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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Religion, Power, and Social Discipline in Joyce's *The Dead* and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*

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| ABSTRACT

This study investigates the representation of religion as a mechanism of social control in James Joyce's *The Dead* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Drawing on Michel Foucault's concepts of power, discipline, and institutional authority, the paper explores how religious discourse regulates individual behaviour and shapes moral life within distinct historical and cultural contexts. Although the two texts emerge from different periods and geographical settings, both depict religion as deeply embedded in everyday practices and social structures. Through close textual analysis, the study demonstrates that Joyce presents religious power in subtle forms, through ritual, silence, internalized guilt, and emotional paralysis, whereas Hawthorne portrays religious authority through overt mechanisms of public shaming, surveillance, and fear of divine punishment. In both narratives, religion functions as a disciplinary system that legitimizes control and normalizes obedience. The paper argues that the relationship between individuals and religious institutions, represented by the church and its clergy, is founded primarily on fear rather than spiritual devotion. By comparing these works, the study reveals how literary texts critique religion not as a transcendent spiritual force, but as a historically situated institution aligned with political authority and systems of power.

| KEYWORDS

James Joyce; Nathaniel Hawthorne; religion; power; discipline; *The Dead*; *The Scarlet Letter*

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### 1. Introduction

The relationship between religion and culture has long been a subject of debate, particularly in modern and postmodern discussions where cultural meanings appear fluid and unstable. Religion is often understood either as an essential component of culture or as a force that precedes and shapes cultural life. While many societies perceive religion as divinely revealed and therefore transcendent, its social practices are inevitably embedded within specific historical and cultural frameworks. As scholars such as Clifford Geertz (1973) and Talal Asad (1993) have argued, religion does not function outside culture but operates through symbolic systems, institutional structures, and relations of power. From this perspective, religion cannot be examined solely as a matter of faith or belief; it must also be understood as a social practice that shapes behaviour, regulates morality, and sustains authority. Literature provides a privileged space for examining this intersection between religion, culture, and power. As a reflection of lived experience, literary texts reveal how religious authority operates not only through doctrine but also through everyday practices, rituals, silence, and social expectations. Religion in literature is therefore often represented ambivalently: it may appear as a source of meaning and order, but it is also frequently exposed as a mechanism of control that disciplines individuals and legitimizes social

hierarchies. This critical representation is particularly visible in texts that emerge from societies where religious institutions are closely aligned with political authority.

Drawing on Michel Foucault's analysis of power and discipline, this study approaches religion as an institutional force that produces obedience through surveillance, normalization, and the internalization of guilt (Foucault, 1977). For Foucault, modern power does not rely solely on overt punishment but operates through subtle forms of control that shape subjects from within. Religion, in this sense, functions as a disciplinary system that governs behaviour by regulating conscience, morality, and self-perception. Confession, ritual practice, and moral judgment become tools through which individuals monitor themselves and others, often without the need for direct coercion. James Joyce's *The Dead* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* offer two distinct yet complementary representations of religious power as a disciplinary force. Although the texts differ in historical context, genre, and narrative form, both depict religion as deeply intertwined with social authority. In *The Scarlet Letter*, religion operates openly within a theocratic society, where church and state are inseparable, and power is exercised through public punishment, shame, and fear of divine judgment. By contrast, *The Dead* presents religious authority in a more internalized and subdued manner, where control is enacted through ritualized behaviour, silence, emotional paralysis, and unspoken moral expectations. In both cases, religious institutions shape individual conduct not primarily through spiritual devotion, but through mechanisms of fear and obedience.

This study does not seek to evaluate the truth or falsity of religious belief, nor does it engage in theological debate. Instead, it examines how Joyce and Hawthorne represent religion as a historically situated institution that participates in systems of power. Through close textual analysis informed by Foucault's theory of discipline, the paper argues that both texts critique religion as a social force that legitimizes authority, reinforces moral regulation, and produces compliant subjects. By placing these works in dialogue, the study highlights how literary texts expose religion not as a purely transcendent or spiritual domain, but as a cultural and political mechanism of control operating within specific historical contexts.

## **2. Literature review**

Scholarly discussions of religion have long moved beyond theological explanation toward an examination of religion as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon. Anthropologists and sociologists have emphasized that religion operates within historically specific cultural frameworks and cannot be separated from systems of power and authority. Clifford Geertz (1973) famously conceptualizes religion as a cultural system composed of symbols that establish powerful and long-lasting moods and motivations. From this perspective, religion shapes moral conduct not only through belief but through socially reinforced meanings and practices. Talal Asad (1993) further challenges universal definitions of religion by arguing that religious traditions are historically produced and disciplined through institutional power. For Asad, religion functions as a system of regulation in which practices, discourses, and bodily performances are shaped by authority rather than by belief alone. This understanding is central to modern critiques of religion that emphasize discipline, normalization, and obedience rather than spirituality. Max Weber (2001) similarly demonstrates how religious ethics influence everyday conduct, economic behaviour, and moral responsibility, showing that religion often aligns with political and economic interests.

Philosophical critiques of religion have also contributed to this shift in understanding. Thinkers such as Hobbes, Spinoza, Hume, and Kant questioned the authority of religious institutions and exposed religion as a human construction shaped by fear, power, and moral regulation. Kant's distinction between institutional religion and moral religion highlights the tension between personal faith and organized authority, a distinction that remains central to literary representations of religion. Modern sociology of religion continues this line of inquiry by examining how religious institutions maintain authority through ritual, hierarchy, and moral surveillance (Bonney, 2004; Freund, 1967). Within literary studies, religion has frequently been examined as a force that shapes character, ideology, and social structure. Critics of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* have emphasized its portrayal of Puritanism as a theocratic system in which law and religion operate as a unified mechanism of control (Miller, 1956; Thomson, 2011). Studies have shown how Hawthorne exposes hypocrisy, gendered power, and moral rigidity through public punishment, shame, and the doctrine of predestination (Mills, 1948). Religion in Hawthorne's novel is thus often read as an oppressive institutional force rather than a source of spiritual redemption.

Similarly, critics of James Joyce's *Dubliners*, particularly "*The Dead*," have explored the pervasive influence of Catholicism on Irish social life. Scholars have noted Joyce's critique of religious paralysis, ritualism, and moral stagnation, arguing that Catholic authority operates through silence, guilt, and internalized discipline rather than overt punishment (Prendergast, 1995; Lernout, 2009). Studies focusing on symbolism, ritual, and biblical allusion demonstrate how Joyce exposes the Church's moral authority as fragile and contradictory (Walzl, 1966; Dickerson, 2018). While existing scholarship has examined religion in both Hawthorne and

Joyce, comparative studies that place these texts within a shared theoretical framework of power and discipline remain limited. This study addresses that gap by reading *The Scarlet Letter* and *"The Dead"* through Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary power. By focusing on how religious authority operates externally through law and punishment in Hawthorne, and internally through normalization and self-surveillance in Joyce, this paper contributes to ongoing debates on religion as a historically situated mechanism of social control rather than a purely spiritual domain.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Michel Foucault's theory of power, discourse, and discipline, which provides a critical framework for understanding religion as an institutional and social mechanism rather than a purely spiritual or theological phenomenon. Foucault challenges traditional views of power as centralized, repressive, or possessed by a single authority. Instead, he conceptualizes power as relational, dispersed, and embedded within everyday social practices, institutions, and discourses (Foucault, 1982). Power exists only when it is exercised and operates through a network of relations that shape human behaviour, knowledge, and social norms. Central to Foucault's thought is the inseparable relationship between power and knowledge. He argues that what a society accepts as truth is produced through discursive practices that both reflect and reinforce power relations (Foucault, 1972; Foucault, 1980). Truth, in this sense, is not universal or transcendent, but historically constructed and sustained by institutional authority. Discourses determine what can be said, who can speak, and which forms of knowledge are legitimized, while alternative perspectives are marginalized or silenced. As Foucault famously states, "truth is a thing of this world" (Foucault, 1980, p. 131).

Foucault's analysis of modern power emphasizes discipline as a key mechanism through which authority operates. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), he demonstrates how power functions by regulating bodies, behaviour, and conduct through surveillance, normalization, and internalized control. Rather than relying solely on physical punishment or overt coercion, disciplinary power produces obedient subjects who monitor themselves according to established norms. Power, therefore, acts upon actions, shaping what individuals perceive as acceptable, moral, or natural (Foucault, 1982).

Religion, when examined through this Foucauldian lens, emerges as a powerful disciplinary institution. Religious authority operates through moral regulation, ritual practice, confession, and the production of guilt, encouraging individuals to internalize norms and police their own behaviour. Rather than functioning only through explicit doctrines or laws, religion exerts control through everyday practices that shape conscience and subjectivity. In this sense, religious power is productive: it produces moral identities, social hierarchies, and forms of obedience aligned with institutional objectives (Foucault, 1977; Foucault, 1980). Foucault also rejects linear and progressive conceptions of history, emphasizing ruptures, discontinuities, and transformations in the operation of power across time (Foucault, 1972). This perspective allows for an analysis of how religious authority adapts its mechanisms to different historical contexts while maintaining its disciplinary function. Power does not disappear but changes form, shifting from visible and punitive practices to more subtle and internalized modes of control.

This theoretical framework is particularly relevant to the analysis of *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Dead*. In Hawthorne's novel, religious power is overtly institutionalized within a theocratic society where discipline is exercised through public punishment, surveillance, and fear of divine judgment. In Joyce's story, religious authority operates more subtly through ritual, silence, emotional restraint, and internalized guilt. Despite these differences, both texts reveal religion as a historically situated system of power that regulates behaviour and shapes social life. By applying Foucault's theory of power and discipline, this study examines how religious institutions in both texts construct moral truth, legitimize authority, and produce social obedience. Rather than approaching religion as a matter of belief or faith, the analysis foregrounds its function as a disciplinary force embedded in specific cultural and historical conditions.

#### 3.1 Culture

Culture is commonly understood as the shared system of meanings, practices, and values through which individuals interpret and organize their social world. Edward B. Tylor (1871) defines culture as a complex whole that includes belief, law, custom, and moral habits acquired by individuals as members of society. From this perspective, culture is not innate but learned, transmitted, and continually reshaped through social interaction. As a result, individuals often perceive their actions as freely chosen, while in reality their behaviour is shaped by deeply embedded cultural norms. Anthropological approaches have emphasized that culture is neither fixed nor universal. Franz Boas rejected evolutionary hierarchies that ranked cultures according to stages of development, arguing instead for cultural relativism and historical specificity (Bauer, 2017). Culture, in this sense, is shaped by particular social conditions rather than by inherent superiority or inferiority. Later theorists, such as Malinowski (1931), stressed the functional unity of culture, arguing that changes in one cultural element affect the entire system. These perspectives underline the idea that culture operates as an integrated framework that organizes social life and behaviour.

In modern societies, culture is increasingly characterized by fluidity and hybridity. Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) argues that cultural purity is a myth and that identities are formed through processes of interaction, exchange, and "contamination." This view challenges rigid conceptions of cultural identity and highlights the instability of cultural boundaries. Anthony Giddens (2002) similarly describes the contemporary world as a "runaway world," in which global forces continually reshape cultural meanings and social practices. Understanding culture is essential for analyzing religion as a social force. As Geertz (1973) and Asad (1993) argue, religion functions within cultural frameworks that shape how belief is practiced, interpreted, and enforced. Religious authority does not operate in isolation but draws its power from cultural norms, institutional structures, and historical conditions. In literary texts, religion therefore appears not as an abstract spiritual phenomenon, but as a culturally embedded system that regulates behaviour, defines morality, and reinforces social hierarchies.

This study adopts this cultural understanding of religion in order to examine how religious authority operates within specific historical contexts in *The Scarlet Letter* and "The Dead." Rather than treating religion as a transcendent or universal truth, the analysis focuses on how cultural conditions enable religion to function as a mechanism of discipline, shaping individual consciousness and social order.

### **3.2 Religion**

Religion is often understood as a system of beliefs grounded in divine revelation, while faith is experienced as a personal and internal relationship with God. This distinction is essential for examining religion as a social phenomenon. Faith operates at the level of individual conviction, whereas religion, once institutionalized, functions through authority, regulation, and collective discipline. Over time, religious teachings that initially sought to address human suffering and moral conduct became formalized into rigid institutions, distancing themselves from personal spiritual experience (Bonney, 2004). As a social institution, religion derives its power not only from belief but from its ability to regulate behaviour and define moral norms. Max Weber (2001) emphasizes that religious ideas shape everyday conduct by establishing ethical frameworks that guide action, discipline desire, and justify authority. In this sense, religion often operates in close alignment with political and economic structures, reinforcing existing power relations rather than challenging them. Religious obedience becomes a social expectation, and moral transgression is met with guilt, shame, or punishment.

Critical approaches to religion have consistently highlighted this institutional dimension. Enlightenment thinkers such as Hobbes, Spinoza, and Kant exposed religion as a human construction shaped by fear, authority, and moral control rather than divine truth. Kant's distinction between institutional religion and moral religion is particularly relevant, as it reveals the tension between personal faith and organized religious authority. Institutional religion prioritizes obedience, ritual, and conformity, often at the expense of ethical autonomy. Michel Foucault's analysis of power further clarifies how religion functions as a disciplinary system. For Foucault, power operates not only through overt coercion but through internalized regulation, surveillance, and normalization (Foucault, 1977). Religious institutions exercise this form of power by shaping conscience, producing guilt, and encouraging self-surveillance through practices such as confession, ritual observance, and moral judgment. In this way, individuals become agents of their own control, disciplining themselves in accordance with religious norms.

This study adopts this understanding of religion as an institutional mechanism of power rather than a transcendent spiritual force. It does not seek to evaluate religious belief or theological truth. Instead, it examines how religious authority is represented in *The Scarlet Letter* and "The Dead" as a historically situated system that governs behaviour, legitimizes social control, and produces obedience. By distinguishing religion from personal faith, the analysis reveals how both Hawthorne and Joyce critique religious institutions as instruments of discipline embedded within specific cultural and historical contexts.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Religion in *The Scarlet Letter***

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* presents Puritan society as a theocratic system in which religion functions as an institutional mechanism of discipline rather than a source of spiritual liberation. Drawing on his own ancestral connection to Puritan New England, Hawthorne exposes the contradictions, hypocrisies, and moral rigidity embedded within a society where religious doctrine governs both private conscience and public law. The novel depicts a community in which church and state are inseparable, forming a unified authority that regulates behaviour through punishment, shame, and fear of divine judgment. Puritanism, as represented in the novel, is grounded in a strict moral code derived from Calvinist theology, particularly the doctrines of original sin and predestination. As Perry Miller (1956) explains, Puritan belief systems framed human existence as a continual struggle

against sin, requiring constant self-examination and submission to religious authority. This theological framework produces a culture of surveillance in which individuals are expected to monitor not only their own behaviour but also that of others. In Foucauldian terms, this society exemplifies disciplinary power operating through both external punishment and internalized guilt (Foucault, 1977).

Public punishment in *The Scarlet Letter* functions as a spectacle of discipline. Hester Prynne's punishment, standing on the scaffold while wearing the scarlet letter, serves not only to shame her but also to instruct the community. The scaffold becomes a visible site of power where moral authority is asserted and social norms are reinforced. As Michel Foucault argues, such public rituals of punishment transform individual suffering into a collective lesson, ensuring that discipline extends beyond the punished subject to the observing population (Foucault, 1977). Hester's body is thus inscribed with religious meaning, becoming a symbol through which authority asserts its dominance. The alliance between religious and political authority is evident in the joint presence of Reverend Wilson and Governor Bellingham during Hester's trial. This collaboration reflects what Talal Asad (1993) describes as the institutionalization of religious power, where doctrine legitimizes governance and obedience is framed as moral duty. In Puritan society, law is presented as an extension of divine will, rendering resistance not merely criminal but sinful. Hawthorne's narration exposes the danger of this fusion, showing how moral authority shields institutional hypocrisy while punishing visible transgression.

Hawthorne further critiques religious authority through the contrast between public virtue and private sin. Arthur Dimmesdale, revered as a holy minister, embodies the internalization of discipline. Unlike Hester, whose punishment is public and corporeal, Dimmesdale's suffering is psychological and concealed. His self-inflicted punishment and eventual physical decline demonstrate how religious power operates internally, producing guilt and self-surveillance. Dimmesdale's torment illustrates Foucault's assertion that modern forms of power are most effective when individuals become the agents of their own punishment (Foucault, 1977). His role as a clergyman intensifies this contradiction, as he embodies both moral authority and moral failure.

Gender plays a crucial role in the operation of religious discipline in the novel. Puritan society applies moral judgment unevenly, subjecting women to harsher scrutiny and punishment. Hester's transgression becomes a permanent marker of identity, while male sinners retain their social authority. Feminist critics have noted that Hester's punishment reflects broader patriarchal structures embedded within religious doctrine (Baym, 1986; Xu, 2010). Her marginalization exposes how religious power reinforces gender hierarchies, presenting obedience and silence as feminine virtues while excusing male authority. Hawthorne's symbolic use of nature further undermines Puritan religious ideology. The forest, condemned by Puritan doctrine as a space of evil, is portrayed as a site of emotional truth and moral freedom. When Hester and Dimmesdale meet in the forest, Hawthorne momentarily suspends religious surveillance, allowing the characters to imagine an existence beyond institutional control. As critics have observed, nature in *The Scarlet Letter* functions as an alternative moral space that resists theological rigidity (Bercovitch, 1978). This contrast exposes the artificiality of Puritan moral absolutism and questions the legitimacy of religious authority.

The doctrine of predestination receives particular scrutiny in Hawthorne's narrative. By portraying morally compassionate characters as condemned and morally corrupt figures as "elect," Hawthorne exposes the ethical contradictions of a system that equates divine favor with social status. This critique aligns with Enlightenment objections to religious determinism, which viewed such doctrines as mechanisms for excusing cruelty and suppressing moral responsibility (Kant, 1996). In *The Scarlet Letter*, predestination becomes a tool that absolves society of accountability while legitimizing suffering. Through these representations, Hawthorne reveals religion as an institutional force that disciplines bodies, regulates desire, and maintains social order through fear and moral surveillance. Religious authority in the novel does not lead to redemption or compassion; instead, it produces isolation, hypocrisy, and suffering. By exposing the gap between spiritual ideals and institutional practices, *The Scarlet Letter* critiques religion as a historically situated system of power that prioritizes control over ethical transformation.

#### **4.2 Religion in *The Dead***

In *The Dead*, James Joyce presents religion not as an openly coercive institution, but as a subtle and internalized form of power that shapes behaviour through ritual, silence, and emotional paralysis. Unlike the overt theocratic discipline depicted in *The Scarlet Letter*, religious authority in Joyce's Dublin operates through normalization rather than punishment. Catholicism is embedded in everyday social practices, influencing thought and conduct without the need for visible force. This form of power aligns closely with Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary control, which functions most effectively when it is internalized and self-regulated (Foucault, 1977).

Joyce situates the story during the Feast of the Epiphany, a detail that underscores the presence of religious symbolism while simultaneously exposing its emptiness. As several critics have noted, Joyce frequently employs religious references not to

affirm belief, but to highlight the gap between spiritual ideals and lived reality (Walzl, 1966; Dickerson, 2018). In *The Dead*, religious rituals persist as social habits rather than sources of moral renewal, contributing to the sense of stagnation that defines Dublin life. The Church's authority is thus maintained not through fear of punishment, but through routine, repetition, and unexamined obedience. Gabriel Conroy serves as a central figure through whom Joyce critiques religious authority. Although Gabriel is not a priest, his behaviour reflects the moral arrogance and desire for authority often associated with institutional religion. His interactions with others reveal a constant need to assert intellectual and moral superiority, whether through condescension, irony, or performative politeness. This attitude mirrors what Foucault describes as the internalization of authority, where individuals reproduce structures of power through everyday interactions rather than formal roles (Foucault, 1977).

Gabriel's treatment of Lily and his wife Gretta illustrates this dynamic clearly. His dismissive remarks and attempts to impose generosity reveal an assumption of moral dominance that collapses when met with resistance. Lily's refusal to accept his money momentarily destabilizes Gabriel's authority, exposing its fragility. This moment demonstrates how religiously shaped moral power depends on compliance; once obedience is withdrawn, authority loses its force. Joyce thus reveals the weakness underlying assumed moral superiority. Joyce further critiques religious power through Gabriel's contradictory attitudes toward Ireland and tradition. In private, Gabriel expresses disdain for Irish nationalism and cultural attachment, declaring himself "sick of my own country." Yet in public, he delivers a speech praising Irish hospitality and ancestral values. This performative contradiction reflects the hypocrisy Joyce associates with institutional Catholicism—outward conformity masking inner detachment. As scholars have observed, Joyce repeatedly exposes the Church's emphasis on external ritual at the expense of genuine ethical engagement (Lernout, 2009; Bowker, 2011).

Religion in *The Dead* also operates through silence and emotional repression. Characters rarely articulate spiritual belief or doubt directly; instead, religious influence is implied through social restraint and moral discomfort. This atmosphere produces what Joyce famously describes as paralysis, a condition in which individuals are unable to act authentically or confront emotional truth. From a Foucauldian perspective, this paralysis reflects the success of disciplinary power: individuals regulate themselves according to internalized norms without requiring external enforcement. Joyce's critique becomes particularly explicit in the episode involving Mr. Browne's questions about monastic practices. The inability of Aunt Kate to provide clear explanations exposes the irrational foundations of religious rituals that are accepted without understanding. The justification that monks suffer to atone for the sins of others highlights the Church's logic of moral substitution, in which obedience replaces ethical reasoning. Joyce presents this reasoning as empty and circular, reinforcing his view of institutional religion as disconnected from human needs.

The story's climax further reveals the emotional consequences of religious discipline. Gabriel's final epiphany does not lead to spiritual awakening but to a recognition of emotional inadequacy and isolation. His realization underscores Joyce's broader critique: a culture shaped by religious restraint and moral regulation suppresses authentic feeling rather than cultivating compassion. In this sense, *The Dead* portrays religion as a force that governs inner life through guilt, silence, and emotional withdrawal. Through these representations, Joyce exposes Catholicism not as a source of transcendence, but as a culturally embedded system that maintains social order by shaping consciousness. Unlike Hawthorne's Puritan society, where discipline is imposed visibly and violently, Joyce's Dublin reveals a modern form of power that operates quietly and effectively from within. Together, these texts demonstrate how religious institutions adapt their mechanisms of control to different historical contexts while producing similar outcomes: obedience, conformity, and moral paralysis.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study has examined the representation of religion in James Joyce's *The Dead* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* as a historically situated system of power rather than a purely spiritual or transcendent force. By reading both texts through Michel Foucault's theory of discipline, the analysis has demonstrated how religious institutions function as mechanisms of social control that regulate behaviour, shape moral consciousness, and sustain obedience within specific cultural contexts. Despite the temporal and geographical distance between the two works, both authors expose religion as an institutional authority grounded in fear, surveillance, and moral regulation rather than genuine spiritual devotion.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, religion operates through overt disciplinary practices embedded within a theocratic society, where church and state function as a unified authority. Public punishment, shame, and the doctrine of predestination serve to normalize suffering and reinforce social hierarchy. Hawthorne reveals how religious doctrine legitimizes cruelty, protects institutional hypocrisy, and imposes unequal moral standards, particularly along gendered lines. Religious power in the novel is visible, coercive, and punitive, shaping both public behaviour and private conscience. By contrast, *The Dead* presents a modern form of religious

discipline that functions through internalization rather than spectacle. Joyce portrays Catholic authority as embedded in ritual, silence, and emotional restraint, producing paralysis rather than redemption. Control is exercised not through law or punishment, but through normalization, routine, and unspoken moral expectations. Joyce's critique exposes how institutional religion governs inner life, suppressing emotional authenticity and sustaining conformity without the need for explicit coercion.

Taken together, these texts demonstrate that religious institutions adapt their mechanisms of control to different historical conditions while producing similar effects. Whether through public discipline or internalized guilt, religion operates as a cultural and political system that shapes subjectivity and reinforces obedience. By distinguishing religion as an institution from personal faith, this study highlights how literary texts critique religious authority not as a matter of belief, but as a historically contingent form of power. In doing so, Joyce and Hawthorne reveal the instability and contradictions at the heart of religious institutions, exposing their role in sustaining social control rather than fostering moral or spiritual liberation.

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