

学校编码: 10384

分类号 _____ 密级 _____

学号: X2007111010

UDC _____

厦 门 大 学

硕 士 学 位 论 文

从生态女性主义角度解读《红字》

An Ecofeminist Reading of *The Scarlet Letter*

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论文提交日期: 2012 年 11 月

论文答辩日期: 2012 年 月

学位授予日期: 2012 年 月

答辩委员会主席: _____

评 阅 人: _____

2012 年 月

建立和谐的世界: 从生态女性主义角度解读《红字》

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厦门大学博硕士

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Abstract

Nathaniel Hawthorne is considered to be one of the most significant American writers in the 19th century. Most of his works focus on the Puritanism of New England. *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne's masterpiece, portrays the cruelty of the Puritanism and its killing of human nature. Since its publication in 1850, *The Scarlet Letter* has received extensive literary attention. The scholars at home and abroad have done extensive research into Hawthorne and the novel from different angles. The main tasks of ecofeminism are to analyze the relationship between the patriarchal oppression of women and the human domination of non-human nature. In order to reach their aims, ecofeminists draw on the approaches of ecological criticism and feminist criticism to deconstruct anthropocentrism and advocate building a kind of harmonious relationship between human beings and nature. This thesis tries to explore Hawthorne's ecofeminist consciousness implied in *The Scarlet Letter* and preliminarily analyzes the author's attempt to break the traditional power structure and political order under male domination, and his ideal to create a human society based on equality and harmony.

There are six parts in the thesis, with four chapters coming between the introduction and the conclusion. The introduction includes a brief introduction of the author's literary achievement, his status in the history of literature, the novel's main plot, position and current research status. Chapter One provides a theoretical framework based on which the thesis develops, that is, ecofeminism, including ecofeminism, its development and the main thoughts of ecofeminism. Chapter Two explores the formation of Hawthorne's ecofeminist consciousness. Hawthorne's family background and the influence from transcendentalists and feminists make him ponder the women's marginal status in the patriarchal society. And the social reality of his time and the influence from Puritanism stimulate him to accuse the cruelty and harshness of puritan society. Chapter Three mainly analyzes the ecofeminism

embodied in *The Scarlet Letter* from two aspects, with the first part demonstrating the oneness between women and nature and the second analyzing the oppression men inflict on women and nature. Chapter Four explores the prospects of harmony in the world. Hawthorne delineates an ideal world where human beings and nature coexist in harmony. The conclusion part further summarizes the ecofeminism embodied in *The Scarlet Letter* through the analysis of above chapters.

Key words: ecofeminism; woman; harmony; The Scarlet Letter

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摘 要

纳撒尼尔·霍桑是十九世纪美国最重要的作家之一。他的作品主要着眼于新英格兰的清教主义。他的代表作《红字》描写了清教主义的残酷和它对人性的扼杀。《红字》自 1850 年问世以来，一直受到人们的广泛关注。国内外学者从多角度对霍桑及其作品《红字》进行了深入研究。生态女性主义的主要任务是分析男性对女性的压迫和人类对自然的压迫之间存在的联系。它借鉴生态批评和女性批评的方法，解构人类中心主义，提倡建立一种人和自然之间和谐相处的关系。本文试从生态女性主义角度探讨霍桑的小说《红字》，并对作者试图打破传统的男权统治的权力结构、政治秩序，构建平等和谐的人类社会这一理念进行初步分析。

本文包括六个部分：绪论、第一、二、三、四章和结论。引言部分主要对霍桑的文学成就和在文学史上的地位，小说的主要情节和小说的地位以及研究现状做简要介绍。第一章主要提供了研究展开的理论基础：生态女性主义。简要介绍了生态女性主义理论，及其发展历程和主要观点。第二章分析了霍桑生态女性主义意识的形成。霍桑的家庭背景，以及超验主义者和女权主义者对他的影响，使他开始思索父权制社会下女性的边缘化地位。他所处时代的社会现实及清教主义的影响促使他控告清教社会的残忍和严厉。第三章主要从两方面分析了红字所体现的生态女性主义意识：第一部分展现了女性与自然的一致性；第二部分分析男性对女性和自然的压迫。第四章探析了霍桑对未来和谐世界的期望。他向我们展示了一幅人类与自然和谐共处的图画。结论部分对《红字》以上章节的分析做出总结，对小说中体现的生态女性主义思想做进一步归纳。

关键词：生态女性主义；女性；和谐；红字

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Introduction

Nathaniel Hawthorne is a distinguished American novelist, short story writer, and essayist. He is regarded as a representative master in the field of moral and allegorical writing in American literature. Herman Melville even hails him as the American Shakespeare. Hawthorne's collection of stories displays stylistic freshness and a keen interest in American subject matter instead of the continental literature and life, therefore he is acclaimed as one of the first American novelists by the great talents in his period. His works particularly concern the deep mystery of man's soul and conscience. Hawthorne devotes himself to exploring some aspects of human nature, namely, evil and sin, within such themes as isolation, guilt, concealment, social reform, and redemption. In his eyes, all forms of social problems, interpersonal conflicts, and all crimes have the root in the universal evil in human nature.

Hawthorne often chooses Puritan New England as the setting of his stories, in which the individuals share responsibilities for moral order. He strives to probe individual and collective consciousness under the pressures of anguish and suffering. His characters are from "a community of Puritans", who are always obsessed with this or that sin, either a scientist, an artist, an idealist, or those living in extremes and absolutes together with their distorted desires. It is obvious that Hawthorne is an expert in getting insight into his characters. According to the review of Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Hawthorne is one of the first major American writers of fiction to focus on the interior lives of his characters, to explore what Henry James would later call the deeper psychology of art" (Harris 267).

Hawthorne's works mainly include four romances: *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Blithedale Romance*, and *The Marble Faun*, three short story collections: *Twice Told tales*, *Moss from an Old Manse*, and *Snow Image and Other Twice Told Tales*, and two myth collections: *A Wonder—Book for Girls and Boys* and *Tanglewood Tales for Girls and Boys*. In 1837 he published his first

acknowledged book *Twice-Told Tales*, which received favorable reviews and sold steadily for months, gradually earning him a considerable reputation. In 1846, he published *Mosses from an Old Manse* which is a more mature collection. The American Review comments, “In the *Mosses from an Old Manse*, it seems to us that his life has deepened since that which gave us *Twice-Told Tales*” (Perkins 576). Hawthorne is accorded due recognition by many of his contemporary men of letters and his important place in American literature is fully recognized. Charles Fenno Hoffman says that “*The Twice-told Tales* are well worth twice telling. They are the offspring of a calm, meditative fancy, enlivened at times with a flickering ray of humor” (Hoffman 281). Edgar Allan Poe commends that “We have very few American tales of real merit—we may say, indeed, none, with the exception of ‘*The Tales of a Traveller*’ of Washington Irving, and these ‘*Twice-Told Tales*’ of Mr. Hawthorne...; Of Mr. Hawthorne’s Tales we would say, emphatically, that they belong to the highest region of Art—an Art subservient to genius of a very lofty order...” (Poe 298-300). Herman Melville also thinks highly of *Mosses from an Old Manse*. He states that “*Mosses from an Old Manse* will be ultimately accounted his [Hawthorne’s] Masterpiece” (Melville 53-86).

Among all Hawthorne’s works, *The Scarlet Letter* is probably the most famous and successful one. The story takes place in the 17th century Boston. The protagonist of the novel Hester Prynne follows her husband, a scholar who is much older than she is, emigrating from Britain to New England. However, he never arrives in Boston. Before long word comes that Hester’s husband has been lost at sea. While waiting for her husband, Hester falls in love with a brilliant minister Arthur Dimmesdale and gives birth to a baby, which is against the doctrine of the Puritanism and will be punished. So on a summer morning in the puritan town of Boston, Hester stands on the scaffold holding her illicit child as a humiliation of a sinner for her adultery, wearing a scarlet letter A as a sign of shame. When she is urged to identify her child’s father, Hester keeps silent and leaves Arthur Dimmesdale anonymous in the affair. Just at that time, Hester’s husband appears and he is bewildered to see her in pillory. Determined to find out who is the adulterer, Hester’s husband disguises himself as a

physician and calls himself “Roger Chillingworth”. He settles in Boston, intent on revenge. He reveals his true identity to no one but Hester, whom he has sworn to secrecy. Refusing to confess his sin to the public, Dimmesdale appears to be wasting away and suffers from mysterious heart trouble, seemingly caused by psychological distress. In the meanwhile, Chillingworth tries all means to torment the minister. Dimmesdale cannot do anything but banish himself from the community. But Hester is able to reconstruct her life and wins a moral victory. Shunned by the community, she makes her living by fine sewing and embroidering. At the meantime, Hester’s charitable deeds and quiet humility have earned her a reprieve from the scorn of the community. The torture Dimmesdale suffers from makes Hester realize that she should reveal the true identity of Chillingworth to him. Then she makes the decision to flee to Europe together with Dimmesdale. They agree to find a ship that is due to sail after Dimmesdale gives his last sermon. Unexpectedly, on the scaffold the minister confesses his sin and dies in the arms of Hester. Frustrated in his revenge, Chillingworth dies a year later and leaves a large amount of money to Pearl. Afterwards Pearl marries a European aristocrat and establishes a family of her own. When Hester dies, she is buried next to Dimmesdale. The two share a single tombstone, which bears a scarlet “A”.

This novel is the culmination of Hawthorne’s own reading, study, and experimentation with themes about the subjects of Puritans, sin, guilt and the human conflict between emotions and intellect. Since its first publishing in 1850, *The Scarlet Letter* has never been out of print. Naturally, such a popular and controversial book can not be silenced. Since its publication, many researchers and scholars have been studying it in various ways. For instance, E. A. Duyckinck, a prominent 19th century American editor and the co-author of the Encyclopaedia of American literature labeled the novel “a psychological romance” and concluded that there was “no truer product of the American soil” (Harris 269) than Hawthorne. Anthony Trollope was one of the first men to point out Hawthorne’s ambivalent attitude towards his subject matter. Carl Van Doren, a noted 19th century American critic, editor, historian and biographer explored the way in which the themes of *The Scarlet Letter* are reflected

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