



## DECIPHERING THE NOVEL “THE SCARLET LETTER” USING SYMBOLIC ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

*"The Scarlet Letter" is a novel written by Nathaniel Hawthorne. His works often focus on history, morality, and religion. Much of Hawthorne's writing centres on New England, with many works featuring moral metaphors with an anti-Puritan inspiration. His fiction works are considered part of the Romantic movement and, more specifically, dark romanticism. His themes often centre on the inherent evil and sin of humanity, and his works often have moral messages and deep psychological complexity. His published works include novels and short stories. The Scarlet Letter, set in Puritan New England during the 1600s, is a love story with its roots, but one filled with sin and punishment. It is also a critique of the hypocrisy of Puritan culture. It follows the story of Hester Prynne, who is ostracised for committing adultery and forced to wear a scarlet letter "A" on her chest as a symbol of her sin. As Hester grapples with societal judgement, she raises her daughter, Pearl, and refuses to reveal the identity of Pearl's father. The novel explores themes of sin, guilt, redemption, and the harsh judgmental nature of society at the time. The characters struggle with the consequences of their actions, and the narrative delves into the complexities of morality and forgiveness.*

**KEYWORDS:** *symbolism, puritan culture, scarlet Letter*

### SYMBOLISM

Symbolism refers to the use of representational imagery: the writer employs an image with a deeper, non-literal meaning, to convey complex ideas. In literature, symbolism is the use of a concrete image to represent an abstract idea. Symbolism is the use of a symbol, which can be a word or an image, to communicate a distinct idea. Symbolism is one of the many literary devices writers use to make their work more vivid. In a way, symbolism illustrates a piece of writing by creating pictures in the reader's mind.

### The Letter A

Though the scarlet letter is supposed to be a sign of shame, Hester interprets it as a potent marker of her identity. Over time, the letter's significance changes. The "A" ultimately comes to stand for "Able," even though it was originally meant to identify Hester as an adulterer. Ultimately, it becomes unclear because the Native Americans who attend the Election Day pageant believe it elevates her to a position of significance. The letter serves the same purpose as Pearl in serving as a tangible reminder of Hester's liaison with Dimmesdale. However, the letter appears little in comparison to a real kid, which serves to highlight the ultimate meaninglessness of the community's system of punishment and judgement.

### Puritan Society

The Puritans thought they were carrying out divine duties. Therefore, there wasn't much opportunity for negotiation. People who were thought to have strayed from God's word were subjected to severe punishment. There have been instances where people of different faiths were executed by hanging in.

A critical, if not contemptuous, perspective of Puritanism is presented in The Scarlet Letter. Hester is unjustly victimised by Puritan society, which the narrator describes as dull, constricting, unforgiving, and narrow-minded. The narrator characterises the local police officer as embodying the "whole dismal severity of the Puritanical code of law," which combined religion and law, at the scene where Hester is set free from prison.

### Hester and Dimmesdale

Hester and Dimmesdale represent Adam and Eve, as well as the repercussions of disobeying God's word or church doctrine. Hester is banished from the community, just like Adam and Eve, for her infidelity, while Dimmesdale is banished metaphorically because of her overwhelming guilt.



### **Pearl**

Despite being a multifaceted character, Pearl serves mostly as a symbol throughout the book. Pearl can be thought of as a living embodiment of her mother's scarlet letter. She is a sign of a transgression and the bodily result of sexual sin. But Pearl is more than just her mother's punishment—even though she serves as a reminder of Hester's "sin"—she is also a blessing. She is a symbol of "sin" as well as the ferocious force and passion that gave rise to it. As a result, Pearl gives her mother a cause to live and lifts her up when she feels like giving up. Pearl can't truly become "human" until Dimmesdale's identity as her father is made known. She operates in a symbolic manner up to then.

### **Chillingworth**

The fact that Chillingworth's name embodies the icy and unforgiving aspects of his character and heart is no coincidence. His heart has no space for anything but retaliation; he is an ice character. He ultimately becomes a symbol of evil and is shut out of humanity as a result.

### **The Color Red**

Red is a sign of Hester's strong passion and love in *The Scarlet Letter*, as well as her misdeeds. The crimson glow that appears on her cheeks shows that even after she takes off the "A" she has been ordered to wear, red is still a part of who she is.

### **The Rose Bush**

The rose bush represents Hester. Its red blossoms are not surprising. Like Hester, red roses are renowned for their exquisite beauty, but they can also be very difficult to manage. Roses are perennial plants that grow back the following year, and they are known to withstand even the most extreme circumstances. This resilience in the face of adversity is also evident in Hester's personality.

### **The Scaffold**

The scaffold represents both public confession and punishment. Those who have committed sins or crimes are required to come before the community for everyone to see and be judged for what they have done, rather than hiding away in shame. It serves as a deterrent to others to prevent them from sinning as well as a means of making individuals who have committed wrongdoing take responsibility for their acts. In this sense, the scaffold frequently represents balance.

### **The Prison Door**

The prison's massive, spiked wooden door is a representation of punishment. The door's bars and spikes represent the punitive and unforgiving system of justice prevalent in a culture steeped in Puritanism.

### **The Shadows**

Shadows are used in *The Scarlet Letter* to represent how the truth is hidden. Dimmesdale is frequently characterised as existing in the shadows since he won't acknowledge his sin with Hester or the fact that he is Pearl's father. He remains in the shadows or the dark throughout the narrative as long as he keeps hiding what he has done.

### **The Sunlight**

Sunlight symbolises both truth and the grace of God in *The Scarlet Letter*. Once the truth of Hester's sin is revealed in public, then she stands in the sunlight. Once Dimmesdale reveals his role, he too stands in the sunlight. Later, when Hester and Dimmesdale decide to flee together to England, they are in the forest. Once their decision has been made, sunlight breaks through and shines upon them, indicating that their decision has been made.

### **Nature vs. Society**

The novel explores the contrast between the harsh judgement of society and the natural world, often portraying nature as more forgiving and accepting.

### **Irony**

There is dramatic irony in the fact that Dimmesdale is Pearl's father, known to the reader but concealed from the characters until later in the novel.

### **Redemption**

The novel explores the possibility of redemption and forgiveness, particularly as characters confront their sins and attempt to find a path to moral renewal.

### **Historical Context**

Hawthorne provides a critical perspective on the rigid social and religious structures of 17th-century Puritan New England, commenting on the consequences of strict moral absolutism.



## CONCLUSION

Analysing these elements can provide a deeper understanding of the novel's themes and the complex characters within the Puritan society depicted by Hawthorne. A symbol is an object that stands for something else, such as an idea or a concept, or otherwise conveys a meaning. There are many symbols in *The Scarlet Letter*. Symbols are an important key to understanding and interpreting the meaning present in a work of literature, as are other literary devices.

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