

Original Paper

Mistaking the Terrestrial Slum for the Celestial City: A Reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Celestial Railroad"

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Abstract

Nathaniel Hawthorne's allegory "The Celestial Railroad" depicts an American society in which morality and spirituality have been relegated to the background. We set out in this study to critically analyse how Hawthorne in this short story depicts the alarming extent to which terrestrial distractions especially in this modern age of industry, innovation and capitalism have instead derailed many Christians from the celestial city to the terrestrial slums of perdition, misery and destruction. The qualitative approach was used to analyse the data collected for this study. This paper is based on the hypothesis that the quest for pleasure and the advent of industrial and technological development have drifted the Christian further away from the path of salvation as depicted in Hawthorne's "The Celestial Railroad." New Historicism was the theoretical lens employed for this research endeavour. This study revealed that, Hawthorne's "The Celestial Railroad" is even more relevant in the 21st century due to the alarming extent to which Christian ideals have been violated, much more than what obtained when the story was published.

Keywords

Mistaking, Terrestrial slum, Celestial City, Puritanism, Capitalism

1. Introduction

The impact of Puritanism has far reaching effects on American history especially in the colonial past of the United States of America. From the period of the persecution of the Non-Conformists (Note 1) by the crown and Anglican Church in the United Kingdom to that blessed day that John Winthrop (Note 2) (1588-1649) lectured to a group of Puritans (colonists) about to depart for the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Puritanism had always been a strong force to reckon with. John Winthrop laid out in his A

Model of Christian Charity the Puritan vision to build a “godly commonwealth” for New England. He referred to New England in his lecture as “A City on the Hill”, and “The New Israel.” Till date, the contributions of Puritans to the religious, political and economic development of the United States of America remain indelible.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 - 1864) was a prominent 19th Century American novelist and short story writer whose artistic works focused on American history, morality and religion. His ancestry is linked to one of the Puritan families that masterminded the Salem Witch Trials and some of the excesses meted on the Red Indians by the Puritans during the King Phillip War (1675–1676) (Note 3). Hawthorne’s Puritan ancestry caused him to change his name from Hathorne to Hawthorne in order to separate himself from his Puritan fore-father John Hathorne, a prominent judge in Salem during the controversial Salem Witch Trials at the end of the 17th century. Most of his works depict anti-Puritan sentiments but however, contain a recurrent religious and moral undertone. Most famous for his 1850 masterpiece entitled *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne’s short story “The Celestial Railroad” (1843) inspired by John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* is very telling about the hypocrisy that plagued the religious space in the American society.

Despite the fact that Nathaniel Hawthorne had a negative impression about the Puritans because of their regrettable spirit of hypocrisy, it nevertheless annuls the soundness of the Puritan doctrine as far as the building of a truly morally and spiritually vibrant American society is concerned. Hawthorne’s lamentation on the morally decadent American society may have been perceived as a distant and low voice rebuking in the wilderness in his days, but decades or centuries after his death have proven that the relevance of his message remains vital till date. His critique of the church and the entire Christian community is more pertinent today due to the fact that moral and spiritual values are alarmingly being violated today more than it was the case two hundred years ago when he published his works. We therefore set out in this study to analyse how Hawthorne shows the insidious extent to which terrestrial distractions especially in this modern age of industry, innovation and capitalism have instead derailed many Christians from the celestial city to the slums of perdition, misery and destruction.

This paper is therefore based on the hypothesis that the quest for pleasure and the advent of industrial and technological development have drifted the Christian further away from the path of salvation as depicted in Hawthorne’s “The Celestial Railroad”. In this study, we shall be seeking to address the following research questions: What prevents pilgrims from successfully making it to the celestial city? How does Hawthorne portray Christians and the church in his short story under study? How does the Puritan doctrine and history impact Hawthorne’s works of art as reflected in the story? How relevant is his story to the 21st century audience?

For a better understanding of this paper, some key words will be defined and situated in the context in which they will be used. These words/ terms include: mistaking, terrestrial, slum and celestial city. To begin with, mistaking, is the gerund of the word mistake. According to the *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (4th Edition), a mistake is an action, decision, or judgment that produces an

unwanted or unintentional result. Terrestrial is defined in the *Merriam Webster Dictionary* as having to do with life on earth especially as opposed to that in heaven. In the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, a slum is defined as a very poor and crowded area, especially of a city. It further defines it as a very untidy or dirty place. The celestial city in the context of this paper can be seen as heaven, paradise or the heavenly Jerusalem. This city is the goal of Christian's journey in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. It is worth noting that Hawthorne's "The Celestial Railroad" is inspired by Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Conclusively, we set out in this study to critically analyse how and why characters in the short story rather end up perishing due to mundane or terrestrial considerations instead of striving to reach the celestial city which is their original destination.

2. Theoretical Framework

Nathaniel Hawthorne can be aptly described as a historical novelist because almost all his artistic works reflect moments or episodes in American history. His zeal to see a truly morally and spiritually transformed American society triggered in him the desire to delve into the religious past of the United States of America, especially the era of the Puritans who laid a moral, spiritual, economic and political foundation for the American colony decades before the independence of the USA in 1783. Hawthorne's disgust for the excesses of the Puritans dominates his fictions notably his 1850 masterpiece - *The Scarlet Letter*. Being a descendant of a notorious family that spearheaded the famous Salem Witch Trials, he was never comfortable with his ancestry. This caused him to change his family name from Hathorne to Hawthorne because he was ashamed of the brutality and the partiality registered against the Red Indians during those trials and the King Phillip's war in the American colony.

John Bunyan's *Pilgrims' Progress* served as an inspiration to Hawthorne in the sense that the journey motif of the pilgrims in *Pilgrims' Progress* and "The Celestial Railroad" are the same. Some of the characters and settings in Bunyan's work also appear playing almost the same role in Hawthorne's short story. Due to the fact that this story under study has a recurrent historical undertone, and the fact that it hinges on capitalism, New Historicism is employed as the theoretical lense to navigate through this topic. Stephen Greenblatt opines that New Historicism works to remain always attuned to the contradictions of any historical moment, including those moments dominated by capitalism. The Puritan ethic upholds godliness and industry. It is not an easy task to blend these two visions (that is) to conduct a truly godly life and to be involved in business activities to maximize profits in a capitalist society. What always happens is that Christian values are always compromised in the quest to maximize profits in the market place. This is exactly what obtains in Hawthorne's "The Celestial Road" as one meets many pilgrims who end at Vanity Fair where there is much business and mundane fun instead of continuing their journey to the celestial city.

In this paper, we shall attempt a critical analysis of factors that influence the derailment of pilgrims from their goal of salvation; and also focus on how Hawthorne in his short story under study, suggests a return to the fundamental Christian values and practices that guarantee salvation especially in this

modern age of mechanical and technological advancement.

3. Derailing Factors on the Way to the Celestial City

Nathaniel Hawthorne's major preoccupation in most of his works has to do with the aspect of religious hypocrisy. In this story "The Celestial Railroad", Hawthorne takes the reader into the lives of people who supposedly set out for a pilgrimage to the holy city where only the righteous are expected to be granted entry. It is rather unfortunate that many who set out on this journey from the city of destruction hardly enter the celestial city due to religious, social and economic factors which will be analyzed below.

To begin with, considering the fact that "The Celestial Railroad" is a story that has a recurrent and deep religious undertone, we shall begin with the religious factors depicted in the story that hinder the pilgrims' attainment of their goal of salvation. The story opens with people from the City of Destruction at the stationhouse clamouring to buy tickets to board a coach for the Celestial City. This is supposed to be a holy mission with pilgrims spending time in prayer, meditation and discussions that edify them morally and spiritually. The officials that head the railroad corporation, Mr Smooth-it-away, and Apollyon (who is the person who manages the engine) are all agents of the devil whose mission is to derail pilgrims from walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Apollyon is said to be Christian's old enemy. The implication of the presence and role played by these two characters in the story is very crucial as far as the subject of mistaking the City of Destruction for the Celestial City by pilgrims is concerned.

The fact that both Mr Smooth-it-away and Apollyon are the ones guiding and driving the passengers already shows that the mission from the beginning is a failure. Mr Smooth-it-away is very deceitful. He makes the passengers in the coach to believe that he knows the road to the Celestial City and has actually been to that city himself. All he does is to lead the pilgrims to locations and characters that only help to drift them far away from the right path to the Celestial City. Apollyon is even a biblical figure that is representative of evil and darkness. Their misleading of the pilgrims is painful because to arrive in the holy city, one is expected to brave the journey by foot. The pilgrims in the coach are made to laugh or mock at the two pilgrims footing it to the Celestial City when they overtake them in their coach. This is what is registered about their conduct in the short story:

The passengers being all comfortably seated, we now rattled away merrily, accomplishing a greater distance in ten minutes than Christian probably trudged over in a day. It was laughable, while we glanced along, as it were, at the tail of a thunderbolt, to observe two dusty foot travellers in the old pilgrim guise, with cockle shell and staff, their mystic rolls of parchment in their hands and their intolerable burdens on their backs. The preposterous obstinacy of these honest people in persisting to groan and stumble along the difficult pathway rather than take advantage of modern improvements, excited great mirth among our wiser brotherhood. We greeted the two pilgrims with many pleasant gibes and a roar of laughter; whereupon they gazed

at us with such woeful and absurdly compassionate visages that our merriment grew tenfold more obstreperous.

It is worth noting that, the railroad does not pass through the cross. The cross is very significant in this story because, it is only by passing through the cross that burdens of pilgrims fall off. Only those who foot it to the Celestial City have the opportunity to use that path. One can however not enter the holy city with burdens on our backs. The load carried by pilgrims is symbolic of the sins people commit which were all atoned for by Jesus on the cross of Calvary. It is unfortunate that the few who are doing the right thing or taking the right path to achieve salvation are mocked by a multitude of those who are perishing. This indeed is a reflection of what obtains in the secular world and a confirmation about what is registered in the *Bible*. The analogy of the narrow gate through which only a few pass through, is similar to the case of the two dusty travellers we meet in *The Celestial Railroad* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Mr Smooth-it-away and Apollyon are representative of evil or the dark forces that Christians must overcome before they can triumphantly enter the Celestial City.

Alan Colquhoun in his essay, "Three kinds of Historicism", mentions three dominant definitions firstly "the theory that all socio-cultural phenomena are historically determined", secondly "a concern for the institutions and traditions of the past", and finally "the use of historical forms." The society in which Hawthorne wrote this story was the America of the 19th century when machines were gradually replacing work done with the hands. It was also a time of the Age of Enlightenment when Americans were fast shifting from religious fanaticism to reason. The religious ideals upheld by the Puritans of New England were fast disappearing, thus giving way to a modern American society that paid little or no attention to Christian values. As a historical novelist, Hawthorne bore the burden of seeing a spiritually and morally sterile 19th century American generation, and thus sought to call the attention of his generation to return to the fundamental religious values that served as a solid foundation of the American nation.

On the social domain, one senses that the pilgrims were also immersed in issues that made news in the society. Since the pilgrimage was embarked on by people from many walks of life, the company in the coach was very lively due to the many societal issues on the news that were being discussed. The narrator of the story who is also one of the pilgrims who boarded the train for the pilgrimage described the ambiance in the train thus:

Among the gentlemen were characters of deserved eminence--magistrates, politicians, and men of wealth, by whose example religion could not but be greatly recommended to their meaner brethren. In the ladies' apartment, too, I rejoiced to distinguish some of those flowers of fashionable society who are so well fitted to adorn the most elevated circles of the Celestial City. There was much pleasant conversation about the news of the day, topics of business and politics, or the lighter matters of amusement; while religion, though indubitably the main thing at heart, was thrown tastefully into the background. Even an infidel would have heard little or nothing to shock his sensibility.

It is disheartening to observe that instead of looking forward to see a group of pilgrims on a holy mission praying, meditating, singing, reading the Bible and sharing scriptural lessons, we instead find them involved in vain or secular conversations. What actually animate their conversations are issues of business, politics, and fashionable items to possess. It is rather disheartening to notice that they all burst into laughter when they overtake the two “dusty pilgrims” footing their way to the Celestial City. These two are the ones doing what it takes to be hilariously received in the holy city, but they are instead mocked at, by those who have completely lost their focus and way to the Celestial City. The age of industry or what came to be referred to as the Industrial Revolution drifted men far away from God to material things like the machines that have made human life easy. Unfortunately, all the pilgrims apart from the two foot pilgrims never arrived the Celestial City.

New Historicism seeks to examine texts with an emphasis on the social, political, or cultural context within which they have been constructed, with an underlying assumption that a text is the product of its time. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Celestial Railroad” was published in 1841, which is the period of the first Industrial Revolution that started in Britain. The fact that pilgrims go on pilgrimage by train and not by foot rather misleads the pilgrims because, they never arrive at their destination. One can argue that, the fact that the pilgrims in the coach could not indulge in healthy and spiritual conversations that could have edified them spiritually; and the fact that the coach could not enter the Celestial City justify the fact that modern inventions have instead contributed to render humanity spiritually and morally sterile.

Economic factors also adversely affect the spiritual health of the pilgrims as depicted in Hawthorne’s short story under study. The most notorious place on the way to the Celestial City is Vanity Fair. This is the place where there is so much business and many pilgrims tend to end their journey there because of the pleasure and the business that boom there. The narrator of the story paints a bright picture of Vanity Fair when their engine arrives the fair thus:

It was late in the day when the train thundered into the ancient city of Vanity, where Vanity Fair is still at the height of prosperity, and exhibits an epitome of whatever is brilliant, gay, and fascinating beneath the sun. .. On the contrary, as the new railroad brings with it great trade and a constant influx of strangers, the lord of Vanity Fair is its chief patron, and the capitalists of the city are among the largest stockholders. Many passengers stop to take their pleasure or make their profit in the Fair; instead of going onward to the Celestial City.

It is worth noting that Vanity Fair is symbolic of the American marketplace. America being a major proponent of capitalism, makes the American society a very competitive one. Due to the unfair competition that is inherent in the American capitalist space, it is but obvious that the strong will trample over the weak. As indicated in the story, many pilgrims amongst whom are entrepreneurs, philosophers, princes, presidents, poets, generals, artists, actors, and philanthropists stop there and actually make their home there. This notorious place also serves as a place of great persecution and a death trap to genuine pilgrims like the case of Christian and Faithful. Everything at Vanity Fair is made

in such a way as to either deceive pilgrims from getting to the Celestial City or terminate their progress by any means possible. Some of the characters we meet here include: “Rev. Mr. Shallow-deep, the Rev. Mr. Stumble-at-truth, that fine old clerical character the Rev. Mr. This-today, who expects shortly to resign his pulpit to the Rev. Mr. That-tomorrow; together with the Rev. Mr. Bewilderment, the Rev. Mr. Clog-the-spirit, and, last and greatest, the Rev. Dr. Wind-of-doctrine.” Being an allegorical story, the names of these characters already denote their character traits.

Vanity Fair that is representative of corruption and deception is dreaded by genuine pilgrims. Mr Stick-to-the-right who finally reaches the Celestial City makes it abundantly clear to the narrator of the story (who is also a pilgrim) that sojourning in the city of Vanity is dangerous if not deadly. This is how Mr Stick-to-the-right emphatically warns him:

I do assure you, and beseech you to receive the truth of my words, that that whole concern is a bubble. You may travel on it all your lifetime, were you to live thousands of years, and yet never get beyond the limits of Vanity Fair. Yea, though you should deem yourself entering the gates of the blessed city, it will be nothing but a miserable delusion.

Sojourning at Vanity Fair is indeed a deception because none of those who sojourned there ever entered the holy city. Mention is also made of the fact that “the capitalists of the city are among the largest stockholders”. Hawthorne was very conscious of the fact that American capitalism greatly drifted Americans from the path of morality and spirituality. Vanity Fair can be interpreted as one of the symbols that symbolize the depravity of Americans as a result of their reckless quest for profit maximization and material accumulation. Stephen Greenblatt opines that New Historicism works to remain always attuned to the contradictions of any historical moment, including those moments dominated by capitalism. Vanity Fair as a microcosm of the American marketplace or modern capitalism can be seen as the high point of deception because it is here that almost all those who set out for the Celestial City ended. This again reveals the great extent to which the place of destruction is mistaken for the place of salvation by those who set out on pilgrimage for the purpose of salvation as depicted in Hawthorne’s “The Celestial Railroad.”

4. Towards Retracing the Path to the Celestial City

Inspired by John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* published in 1678, Nathaniel Hawthorne appears to be one of the numerous readers of this classic who found its content not only thrilling but also relevant to the wayward American society of the first half of the 19th century when “The Celestial Railroad” (an adaptation of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*) was published. Like Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, “The Celestial Railroad” reveals timeless or enduring truths about salvation, Christ-like living and the importance to remain strong and steadfast in the faith. Tracing the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne right up to 1850 when his masterpiece *Scarlet Letter* was published, one observes that Hawthorne was burdened by the alarming rate of hypocrisy that plagued the American Christian space. Revisiting a book (*Pilgrim’s Progress*) that was written 165 years before the short story under study, and writing an

adapted version of it, is proof of the relevance of the novel even at the backdrop of the age of industrialization when “The Celestial Railroad” was published.

Apart from the socio-economic and religious context in which Hawthorne published “The Celestial Railroad”, one also opines that the present economic and religious context in which this paper is written is of great interest to the 21st century audience who live in a dispensation that is by far immoral and industrialised than the period in which John Bunyan and Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote. A New Historicist’s interpretation of a text strongly upholds the view that the critic’s environment and beliefs must unavoidably influence his or her interpretation of a text. One is therefore of the opinion that, if there was to be another adaptation of *Pilgrim’s Progress* in this century, other technological and perverse factors apart from a coach and railroad, would have been included in it. It is worth mentioning that most of these mechanical and technological advancements have only helped to drift humanity far away from the narrow and difficult path from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City.

To begin with, one avers that Nathaniel Hawthorne set out in “The Celestial Railroad” to conscientise, if not call the attention of the 19th century American generation to make a departure from godlessness to godliness. He appears to frown at modern inventions in the transportation sector like the locomotive or the train. The fact that he places the cross in his story where pilgrims must pass through for their burden of sins to fall from their backs (as it is the case in *Pilgrim’s Progress*) far away from the railroad is very telling. What this means is that anyone who does not undertake the pilgrimage by foot can never enter the holy city.

However, he also passes through the message that although it is a herculean task to reach the Celestial City, it is not impossible. He creates two resilient characters that defy all odds and triumphantly reach the desired destination. Mr Stick-to-the right and Faithful can be seen as epitomes of Christian commitment and resilience. Despite the temptations of easy and pleasurable life that the world offers, and despite the fierce and heartless treatment of faithful pilgrims by Beelzebub and Apollyon, God still grants protection to those who sincerely believe and trust in Him like the case of Mr Stick-to-the-right and Faithful in the story. Through the portrait of these two victorious pilgrims over the travails of this sinful world, Hawthorne is passing through the message that the modern American generation can still defy the temptations, hardships, and depravity of the modern age of industry and innovation, live a life of morality and faithfulness to God; and still be able to make it to the Celestial City.

Hawthorne can be seen as the John the Baptist of the 19th century American society, crying for salvation in the American wilderness of perversion, materialism and hypocrisy. Hawthorne’s message is still very applicable in this 21st century in which moral and spiritual values have further been abused. We now live in a more perverse generation in which obnoxious or unchristian practices like lesbianism, homosexuality, same sex marriages, heterosexuality have been ratified as law by the government of the United States of America. It is not just the case of the United States of America, but many countries across the world are fast embracing this new ungodly trend. This therefore justifies the opinion that “The Celestial Railroad” is even more relevant today due to the alarming rate of moral and spiritual

dissipation.

Secondly, Nathaniel Hawthorne evokes the evolution of the American intellectual/ religious currents of the 19th century as another hindrance to the attainment of salvation represented by the Celestial City in the story. Mention is made of “cruel giants” namely, Pope and Pagan. Mention is also made of “Giant Transcendentalist” not as a facilitating factor but rather as a destructive factor that pilgrims must avoid in order to make it to the Celestial City. According to Nathaniel Hawthorne, the shift in religious thoughts from Puritanism to Transcendentalism has drifted Americans from the path that leads to salvation. As a descendant of a Puritan family, not only was he obsessed with the hypocrisy that characterized the Puritan era, he was by no means comfortable with the doctrine and practices of Unitarians (Note 4) and Transcendentalists (Note 5). This explains why he derogatively mentions them in this short story.

The implication of associating Pope and Pagan with the evil that hinders the pilgrims’ progress is far reaching. A historical interpretation of this religious allusion takes one to the conflict that spark the Reformation movement and the conflict that erupted between the Vatican and the English Crown which resulted to the exit of the British Kingdom from the Roman Catholic Church and the creation of the Anglican Church. It should be noted that, not only did the non-conformists have problems with the Church of England for not practicing scriptures as it ought to, they also had problems with the Roman Catholic Church whom they blamed for misinterpreting the Holy Scriptures. When these non-conformists who later referred to themselves as Puritans voluntarily left England for the New World which they later referred to as New England, they still had these misgivings about the Roman Catholic Church and went ahead to ensure that America remained a Protestant nation. With the mission to practice Christianity in its purest form, the Puritans of New England set out to make America a Christian Commonwealth (Note 6). Associating Pope and Pagan with evil as depicted in “The Celestial Railroad,” goes a long way to portray the deep rooted conflict and disapproval of the Roman Catholic Church by the Puritans whom Nathaniel Hawthorne traces his ancestry to. According to him, Christians must strive for purity in faith, purity in action and a Christly attitude in all aspects of life; if not, their struggle to have everlasting life as a reward of a fulfilled and successful Christian life would forever remain a far-fetched dream.

Hawthorne further demonizes transcendentalism in his short story under study by referring to it as “Giant Transcendentalist”. It is worth noting that leading transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson and David Thoreau were contemporaries of Nathaniel Hawthorne. By presenting transcendentalism in his short story as an obstructing force to the pilgrims, he is buttressing the argument that the transcendentalist movement is a corruption of the gospel and cannot lead its followers to the Celestial City. According to him, it rather constitutes those false doctrines that rather derail Christians from the path of salvation. While transcendentalists stressed on the innate goodness and divinity of all creatures, Puritans believed in the innate sinfulness of mankind who can only be saved by God’s grace through the cross of Jesus Christ. Although both groups shared some common values at the level of nation

building, their spiritual ideologies appeared rather conflicting. Being someone who held the puritan ethic in high esteem, but criticized members of the puritan society who were hypocritical in their way of life, Hawthorne can be seen as yet another 19th century prophet who came in the spirit of John Bunyan and persistently pointed out to the religious and intellectual ideologies of his era that hindered Christians from walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Hawthorne's message is still relevant today, because many more conflicting, if not misleading ideologies have surfaced today that rather cause humanity to continue going further on the wrong road to the "City of Destruction."

Another factor that Hawthorne draws the attention of his readers to was the rising level of industrialisation and the untrammelled quest for material improvement in the 19th century American society depicted in "The Celestial Railroad." Hawthorne seems to have used his short story to point to the danger and temptations that money entangles Christians in. It is worthwhile to note that, one of the cardinal principles of the protestant/ puritan ethic is the quest for spiritual and material improvement. Their belief in industry was inspired or motivated by their belief in hard work as a means of preventing them from idleness which is the devil's workshop. Working hard would definitely lead to material wealth and thus, give the puritans the means to reach out to those in need. Due to the fact that money and spirituality are not really good bed neighbours, Americans soon attained the material demands of the protestant ethic but the moral and spiritual aspects of this ethic were relegated to the background, thereby raising a society of people who were well-to-do materially but spiritually and morally sterile.

The business and capitalist scene that Hawthorne paints in the story referred to as Vanity Fair is indeed a demonstration of how money and material possessions if not well managed and conceived rather isolates Christians far away from the path of righteousness and commitment to the Christian cause. By portraying the digression of many pilgrims at Vanity Fair, the fun and vanities that mislead many a pilgrim at Vanity Fair, and the sudden death of some pilgrims at this fair; Nathaniel is again pointing out to his audience that, one cannot serve both God and Mammon and expect to inherit the kingdom of God. By portraying the lukewarm attitude of Mr Stick-to-the right and Faithful towards the fanfare and mundane pleasures at Vanity Fair, and the fact that only these two pilgrims finally reach the Celestial City, Hawthorne is again drawing our attention to the fact that the quest for material possessions if not guided by a strong sense and spirit of morality and godliness, would inevitably land Christians on the highway to perdition.

5. Conclusion

We set out in this study to critically analyze how Hawthorne in his "The Celestial Railroad" shows the alarming extent to which terrestrial distractions especially in this modern age of industry, innovation and capitalism have instead derailed many Christians from the celestial city to the slums of perdition, misery and destruction. Based on the hypothesis that the quest for pleasure and the advent of industrial and technological development have drifted the Christian further away from the path of salvation, we conclude by validating this hypothesis taking into consideration the analysis made in this study to

justify this claim.

With the use of the New Historicist theoretical lens, one was able to interrogate the history of Puritanism in the United States of America which served as the source of inspiration to the author of the story under study. This researcher examined the life of the author and the history of the first half of the 19th century which was the period in which the story was published. Considering the fact that a New Historicist reading of a work of arts also implicates the influence of the critic's environment/society, we also attempted to justify the relevance of this study to the 21st century audience.

Having discussed the extent to which pilgrims have been derailed from their path of salvation, and possible ways by which Hawthorne suggests a return to the genuine road to salvation, we came out with some findings. Firstly, we found out that advancement in industrial and technological development has to a greater extent derailed pilgrims from their path to the Celestial City. Secondly, we found out that Hawthorne's "The Celestial Railroad" is even more relevant in the 21st century due to the alarming extent to which Christian ideals have been violated, much more than what obtained when the story was published. The work therefore serves as a clarion call to the modern American generation in particular and humanity in general, to scrupulously embrace Christian values so as to be hilariously received in the Celestial City like the case of Mr. Stick-to-the-right and Faithful in the short story.

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Notes

Note 1. These were a group of English Christians in the 17th Century that later referred to themselves as the Puritans. They were described by the Anglican Church and the Crown as non-conformists because they did not pay allegiance to the Anglican Church. They felt that the Bible was not interpreted by the Anglican Church the way it ought to have been done. Their goal was therefore to practice biblical principles in its purest form.

Note 2. Dolly Winthrop was the first governor (Puritan) of the American colony. He led the delegation of Puritans in 1639 to the New World and resolved to make the land a Christian commonwealth; they referred to America as “a city on the hill.”

Note 3. An armed struggle between indigenous inhabitants of New England and New England colonists and their indigenous allies.

Note 4. A Christian denomination or sect that rejects the doctrine of the Trinity, and favour the belief that there is no distinction of persons in God. They seek to stress on the innate goodness of every man as opposed to Puritans who hold that men are sinful by nature and can only be saved by God's grace.

Note 5. Transcendentalism stresses on the importance of a direct relationship with God and nature. It also stresses on the divinity of man and the need for man to be self-reliant.

Note 6. This was the vision that the early Puritans who landed in America, led by Dolly Winthrop had of New England. They had the vision to make America a Christian nation.