Nathaniel Hawthorne And Puritanism

There are very deep bonds between Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Puritan ancestors, and this is what influenced his creation of a story which highlighted both their strengths and weaknesses. Nathaniel's knowledge of the Puritan's beliefs as well as admiration for their positives was set on balance by the concerns that he had for their oppressive and rigid rules. His attitudes toward the Puritans are portrayed in 'The Scarlet Letter' as he portrays the characters, the themes and the plot of the story.

Puritans departed from the Old World with an aim of 'purifying' the church in England. The main concern was that the services were not simple and that in a religion there should be a deep spiritual relationship between a person and the God that they are worshipping. This relationship between the person and God was mediated by the government and clergy in England (Hawthorne & Person, 2017). Since the Puritans opted to be against such assumptions, there arose persecution against them in England. This is what led some of them to run to Holland and as a result, to the new world. They were hoping to establish a society which is described as 'city on a hill', which would be a place where all people would be seeing them. In that place, if they were to obey and glorify God's ways, they would be blessed and prospered. Nathaniel gives the irony in this concept while describing the prison as a building which is torn already after the colony is only fifteen in age.

The viewpoint of Hawthorne of such society appears to be disclosed in some areas within the novel especially in the house of the Governor and also in the holiday of New England. On the walls of Bellingham are the portraits of Hawthorne's forefathers that put on formal and stately clothes of Old World (Hawthorne & Person, 2017). He states that all of the ancestors were characterized by severity and sternness that the old portraits wore. It is as though they were ghosts instead of just photos, of worthies that have departed, and they were looking with intolerant and harsh criticism in the enjoyments and pursuits of the men who are living.

While recounting of the holiday set apart in New England in honour of the government change, Hawthorne gives a description of the parade-goers of non-Puritans in terms full of joy. Their behaviour, their dressing and the happiness which is painted on their faces does not seem like their nature. In his writing, he makes a pointed understatement that puritans compacted the public joy and mirth which they considered acceptable to infirmities of humans, and as result they dispelled customary cloud which for the period of one holiday, they seemed barely more grave compared to majority of other societies in the time of general affliction (Crowley, 2013).

The gift of Hawthorne for the ironic understatement needs to be balanced by the fact that he senses in connection to the Puritan ancestors and he also admires several qualities of theirs. It is worth considering the description which Hawthorne offers of them in the preface in the Custom House. According to him, he perceives them as the old General which he describes such as people of moral courage, perseverance, strength and integrity. Hawthorne also shares the bother for the disdain which they have toward the need to have a commercial job which offers very little to the community in terms of spiritual benefits (Crowley, 2013). Furthermore, Hawthorne seems to condemn the tax supervisor who lacks spiritual compass and sensibility.

The heroine of the novel is Hester, who is a feminist and she is very forgiving just as it is with the people who ae around her are unforgiving. Nathaniel brings her as one who is willing to assist the people that are reviling her and also sufficiently loyal to live near the Dimmesdale, regardless his fearfulness which is portrayed by his not claiming Pearl to be his own daughter (Hawthorne & Person, 2017). Also, she agrees to maintain the secret of Chillingworth regardless of how much it was costing her. Ideally, there is no one of the Puritans within the novel who is portrayed sympathetically. There is marginalization and mistreatment of Hester by the populace and threatening to go away with her child. She is continually shun by her lover all the way till he passed on. She is tortured psychologically by her husband. All this torture and mistreatment which she goes through is clearly executed by this particular clique of Christians, while Hester, who fails to choose their religion readily, does not do anything to revenge for what is done against her (Hawthorne, 2010).

So clearly majority of Nathaniel Hawthorne's deal with religion. Often, his characters are portrayed as struggling with their religious beliefs. In addition, it can be deduced that he wasn't comfortable being in his religion and through some ways he renounced it via writings. The reader can clearly point out that his characters are illustrating hypocrisy as well as being victims of their personal guilt. Hawthorne makes profuse utilization of the past of Puritan including its harsh ruling code, witchcraft and odd exclusionary belief.

References

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