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## The Contagious “A” :

*The Mutual Interaction between Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter  
and Suzan-Lori Parks’s In the Blood*

*Akari TADOKORO*

### Introduction

Seen most clearly in the examples of *The America Play* (1994) and the Pulitzer-winning *Topdog/Underdog* (2001), Suzan-Lori Parks’s theatrical project is to reenact the undocumented experiences of African Americans. Parks regards theater as “the perfect place to ‘make’ history” and claims that, “because so much of African-American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, washed out, one of my tasks as playwright is to ... locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, find bones, hear the bones sing, write it down” (“Possession” 4).

The dramaturgy of “Rep & Rev” (Repetition and Revision) has become a bywords for Parks, and through it she aims to deconstruct and recontextualize conventional American history. However, this does not necessarily mean that the absence of African American voices in American history is the sole focus of her playwriting. Parks also states that “[t]he history of Literature is in question” and that “the history of History is in question too” (“Possession” 4). This can be seen in her reappropriation and rewriting of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).

Parks’s *In the Blood* (1999) and *Fucking A* (2000) are each created as “riffs” on *The Scarlet Letter*.<sup>1</sup> Riff, a term coined by jazz musicians, has been extended to other

areas of art to represent “an improvisation, variation, or commentary on a theme, subject, etc.” (“Riff,” def. 5.2).<sup>2</sup> This characteristic of riffing is more apparent in *In the Blood*, which will be explored in this essay. In contrast to *Fucking A*, which shares only the heroine’s name and the letter “A” with *The Scarlet Letter*, *In the Blood* borrows more elements from Hawthorne’s work, such as characters’ names, scene titles, the gaze cast on female bodies and the ambiguity of the letter “A.” While adopting these elements from *The Scarlet Letter*, Parks presents a filicide of an African American woman, named Hester, using characterization which deviates greatly from Hawthorne’s work.

Although *In the Blood* is generated from *The Scarlet Letter*, with Parks’s recognition that “[t]he history of Literature is in question,” former studies do not fully examine the specific methodology of Parks’s rewriting of the authorized history of American literature nor address how *In the Blood* transforms the reading of *The Scarlet Letter*. For example, Harvey Young, while acknowledging that *In the Blood* is “[l]oosely based on Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*” (32), does not examine the play in terms of its predecessor. In contrast, Deborah R. Geis points out the similarities in the opening scenes (129), the fact that Chillingworth and Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter* are clearly depicted as Chilli and Reverend D. (137), and that Welfare represents Hawthorne’s puritan society (129). Geis closely examines the similarities between the two works, but does no more than connect the white canonical work with the black Hester’s story.

The purpose of this essay is to reevaluate *In the Blood* as a play that aims to rewrite the history of Literature itself. To analyze this process of rewriting history, this essay problematizes Parks’s use of adaptation in her playwriting. Parks has literary works from the past and her own play interact on the stage, indicating that her contemporary play is not drawn from its predecessor. When considering this intertextual and reciprocal interaction, Jennifer Larson provides us with guidance to explore its operation. Due to the superficial similarities of *In the Blood* to Tony

Kushner’s *Angels in America*, it occurred to Larson that the “A” could be “AIDS, a disease that travels ‘in the blood’ of its victims” (54). This essay regards the “A” in *In the Blood* as a kind of virus that infects and mutates *The Scarlet Letter* and aims to reveal that the nature of adaptation itself will be renewed. This first requires an examination of how the nature of adaptation can be connected to the image of infection transmitted through blood.

## 1. Literary Lineage in Adaptation

Applying a biological metaphor to the theory of adaptation,<sup>3</sup> Linda Hutcheon explains, “Stories do get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments; like genes, they adapt to those new environments *by virtue of* mutation—in their “offspring” or their adaptations. And the fittest do more than survive; they flourish (32)”. Adaptations are the offspring of their original works; and so part of literary history is created by the line of descent from the parent texts to their offspring. This genealogy shows that the original work and its offspring belong to the same lineage. At this point, the metaphor of blood relationship can be applied to discussions on *The Scarlet Letter* and *In the Blood* even though it remains unclear how *In the Blood* transforms *The Scarlet Letter*.

Interestingly, the same concepts of “offspring” and “mutation” can be found in the biological idea of adaptation and Parks’s play. Parks states, “They’re all about the intersection of the historical and the now. Even *In the Blood* is about that intersection because it is not based on *The Scarlet Letter* but *The Scarlet Letter* is one of its parents, let’s say” (Wetmore 129). What needs to be emphasized here is that there are several “parents” to her work. The situation in which multiple parent texts exist is allegorically depicted in the five children of Hester, La Negrita, each fathered by a different man. As Hester, La Negrita gave birth to illegitimate children, *In the Blood* is also the illegitimate child of *The Scarlet Letter*, and thus the basic flow of literary

history, in which child texts descend from their parent texts, is also being disrupted.

Moreover, the difference between the theory of adaptation and Parks's writing lies in the nature of "mutation." As quoted earlier, the biological metaphor, which has a strong affinity for the concept of virus, can be applied to the theory of adaptation. What Parks intends is to use the nature of adaptation that produces mutations and to deliberately intervene in its form, thereby accelerating the creation of further mutations. Not only does the parent text influence its offspring, but *In the Blood* also reciprocally mutates *The Scarlet Letter*, and this mechanism will be revealed through the metaphor of virus. The next section investigates how *The Scarlet Letter* influences the reception of *In the Blood*.

## 2. From *The Scarlet Letter* to *In the Blood*

*In the Blood* portrays a desperate situation in which Hester, La Negrita, an illiterate African American mother of five illegitimate children, gets exploited both economically and sexually by five persons who are played by the same actors as her children: her former boyfriend Chilli, her white friend Amiga Gringa, her doctor, Reverend D., and a social worker from the welfare office. Her five "treasures" (i.e., her children) become conflated with her exploiters, some of whom have higher social status and/or a duty to support socially vulnerable people. The tragic nature of this situation becomes highlighted when viewed through the lens of *The Scarlet Letter*.

The opening scene, when the chorus condemns Hester, replicates the second chapter of *The Scarlet Letter* (Geis 129, Ozieblo 55). Hawthorne's Hester, who is forced to wear the letter "A" for adultery and Parks's Hester, who gave birth to five illegitimate children, are put in a similar situation because the two are exposed to the gaze of the people. The difference resides in the ending; whereas Hawthorne's Hester comes to be recognized as "the town's own Hester" (*The Scarlet Letter* 176), transforming the meaning of "A" to "Able" (175) and "Angel" (171), Parks's Hester

continues to be exploited.<sup>4</sup> The letter "A," the only symbol of the alphabet Hester, La Negrita has successfully learned how to write, represents the continuity of her entrapment in a system of exploitation. The portrayal of Parks's Hester, who cannot even thread a needle, also effectively differentiates the black Hester of *In the Blood* from the white Hester of *The Scarlet Letter*. "The Prison Door," the title of the first chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*, is moved to the last scene of *In the Blood*, signifying the destruction of Hester, La Negrita's life. As Larson observes, "... Parks's substantial revision of Hester Prynne and *The Scarlet Letter* also shows that time, and thus history, have become only more malignant for America's present-day Hesters, especially if they are black and poor" (42).

As noted above, Parks borrows the structure from the beginning of the novel, while also highlighting the differences between the story on stage and Hawthorne's novel. This will be a scathing attack on contemporary American society because Hester, La Negrita continues to be exploited and eliminated whereas the gaze cast on Hester Prynne changed and she became accepted as a member of society. However, this also means that pre-established interpretations of *The Scarlet Letter* limit the range of audience acceptance. By incorporating elements of *The Scarlet Letter* into her play, the interpretation by audience becomes limited and channeled. This influence of an antecedent text on its descendants is analogous to hierarchical power relationships. However, Parks also uses a theatrical device to make her play deviate from the original text. To explore this device, the role of the chorus in the play should be investigated. Young, who focuses on the complicated relationship between the chorus and society, argues:

To attend the theatre was, ... to be a citizen watching a citizen play a citizen who indeed is watched by a citizen who both watches and watches you watch. The theatre was a place where society watched itself—and the presence of the chorus, as a metaphorical, partially unsilvered mirror, allowed this to occur. (31-2)

The chorus (i.e., society) which is composed of all the characters except Hester, La Negrita surrounds and condemns her. As the audience sees the chorus demeaning her, the audience's gaze becomes assimilated with that of the citizens on stage and, by doing so, the audience unconsciously becomes complicit with the chorus. On the surface, it seems that Parks reenacts the opposition of society versus the individual (i.e., Hester) depicted in the novel. However, the chorus in this play cannot be fully interpreted as representing the interests of society. In the first place, the chorus in the play is composed of the actors who also play both the exploiters and Hester, La Negrita's children, and during the "confession" all of the exploiters reveal their ulterior motives. For example, making an excuse for not helping Hester, La Negrita, Doctor says, "Theres such a gulf between us" (44). While obviously borrowing the structure from *The Scarlet Letter*, Parks gradually mutates the original form by embedding her own elements into her play, which could not be confirmed in the parent text. This is one of the characteristics of Parks's adaptation; she intervenes in the original form and deviates her play from its predecessor, thereby creating an opportunity to break the unidirectional framework that the parent text influences its offspring. In addition to the structure of the beginning of the novel, Parks also borrows the letter "A" from *The Scarlet Letter*, which is the main focus of the next section.

### 3. Plurality of "A"

As previously mentioned, Hester, La Negrita writes the letter "A" repeatedly in the struggle to learn the alphabet. The interpretation of the "A" in *In the Blood* is also strongly influenced by *The Scarlet Letter*, but the various interpretations of the "A" in *In the Blood* can also transform the latter. Concerning the prior condition for reading a variety of meanings into the "A," the last part of Hawthorne's novel should be focused on.

In the novel, the meanings of "A" are specified as "adultery," "able," and "angel," but as for the scarlet letter that "[m]ost of the spectators testified to having seen, on the breast of the unhappy minister," the interpretation is left to the readers (*The Scarlet Letter* 278).<sup>5</sup> Although the meanings of the "A" in *The Scarlet Letter* are specified in the novel, the possibility for other interpretations is opened up. Borrowing the letter "A" from *The Scarlet Letter* means that there is a structural similarity between the two texts; we can explore several possible interpretations on the "A" in the play, but new meanings continue to be produced.

When considered in the context of the play, there are at least three possible analyses of the "A" in *In the Blood*. Firstly, since the "A" is merely a letter practiced by Hester, La Negrita, the "A" signifies her illiteracy. Also, Hester, La Negrita is unable to read nor thread a needle. Therefore, through this visual effect of transforming the white Hester into the black Hester, we can invert the meaning of the "A" from "able" to "unable." Furthermore, Jabber, Hester's eldest son, explains the shape of "A" as "[I]egs apart hands crost the chest like I showd you" (11). Spreading one's legs apart can have a sexual connotation, expressing Hester, La Negrita's sexuality, and further carrying the implication that she is a "slut." However, if we connect the play with another of its parent texts, Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), the same posture can also be regarded as an imposing stance. With a change of perspective, the "A" can be viewed as a symbol for Hester, La Negrita's strength and courage, as she feeds and protects her children even as she sacrifices herself in the face of adversity.

These three interpretations all provide us with the possibility to invert the image of Hester Prynne, implying that the "A" could stand for her inability and sexuality, thereby triggering an exploration of some aspects of Hester Prynne's character, which have never been focused on before. In addition, the "A" for "slut" and "courage" seems to be contradictory, but both highlight the tragic ending that Hester, La Negrita continues to be betrayed and placed in a predicament because her sexuality and



sense of responsibility as a mother lead to her destruction. In other words, although love is depicted as a virtue of Hester Prynne, in Parks's version, loving someone can bring further hardship. In this way, more variations on the "A," each of which has the possibility to transform *The Scarlet Letter*, continue to be generated.

A further and more complex interpretation is the "A" as "AIDS," suggested in the Introduction. If we consider the expression, "BAD NEWS IN HER BLOOD" (7) and the image of "A" written in Jabber's blood puddle (i.e., in the blood) to be linked, then the "A" can be equated with the "Bad News."<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the "A" could also be interpreted as an infection spread through blood. Indeed, an infectious disease may be lurking in Hester, La Negrita's body, as Welfare recalls a time when she and her husband enjoyed a sexual orgy with Hester and states, "I was afraid I'd catch something" (62). Also, in the beginning of the play, the chorus says, "HERE SHE COMES / MOVE ASIDE / WHAT SHE GOT'S CATCHY / LET HER PASS / DONT GET CLOSE" (7). As seen in these examples, there are lines in the play which imply the concept of contagion, leading us to connect Hester, La Negrita's "A" with the image of infection.

What needs to be emphasized here is the nature of the "A" in *In the Blood*, which endlessly produces new meanings, thereby providing an opportunity to transform the reading of *The Scarlet Letter*. The variety of meanings of the "A," which differs depending on the audience's perspective, continues to be propagated and be incorporated into the discussions on the "A." If we separate *In the Blood* from *The Scarlet Letter*, the "A" would remain merely a practiced letter and no further interpretation would be generated. The alien elements from *The Scarlet Letter* catch on and influence *In the Blood*, and once the reading of *In the Blood* is affected, multiple meanings of the "A," which are unacceptable in the context of *The Scarlet Letter*, continue to be produced and mutate our readings of the parent text. In other words, what Parks achieves is to incorporate Hester, La Negrita's "A," which repeatedly propagates new meanings like a virus, into the line of inheritance from

*The Scarlet Letter* to its adaptations.<sup>7</sup> The "A" embedded in literary history centered on *The Scarlet Letter* starts to spiral out of control. These mutating and contagious interpretations of the "A" support Larson's contention that the "A" is a metaphor for an infectious blood-borne virus, even if it cannot be clearly identified as AIDS.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, however, Parks also questions the adaptive reading of *In the Blood* through her play. To explore this possibility, a scene, in which Hester, La Negrita is asked by Welfare for the name of the father of Baby (her youngest child) when she visits the social welfare office to obtain financial assistance, will be investigated.

Welfare: ... Whats his name?

Hester: I dunno.

Welfare: You dont have to say it out loud. Write it down.

She gives Hester pencil and paper.

Hester writes. Welfare looks at the paper.

Welfare: "A."

(*Rest*)

Adam, Andrew, Archie, *Arthur*, Aloysius, "A" what?

Hester: Looks good dont it?

(58; italics mine)

This scene presents the perception gaps between the audience reading the play and watching the play, in addition to those between Welfare and Hester, La Negrita. First, those who read the script of the play can recognize that the "A" is written with quotation marks, whereas the audience in the theater cannot. Furthermore, Welfare assumes that the "A" shows the name of child's father, but Hester, La Negrita does not have the intention of accusing Reverend D. and is even unaware that she is sexually exploited. This is also clear when Hester, La Negrita offers to regularly meet

Reverend D. for sex (77), and subsequently claims that Reverend D. likes her (102). She is just writing the only letter she can write when she is given a piece of paper.

Concerning this scene, Larson suggests, “The A simultaneously names the delinquent father and sexual abuser, allowing Hester to express her emotional angst, and protects his anonymity as prescribed by the patriarchal power structure, so that she might still hope to receive financial support from him” (46). Since Reverend D. is clearly modeled after Arthur Dimmesdale, the possibility that his name is Arthur cannot be ignored. On the contrary, an audience familiar with *The Scarlet Letter* probably associates the “A” with Arthur. By exploring the play through the lens of *The Scarlet Letter*, we can invert the image of Hester, La Negrita as an oppressed woman who is unable to accurately grasp her own situation into a woman who knows she is being exploited but whose anger is suppressed.

This contradictory interpretation questions the norm in adaptation that the reading of a child text is strongly influenced by its parent. If adaptive reading is applied to *In the Blood*, the “A” can be connected to “Arthur,” even though no one knows the first name of Reverend D. In this anomalous situation the “A” can be interpreted as “Arthur,” but because it is not made explicit in the context of the play, the meaning of the “A” cannot be settled on. Parks betrays the audience’s expectation that the “A” is “Arthur” through her playful word choice while also revealing the awkwardness of this adaptive reading.

To sum up, the following two points characterize Parks’s adaptation. First, she exploits both the nature of adaptation which triggers mutations and ambiguity within the original “A,” thereby boldly transforming the meanings of “A” and boosting further mutations of *The Scarlet Letter*. Second, she provokes contradiction in the adaptive reading of *In the Blood* and takes the first step to question the norm of adaptation. These two effects are produced from the contagious aspect of the “A.” The further effect of incorporating the contagious “A” into the literary lineage from *The Scarlet Letter* to *In the Blood* will be investigated in the following section.

#### 4. Beginning of Mutations

This section focuses on another two aspects of the “A”: the racial image and the possibility of provoking further mutations. First, Hester, La Negrita’s racial identity will be focused on. As quoted earlier, Parks’s revision shows the possibility that Hester, La Negrita cannot follow the same path as Hawthorne’s white protagonist “especially if ... black and poor” (Larson 42). The visual effect of the white Hester being replaced by a black Hester also has the potential to promote such a reading. Based on this suggestion, it can be argued that “BAD NEWS IN HER BLOOD” (7) represents her blackness. Racial identity is one of the factors which determines the course of Hester, La Negrita’s life and the same can be said of her half-white children.<sup>9</sup> With the recognition that the “A” can dictate Hester, La Negrita’s life, Geis further elaborates, “The *A* for Hester becomes conflated with the ‘hand of fate’ that she has envisioned coming down toward her throughout the play . . .” (139). At this point, the “A” takes on a fatalistic potency, transforming a woman’s life from that of Hester portrayed by Hawthorne to the one who gets imprisoned.

Thus far, the following three points have been confirmed as valid interpretations of the “A”: the viral metaphor, the readings of racial identity, and the fateful power transforming one woman’s life. While these key words, “blood,” “infection,” and “blackness,” seem to have nothing in common, they can all be read in the context of the American literary tradition, where *The Scarlet Letter* remains a popular source for adaptations. As Lawrence Buell summarizes:

Since 1985 alone, *The Scarlet Letter* has generated across three continents at least four novels, four plays, three operas, two musicals, three films (one in Korean), and two dance creations. The scarlet *A*, its defining symbol, continues to serve as a touchstone motif for mass culture down to this day . . . (73)

*The Scarlet Letter* has given birth to various adaptations, demonstrating that the letter “A” and its meanings have formed one tradition of American literature/culture. *In the Blood* is also included in the group of works which are descended from *The Scarlet Letter* (Buell 73). Therefore, Parks incorporates the story of the black Hester into the history of literary adaptation centered on Hawthorne. This can also offer us the implication that Parks is trying to add “black” blood into the literary lineage of the white canon, since the metaphor of blood relatives can be applied to the biological idea of adaptation. If we can draw a parallel between the racist social principle that a person with even one black ancestor was considered black, and the similarly racist literary history, we can argue that Parks may be trying to recast a canonical white work as black.

However, this does not mean that Parks is attempting to erase the original text. This corresponds to the situation that even if a person is perceived as black because of the admixture of a drop of black blood, we cannot ignore their white roots. We can see this by analogizing with the act of deleting writing with black ink. Even when the letters are blotted out in black, it does not erase the original text. Rather, it signifies that the original text exists under the black ink. Parks utilizes the historical convention of eliminating the text; hence exposing the fact that inconvenient writings have been deleted from History, while also providing the opportunity for Hawthorne’s original text and Parks’s text to overlap like a palimpsest and to interact with each other.

What becomes emphasized is the positive effect of intertextual communication. As previously explored, the “A” continues to propagate its meanings when *The Scarlet Letter* and *In the Blood* interact with each other. The “A” written by Hester, La Negrita is indeed a kind of “virus,” which continues to transform the original context. When considered in this way, the “A” can signify the beginning of various mutations because it is the first letter of the alphabet and has the possibility to be developed in any way. Moreover, the “A” can stand for a prefix “a-” which reverses

the meaning of words. As shown in the example of "a-historical," once the "a" is added to the word "historical," its meaning changes to "[n]ot historical; unrelated to or unconcerned with history or historical events" ("Ahistorical," def). "A" as a prefix, which transforms meanings by being added to the beginning of a word, correlates to the metaphor of a virus, which infects and thereby mutates the host. The "A," indeed, provokes further variations.

Therefore, once the "A" that Parks embeds in her play changes the way the "A" in *The Scarlet Letter* is read, the reading of *In the Blood* will itself be transformed anew. Instead of the original work creating its adaptation, *The Scarlet Letter* and *In the Blood* continue to interact and transform each other like the reciprocal transformations of virus and host. By making the viral "A," Parks boldly intervenes in the conventional mode of adaptation and unleashes an atypical mode of adaptation that cannot be captured within the unidirectional framework of parent text to offspring. This prompts us to rewrite a page in the history of adaptation, hence producing an opportunity to question the history of American literature itself.

## 5. Conclusion: A Re-interpretation of Hester and the "A"

The "A" in *In the Blood* continues to propagate meanings like a contagious virus. Hence, it is natural that the meanings of the "A" differ depending on the perspectives of audiences and critics. The conventional theory of adaptation treats the original text as primary and its adaptation as secondary. However, Parks uses the form of adaptation and proliferates the meanings of the "A," thus making unclear its original reference point. As a result, the opposition between the original work (as primary) and its adaptation (as secondary) has been destabilized, modifying the very nature of adaptation. Also, Parks creates an awkwardness in the adaptive reading by borrowing the "A" in *The Scarlet Letter*, thereby also perpetually mutating and circulating the "A" in *In the Blood*, which prompts the contradictory interpretation. Parks succeeds

in repeating and revising (i.e., “Rep & Rev”) the form of adaptation itself.

This mechanism continues to work as long as the play is performed. Indeed, it is the audience who entertains the story of Hester, La Negrita and reads the multiple meanings into the “A.” Since various interpretations continue to be produced, it is extremely difficult for us to reach a single conclusion. However, this does not mean that discussions of Hester, La Negrita and the letter “A” are meaningless. On the contrary, since no one interpretation can be final, the process of re-interpretation is continuous. An African American woman, whose existence is ignored by society, comes to light through the hands of Suzan-Lori Parks. As long as the play is performed, the mechanism of rewriting literary history continues to be activated, and passed on, allowing Hester, La Negrita, who was deleted from History, to survive in an ever-lasting process of re-interpretations.

※ An earlier version of this paper was orally presented at the 60th Annual General Meeting of the American Literature Society of Japan, held via Zoom on October 2nd, 2021.

## Notes

- 1 Parks got the idea for *Fucking A* when she was in a canoe with her friend and said, “I’m going to write a play called *Fucking A*, and its going to be a riff on *The Scarlet Letter*” (Wetmore 120).
- 2 This definition is referenced from the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In jazz and popular music, a “riff” is a short repeated musical phrase, often with a strong or syncopated rhythm, played over changing chords or harmonies or used as a background to a solo improvisation” (“Riff,” def.5.1).
- 3 Linda Hutcheon identifies three principles of adaptation: “[a]n acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works,” “[a] creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging,” and “[a]n extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (8). Furthermore, adaptation needs to be “an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art” (170).
- 4 *The Scarlet Letter* begins with a scene in which Hester Prynne is released from the town prison. Consequently, it is possible to consider that the ending of *In the Blood* is connected to the beginning of *The Scarlet Letter*.
- 5 After listing several possibilities, Hawthorne writes, “The reader may choose among these

- theories” (*The Scarlet Letter* 278).
- 6 In *Angels in America*, Act One of Part 1 is entitled as “Bad News.”
  - 7 This image also relates to Parks’s perception that theatre is “an incubator to create ‘new’ historical events” (“Possession” 4-5).
  - 8 In *The Scarlet Letter*, too, “A” is depicted as something which has a “contagious fear” (*The Scarlet Letter* 90), and thus it could also be argued that the “A” depicted by Hawthorne was also something infectious.
  - 9 Philip C. Kolin suggests that “in the blood” can stand for her “offspring” (247).

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## 感染する「A」

——ナサニエル・ホーソーンの『緋文字』と

スーザン＝ロリ・パークスの『イン・ザ・ブラッド』の相互作用——

田所朱莉

権威化された「文学史」と「歴史」に対して懐疑心を抱くスーザン＝ロリ・パークスは、舞台上での歴史の創造を試みる。本論考では、『緋文字』の「リフ」として創作されたパークスの戯曲、『イン・ザ・ブラッド』を通して、文学史書き換えのメカニズムを考察する。具体的には、『イン・ザ・ブラッド』の「A」がAIDSかもしれないという先行研究を議論の足がかりとして、両作品の相互作用を、ウィルスのメタファーを用いて論ずる。

まず、アダプテーションがどのように血液を媒介して感染するウィルスと結びつけられるかを模索する。パークスがアダプテーションにおいて「親テキストから子テキストへと自然に『変異』を起こしていく」特性、および「親テキストから子テキストへとという血の流れによって文学史のひとつの流れがなり立っている点」を利用して、劇作を行っていることを指摘する。つまり、パークスはアダプテーションにおける「変異」を利用しつつ、親テキストが子テキストに影響を与えるだけでなく、子が親のあり方を変える可能性を打ち出すのである。

したがって、本論考では、①『緋文字』がどのように『イン・ザ・ブラッド』に影響を与えているか、②『イン・ザ・ブラッド』がどのように『緋文字』の解釈に影響を与えるかを議論する。特に、「A」の文字に着目することで、『イン・ザ・ブラッド』の「A」に読み込める3つの解釈の可能性を提示し、それらの全てが『緋文字』のヘスターのイメージを崩す可能性を持つことを考察する。しかし、「A」の意味は、この3つに留まらない。さらなる「A」

の可能性が、先述の AIDS である。

重要となるのは、多様な意味を生産し続ける『イン・ザ・ブラッド』の「A」の性質である。両作品を分けて考えれば、「A」は黒人ヘスターが練習する記号であり続ける。『緋文字』の「A」の要素が『イン・ザ・ブラッド』に取り憑き、一度本作の解釈が影響されれば、『緋文字』のコンテキストでは容認できない意味が生み出され、我々の『緋文字』の解釈自体が変わってしまう可能性が浮上する。言い換えれば、パークスは『緋文字』から『イン・ザ・ブラッド』という文学的な血の流れの中に、新たな意味を生産し続け、親テキストのあり方を変えてしまうウィルスのな「A」を組み込んでいると考えられる。

本論考では、「A」の考察を通して、『緋文字』と『イン・ザ・ブラッド』が相互作用していくことを議論する。それにより、原作が一次的、翻案が二次的なものとして扱われるアダプテーションのあり方にパークスが介入し、アダプテーションのあり方自体を改訂する契機が生み出されていることを明らかにする。

