CONCLUSION:

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The more one dwells on Updike’s “The Scarlet Letter Trilogy”, the more one becomes aware of the affinity between the two novelists belonging to two different centuries. Updike has always had a Hawthorne obsession looming large over his consciousness. He puts forward this idea in a series of articles and interviews. Suffice it to say, The Scarlet Letter remains a monumental classic not because of Updike’s Trilogy on it and Christopher Bigsby’s intertexts, but in spite of the fact that both Updike and Bigsby have taken over where Hawthorne had left off. This serves to prove how much blood The Scarlet Letter had.

Having acknowledged Hawthorne as the “author of our classic novel of religious conscience and religious suffering” , one who “had a lot of things to say to the modern world”, and having candidly declared that “one would love even to aspire to be as good as Hawthorne”, Updike admits to have “thrown almost by accident into the Hawthorne territory”. If Updike’s philosophical corpus is conditioned by his reading of Kierkegaard and John Barth, his literary self is largely shaped by his affiliation to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Salinger and Nabokov. Hawthorne may be treated as his literary model.
I have already shown the intertextual resonances and dissonances between The Scarlet Letter and Updike’s Trilogy. This chapter broadly reexamines the issue, pointing out the similarities and differences between these two authors in general.

Natheniel Hawthorne was primarily preoccupied with the moral and psychological issues that racked the human heart. Born in Salem, a place ravaged by unbridled fanaticism of early Quakerism and the uncompromising bigotry of Puritanism, Hawthorne was harassed by his descent from John Hathorne, one of the judges of the infamous Salem witch trials of 1692. Hawthorne’s characters are torn between, as it were, an individual’s instinctive impulse and the codes of social morality. Hawthorne tried to show how the asphyxia of moral ethics of a rigid puritan society tried to choke the passionate instinctual efflorescence of the human heart. The constrictions and restrictions imposed by the puritanical forefathers stifled the natural flow of life-enhancing instincts of human behaviour in Hawthorne who presented his America beleaguered by the grim repressions and grave decorousness of the puritans. As Professor Turner so rightly observes that “Hawthorne’s indebtedness to the history of New England was a good deal larger than has ordinarily been supposed”. Elizabeth Peabody, Hawthorne’s sister-in-law, endorses a similar opinion and says that
Hawthorne “made himself thoroughly acquainted with the ancient history of Salem, and especially with the witchcraft era”\(^7\). Updike transforms this grim America of Hawthorne into a jovial one in keeping with the free, liberal, progressive America liberated from the orthodox severity of puritanism. The severe and harsh puritanical forefathers of Hawthorne are supplanted by jovial and liberated American living at their own sweet will.

While Hawthorne’s works are suffused with a sombre tragic glow, Updike’s novels are couched in a polished comic style. Since during Hawthorne’s time the love-ethic and moral issues were rigid and highly punctilious, Hawthorne was concerned with the serious and the tragic. Things have changed substantially in Updike who, chiming with the carefree spirit of his age, is concerned with the playful and the comic. If Hawthorne was very much serious with codes of social and religious morality, Updike makes a travesty of such a decorous morality in his works which therefore, often, appear to be a flagrant parody of Hawthorne. In this connection one may note that Linda Hutcheon\(^8\) treats parody as a postmodern device. Thus the ironhanded gravity of Hawthorne’s temperament is lost in the frivolity of Updike’s world.
Hawthorne used a highly romantic style in presenting the passionate flow of an individual cluttered in the stagnancy of socio-religio orthodoxy. Updike’s works, on the other hand, are couched in an unabashed, free, clinical realism. Updike, in a sense, deromanticizes and deglamorizes the dignified formal indulgence of Hawthorne.

But as regards style, what connects Updike with the axis of Hawthorne is that both used a liturgical language redolent of religion and theosophy. “A very vivid ghost of Christianity stares out at us from his [Hawthorne’s] prose” ("Creed" 76), observed Updike. If "Hawthorne’s vocabulary retained phrases of conventional piety" ("Creed" 75), Updike’s own vocabulary is steeped in theosophical and Christian idiom. But this theosophical inclination of Updike can be traced back more to his family background than to his filiations with Hawthorne.

Hawthorne fights shy of presenting the libido overtly in his work. Scarcely do we find in him an explicit display of the erotic encounters of his characters. Even in The Scarlet Letter, the act of adultery between Hester and her pastor Dimmesdale has been tactfully parried or implicitly referred to. There has always been a conscious attempt of hushing up the sexual acts in Hawthorne. Hawthorne had, as it were, something dark and shadowy in him and was disguised in a dense romantic shroud, giving vent to eros only

Hawthorne is often criticized for his double-edged narrative particularly evinced in *The Scarlet Letter*. A puritan wrestling with puritanism, Hawthorne was, as it were, a split man who could not freely write what his heart wanted to say. That is why in the unique narratology of *The Scarlet Letter* we find a second disguised Hawthorne playing hide and seek with the narratology. Although the outer Hawthorne punishes Hester, the inner Hawthorne supports her and even goes to the extent of deifying her. D. H. Lawrence\(^10\) invites us to “look through the surface of American art, and see the inner diabolism of the symbolic meaning” (*Studies* 78). Lawrence’s acuity penetrates the “marvellous under-meaning” and “perfect duplicity” of *The Scarlet Letter* (*Studies* 94). Hawthorne’s narrative in *The Scarlet Letter* serves but to ‘deconstruct’ itself, elevating the adulteress to
the status of a divine deity. For example, in the following passage
Hawthorne exploits the subjunctive mood to give vent to his innermost feelings:

Had there been a Papist among the crowd of Puritans, he might have seen in this beautiful woman [Hester], so picturesque in her attire and mien, with the infant her bosom, an object to remind him of the image of Divine Maternity[ ... ] (52).

If Hester has been equated with Virgin Mary here, she has been compared with Jesus Christ in the following passage:

[...] she [Hester] never responded to these attacks, save by a flush of crimson that rose irrepressibly over the pale cheek, and again subsided into the depths of her bosom. She was patient – a martyr, indeed – but she forebore to pray for her enemies, lest, in spite of her forgiving aspirations, the words of blessing should stubbornly twist themselves into a curse.

[Hawthorne's equivocal style becomes an element in this novel](408), argues Daniel Cottom and feels that “the narrator creates the dialectic that defines romance as the triumph of imagination over actuality” (415). Similarly following in the footsteps of Lawrence, David
Leverenz\textsuperscript{12} has observed that the “narrator’s implicit symbolic advocacy becomes overt” (416) in \textit{The Scarlet Letter}.

Updike’s narrative, on the contrary, is stripped of this film of duplicity or under-meaning. If Edgar in \textit{King Lear} exhorted, “Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say” (V, iii), Hawthorne could not speak what he had felt and wrote what he ought to have said. But Updike’s narrative fits Edgar’s prescription, leaving no gap between the narrative and the implied meaning. Free from the repression of any religious orthodoxy, Updike dealt with his narrative both with impunity and with impudicity. Further, unlike Hawthorne, Updike neither idealises nor idolises his female characters. Instead of deifying his heroines, Updike treats them realistically as women of flesh and blood (to be sexually enjoyed by his heroes). As Donald J. Greiner\textsuperscript{13} so wittily puts it:

\begin{quote}
Updike may enter the bedroom while Hawthorne tiptoes past the door but both insist on the instinctive linking of sexuality and religion (480).
\end{quote}

If Hawthorne consecrates Hester and elevates her to the pedestal of a saint or a female messiah, Updike desecrates Hawthorne’s devotion to the Hester-figure and explores her darker aspects in his Trilogy. For example, while Hester is too serene and too dignified a lady to use scurrilous
language, almost all the Hester-equivalents of Updike – Sarah Worth (in S), Esther and Verna (in Roger’s Version), etc. – are capable of snide remarks and even abusive invectives. Thus we may say that while Hawthorne’s heroine blushes, Updike’s heroine blusters. The laconicity of Hawthorne’s heroine is contrasted with the volubility of Updike’s heroines.

Another basic difference between the narratives in The Scarlet Letter and Updike’s Trilogy is that while Hawthorne himself manoeuvres and manipulates the dynamics of his narratology, Updike distances himself from it and uses the three major characters as his narrators, each of whom writes from his own viewpoint: Rev. Thomas Marshfield in A Month of Sundays, Roger Lambert in Roger’s Version and Sarah Worth in S. Updike’s Trilogy thus provides us with ample scope and gives us more room for looking through the psychic world of his protagonists and studying them from within.

In Hawthorne we find that the body and the soul are two disparate entities. Updike himself pointed out this dualism in his essay “Hawthorne’s Creed”:

From Christianity Hawthorne accepted the dualism, and made it more radical still (76).
Referring to *The Blithedale Romance*, Updike observes, “The novel in its smallest details conveys Hawthorne’s instinctive tenet that matter and spirit are inevitably at war” (“Creed” 77). Donald J. Greiner in his article “Body and soul: John Updike and *The Scarlet Letter*” has brilliantly examined this aspect. Greiner observes that Updike with his knowledge of modern theology, particularly that of Karl Barth, rejects “Hawthorne’s separation of body and soul” (475). In Updike’s Trilogy the body and the soul are reconciled into a harmonious whole. As Greiner so keenly observes:

> The American Protestant obsession with sex, sin, and salvation is no less frantic now than it was in the Puritan milieu of *The Scarlet Letter*; but Updike shows that the contemporary reconstruction of the body requires a reconsideration of faith. Arguing on the one hand for a conservative orthodoxy that denies the human effort to reach God, Updike insists on the other hand that the Hawthornean separation of flesh and spirit is today an invalid interpretation of the Biblical texts (495).

If Hawthorne was very much obsessed with sin and guilt and his characters are rocked and racked by remorse, Updike’s characters are markedly free from it. Neither do the Updikean characters suffer from any compunction nor do they shrink from luxuriating in further liaisons.
Adultery which was an aberration in Hawthorne, becomes a celebration to his literary inheritor Updike.

These differences notwithstanding, we may say that both Hawthorne and Updike were true to their respective ages. If Updike greatly differs from his nineteenth-century predecessor, it is all the more inevitable and natural, for Updike’s Trilogy fills in the socio-temporal gap of 125 to 140 years since Hawthorne.

But the point where Hawthorne and Updike converge and which puts them in the same paradigm is invariably their alliance with the religious and the sexual. Updike’s characters like Rev. March in The Centaur, Rev. Eccles and Rev. Kruppenbach in Rabbit, Run, The Priest Hook in The Poorhouse Fair, Freddy Thorne in Couples, Rev. Marshfield in A Month of Sundays, Roger Lambert in Roger’s Version, Arthur Steinmetz and Sarah Worth in S, etc. make an otherwise incongruous conflation of the clerical and the sexual. As Greiner observes so appositely that in Updike and Hawthorne there is an “inextricable unity of religion, sexual transgression and guilt. Erotic desire and religious sensibility shape the centers of their fiction”\(^\text{14}\)

Thus, Updike’s “Hawthorne novels” not only substantiate their intertextual dialogue with The Scarlet Letter, but gives us the sense of a resurrection and reincarnation of Hawthorne’s classic into the corpus of a
twentieth-century middle-class American society. I wish to sum up with a perspicacious observation of David Lodge:

Indeed, the more one dwells on the comparison, the more plausible it becomes to see Hawthorne as Updike’s literary ancestor among the classic American novelists.\textsuperscript{15}
Notes and References

1. Christopher Bigsby, a Professor of American Literature at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, has written two recent intertexts of *The Scarlet Letter*: a) *Hester: A Romance* (1994) and b) *Pearl*


