of the feminist critics towards the ending of *Little Women* in their introduction to *"Little Women" and the Feminist Imagination*, xvii.

⁹¹ Catharine R. Stimpson, "Reading for Love: Canons, Paracanons, and Whistling Jo March," in *"Little Women" and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays*, ed. Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark (New York: Garland, 1999), 74.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to demonstrate that Hester Prynne and Jo March become respected and productive members of American society without losing their individuality in the process. In other words, to prove that Nathaniel Hawthorne and Louisa May Alcott created in Hester and Jo strong female protagonists who except being complex characters, have in common their transformation from being not fitting in outsiders up to becoming beneficial part of their communities. And most of all, who, even after the process of transformation is over, keep their strong and unique selves.

To summarize the key points of the analysis, Hester and Jo are both outsiders at the beginning of the novels as Hester is an adulteress, whereas Jo is a tomboy. What, except their individuality, makes them outsiders is also the way others perceive them. However, both of them decide to tackle their burdens at the beginning of *The Scarlet Letter* and *Little Women* and these decisions appear to start their transformation, in other words, to begin their journey of becoming productive and acknowledged members of American society. The process of their development is not easy and somebody might suggest that it deprives Hester and Jo of their individuality as Hester seems to lose her femininity by wearing the scarlet letter, while Jo stops being the wild and rough tomboy. In a way, they seem to stop being the pure Romantic individuals they were at the beginning. Nevertheless, it is natural to change in order to develop, and therefore some aspects of one's personality might become less visible than the others. Yet that does not mean that Hester and Jo would lose their individuality. On the contrary, in Hester's case the process of transformation makes her even stronger female individual than she was at the beginning. As the analysis further argues, it is visible that Hester's life in seclusion from Bostonian society helped her develop her individual thinking. Thanks to which she becomes a valuable advisor to all souls, especially vulnerable women, who need comfort and counsel. In contrast, as a result of her transformation, Jo finally finds her way to womanhood and gains a home where, surrounded by boy pupils, she lives a satisfying life while doing something beneficial for her community. In addition, she did not even sacrifice her dream of writing "something splendid" (*LW*, 133) someday when entering the marriage with Friedrich Bhaer as she still believes that she "may write a good book yet" (*GW*, 312) at the end of the novel. To conclude, neither Hester Prynne nor Jo March stopped being strong female individuals in the process of finding their place in American society they do fit in.

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