

The Malady of Humanity in Medical Science in Nineteenth-Century America: A Look into Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*

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Abstract: This study focuses on the implications attributed during the nineteenth-century, taking into account the evident changes brought about by the social, political and scientific developments, and focusing on two fundamental novels of American literary history, namely Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. This research reveals how through their literature, both authors unquestionably expressed their concern for humanity, especially in regards to the medical sciences, unveiling its faults and shortcomings.

Keywords: *Nineteenth-century Literature, American Literature, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Moby Dick, The Scarlet Letter, Medical Science, Literary History*

Among the most noteworthy works of nineteenth-century America, the two that had the most impact are Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, where a common underlying thread is shared concerning the cultural aspect of medicine and health during this era. In nineteenth-century America, a series of unprecedented changes came about because of the social, political and scientific developments, evidenced by a clear trace marked by the literature of the time. It is thus apparent from these two literary classics that one is able to perceive the deep skeptical view of humanity of these times, especially in regards to the medical sciences, unveiling its faults and shortcomings. With *Moby Dick* published in the year 1851 and *The Scarlet Letter* published a year before, the initial American idealization was slowly losing its appeal as a darker view of this society was upheld. Specifically, Melville and Hawthorne both saw the role of medicine in a negative way, as they both agreed that it was corrupted. The social implications and lessons learned from these two important works in American history reveal the author's views on humanity that still influence our overall understanding of society and its evolvments.

During this time in New England, the American society was expanding its boundaries and increasing in population, even as new advances in technology and science were being made. In fact, since "the eighteenth century, medicine made considerable progress, providing a foundation for advances of the next century" (Smith par 2). On the downside, the stressful changes that were taking place affected both writers: they began to perceive their world through a skeptical and pessimistic lens. In particular, both Melville and Hawthorne condemned America's medical sciences that were progressing rapidly as they assumed that humans were at fault for corrupting society due to their inevitable fallen nature. In fact, Hawthorne "was certain that evil cannot be relinquished [since it] is the common human heritage" (Van Doren 137). Hence, the medical sciences were also seen as the byproduct of a corrupted society, driven by materialistic and egotistical needs, rather than by the genuine pursuit of a person's wellbeing. For this reason, both *Moby Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter* incorporate several "medical side-comments" dispersed throughout their pages (Smith par 7), which can be easily overlooked, but when considered in their totality they can serve to clarify the specific cultural skepticism towards the medical sciences of nineteenth-century America.

According to an article by the scholar David Rampton, the ideal "figure of the doctor," for Hawthorne especially would be a mixture of "Puritan zealot and the nineteenth-century man of science" who would have to be a reliable and trustworthy individual that is "detached from both patient and community and yet intimately involved in the lives of both, the representative of tradition and innovation, [and] the purveyor of secular concerns and spiritual truths" (59). However, as it will be revealed, none of the physicians and doctors presented in these two literary works fully accomplishes this ideal. As for Melville, another scholar declares that his skeptical attitude towards the "scientific spirit of the nineteenth century" came as a result of "its eagerness to capture the minds of men and its pretended ability to answer the final philosophical

questions" (Hillway 411). Another scholar remarked that Melville, as an "astute commentator on human nature," had "doubted the worth of medicine and the claims of science" during mid-nineteenth century (Smith par 1). As a result, Melville mocked the "esotericism [and the] mysteriousness" of science, regarding it as mere "humbug," and used it "chiefly as a source of humor" in his writing (Hillway 411).

To start, in Melville's *Moby Dick* there are many subtle yet significant criticisms made towards this field of science. For example, in Chapter 120, an exclamation made by Ahab reflects Melville's view of medicine negatively as it is used to express his frustration to Starbuck. After Starbuck approaches him with the idea that they should "send down the maintopsail yard," Ahab refuses, saying, "Strike nothing; lash it" (Melville 437, 438). As Starbuck and his mistrust irritate him, Ahab proceeds to say to him, "Oh, take medicine, take medicine!" Perhaps he considers Starbuck to be sick with idiocy, so he sarcastically tells him to get medicine to cure it. Here, Ahab also mentions that, "the colic is a noisy malady" (438). In relation to this, Ahab may be considering Starbuck's advice as a disturbance, something as a noisy stomachache or indigestion.

In another case, Stubb says to the steward Dough-Boy who offers the shipmates some ginger: "we'll teach you to drug a harpooneer; none of your apothecary's medicine here; you want to poison us, do ye? You have got our insurances on our lives and want to murder us all, and pocket the proceeds, do ye?" (280). Instead, the shipmates demand to "get something better" to drink. Here, they associate the steward Dough-Boy as the apothecary or pharmacist that is bringing them some ginger to drink, as if it was poisonous medicine (280). In fact, the expression used here, "to drug a harpooneer," echoes the same underlying premise of viewing medicine negatively, as the shipmates assume that the Dough-Boy has come to poison them with the ginger. What's more, they refer to the Dough-Boy, here representing a pharmacist, as someone who has their "insurances on [their] lives," and whose purpose is "to murder us all, and pocket the proceeds" (280). Thus, the pharmacist is portrayed as a greedy murderer who is out to poison his patients, for in the end, his benefit is obtaining their money, not their wellbeing.

In the chapter titled "Ambergris," Ishmael ponders on the viscous substance found within the "bowels of a sick whale" that is used to make perfumes (355). He then continues by claiming: "By some, ambergris is supposed to be the cause, and by others the effect, of the dyspepsia in the whale" (355). Ironically, the very substance that is used to enhance a person's hygiene with a nice aroma is actually the sickening toxin that gives a whale dyspepsia, or indigestion. Yet, the next point that Ishmael brings resonates more with Melville's criticism of medicine: "How to cure such a dyspepsia it were hard to say, unless by administering three or four boat loads of Brandreth's pills, and then running out of harm's way, as laborers do in blasting rocks" (355). Though a bit grotesque, this description of the Brandreth's pills, which are laxatives, are supposedly used to help cure dyspepsia, yet the tone here is quite humorous, considering the great quantity of pills necessary to cure the whale. Now, this comment reiterates Melville's critical view towards medicinal science, giving it a mocking twist.

Further in this same chapter, Ishmael describes the origin of the idea that "all whales always smell bad" from the fact that in the centuries past, the whalers were not able to extract the oil from the whales while at sea, so they had to wait till they reached land. Nevertheless, by that time, "these whale cemeteries" were emanating such a strong, odious smell that it was "similar to that arising from excavating an old city graveyard, for the foundations of a Lying-in Hospital" (356). While the contrast made in these lines stands for the opposition of a graveyard (representing death) and a hospital (representing the recovery of life), it nevertheless makes an underlying criticism of the medical sciences as it described how ironic it is that a hospital is built on an old cemetery, a place of death. Melville may have been subtly portraying his negative view of the medicinal science, grounded on destructive and evil purposes. He then concludes at the end of this chapter, that "living or dead, if but decently treated, whales as a species are by no means creatures of ill odor," because a whale, "as a general thing, he enjoys such high health; taking abundance of exercise; always out of doors; though, it is true, seldom in the open air" (357). Although Ishmael is referring to the whale's health, he still brings up a relevant point concerning the importance of regular exercise necessary to achieve "high health."

No matter what the dominant topic within each chapter on the novel may be, Melville always seems to make references here and there of his view of the medical sciences. In the beginning chapters, at the Spouter-Inn, Ishmael finds himself surrounded by a “wild set of mariners” (18). They are certainly not experiencing “high health,” as one of them “complained of a bad cold in his head” (18). However, in order to get the cure, he seeks the medicinal powers within the bar. The bartender, here portrayed as the doctor, serves him “a pitch-like potion of gin and molasses, which he swore was a sovereign cure for all colds and catarrhs whatsoever” (18). Hence, Melville again strikes a comical but harsh view of medicine, as in this case, alcoholic drinks are a more effective means of curing human diseases than the medical treatments from doctors. The result of this, after the “liquor soon mounted into their heads,” was that “they began capering about most obstreperously” and had a jovial time (18).

In the chapter titled “The Ramadan,” Ishmael discovers Queequeg one day following his religious fast and becomes very concerned for his friend’s health. He states that he tried to “show Queequeg that all these Lents, Ramadans, and prolonged ham-squattings in cold, cheerless rooms were stark nonsense” and “bad for the health; useless for the soul; opposed, in short, to the obvious laws of Hygiene and common sense” (79). In this example, it is clear that the genuine concern with one’s health is always in the back of Melville’s mind as he wrote this novel, and not the selfish pursuit that drove most medical scientists of his time. While many of these subtle remarks can be easily disregarded, when considered as a whole, Melville’s message becomes more evident.

Moreover, in the chapter titled “The Cabin, Ahab forms a closer bond to Pip, yet he tries to keep him at a distance, fearing that he might become too sympathetic towards him and thus lose his focus from the whale. He tells Pip: “There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health” (457). From these lines, it is evident that Ahab perceives Pip as the medicinal cure to his “malady”— possible his mental illness or his evil, vengeful character—and thus wishes to keep him inside the cabin. However, Ahab is persistent towards his evil intent in chasing the White Whale to its death, so he will not allow for his character to be softened or alleviated by Pip’s tenderness. In fact, Ahab strives for the opposite effect—to keep his “malady”—as it is essentially, what he considers his “most desired health.”

Soon after Ahab tells Pip to go sit in his chair inside the cabin, Pip answers “No, no, no! ye have not a whole body, sir; do ye but use poor me for your one lost leg; only tread upon me, sir; I ask no more, so I remain a part of ye” (457). Again, Pip is presented as the remedial cure for Ahab, but now concerning his physical state, offering himself to be the leg of support that he needs. Symbolically, Pip may also be considered as the spiritual cure for Ahab (if he allowed it) that could have led him to sanity again. Ahab realizes that Pip, portrayed as an inferior being—“a black! And crazy!”—now appears to be recovering: “[M]ethinks like cures like applies to him too; he grows so sane again” (457). Nonetheless, Ahab refuses Pip—his pill—in order to remain “ill.” As a result, Melville in some way demonstrates how the medical cures produced in his society at the time were rubbish to him, choosing to remain ill than to be cured by something created by a corrupted medical scientist.

After Queequeg has been inside that “dampness and slime” atmosphere while working inside the ship’s hatchway, he becomes sick with “a terrible chill which lapsed into a fever” that brought him near to “death” (412). However, as he gradually “wasted away,” he somehow was able to recover immediately after remembering a duty he had to do ashore. Queequeg reasoned that “to live or die was a matter of his own sovereign will and pleasure,” so that “if a man made up his mind to live, mere sickness could not kill him” except a whale or some other destroyer (415). No matter how exaggerated or stretched this idea may be, this point completely throws off any need for a medicinal cure. Indeed, it was “a wondrous testimony to that immortal health in him which could not die, or be weakened” (412). Therefore, in this extreme yet miraculous act in which Queequeg recovers from his sickness, it is likely that Melville wanted to show how a man could find his *own* means of getting better without depending on any medical doctor to heal him.

In many cases, the physical and mental health of the characters is mentioned. When Starbuck is first introduced as the “chief mate of the *Pequod*,” Melville depicts his physical state and remarks that he “was by

no means ill-looking" (100). In fact, his "pure tight skin was an excellent fit; and closely wrapped up in it, and embalmed with inner health and strength, like a revived Egyptian" (100). His good, inner health confirms with his strong spiritual condition, as he is often the voice of reason throughout the novel. As for Captain Ahab, he is described to Ishmael by Peleg as "sort of sick, and yet he don't look so. In fact, he ain't sick; but no, he isn't well either," and that he is "a queer man... but a good one." He also says that Ahab is "a grand, ungodly, god-like man" (74). All these descriptions in some way refer to his physical, mental, and spiritual health—all encompassed by the loss of his leg—as it has made him physically crippled, mentally unstable, and spiritually unholy in this pursuit of the whale. In contrast to Starbuck, Ahab is quite "sick" as he lacks the spiritual health that Starbuck has, as it oftentimes correlates with the natural health of a person.

On the other hand, while there is another captain with a similar condition to Ahab, his attitude towards his ailment is very different. This is Captain Boomer of the *Samuel Enderby*, who lost his arm while pursuing the White Whale. However, instead of succumbing to his "malady," Captain Boomer decides to laugh about it, drink rum, and have a good time. His doctor, the "professional gentleman" named Bunker, explains: "I did all I could; sat up with him nights; was very severe with him in the matter of diet" (380-381). Yet, Boomer gives his part of the story concerning this "very severe" diet and medical treatment:

[D]rinking hot rum toddies with me every night, till he couldn't see to put on the bandages; and sending me to bed, half seas over, about three o'clock in the morning... he sat up with me indeed, and was very severe in my diet. Oh! a great watcher, and very dietetically severe, is Dr. Bunker. (Bunker, you dog, laugh out! why don't ye? You know you're a precious jolly rascal.) But, heave ahead, boy, I'd rather be killed by you than kept alive by any other man. (381)

In this passage, Melville sarcastically criticizes the medical sciences by demonstrating that even the serious treatments given by professional doctors come to be utter absurdities and sheer scams. It is significant to note the doctor's response to this, as he tries to clarify matters in front of Ahab, saying, "I... Jack Bunker, late of the reverend clergy—am a strict total abstinence man; I never drink" (381). However, here Boomer cuts in to finish the sentence with "Water!" since "fresh water throws him into the hydrophobia" (381). Again, the fact that this interchange between the doctor and his patient is made in such an ebullient and absurd tone reinforces the negative perspective that Melville has towards the medical field in general. In a sense, it is corrupted by a society that is driven by money and self-pleasure. For one critic, Bunker here exhibits the characteristic scientific coldness that Melville so fervently abhorred (Hillway 412).

Similarly, in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the same negativity towards the medical science is maintained as it presents it as corrupted and evil. Centered in seventeenth century Salem, it nevertheless parallels with the situations of the nineteenth century. While these time periods are "oppressive in their own ways," with the seventeenth century being "too self-righteous in matters of religion and morality" and the nineteenth century as "too smug in its allegiance to materialism," Hawthorne still uses both of these aspects and unites them to represent the specific conditions of antebellum America, especially as he masterfully pinpoints his criticism against the medical sciences (qtd. in Butler par 11).

Particularly, the character of Roger Chillingworth acts as the medical doctor who comes to cure Arthur Dimmesdale from his mysterious sickness. Chillingworth is first described as "a person of great skill in physic," or medicine and healing (Hawthorne 1410). Though his presence is minimal in the story, it is nevertheless pivotal within this context. Thus, in Chapter IX, titled "The Leech," Chillingworth moves in with Dimmesdale in order to keep a close look at him, attending to him constantly. While on the surface this seems an act of friendship and self-sacrifice on his part, the real means behind this is pure malice. Dimmesdale, however, is not aware of Chillingworth's hunger for vengeance towards him for having an affair with his wife, Hester Prynne.

In addition, Hawthorne described Chillingworth's background studies, as he had been "extensively acquainted with the medical science of the day" and "as a physician he presented himself" to the New England community and they believed and trusted him to be such. Here, Hawthorne unveils that during this epoch,

such “[s]killful men, of the medical and chirurgical [surgical] profession, were of rare occurrence in the colony” since they “seldom... partook of the religious zeal that brought other emigrants across the Atlantic” (1416). Hawthorne further concurs that “such men were materialized” having lost their “spiritual view of existence amid the intricacies of that wondrous mechanism” that dealt with the medical sciences (1416). It may be that Hawthorne regarded this with seriousness, for as many doctors and physicians thrived on their materialized mindsets, their spirituality withered away, thus classifying them as vile and cold machines that diligently sought after personal gain. According to one scholar, Chillingworth as the “medical scientist” in the novel is “undone by flawed notions of objectivity, by the hubris born of intellectual complacency, [and] by the assumption that nature engenders what culture dictates” (Rampton 58).

Apparently, Chillingworth possessed great familiarity with the “machinery of antique physic; in which every remedy contained a multitude of far-fetched and heterogeneous ingredients” (1416). Besides this, he also learned so much more from the Indians, who taught him about “the properties of native herbs and roots,” so that he regarded this “simple medicines” from the “untutored savage” as efficient as the “European pharmacopoeia,” the collection of approved drugs, “which so many learned doctors had spent centuries in elaborating” (1416). This aspect of the medical sciences, considering so much flourished from the discovery of natural cures that were passed on from Indian culture and tradition, perhaps added a level of uncertainty when contrasted against the more elaborated European drugs. In fact, Dimmesdale at first avoided the physician’s help at all costs, renouncing it by declaring, “I need no medicine” (1417). Yet, having become “paler and thinner,” he has no choice but to give in to the insistent Chillingworth. In the later chapters of the novel, a mariner from the ship approaches Hester and tells her beforehand that, “No fear of scurvy or ship-fever, this voyage! What with the ship’s surgeon and this other doctor, our only danger will be from drug or pill” (1478). Evidently, there was more fear perceived from the drugs and pills than the surgeons and doctors of this time.

Chillingworth’s secret evil scheme is slowly revealed externally in his appearance. While he seemed innocent at first, appearing as a true professional, he gradually becomes more and more diabolical. Cleverly nicknamed by Hawthorne as “the leech,” Chillingworth’s character as the evil physician is portrayed as a bloodthirsty leech that feeds upon his patients. Initially, though, Chillingworth “had been calm in temperament, kindly, though not of warm affections, but ever... a pure and upright man” (1421). From this description, it is evident that while Chillingworth is not a complete embodiment of evil, though he was never truly virtuous either. Yet, his character gradually begins to descend until becoming like the Devil himself, seeking someone to devour and destroy. Undoubtedly, “Chillingworth surpasses each previous villain” (Van Doren 130).

His decadence is catalyzed from the moment he is gripped by a “terrible fascination,” an evil purpose that “never set him free again, until he had done all its bidding” (1421). Particularly, when Chillingworth finds the mysterious mark in Dimmesdale’s bosom, he undergoes a transformation that depicts him as a diabolical figure, with a “ghastly rapture...bursting forth through the whole ugliness of his figure,” and acting similar to how “Satan comports himself, when a precious human soul is lost to heaven, and won into his kingdom” (1427). However, it is striking that “what distinguished the physician’s ecstasy from Satan’s was the trait of wonder in it!” (1427). As a result, Hawthorne could not have been more obvious in presenting his negative view towards the medical doctors of his time.

While he is examining his patient Dimmesdale, the medical procedures he undertakes are depicted as if he was searching for gold, confirming the materialistic and greedy aspect of doctors that both Melville and Hawthorne criticize. It is mentioned that Chillingworth “dug into the poor clergyman’s heart, like a miner searching for gold...possibly in quest of a jewel that had been buried on the dead man’s bosom, but likely to find nothing save mortality and corruption” (1422). Clearly, Hawthorne presents his criticism of doctors and surgeons as he displays Chillingworth as digging through the victim’s body as if he were a miner looking for gold; however, there would not be any jewels for him there, except mortality and corruption as he is to discover (what he already suspected) that Dimmesdale was in fact guilty of the affair with Hester. In fact, after examining his patient’s body, or the “soil where this dark miner was working,” had at last “shown indications that encouraged him” which motivates him further to take vengeance on him (1422).

As Chillingworth “digs” this out, “a light glimmered out of the physician’s eyes, burning blue and ominous, like the reflection of a furnace...like one of those gleams of ghastly fire” (1422). From these gothic-like descriptions of Chillingworth, his immanent evil and frightening appearance is suggested, echoing his devilish persona. In regards to this, a critic argued that Hawthorne, “without committing himself to belief in witchcraft, fills in Chillingworth’s diabolical background” especially depicted in this description: “[T]he fire in his laboratory had been brought from the lower regions, and was fed with infernal fuel; and [it]...was getting sooty with the smoke” (qtd. in Miller 101). Hence, Hawthorne gives the depiction of a nineteenth-century physician in an exaggerated and gothic way to criticize the medical field that was untrustworthy and corrupted during this time.

The reason for Dimmesdale not recognizing the physician’s evil ways has to do with the “morbidness” of his own “sick heart” of sin, that, while he is “suspicious of all mankind” and “Trusting no man as his friend,” he is unable to “recognize his enemy when the latter actually appeared” (1422). Consequently, he blindly lets his life hang by the hands of this deceitful and terrifying doctor, keeping him within the boundaries of his own home, “daily receiving the old physician in his study; or visiting the laboratory, and, for recreation’s sake, watching the processes by which weeds were converted into drugs of potency” (1422). In this instance, Hawthorne illustrates his skeptical view of **humanity** as he sees the problem is not only on the evil doctor, but also on the patient who also is corrupted in his own sins, concluding that humans are evil in nature and thus unable to “heal” each other’s wounds.

One day Dimmesdale catches Chillingworth searching for curative weeds and herbs out in the graveyard. He asks his doctor, “where, my kind doctor, did you gather those herbs, with such a dark, flabby leaf?” (1422). To this, Chillingworth replies: “I found them growing on a grave, which bore no tombstone, no other memorial of the dead man, save these ugly weeds that have taken upon themselves to keep him in remembrance. Although Chillingworth uses this moment to hint at the man’s buried secret sins, much like the weed growing out of the grave, it is also profoundly symbolic of the unreliability of medicine that Hawthorne and Melville condemn. Ironically, the weeds and herbs that are supposedly given as a curative and life-giving treatment for sick patients here are shown to emerge right from a grave full of death.

On top of this, Chillingworth makes a crucial statement that relates to this same idea: “[A]ll the powers of nature call so earnestly for the confession of sin, that these black weeds have sprung up out of a buried heart to make manifest, an outspoken crime?” (1423). Undeniably, the “outspoken crime” may very well be the negative aspect of doctors from this era, a sin that needs to be brought to the surface, which is nevertheless evident by the “black weeds” of evidence that show their buried secrets. One critic said it best in the following statement that unwraps this idea: “What this particular physician goes looking for in someone else, dark secrets and hypocrisy and self-hatred, he ends up discovering within his own breast, and it kills him as surely as it does the patient to whom he condescends” (Rampton 60).

Uneasy of the intentions of his physician, Dimmesdale proceeds to question him, saying, “But, now, I would ask of my well-skilled physician, whether, in good sooth, he deems me to have profited by his kindly care of this weak frame of mine?” (1423). Peculiarly, Dimmesdale doubts whether his so-called “well-skilled physician” is actually helping or hindering his health. In the same way, Hawthorne propels this question into a larger spectrum to incorporate the medical surgeons, physicians, and doctors of the nineteenth-century, who seemed to be quite the professionals on the surface, yet their expertise and motives may not have been the most efficient.

Furthermore, Dimmesdale demands to know what the physician has to say concerning his health, “Speak frankly, I pray you, be it for life or death” (1425). Chillingworth describes the outward observations he has made, but determines that by “watching the tokens of your aspect, now for months gone by, I should deem you a man sore sick,” though “not so sick but that an instructed and watchful physician might well hope to cure you” (1425). Instead of providing a concise assessment of the man’s health, he only seems to “speak in riddles” (1425). Somehow all his expertise in the medical sciences seem absurd when dealing with a patient whom he does not know how to cure, as the real sickness of Dimmesdale concern’s from his hidden sin. Dimmesdale hence exclaims in desperation, “You deal not, I take it, in medicine for the soul!” (1425). So, the

physician attempts to clarify his observations by concluding that “[h]e to whom only the outward and physical evil is laid open knoweth...but half the evil which he is called upon to cure,” since this “bodily disease... may, after all, be but a symptom of some ailment in the spiritual part” (1425).

Consequently, in a state of panic, Dimmesdale deems it better to expose his “soul’s disease” to the “one Physician of the soul!” but never to “an earthly physician!” (1426). Nonetheless, Chillingworth “readily assented, and went on with his medical supervision of the minister; doing his best for him, in all good faith, but always quitting the patient’s apartment, at the close of the professional interview, with a mysterious and puzzled smile upon his lips” (1426). There is nothing more appalling to Hawthorne than an evil-minded physician, who takes advantage of his patients and create fear and discomfort instead of promoting their overall well-being. In relation to this, a critic concurs that, “Chillingworth, in *The Scarlet Letter*, exerts his medical knowledge not to relieve physical suffering but to torment Dimmesdale” (Loving 274). Lastly, one critic acknowledges that Chillingworth as a doctor is “obviously vengeful,” much like the other doctors during this era who were seen as “materialistic and possessive,” so that Hawthorne’s (as well as Melville’s) skeptical perspective of medical scientists is spread throughout these texts (Butler par 1-2).

Overall, in nineteenth-century America it was evident that due to the many changes brought about by the social, political and scientific developments, these two fundamental novels of American literary history, namely Melville’s *Moby Dick* and Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, undeniably took a more skeptical look at humanity, especially in regards to the medical sciences, unveiling its faults and shortcomings. Despite this, these two literary masterpieces never fail to “resonate in today’s society as timeless classics that teach society lessons, observe moral and social disillusion, and inspire and enthrall readers” (Butler par 12).

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