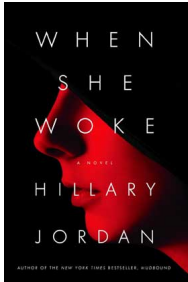


## Classic letdown

Written by BY TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor  
Thursday, 01 March 2012 12:28

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Hillary Jordan's provocative novel, "When She Woke," is a futuristic reworking of "The Scarlet Letter," Nathaniel Hawthorne's distinguished tale of Hester Prynne, a fallen woman scorned by a society gone rigid with zealotry.

Like her counterpart in the classic story, young Hannah Payne, a Dallas native, has led a sheltered life. Her overprotective parents expect no more of her than to attend church, marry well and be a good mother.

Life had other plans for Hannah, as she falls in love with the very married preacher of her mega-church.

Hannah's naiveté leads to an unwanted pregnancy and a back alley abortion.

When the state of Texas finds out what she has done, Hannah is arrested, tried and convicted of murder. The prosecution offers her several opportunities to give up the name of her lover and the abortionist, but Hannah remains mute. Her silence exacts an extreme price. In Hannah's world, where *Roe v. Wade* is no more and where there is no room for moral mistakes, justice is swift and cruel.

Hannah's punishment does not come in the form of a lengthy prison sentence. Instead, she is given a genetically engineered virus that turns her skin red.

Forced to live in the world as a "chrome" – a criminal whose skin color is dyed to match their crime – Hannah finds solace and protection in a network of underground warriors who are determined to help women like Hannah, often with violent results. To these revolutionaries, the

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harsh judgment is “personal.” They offer Hannah a chance at a new life, but she has to permanently break all ties with her past.

Jordan’s look at a controlling society that seems to have forgotten the grace that comes with forgiveness is timely, given the headlines of the past few months.

In more capable hands, this story could have been the catalyst for interesting discussions about the consequences of choices and the role government plays in our personal lives. About two-thirds of the way in, however, Jordan jumps the shark, using overworked clichés and hackneyed ribbon to wrap up ends that would have been better left loose.