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The Scarlet Letter (1850)*

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Dedication

*I dedicate this modest work to my dear mother and father for their
patience, help, and support during all the years of my study
“Without you, I would have neither the confidence nor the will to
complete this work”.*

*To my perfect brothers and sisters for their encouragement and love,
especially my lovely little sister Naima.*

*To all my family in Ghilizane and Oran, especially my lovely nieces,
Nouha and Ghina.*

*To all my friends and colleagues without exception and to all whom I
love I dedicate this modest work with respect and love.*

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Abstract

In American literature, Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is a worthy symbolic novel, in which symbolism invades all its components. The objective of this work is to explore the symbols used in the novel, casting light on the level of words, letters and characters, and also to decode these symbols and identify the various interpretations they stand for, by applying Saussure's Theory.

The present work is divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with the notion of aestheticism in general and presents the most common stylistic devices in literature such as simile, metaphor, and irony; as well as their theories and views.

The second chapter tackles the notion of symbolism as a movement and as a literary device and it presents different theories related to symbolism which are attributed to Whitehead, Langer and Saussure. Ferdinand De Saussure's Theory is the one which is applied in this study.

The third chapter gives an overview about American literature and about the Romantic Movement, and it presents Hawthorne's major works focusing on his masterpiece *The Scarlet letter* and its literary analysis. The fourth chapter sheds light on the symbols used in this novel and their interpretations.

All in all, this study aims at showing Nathaniel Hawthorne's motive behind the use of symbols in his work *The Scarlet letter* (1850).

Key Words: American Literature, Aestheticism, Romanticism, Symbolism.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Literature has a wide and various tendencies, in which we can find a lot of writers, poets, and critics; each one of them has his own style, views and principals. It is said to be a mirror that reflects human life and society with its characteristics and developments and this is what makes differences between literary works of one nation and another, or one period and another.

American literature is a treasure land of many authors to discover, a lot of topics to deal with, and a successive periods to shed light on. It has been passing through different literary movements such as Realism, Naturalism, Rationalism, and Romanticism; the latter is considered as the richest period of authors who contributed in the evolution of American literature as a whole with their brilliant and attractive writings (Santee, 2010).

Romanticism or the romantic period was a literary and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century; it is a movement that focuses more on feeling and emotion rather than thought (Kaiser, 2004). The American Romanticism stands by the American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson who had a big influence on the life of the nineteenth century America, an influence that remains till the present (skipp, 1992). He was contributing in the development of this period; in addition, he is the most comprehensive and influential representative of the five principals of Romanticism, which are: intuition is the most reliable than reason; the expression of experience; the individuality; nature; and the aspiration to the ideal (ibid.).

The romantic writers saw themselves as revolting against the age of reason (1700-1770); they celebrated imagination and intuition versus reason and calculation, individualism versus social conformity, and spontaneity versus control (Kaiser, 2004). The romantic authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and Edgar Allan Poe try to adopt in their writings the major features of romanticism such as the super-use of imagination, symbolism and the focus on nature; they attempt to make readers interact with their works; they celebrate the freedom of the individual and his emotions and this is what makes them the most important and the true romanticists in the nineteenth century American literature (ibid.). For instance, Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) seems to be the greatest symbolic novel in American

literature; it is about a struggle between the hero Captain Ahab and the greatest white whale, in which at the end the whale attacked Ahab and killed him; in this novel, it is clear that the great white whale symbolizes God or Fate (High, 1986).

American literature as well creates a fertile milieu for symbolism (Coyle *et al*, 1990). Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) is an American symbolist and one of the prominent and significant literary figures in the romantic period whose romances are considered among the American great symbolic works which play a big role in the evolution of the romantic period:

“He always writes about man in society rather than simply about man in nature. His characters usually have some secret guilt or problem which keeps them at a distance from other people. They are troubled by pride or the desire for revenge” (High, 1986: 49).

Hawthorne writes essentially as a moralist, he interests in what happened in the minds and the hearts of men and women when they had done wrong (Bode, 1981). The theme of Puritanism (A religion based on purity and worship) repeated in most of his works which are often set in colonial America (Grellet, 2009). Hence, Hawthorne has a strong feeling for the Puritan past of the seventeenth century New England, and this is the setting of his masterpiece *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) which is regarded as the most eminent and one of his best novels in the nineteenth century (High,1986).

Among the four masterpieces of 1850s (*The Scarlet Letter* 1850), (*Moby Dick* 1851), (*Walden* 1854), and (*Leaves of Grass* 1855), only *The Scarlet Letter* was an immediate success, selling 5,000 copies within the first six months (Ford, 1967).

The choice of Nathaniel Hawthorne is mainly based on our interest in his use of allegory and symbolism. Among all of his works, the selection of *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is on the basis that it is Hawthorne’s masterpiece and his most symbolic work. Another reason, which contributes in our selection, is that it deals with the breaking rules of the Puritan society, their religious traits and their severe laws against the sinners.

Hawthorne’s motive behind writing his novel *The Scarlet Letter*(1850 is his dismissing from his position for political reasons in Salem Custom House (Gross, 1960).

Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), the corpus of our study, is a worthy symbolic novel in which symbolism invades all its components. It is the study of the effects of adultery, a story of a married woman who lets her heart rule her head and commits adultery and finally suffers from the effects of her sin which is the illegitimate child, and then she is forced to wear the scarlet "A" on her dress for the rest of her life; so, all would recognize her as an adulteress. Through this novel, Hawthorne tries to express the struggle between the woman and the law status, and he also attempts to show us how the Puritans deal with persons who try to break the Puritan laws and traditions. In addition to that, he uses symbols to express social and spiritual status at that time of his work.

Hawthorne in his novel studies three types of sin, the revealed sin of Hester who is the adulteress, the concealed sin of Dimmesdale who is her lover, and the unpardonable sin of Chillingworth who is her cheated husband, and the inherited sin of Pearl who is her illegitimate child (Gross, 1960).

One of the most skillful ways in which Hawthorne develops his type of romanticism in his novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is through the use of symbols, through one stands for another (Bode, 1981).

In literature, symbolism basically carries the meaning of the literary device that writers use to convey their messages indirectly by using symbols, whether for the sake of decorating the work in order to give it an artistic beauty and aesthetic taste or for any other purposes such as criticizing society behind those symbols to avoid troubles and problems that may fall upon the writer (Amraoui & Salah, 2009).

It frequently happens that, as beginners, when we read literature and face symbols as an aesthetic and artistic dress for literary works, it is rare that we realize or recognize that this character or that action is symbolizing something else. However, when we appreciate and interpret the literary work skillfully, we can recognize the symbols and we can decode and decipher them.

The analysis of any literary work requires the examination of the writer's vocabulary, his style of writing and his language. Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is full of figures of speech, especially symbolism.

This study aims at presenting an overview of some theories of symbolism, and at applying one of them in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). By this examination, we

intend at the end of this work to shed light on symbolism in the novel, to select the symbols used there; therefore, to decode these symbols and identify the various interpretations they stand for.

Seeking to reach this aim, we attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1- Why does the writer overuse symbols in *the Scarlet Letter* (1850)?
- 2- What are the different interpretations they stand for?

This study examines the use of symbolism in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850); it is based on three major hypotheses:

- The writer has recourse to symbols to give the reader a full picture of his American society at that time.
- The writer overuses symbols to add depth to his themes.
- The writer uses his characters as symbols in order to emphasize more his themes of sin and adultery.

The framework of this paper is divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with the notion of aestheticism in general and presents the most common stylistic devices in literature such as simile, metaphor, and irony; as well as their theories and views.

The second chapter tackles the notion of symbolism as a movement and as a literary device and it presents different theories related to symbolism which are attributed to Whitehead, Langer and Saussure. Ferdinand De Saussure's Theory is the one which is applied on this novel.

The third chapter gives an overview about American literature and about the Romantic Movement, and it presents Hawthorne's major works focusing on his masterpiece *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and its literary analysis.

The fourth chapter sheds light on the symbols used in this novel and their interpretations, as well as the samples of symbolism selected from the novel.

To conclude, the present study tries to find out answers to our above-stated questions and to focus on Hawthorne's motives behind the use of symbolism in his novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).

Chapter One

Literary Devices: A General Survey

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Literary Devices: A General Survey

Introduction

Literary devices or figures of speech refer to specific aspects of literature, by which authors create meaning through language, and by which readers understand and appreciate writers' works. They are used for explaining speech beyond its usual usage.

This chapter sheds light on aestheticism in general and examines the major literary devices in literature.

1.1 Aestheticism (Aesthetic Movement)

Since Literature is a mirror that reflects human life and society, so aestheticism plays a great role in shaping this Literature and giving it an artistic beauty and aesthetic taste.

Without aestheticism, there is no meaning of literature, because the science of beauty, in general is called aesthetics. The term aesthetics has to come to signify something, which is connected with the criticism of the beautiful or to the theory of taste; an *aesthete* is one who is devoted to the beautiful in art, music and literature (Cuddon, 1998).

Aestheticism is a term given to a literary and artistic movement in the 19th century. Cuddon (1998) claims:

“The origins of this movement (aestheticism) are to be found in the work of several German writers of the romantic period: Kant, Schelling, Goethe and Schiller, it seems to have been a kind of reaction against the materialism and capitalism of the later Victorian period”
(Cuddon, 1998: 11-12)

The difference between Aestheticism and other nineteenth century approaches does not refer to beauty and excludes everything else, but it made feelings, admittedly the feelings

engendered by art in particular the means by which mankind could recognize and explore its true identity (Coyle *et al*, 1990).

Since Aestheticism is the science of beauty in general, aestheticism in the literary work itself is concerned with the writers' use of figurative language (Literary Devices) and Literary Deviation. The latter is concerned with inventing and modifying some lexical, grammatical or structural elements for the immediate use in order to suit a specific state; for instance, when the writer exceeds the normal language used by ordinary people or invents and borrows new words and expressions that are not usual in ordinary formal language, he deviates from the normal language (Fadaee, 2011).

Concerning the figurative language, it is the writers' use of some literary devices such as simile, metaphor, irony, etc., in order to give their works beauty and aesthetic taste.

1.2 Figures of Speech

Figures of speech play a big role in shaping literature and giving it an aesthetic taste; they refer to specific aspects of literature, by which authors create meaning through language, and by which readers understand and appreciate writers' works, and the language that uses figures of speech is called figurative language and its purpose is to add clarity and beauty to the speech (ibid.).

Figurative language is any use of language where the intended meaning differs from the actual literal meaning of the words themselves; it has some specific features which make it different from nonfigurative language; therefore, the figurative language includes exaggeration in speech (ibid.). There are many techniques that can rightly be called figurative language, including metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, irony, oxymoron, etc. ¹ for instance:

- * **FL**: The book is as heavy as an elephant (simile).
- * **Non-FL**: The box is as heavy as my suitcase (ordinary sentence).

Here, we can say that the figurative language contains some aesthetic features and clearness in meaning. The most prominent devices in literature are simile, metaphor, irony, personification and oxymoron.²

¹ <http://www.eserver.org/rhetoric>

² <http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html>

1.2.1 Metaphor

Metaphor is like simile, but it is more complicated (Cormac & Earle, 1985). It is a figure of speech in which one thing is compared in terms of another (Cuddon, 1998). Unlike simile, the comparison in metaphor is implicit, the words “like” and “as” are missing (Cormac & Earle, 1985).

Hence, we as readers have to recognize the comparison by ourselves without those words, which help us to identify simile so quickly.³

Aristotle said that the metaphor is a unit of relationship, and its radical form is a statement of identity of the “A is B” type; putting it in its proper hypothetical form, of the “let X be Y” type (Frye, 1957).

All metaphors are similes; while using metaphor we are really saying that “A” is in some respects comparable with “B” (ibid.).

Aristotle states:

“Metaphors like epithets, must be fitting, which means that they must fairly correspond to the thing signified: failing this, their inappropriateness will be conspicuous: the want of harmony between two things is emphasized by their being placed side by side.” (Quoted in Roberts, 2010: 154).

For example: **1-** *John is a lion.*

2- *Jim has a hyena's laugh.*

In the first example, we must know that the speaker means that John and the lion have the same quality that is the courage. In the second example, the writer wants to convey to the reader that Jim laughs like a hyena; i.e., they share the same laugh.

1.2.2 Simile

Simile is a type of metaphor; it is an explicit comparison in which two different qualities are compared by using connecting words such as “like” or “as” (Cormac & Earle, 1985). In

³ <http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html>

other words, simile is a figure of speech in which one thing is compared in terms of another, this comparison is introduced by words such as “like” or “as”, and we can recognize simile by these words (Cuddon, 1998). According to Aristotle,

“Simile is a metaphor, differing from it only in the way it is put ...besides, it does not say outright that “this” is “that”, and therefore the hearer is less interested in the idea.” (Quoted in Roberts, 2010: 173).

For example, *John is courageous as a lion.*

Here, John is like a lion, i.e., John and the lion share the same quality that of courage. In other words, the lion is a symbol of courage; that is why the speaker attributes the quality of courage to John.

1.2.3 Irony

Irony is when someone says or supposes something, but he means something else, i.e. what is said does not mean exactly the literal words of the speaker.⁴ In irony, “The meaning was contrary to the words” (Cuddon, 1998: 428).

The two basic kinds of irony are verbal and irony of situation; the first is what is said by someone is the exact opposite of what is meant (Cuddon, 1998), such as when one says to an ugly person “how beautiful you are!”

The second kind of irony is irony of situation in which the result or the outcome of actions is the contrary of what the actor expected (ibid.).

Kierkegaard(1841) asserts that irony is a manner of seeing things, a way of showing existence; and Amiel, in his *Journal Intime*(1883-7) claims that irony emerges from a perception of the ridiculousness and nonsensicality of life, while Novalis described irony as a real consciousness, true presence of mind (Cuddon, 1998).

1.2.4 Oxymoron

Oxymoron is a figure of speech in which contradictory terms or verbal unites are combined together for a special effect (Cuddon, 1998).

⁴ <http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html>

It is a paradoxical utterance that correlates two terms that are contrary in meaning in ordinary usage.⁵ The most prominent example of oxymoron occurs in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*:

"Here's much to do with hate, but more with love

Why then, O brawling love! O loving hate!

O anything! Of nothing, first create!

O heavy lightness! Serious vanity!

Mis-shapen chaos of well-seeming forms!"(Cuddon, 1998: 627).

Oxymoron in Milton's *Paradise lost*:

"No light, but rather darkness visible" (ibid.).

To Shen(1987), an oxymoron is the combination of two apparently contradictory elements, thus producing an apparently an odd (but actually often quite reasonable) statement (Coyle *et al*, nd). He made a distinction between the two types of oxymoron, direct and indirect; the direct oxymoron represents direct antonyms in which two opposite poles on certain dimension such as *hot* and *cold* or *wet* and *dry* (ibid.). Concerning the second type of oxymoron is the indirect oxymoron in which the two opposite terms are not direct antonyms, i.e., the first term is not the exact opposite of the second, for instance *watery dryness* and *sunny coldness*. Here, we see that water is not the exact opposite of dryness, and the same for the second example (ibid.).

1.2.5 Personification

Personification is a figure of speech in which human thoughts, actions, perceptions and emotions are directly attributed to inanimate objects or abstract ideas (Paxson, 1994). In other words, personification is where an abstract concept is represented as a person.⁶

Personification is related to metaphor; in a Greek term is "*prosopopeia*", in which an abstract or inanimate object is given human attributes or feeling (ibid.). It refers to the practice of presenting consciously fictional personality by an abstract thing (ibid.).

⁵ <http://theliterarylink.com/metaphors.html>

⁶ See the same website.

Paxson(1994) asserts that personification deals with presenting an absent person as present, or in making a silent thing articulate. It is to associate the semantic marker of human with that of inhuman.

For example: The wind whispered through the trees

The speaker gives the wind one of the characteristics of a human being which is whispering.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the major literary devices that authors use in their literary works. Literary devices are regarded as the most effective tools to add clarity and give beauty to any work of literature, and they also clarify meanings to the reader.

Chapter Two

Symbolism: A General Overview

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Symbolism: A General Overview

Introduction

Symbolism is a literary device regarded as the most aesthetic device that the American writers based on in their writings; it helps them in conveying their messages indirectly in order to avoid problems that may fall upon them; so, they used animals, objects and characters as a symbol. There are many critics and literary men who have views in symbolism and its uses; these views are differing from one critic to another which led to appear different literary theories that help the readers to pick up the symbols easily in any literary works.

This chapter deals with the notion of symbolism as a movement and as a literary device and tries to introduce some theories of symbolism which are attributed to Whitehead, Langer, Frye and Saussure.

2.1 Symbolism

A symbol is something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else (Hall, 1994). Symbolism, or the use of symbols, involves using an object, an attitude, a belief, or a value in order to represent an abstract idea; it takes something ordinary or basic and makes it more than what it is in reality (Fadaee, 2011).

Cuddon (1998) states: “The word symbol derives from the Greek verb “*symballein*”, “to throw together”, and its noun “*symbolon*”, “mark” or “sign”. It is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or stands for something else” (Cuddon, 1998: 884-885).

A symbol has both a literal meaning (what it really is) and a symbolic meaning (what it represents) (Sadowski, 1957). In other words, a *symbol* must be something you can hold in your hand or draw a picture of, while the idea it symbolizes must be something you cannot hold in your hand or draw a picture of; it is a kind of figures of speech used for increasing the beauty of the text and has figurative meaning besides its literal meaning (Sadowski, 1957)

Symbolism in Literature is the deepness and hidden meaning in a piece of work; it is often used to represent things, a moral or a religious belief or value by symbols; for instance: scales symbolize justice, the dove symbolizes peace, the lion symbolizes courage and the cross symbolizes Christianity (Cuddon, 1998).

Even gestures and actions can be symbolic, for example: beating of the breast symbolizes remorse and the opening of the mouth and the eyes symbolize astonishment and surprise (ibid.). So, we can say that a symbol links an image with its concept. Without symbolism in particular writings, literature is just a brunch of meaningless words on paper (Fadaee, 2011).

Signs and symbols provide mental exercise in understanding and studying the meaning and messages that lies behind the signs and their effects to individuals as they interact in the society.⁷

Symbolism as a movement refers to an aesthetic movement originated in France in the last half of the 19th century, it is often referred to as a “decadent movement” mainly because of the use of imagination as a reality; it mostly associated with French literature considering it as its fertile land from which it spreads to other literatures; Symbolism started as a reaction to the naturalism and realism movements (Habib, 2005).

The French symbolist school began with the writings of Charles Baudelaire (1851-1867) and Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898); most of Baudelaire’s poems are based and concentrated on themes of the sex and death, he was inspired by the work of the American writer Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), whom he called his “twin soul”.⁸

At the end of the nineteenth century, symbolism lost its popularity in France (Habib, 2005). Yet the movement’s popularity increased and spread to the continental Europe, England, Russian, the United States, and South America (ibid.). The symbolists’ experimental methods appealed to many English, Irish and American poets such as William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), Ezra Pound (1885-1972), T.S Eliot (1888-1965), and Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) (Habib, 2005).

Symbolism is introduced into English speaking world because of the publication of Arthur Symons’s book “the symbolist movement in literature (1899); Symons in his

⁷ <http://users.aber.ac.uk/dgc/Documents/S4B/sem02.html>

⁸ www.usm.es/.../2.HistoryLiteraryCriticism

understanding of symbolism is influenced by the poet W.B. Yeats, he described the later nineteenth century as “the age of science, the age of material things; he also inspected the symbolist movement as a revolt against exteriority (Habib, 2005).

According to Perrine (1974), the meaning of the literary symbol should be recognized according to its context; it means that the meaning of symbol identified inside the text, not outside it; in addition to that the symbol is called a symbol if we find its representative meaning different from its literal meaning (Fadaee, 2011).

2.2 Theories of Symbolism

Symbolism has a lot of meanings and has taken many directions because of the different theorists who were contributed in its evolution in various domains with their views and theories.

“Rapoport (in Royce 1965), for whom symbols are “products of the human abstracting process” (p.97), Hayakawa (ibid), for whom symbolism is “that which shapes the entire psychic life of man” (p.92), and Whitehead (1927), for whom symbolism “is inherent in the very texture of human life” (p.60)” (Quoted in Petocz, 1999:11).

With reference to the above quote, symbolism has various definitions; it differs according to the theorist’s ideas and views about the term symbolism.

2.2.1 Langer’s Theory of Symbolism

Susanne Langer (1895-1985) is an American philosopher who has so far made the most of the notion of the symbol; she considers symbolism to be the central concern of philosophy because it underlies human knowledge and understanding⁹.

Langer(1954) asserts that Symbolization is the essential act of thought...and the symbol-making function is one of man’s major actions, like eating, looking or moving about...it is the fundamental process of his mind, and goes on all the time (Langer, 1954).

⁹ www.anthologyflood.com/auxierlanger.html

Langer(1953) asserts: “a symbol mediates knowledge, giving us cognitive control, or insight, in one way or another.”¹⁰ Langer also links the function of abstraction to her definition of a symbol in saying that a symbol is any device with which we are making an abstraction; therefore, abstraction on Langer’s view is a spontaneous and natural comprehension of form itself through its exemplification in informed perception or intuitions (Langer, 1953). In addition, abstraction is the process of forming a notion of an object making it a more common term by disregarding the details of it.¹¹

Symbolism can be any articulate form whose internal structure is given to our perception; and the aesthetic symbol on Langer’s conception is an abstraction device that is meant to give us knowledge of feeling (Langer, 1953). Langer(1953) claims “A symbol is understood when we conceive the idea it presents while a sign is the generic term which covers both signals and symbols”¹²

Langer(1954) made a distinction between symbol and sign; she asserts that symbol and sign are not the same, the use of symbols an addition to the use of signs that animals also use, frees humans not only to react their environment but also to think about it, and also symbols, allow us to create imagery and ideas not directly related to the real world, so that we can plan, imagine, and communicate abstractions to do, in essence, the things that make us human (Eschholz et al, 2000). The difference between a sign and a symbol is that a sign causes us to think or act in the face of the thing signified, whereas a symbol causes us to think about the thing symbolized (ibid.). Therefore, we can say that a symbol differs from a sign in that the symbol does not announce the existence of the object that is its meaning, but brings this thing to mind.

2.2.2 Whitehead’s Theory

Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), is an English mathematician and philosopher who discussed many subjects, symbolism was his most significant subject.

For Whitehead, symbolism dominates the men’s thoughts and imagination; he asserts that symbolism is widely connected with the use of pure sense perception in the character of symbols for more innate and primary factors in our experience.¹³ “The word is a symbol and

¹⁰ www.american-philosophy.org/events/documents/Innis_Reading_3-making_of_the_literary_symbol

¹¹ www.anthologyflood.com/auxierlanger.html

¹² See the same website.

¹³ www.anthonyflood.com/whiteheadsymbolism.html

its meaning is constituted by the ideas, images, and emotions which it raises in the mind of the hearer” (Whitehead, 1927:2).

“Symbolism is very fallible in the sense that it may induce actions, feelings, emotions and beliefs about things which are only notions without exemplification in the world which the symbolism leads us to presuppose.”(Whitehead, 1927:6).

Whitehead(1927) claims that there is a difference between symbolism and direct knowledge; direct knowledge is infallible, i.e. it is correct and perfect, it is inerrant (it is not exposed to errors and wrong ideas); so, what we have known, we have known; but symbolism is very fallible, i.e. it is exposed to mistakes; within symbolism, we may produce wrong interpretation of the symbol we have, we are not sure that it is correct (Whitehead, 1927).

2.2.3 Frye’s Theory

Frye(1957) asserts that talking about symbolism in ordinary life is thinking of such learned cultural archetypes as the cross or the crown, or of the usual associations as of white with purity or green of jealousy; as an archetype, green may symbolize hope or a go sign in traffic; but, the word green as a verbal sign always refers to a certain colour. The study of archetypes is the study of literary symbols as part of a whole; some symbols are images of things common to all men, and therefore have a communicable power which is potentially unlimited (Ibid). “The word symbol means any unit of any literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention” (Frye, 1957, p.71).

Frye in his Anatomy of criticism asserts that we as readers when we are reading, we find our attention moving in two directions at once; one direction is outward, in which we go outside our reading, from the writers to the things they mean, the other direction is inward, in which we try to appreciate the meaning from the word itself; in both cases we deal with symbols (Frye, 1957).

These two types of understanding take place simultaneously in all reading, but verbal structure may be classified according to whether the final direction of meaning is outward or inward (Frye, 1957)).

“In descriptive or assertive writing the final direction is outward” (Frye, 1957:74). This means that what is said does not represent the literal meaning of the speech, but it represents something outside the speech itself. Therefore, the verbal structures represent things external to it.

2.2.4 Saussure’s Theory

Ferdinand De Saussure is a Swiss linguist who emerged a study of “semiotics” in the nineteenth century, which is the study of signs, symbols and their meaning.¹⁴

Saussure(1990) described semiotics as a link between an object that is called “the signified” and its linguistic representation that can be a word called “the signifier” and the two are connected ‘Saussure, 1990). The word symbol has been used to designate the linguistic sign or more specifically what is called “*the signifier*” (ibid.). The signifier is interpreted as the material of (physical) form of the sign; it is something which can be seen, heard, touched, smelt or tasted.¹⁵

The field of semiotics is governed by its elements and key concepts which help in studying, constructing and understanding symbols, which are the signified, signifier and object. For Saussure(1990), the signified is the intellectual concept represented by the signifier (verbal or non-verbal); the signifier is the visible form that represents the signified; the object is the observed form that is being represented by the signs (Saussure, 1990).

He defined a sign as being composed of signifier (signifiant), the form which the sign takes, and the signified (signifié), the concept it represents; so, the sign is the result of the association of the signifier and the signified and the link between them is arbitrary (Saussure, 1990).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen different literary theories that present different definition of symbolism because it is regarded as the most prominent literary device that authors used in their works to convey messages indirectly in order to avoid problems that may fall upon them.

¹⁴ <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~kemmer/Found/saussurebio.html>

¹⁵ <http://users.aber.ac.uk/dgc/Documents/S4B/sem02.html>

Chapter Three

The Scarlet Letter(1850): A
critical Review

Chapter Three

The Scarlet Letter (1850): A Critical Review

Introduction

American literature has passed through a lot of periods; this has led to the appearance of different literary movements, which produce a lot of writers specialized in different genres poetry, drama and fiction (Bode, 1981). Romantic writers focus on nature, individual and imagination (Santee, 2010). Nathaniel Hawthorne is a romantic author who believes in imagination and emotion (ibid.). This chapter introduces an overview about American literature and about the Romantic Movement, and also represents Hawthorne's major works, focusing on his masterpiece *The Scarlet letter(1850)* and its analysis.

3.1 American Literature in the Nineteenth Century

American literature is a treasure land of authors who have contributed to its evolution in different genres such as poetry, drama and fiction. It has passed through successive periods, and each period has its special characteristics which affect the style and the writing of authors and poets (Grellet, 2009). American literature has developed from time to time because of the plentiful authors, poets, novelists, and critics and the diversity of their works (ibid.).

The nineteenth century American literature has been characterized by the multiplicity of literary works in different genres. The first comprehensive anthology of American poetry appeared in the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s; in the half of the century poets tried to inform, to entertain, and to put into memorable language America's history, myths and topography, their poetry built upon tradition, so poetry represents tradition itself, a long history of expression carried to America from a European past.¹⁶ The most prominent American poets are Walt Whitman, William Cullen Bryant, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

William Cullen Bryant (1798-1878) is one of the America's first naturalistic poet; his poems' themes are typical of the nineteenth century American verse (Bode, 1981). He is interested in describing nature; he used to describe the beauty of flowers and trees (ibid.). Bryant chooses nature as a source for poetic inspiration, and also he is interested in death and

¹⁶ www.usm.es/.../2.HistoryLiteraryCriticism

melancholy that is why he was the most known American romantic poet (Grellet, 2009). His first great poem is *Thanatopsis* (1817); its title is Greek standing for *view of death*; in this poem, Bryant attempts to make the individual believe that the death is the absolute end of the individual (High, 1986).

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) is another great American poet who called himself a “cosmic poet”; he meant the poet of the whole world and the seer of the past, present, and future (Grellet, 2009). Concerning his writing, Whitman used to write his poems like ordinary sentences rather than stanzas, his repetition of words’ sounds gives unity to his poetry, so that ordinary people can read and understand his poems easily (High, 1986). Whitman’s best work is *Leaves of Grass* (1855), a book that contains a cluster of poems; he remained to add new poems to the collection until his death, most of the poems in *Leaves of Grass* deal with man and nature (Bode,1981).

The nineteenth century American literature has seen the rise of different literary movements which have made the American authors produce wonderful works in all genres especially in fiction. Fiction includes novels and short stories to which the United States made early contributions; in the early nineteenth century, short stories reached a high point in its development (ibid.).

Among the movements that appear in nineteenth century are romanticism, realism and naturalism. The latter, which reached its height in the 1890s, is usually viewed as a result of realism (Lamb & Thompson, 2005). It is a word created by the French novelist Emile Zola (High, 1986). Naturalists believe that people have not the absolute freedom, their behaviours and opinions are controlled by the environment (ibid.). They wrote about the sexual affairs of young girls who had moved from farms to cities and about individuals who had the ability but not the opportunity to grow (Lamb & Thompson, 2005). Some of these authors are Stephen Crane, Frank Norris and Hamlin Garland:

“The naturalists explained society in Darwinist terms: heredity and environment determine men in a world where only the fittest survive; these ideas dominate the works of Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, Upton Sinclair and Henry James. The major American naturalists are Stephen Crane, Frank Norris and Jack London.”(Grellet, 2009: 117)

Stephen Crane (1871-1900) is considered as the first American naturalist, and all his characters are controlled by their environment (High, 1986). In all his works, Crane focuses on the effect of fear on behaviour (Skipp, 1992). At the age of twenty-nine, Crane became famous by his novel *Maggie: A Girl of Streets* (1893), which is the first naturalistic American novel (Grellet, 2009). It is a sad story of a girl who is betrayed by her family and friends; she lives in the streets and finally she becomes a prostitute and one day she jumps in the river and dies.

American literary realism is a movement in which the individuals are controlled by themselves; they are responsible for their behaviours.¹⁷ The major realist authors are William Dean Howells who is considered as the realism's most vocal proponent, Henry James who is the greatest of the realists, called *the father of the psychological novel*, and Ellen Glasgow (Skipp, 1992).

By the 1875, American writers are moving towards realism; William Dean Howells (1837-1920) is the first American realist who created the first theory for American realism (High, 1986). He supported the new anti-romantic realism (Skipp, 1992: 50). Howells applied his realist theories in his novels; his best novel is *The Rise of Silas Laphan* (1885), which is a story of a normal, uneducated man who becomes rich in the paint business; in the end, his paint is ruined because he refuses to cheat other people (High, 1986).

3.2 Romanticism (The Romantic Period)

During the 19th century, many of the major and the prominent figures in American Literature appeared; they were writers of novels, romances and short stories, this quick appearance and development of writers occurred under the influence of a European cultural movement, *Romanticism*.¹⁸ In fact, *Romanticism* is a movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; it was an artistic and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of 18th century.¹⁹

Romanticism initially emerged as a response to the age of reason, characterized by a great focus on the freedom of the individual and his emotions, on human imagination, and on nature (Santee, 2010). The American Romantics demonstrated a high level of moral

¹⁷ [www.freedictionary.com/romantic period](http://www.freedictionary.com/romantic+period).

¹⁸ See the same website

¹⁹ See the same website

enthusiasm, commitment to individualism and the unfolding of the self, an inherently, good, while human society was filled with corruption.²⁰

The Romantic Movement appeared in America at the beginning of the 19th; it greatly influenced the American culture until the middle of the century (Santee, 2010). It based more on emotion rather than reason, on feelings rather than logic, on imagination rather than reality and on individualism rather than social conformity; it deals with the love of nature, of freedom, and of the individualism, which were so admired by the Americans and especially writers and artists (ibid.). Bode (1981) states: “[...] The individual instead of the group, the wild instead of the tame. The irregular instead of the regular are features stressed by romantic writers”(Bode (1981: 8).

Therefore, most of the American writers used to express themselves under the effects of romanticism; they give an enormous importance to the individual and to nature in their works (Santee, 2010). They attempt to demonstrate and to show more how nature could bring out deep feeling in man and they rely heavily on symbolism and allegory (ibid.).

The American romanticists of the mid-19th century named themselves “*Transcendentalist*” who were led by the American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson (the founder of transcendentalism) (skipp, 1992). Transcendentalists attempt to find the truth through feeling and intuition rather than through logic (High, 1986).

Bode(1981) defined Transcendentalism as a “recognition in man of the capacity of knowing truth intuitively, or of attaining knowledge transcending the reach of the senses”. (Bode, 1981: 53)

Therefore, the American transcendentalism had its roots in Romanticism; it is a belief that the visible world observed by an intuitive imagination, which offers endless signs about the invisible world, whose truth stand behind the physical facts perceived by the five senses (Skipp, 1992).

Writers such as Hawthorne, Poe, Thoreau and Emerson are true romanticists and at the same time transcendentalists, they were interested in the decadent aspects of the features of romanticism in both poetry and fiction; with those American romanticists, the American literature gradually develop and take new directions (Bode, 1981).

²⁰ [www.freedictionary.com/romantic period.](http://www.freedictionary.com/romantic%20period)

3.2.1 Hawthorne's Style, Themes and Works

Nathaniel Hawthorne is considered as the greatest American novelist whose works made the American Literature gradually develop; his novels and short stories are still considered as the best that America has produced (Bode, 1981).

Hawthorne writes about various subjects and various themes, but his favourite theme is alienation. He has a strong feeling for the Puritan past of the seventeenth century New England, and this is the setting of his masterpiece *The scarlet Letter* (1850) (High, 1986). It is a story of Hester Prynne who commits adultery with a religious man Arthur Dimmesdale, and she is forced to wear the Scarlet Letter "A" on her dress as a punishment of her sin. This novel shows how the Puritans deal with persons who try to break the Puritan laws.

In much of his writing, Hawthorne examines the effects of evil when it was inside the human mind, and focuses on the dark side of human character (ibid.). He said in his notebook "there is evil in every human heart", and in his speculative sketch, "*fancy's show box*" that every "heart has surely been polluted by the flitting phantoms of iniquity" (Quoted in Gross, 1960: 6). Themes of loneliness, evil and alienation are repeated in most of his works.

"Hawthorne always writes about man in society rather than about man in nature" (High, 1986: 49). In all his works (novels and short stories), he wrote as a moralist, he was interested in what happened in human mind when they had done wrong or broke the normal law and tradition (Bode, 1981).

Hawthorne describes the psychology of his characters as Bode (1981) states:

"Hawthorne was imbued with an inquiring imagination, an intensely meditative mind, and an unceasing interest in the ambiguity of man's being. He was anatomist of "the interior of the heart". Conscious of the loneliness of man in the universe, of the darkness that enshrouds all joy, and of the need of man to look into his soul" (Bode, 1981: 44).

Hawthorne in his writings, not characterize only with the emphasis on the dangers, difficulties and contradictions that face the man in his life, but he also bases on the use of symbols, on making one stand for another, for example, "A black veil represents the

wickedness of mankind, a marble heart represents an individual's unpardonable sin, a garden of poisonous flowers represents hell" (Bode, 1981: 9).

Concerning Hawthorne's works, his first publication was *Fanshawe* in 1828, and then collection of short stories *Twice Told-Tales* (1837), he also wrote another collection which is *Grand Father's Chair* in 1841. Hawthorne Published further collection *Mosses From Old Manse* in 1846; his best work usually has a strong feeling for the Puritan past of seventeenth century New England, which is the setting of *The Scarlet Letter*(1850).

3.2.2 *The Scarlet Letter* (1850): A Literary Analysis

3.2.2.1 Plot Summary

The story of *The Scarlet Letter*(1850) is about a woman whose husband sends her before him to Boston, the Puritan settlement in New England while he remains two years in Amsterdam looking after some necessary affairs.

While living alone in Boston, Hester Prynne falls in love and commits adultery with a religious man who is the Puritan minister called Arthur Dimmesdale. Hester gets pregnant with a daughter, her illegitimate child, whom she names Pearl. Everyone recognizes that she is separated from her husband for two years, and the baby cannot be his, and no one knows who her lover is.

Because of Hester's sin of adultery, the village magistrates imprisoned her for this sin, and she is publicly punished and obliged to stand upon the scaffold (a public stage) and wears a scarlet "A" on the bodice of her dress, carrying her child and exposed to public humiliation in order to everyone knows that she is an adulteress; but the minister does not confess his sin of adultery.

When her husband Chillingworth joins her in Boston, he accidentally witnesses the scene of her public punishment and consequently decides to take revenge for his wife. After seven years, Dimmesdale calls Hester and her child to join him on the scaffold and suddenly he confesses his sin and opens his skirt. The scarlet "A" that is carved on his chest reveals to the townspeople, and he dies.

Years after when Hester also died, she is buried near the minister, they share the same grave- stone, and the scarlet "A" marked on the head stone.

3.2.2.2 The Setting

The novel takes place on a small colonial town of Boston, Massachusetts in the 17th century; as Hawthorne describes it, the town is situated between the sea and a great wilderness (Kirk, 2000). It is the Puritan society, a pure religious community.

The events of the novel take a long period and different places, which make the novel more interesting.

The first events take place in the market place which is one of the main gathering places of the Puritans.

The scaffold is also one of the significant settings of the novel, where Hester Prynne is punished publicly and where Dimmesdale confesses his sin of adultery.

The novel also takes place in the prison and the cottage where Hester lives an isolated life after committing her sin of adultery.

The forest is the most noticeable setting in that novel, in which Dimmesdale and Hester feel the freedom which is vanished in the city, they can express their feelings and emotions openly, and discuss plans.

3.2.2.3 The Characters

In this novel, we have four major characters that are: Hester Prynne, Roger Chillingworth, Arthur Dimmesdale and Pearl (Gross, 1960).

Hester Prynne: She is the protagonist of the novel; she is Chillingworth's wife and Pearl's mother. She is firstly introduced as a guilty woman who is severely punished and obliged to wear the scarlet letter "A" on her cloth as a symbol of her sin of adultery. At the end of the novel Hester's personality is changed to a brave, helpful, tender and sensitive human being.

Roger Chillingworth: He is actually Hester's husband, who is much older than she is. He is from Netherland (Amsterdam), he arrives in Boston on the day that Hester publicly shamed and forced to wear the scarlet letter "A". He is firstly seen as a victim of his wife's adultery, but Hawthorne associates this character with devilish features, he is viewed as an evil spirit, because of his desire of revenge rather than justice.

Arthur Dimmesdale: He is a religious man and a respected minister in Boston; he was loved by the people of town. He is Hester's fellow sinner and Pearl's father, but this fact is hidden till the end of the novel. Dimmesdale as a consequence of his sin, and secrecy, is living in a confusion ragging between holiness and self-torture, that causes his health to fall gradually and ends with his death.

Pearl: She is the illegitimate child and the result of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale adultery that causes her much anguish and torment. Pearl in the novel is described as extremely beautiful child who enjoys the freedom and who lacks Puritan qualities. She is wise far beyond her years, frequently engaging in ironic play having to do with her mother's scarlet letter .When Dimmesdale confesses his paternity and dies; Pearl becomes a normal child and is going to live a normal life with her mother.

The minor characters are: The black man, Mistress Hibbins, Governor Bellingham, and John Wilson (Gross, 1960).

The Black Man: A nickname for the devil, the legend tells that Black Man inhabits the wood and where he appears at nights with a book in his hand. Within this book, people of devil spirits write their names using their own blood.

Mistress Hibbins: She is a widow who lives with her brother Governor Bellingham, she commonly known to be a witch who ventures into the forest and makes some appointment with the black man at night.

Governor Bellingham: He is the former governor who witnesses the punishment of Hester Prynne. He decided to allow Pearl to stay with her mother.

John Wilson: He is the oldest clergyman in Boston and the friend of Arthur Dimmesdale. Like Governor Bellingham, he follows the community's rules severely.

3.2.2.4 Themes

In this novel, the theme of sin is considered as the most predominant theme that prevails in the whole novel. It is clear in the behaviour of Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale and Roger Chillingworth. They experience the effects of sin in different forms.

“In the scarlet letter, Hawthorne made a study of three types of sin, the revealed sin of Hester, the concealed sin of Dimmesdale, and the unpardonable sin of Chillingworth” (Gross, 1960: 104).

Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale have both committed the same sin which is adultery. Their behaviour can be called a “sin” because Hester is a married woman, and Dimmesdale is a religious man in a church; while Roger Chillingworth is guilty of having the sin of revenge.

The unpardonable sin is clear in the portrayal of Chillingworth, the husband who seeks revenge for his wife. He sinned out of anger for the adultery and he never felt any shame for his revenge because to him it was not a sin, but it is a goal.

The sin in general led to alienation (Gross, 1960). So the second theme that dominates the novel is alienation. It is clear in the isolated life of Hester in New England. She becomes isolated and lives lonely in cottage near the outskirts of the city because of her shameful history.

Revenge is also one of the noticeable themes in the novel. It is clear in the behaviour of Roger Chillingworth, when he was trying to destroy Dimmesdale in order to take revenge for his wife when he recognizes that he is her lover and the real father of Pearl.

3.2.2.5 Style

In *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) Hawthorne has used formal words chosen carefully for exact and precise meaning (Gross, 1960). The mixture of reality and fiction makes the novel more attractive, this makes the reader ask whether the events are real or fictional (ibid.).

Hawthorne used to describe the psychology of his characters; the characters in the (*SL*) have wronged secretly, this is what keeps them at a distance from people (High, 1986).

In fact, Hawthorne’s style is a commonplace for any writer of the nineteenth century. He frequently writes lengthy visual descriptions since his audience had no other means to see the setting, as we see in his novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) when he intricately describes the prison door and its surroundings. Hawthorne has also used the formal dialogue from one character to another one, as we see in the dialogue of Pearl, the young child; he makes her as the other characters, there is no difference between them. In addition, Hawthorne in his novel focuses on the description of the characters’ inner struggle, and this is clear in Dimmesdale’s

internal struggle when he has struggled with himself to make his sin public and in Chillingworth's behaviour when he tries to take revenge for his wife.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discovered that Hawthorne has many themes related to some historical factors, his personal life, and literary status in the nineteenth century American literature. This is what makes him famous. One of his known novels is *The Scarlet Letter*(1850). The latter is rich in various stylistics devices. One of them is symbolism.

Chapter Four

The Investigation of Symbolism in

The Scarlet Letter (1850)

Chapter Four

The Investigation of Symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)

Introduction

In *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) there is a great deal of symbolism, it would be impossible to deal with all the symbols; therefore, we focus on the major ones and try to depict the different interpretations they stand for. “*The Scarlet Letter* is so popular, generation after generation, because its beauty lies in the layers of meaning and the uncertainties of the symbols and characters” (Kirk, 2000: 7). This chapter explores the major symbols used in this novel and their various interpretations.

4.1 Symbolism in Objects

Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) used a lot of symbols; he used to make one stand for another, and he based on presenting things and objects with two meanings, the invisible meaning and the hidden meaning which is the real meaning that stands for the symbols. We as readers of this novel, we should decode these symbols and recognize their real meaning.

4.1.1 The Scarlet Letter “A”

The most prominent and the noticeable symbol in the Hawthorne’s novel is the scarlet letter “A” that is embroidered on the bodice of Hester’s dress when she committed adultery and brought Pearl as her illegitimate child.

Since the Puritan society is a model society operating on God’s laws and it is a safe-haven for humanity that is free of sin and crime. Even the Puritanism, a religion based on purity and worship, cannot be sin-free and crime-free; so they punished her and obliged her to wear a scarlet “A” upon her breast and stand upon the scaffold to show the world that she is an adulteress. In the Second Chapter, Hawthorne writes:

“On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A. It was so artistically

done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore,...was THE SCARLET LETTER, so fantastically embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom” (Hawthorne, 1994: 45-46).

“... she turned her eyes downward at the scarlet letter, and even touched it with her finger ,to assure herself that the infant and the shame were real” (Hawthorne, 1994: 50).

In the novel, the meaning of the scarlet letter “A” changes different times. It begins as a symbol of sin and especially adultery, it becomes a symbol of loneliness, alienation and isolation, and finally it becomes a symbol of ability, admirable and angel.

Firstly, the scarlet letter “A” is a symbol of adultery in which Hester wears the scarlet letter on her breast as symbol of her sin against Roger Chillingworth. The Puritans punished her and obliged her to wear a scarlet A upon her dress in order to show the world that she is adulteress because she brought shame upon them; in the Fifth Chapter, Hawthorne wrote:

“Here, she said to herself, had been the scene of her guilt, and here should be the scene of her earthly punishment.” (Hawthorne, 1994: 68).

As the townsman said to Hester’s husband Chillingworth when he came to Boston,

“[...] For the remainder for her natural life to wear a mark of shame upon her bosom.” (Hawthorne, 1994: 53).

With reference to this quotation, it is obvious that “the mark of shame” is the scarlet A, which is a symbol of shame, sin and especially adultery.

“Any sin will be followed by isolation.”(Gross, 1960: 19). Therefore, the sin in general led to isolation, from whatever the sinner did. The sin of Hester causes her to be isolated from her society, departing from this point; we arrive at the second meaning of the scarlet letter which is aloneness and alienation.

The second meaning of the scarlet letter is aloneness and alienation that stands for Hester's isolated life in New England. She lives in cottage near the outskirts of the city. Hester became isolated because of her shameful history, she has no friend in the world; Pearl, her illegitimate child is the only companion of her lonely life. Hawthorne wrote:

“Lonely as was Hester's situation, and without a friend on earth who dared to show himself, she, however, incurred no risk of want” (Hawthorne, 1994: 69).

Finally, the meaning of the scarlet letter “A” takes another direction which is ability, admirable and angel; because later, the townspeople view the scarlet letter to stand for the ability of Hester's needlework and for the ability of the help of the poor and the sick without selfishness. Therefore, Hester's personality grows to be admirable amongst the people of the town. In Chapter Thirteen, the townspeople said:

“Do you see that woman with the embroidered badge? They would say to strangers. ‘It is our Hester—the town's own Hester—who is so kind to the poor, so helpful to the sick, so comfortable to the afflicted!’” (Hawthorne, 1994: 138).

The town's people refused the first meaning of the scarlet letter that Hester wore on her breast:

“The letter was the symbol of her calling. Such helpfulness was found in her—so much power to do, and power to sympathize— that many people refused to interpret the scarlet “A” by its original signification. They said that it meant “Able”, so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength” (Hawthorne, 1994: 137).

The three changes of the meaning of the scarlet letter show the progressive possession of Hester's sin, her lonely life and her ability.

4.1.2 The Scaffold

The second symbol in this novel is the scaffold, which is a platform on which Hester

stands and wears the scarlet “A” on her dress and carrying her illegitimate child for approximately three hours:

“It was, in short, the platform of the pillory, and above it rose the framework of that instrument of discipline, so fashioned as to confine the human head in its light grasp, and this hold it up the public gaze. The very ideal of ignominy was embodied and made manifest in this contrivance of wood and iron...her sentence bore that she should stand a certain time upon the platform, but without undergoing that gripe about the neck and confinement of the head” (Hawthorne, 1994: 47).

For the Puritans, the sinner must stand on the scaffold to show his/her sin; in the Second Chapter, Hawthorne wrote:

“[...] the townspeople assembled and leveling their stern regards at Hester Prynne _yes, at herself_who stood on the scaffold of the pillory ,an infant on her arm ,and the letter “A” in scarlet ,fantastically with gold thread, upon her bosom !(Hawthorne, 1994: 50).

The scaffold, like the scarlet letter to the Puritans, is a place of public shame for those persons who decide to break the puritan laws; it represents the sin of the person standing upon it and it shows the Puritan way of dealing with sin. It also symbolizes punishment, shame and the fate of isolation.

4.1.3 The Forest

The forest in the novel is a place where Hester and her lover Dimmesdale were met together, in order to be alone far from the eyes of the people. To many Puritans, the forest is a dark and evil place hunted by the black man (Kirk, 2000). It is a place free of laws where people can go to escape the harsh strictness of the Puritans.

The forest is considered as a natural world, governed by natural laws, as opposed to the artificial one, the Puritan community with its manmade laws (ibid.). In this world, Hester

can take off her cap, let down her hair, and discuss plans with Dimmesdale to be together away from the severe laws of the Puritans.

Therefore, the forest symbolizes the free world and the dark world at the same time. It represents the dark world because it is a place where no Puritan laws exist, where witches gather, and where individuals sell their soul to the devil, as Mistress Hibbins said to Hester in the Eighth Chapter:

“Wilt thou go with us tonight? There will be a merry company in the forest; and I well-nigh promised the Black Man that comely Hester Prynne should make one ...had they taken her from me, I would willingly have gone with thee into the forest ,and signed my name in the Black Man’s book too ,and that with mine own blood”
(Hawthorne, 1994: 98).

The trees surrounding it do not allow a lot of sunlight penetrate in the forest; this makes the forest a place of gloom and darkness; thus, sins are easy to commit. No one can see what happens in that forest and no one can report misbehaviours. Therefore, it is obvious that the individuals may do as they wish. Here, the forest can symbolize darkness and evil. In Chapter Sixteen Hawthorne wrote:

“Hester Prynne made a step or two towards the track that led through the forest, but still remained under the deep shadow of the trees. She beheld the minister advancing along the path, entirely alone, and leaning on a staff which he had cut by the wayside.”(Hawthorne, 1994: 160).

The forest also symbolizes freedom, because it is a place where men and women can open up, be themselves, and pull out secrets. It is a place where Dimmesdale openly expresses his undying love to Hester, and she can do the same for him.

The forest represents the freedom when Hester removes her letter for a brief time, and she places it back on her bosom before returning to the city.

Hawthorne uses the forest to present protection for members of society to become safe from the daily puritan life where all the strict and religious laws are vanished.

4.1.4 The Meteor

When Dimmesdale stands on the scaffold with Hester Prynne and Pearl in Chapter Twelve, a scarlet meteor appears and traces a red A in the night sky.

In Chapter Twelve, Hawthorne wrote:

“[...]Dimmesdale had done speaking, a light gleamed for and wide over all the muffled sky. It was doubtless caused by one of those meteors, which the night-watcher may so often observe burning out to waste, in the vacant regions of the atmosphere.”(Hawthorne, 1994: 130).

Things like meteors in the shape of an “A” and stars which occur in the sky of America are common and regular, especially in the Puritan communities, and the community leaders and religious men would interpret these meteors to be messages from God to give them warning about bad things or offences affecting the community (Kirk, 2000).

However, in This novel, the scarlet meteor that forms a red A in the sky seemed to have two interpretations. The meteor first interpretation relates to the naivety of the Puritans. Since they are more religious community, the townspeople see the meteor “A” as sign of “Angel” which relates to the governor who passed away onto Heaven to become one of God's angels.

The second interpretation, the meteor symbolizes an aspect of Dimmesdale's life because he is the first person who sees the sign in the sky. Therefore, Dimmesdale sees the meteor as a symbol of his own sin of adultery, and he believes that God is trying to expose his secret as a sinner to the entire world; he thinks that the meteor is saying that he should wear a mark of shame like Hester.

“[...] therefore, solely to the disease in his own eye and heart that the minister, looking upward to the zenith, beheld there the appearance of an immense letter -the letter A- marked out in lines of dull red light .not but the meteor may have shown itself at that point, burning

duskily through a veil of cloud ,but with no such shape as his guilty imagination gave it, or, at least, with so little definiteness, that another's guilt might have seen another symbol in it.”(Hawthorne, 1994: 132).

Hence, identical to the scarlet letter on Hester's breast, the meteor serves as Dimmesdale's personal symbol for his share of the sin. The meteor explodes onto the scene as a divine sign of wrongdoing and a message to the world that God sees all.

4.2 Symbolism in Characters

“*The scarlet letter* achieves greatness in its dramatic, objective presentation of conflicting moralities in action: each character seems at once symbolic, yet real.” (Gross, 1960: 45). There are four major symbolic characters in the novel, which are Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth and Pearl (ibid.).

4.2.1 Hester Prynne

Hester Prynne is a woman who falls in love with a religious man called Dimmesdale and commits adultery. Hester in the novel presents a lot of symbols (Kirk, 2000). Firstly, she is a symbol of strength and ability, in the sense that she remains in Boston alone without her husband for two years, and accepts her punishment; this shows the great strength because she could easily have left Boston searching for new life, and also she later on becomes a voluntary nurse in the town and gives advice in matters of the heart for the people who condemned her. Hence, this acceptance of her fate presents her as a symbol of strength and ability.

The second example of her strength is her refusal to reveal the identity of Pearl's father, and chooses to face the insults and the punishment alone, because watching someone who commits the same crime remains freely and did not expose to any sentence is so difficult. In addition, her strength is clear in the way that she tries to create new life with her lover in the wilderness and she has been able to escape with him from the town.

Hester is also a symbol of passion and affection because she lets her heart controls her, and thinks as her heart prompts her. She is a very passionate and affectionate woman whom the heart predominates. She sinned through blind passion, and her passion and affection leads her to fall in love with the reverend Dimmesdale and commits her sin, because with whom

she knows the real meaning of love, affection and safety which was never felt before with her husband.

Hester is a symbol of beauty and attraction as Hawthorne describes her as a very beautiful woman with dark eyes; in the Second Chapter Hawthorne wrote:

“The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam; and a face which, besides being beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow and deep black eyes. She was ladylike, too, after the manner of the feminine gentility of those days; characterized by a certain state and dignity, rather than by the delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace which is now recognized as its indication” (Hawthorne, 1994: 45).

4.2.2 Arthur Dimmesdale

Dimmesdale is a religious man who commits adultery. He is a symbol of weakness, because he was trying to hide his sin. His sin is concealed from the town until the novel's final scaffold scene. He is weak in the sense that he attends Hester's punishment on the scaffold, but he could not reveal his sin, and makes Hester suffer alone and wear the scarlet letter A on her dress alone. Normally, he is obliged to wear the scarlet letter as Hester has done, because they share the same sin. However, Dimmesdale chooses to hide his guilt which leads him to suffer mentally and also he tortures himself by branding an A on his chest with a hot iron.

Dimmesdale is also a symbol of hypocrisy because he was broken the religious laws and committed the sin of adultery secretly, and we all know that adultery is forbidden in any religion and especially in the Puritan religion, and the sinner must be punished severely.

4.2.3 Roger Chillingworth

Roger Chillingworth is Hester's husband who sends his wife before him to the Puritan settlement, while he remains two years in Amsterdam looking after some necessary affairs.

Chillingworth is a symbol of devil and hell in which he returns on quest for revenge against Dimmesdale.

He is a scholar who used his knowledge to disguise himself as a doctor, intent on discovering and tormenting Hester's anonymous lover. In order to take revenge for his wife, he took up residence with Dimmesdale.

Hence, here since the devil tries to damage and corrupt the most holy of humans, Chillingworth's secret act for revenge against a religious man makes him equal to the Satan himself because of his devilish operation. In the fourth chapter, Hawthorne writes:

"[...] Master Brackett, the jailer, thought fit to introduce a Physician. He described him as a man of skill in all Christian modes of physical science, and likewise familiar with whatever the savage people could teach, in respect to medicinal herbs and roots that grew in the forest."
(Hawthorne, 1994: 60).

4.2.4 Pearl

Pearl is the illegitimate child of Hester and Dimmesdale. She is the living personification of the scarlet letter "A" that her mother wears upon her chest.

Pearl is a symbol of childhood's innocence, because she is the only major character in the novel that does not know what the scarlet letter really means; this appears when Pearl shapes an A on her bosom. In the Fifteenth Chapter, Hawthorne writes:

"[...] Pearl took some eelgrass and imitated, as best she could, on her own bosom the decoration with which she was so familiar on her mother's. A letter _ the letter "A" _ but freshly green, instead of scarlet" (Hawthorne, 1994: 151).

According to this quotation, it is clear that Pearl is a pure innocent child who does not know anything. If she knew what the letter A really means, she did not shape it on her bosom, she was only imitating her mother.

Pearl also symbolizes the intelligence; her acts suggest the super intelligence which a child at her age cannot have. Hawthorne writes:

“ ‘My little Pearl’ said Hester ... ‘dost thou know my child, what this letter means which thy mother is doomed to wear?’, ‘yes mother’ said the child ‘it’s the great letter “A” thou hast taught me in horn book...dost thou know, child, wherefore thy mother wears this letter?’ .‘Truly do I!’ answered Pearl, looking brightly into her mother’s face. ‘It is for the same reason that the minister keeps his hand over his heart!’”(Hawthorne, 1994: 152).

The second example of Pearl’s intelligence is that she asks strange questions that no one equal to her age can ask. She asks her mother:

“What does the letter mean, mother? _and why dost thou wear it?_ And why dost the minister keep his hand over his heart ?”(Hawthorne, 1994: 154).

Pearl is intelligent because she is used to repeat these questions to her mother several times, and she insists because she wants to get the answers. However, her mother was failed in giving her the answers because this subject hurts her and also she prefers to hide the answers and cover the situation with her anger in order to avoid shame in front of her child. Hawthorne writes:

“‘What shall I say?’Thought Hester to herself... ‘Silly Pearl’ said she, ‘what questions are these? There are many things in this world that a child must not ask about. What know I of the minister’s heart? And as for the scarlet letter, I wear it for the sake of its gold thread” (Hawthorne, 1994: 154).

Conclusion

After examining this novel, it is clear that Hawthorne presents his attitude towards the rigid and the strict Puritan society; he used a lot symbols, in order to introduce his views of

motionless and severe Puritans in opposition to sensibility and kind-hearted nature of Hester whom, it seems, he supports.

General Conclusion

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In *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hawthorne expresses the struggle between the woman and the law status (Gross, 1960). Thus, as readers, we understand well that the Puritan Society is a severe religious community, and a model society operating on God's laws and it is a safe-haven for humanity that is free of sin and crime. Even the Puritanism, a religion based on purity and worship, cannot be sin-free and crime-free; that is why they punish Hester severely by making her wear the scarlet A upon her dress and stand upon the scaffold, facing public humiliation (Kirk, 2000).

The main point that should be mentioned is that of Hawthorne's symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). In our investigation of Hawthorne's symbols in the novel, it is clear that Hawthorne uses symbolism to express social and spiritual status at that time of his work, and to explain more his themes of sin and isolation. He presents a highly complex variation on his usual theme of human isolation and the human community. The heroine Hester Prynne was an excellent example of both these themes since she was isolated from a strict Puritan community (Anane & Bensaci, 2009).

In addition, Hawthorne's symbolism is an essential tool in addressing topics indirectly, which is too radical to be publicly addressed in the nineteenth century. Therefore, he used symbolism in an intelligent way to express his beliefs and his own views on human nature and religion.

To conclude, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*(1850) is full of symbols. However, it would impossible to deal with all the symbols. The present study has focused more on the major ones and tried to explain their meanings in order to add an extra meaning to the novel which is mixed between different emotions and feelings towards the sinners and their society.

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Appendix

Nathaniel Hawthorne's Biography

- 1804** Born in Salem, Massachusetts, July 4, the second of three children.
- 1818** Hawthorne's move to Raymond, Maine.
- 1819** Nathaniel returns to Salem and begins preparing for college.
- 1820** He enters Bowdoin, where he was to form lifelong friendship with Franklin Pierce, Horatio Bridge, and Jonathan Cilly.
- 1825** Graduates from Bowdoin, standing eighteenth in a class of thirty-five. Goes back to Salem, but does not enter his Manning uncles' counting house.
- 1828** Publishes his first novel, *Fanshawe*, anonymously and at his own expense.
- 1829** Begins to publish stories, first in the Salem *gazette* and then (1831) in an annual gift-book, the *Token*.
- 1836** Goes to Boston and edits the *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* for a salary of 500\$ a year, 20\$ of which was ever paid.
- 1837** Publishes *Twice-Told Tales*, which his Bowdoin classmate Longfellow reviews enthusiastically. That autumn he meets the three Peabody sisters.
- 1838** Hawthorne has been calling on a heiress, Mary Crowninshield Silsbee. In February she tells him a false story about John Louis O' Sullivan, editor of *The Democratic Review*, and Hawthorne challenges him to duel. O' Sullivan refuses the challenge and refutes the story. Later that month, however, Hawthorne's friend Jonathan Cilly accepts a challenge from a political enemy and is killed in the duel that follows. At that end of the year, Hawthorne becomes engaged to Sophia Amelia Peabody.
- 1839** Receives his first political appointment, as weigher and gauger in the Boston Custom House, at a salary of 1500\$ a year.
- 1840** Joins the Utopian community at Brook Farm, hoping to find a home for himself and Sophia, but leaves it that same year.

- 1841** Marries Sophia July 9; and goes to live with her in Concord, at the old Manse. Publishes an enlarged edition of *Twice-Told Tales*.
- 1842** Lives in Concord, a neighbor of Emerson and Thoreau.
- 1845** Edits and writes an introduction for *Journal of an African Cruiser*, by his friend Horatio Bridge.
- 1846** Receives his second Democratic Party appointment, as surveyor at the Salem Custom House. Publishes *Mosses from an Old Manse*.
- 1849** After being discharged from the Custom House in June, by the new Whig administration, he starts on his most productive period as a writer.
- 1850** Publishes *The Scarlet Letter*. Moves to red farm house near Lenox, in the Berkshires.
- 1851** Publishes the *House of the Seven Gables* and *A Wonder –book for boys and girls*. Moves in the late Autumn to west Newton, near Boston.
- 1852** Publishes *The Snow Image* and *The Blithedale Romance*. Buys “The Wayside”, in Concord, and moves there with his family.
- 1853** Publishes *Tangle wood Tales*, the last book of his productive period. Receives his most lucrative political appointment, that of United States consul at Liverpool.
- 1854** Publishes an enlarged edition of the *Mosses*. Keeps an extensive journal, in preparation for writing a novel about England.
- 1857** Resigns his consulship and spends two months in London.
- 1858** Travels through France and by sea to Italy; spends the spring in Roma and summer in Florence, where he starts writing *The Marble Faun*.
- 1859** In Roma his daughter Una nearly dies of a lingering fever and Hawthorne’s health begins to fail.
- 1860** Publishes *The Marble Faun*. Returns to Concord and the “Wayside”.
- 1861-62** Works on *Dr. Grimshove’s Secret* and *Septimius Felton*, but finds himself unable to finish either.

1863 Publishes *Our Old Home*, a volume of travel sketches dedicated to his friend Pierce, who has become vastly unpopular. Begins work on *Dolliver Romance*, but finds he is rapidly losing his strength.

1884 Sets out on carriage trip with Pierce, to restore his health, but dies in his sleep on the night of may 18-19, at Plymouth, New Hampshire.