

‘SKARLETNO SLOVO’ KAO MORALNA ALEGORIJA

‘THE SCARLET LETTER’ AS A MORAL ALLEGORY

Autor: Milica Veselinović, učenica Gimnazije ‘Stevan Jakovljević’, Vlasotince

Mentor: Biljana Pipović, profesor engleskog jezika

REZIME

U kontekstu kolonijalne Nove Engleske, koristeći simbole i sugerišući čitaocu dublji smisao, Nataniel Hotorn stvara primer alegoričnog remek-dela-‘Skarletno slovo’. Radnja je smeštena u koloniji masačusetskog zaliva, pronađenog od strane prvih Puritanaca u sedamnaestom veku. Na prvi pogled priča o preljubi, ovo je, ustvari, priča o snazi jedne žene, koja postaje legenda u koloniji. Preljubnica romana, Hester Prin, je ‘po starom kolonijalnom zakonu, osuđena da uvek na odeći nosi slovo ‘A’. Znak kazne i simbol odvratanja od greha, čini da ona živi u sramoti i izolovanosti, bez ijednog prijatelja, osim vanbračnog deteta, koje je održava u životu, ali je, takođe, čini svesnom svog greha. Strogi i vrlo religiozni Puritanci, Hester vide kao posrnutu ženu. Ona je, ustvari, žena koja predstavlja osećajno ljudsko biće, koje pronalazi unutrašnju snagu da prkosi stanovnicima grada. Hotorn je predstavlja, ne kao grešnicu, već kao snažnu i sposobnu osobu, između bivšeg muža i ljubavnika, sveštenika, koji ostaje neotkriven do pred sam kraj. Na kraju, snaga i poštenje Hester Prin, čine je najvećim primerom individualne borbe protiv društva. Društvo priznaje da slovo ‘A’ znači ‘sposobna’, ‘anđeo’, ‘vredna divljenja’, ili bilo šta drugo osim ‘preljubnica’.

Ključne reči: alegorija, preljuba, greh, skarletno slovo, Puritanizam

SUMMARY

Through the context of colonial New England, Nathaniel Hawthorne, using symbols and suggesting a reader the deeper meaning, creates an example of allegorical masterpiece, ‘The Scarlet Letter’. The setting is formed by a Massachusetts Bay Colony, founded by the early Puritans in the seventeenth century. At first sight, a story of adultery, it is, actually, a story of a woman’s strength, which becomes something of a legend in the colony. The adulteress of the novel, Hester Prynne ‘by the old colony law is condemned always to wear on her garment the letter ‘A’. A mark of punishment and a symbol to deter from a sin, makes her live in ignominy and seclusion with never any companion but her own illegitimate child, who keeps her in life, but also aware of her sin. Strict and highly religious Puritans see Hester as a fallen woman-she is a woman who represents a sensitive human being instead, and who finds an inner strength to defy the townspeople. She is considered not a sinner, but as a person of ability and strength, between her former husband and her lover - a clergyman, who remains unidentified till the very end. In the end, Hester’s strength and honesty make her the greatest example of the individual struggling against the society. The community acknowledges that the ‘A’ stands for ‘Able’, ‘Angel’, ‘Admirable’, or anything rather than ‘Adulteress’.

Key words: allegory, adultery, sin, the scarlet letter, Puritanism

Content:

The genesis of The Scarlet Letter.....	3-4
Moral allegory.....	4-5
The Puritans & moral.....	5-6
A short view of the plot.....	7
Characters:	
Hester Prynne.....	8-10
The scarlet letter.....	10-11
Arthur Dimmesdale.....	11-13
Pearl.....	13-15
Roger Chillingworth.....	15-16
Conclusion.....	16-17

'Among many morals...we put only this into a sentence- Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred.'

I THE GENESIS OF THE SCARLET LETTER

A rag of scarlet cloth with gold embroidery - a product of wonderful skill of needlework, found somewhere between archives of Mr Surveyor Pue (a Surveyor of His Majesty's Customs for the Port of Salem), in the Custom House, fastened eyes of a man who also used to be a surveyor there from 1839/41. And it wasn't just a temporary impression. Fortunately, as the result of the effort he made to tell us a wonderful story, now we have something really valuable and worth of every our sympathy. Now we have a story about 'The Scarlet Letter'. It is the best known work of the nineteenth century American novelist and short story writer Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on 4 July 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts in the family home, now a museum. He was the son of Elizabeth Clarke Manning and Nathaniel Hathorne, a Captain in the U. S. Navy. His ancestors were some of the first Puritans to settle in the New England area and the lingering guilt Hawthorne felt from his great grandfather having officiated during the Salem Witch Trials provided a theme for many of his stories including 'The House of Seven Gables'.

Hawthorne attended Bowdon College in Brunswick, Maine. Hawthorne was not interested in entering any of the traditional professions; he was an eager reader and already writing his own short stories and had many published in magazines, some of them anonymously. Upon graduation he continued to write stories and sketches, some of them included in his collection *Twice Told Tales* (1837). It was not a lucrative pursuit so



Hawthorne worked at the Salem Custom-House to augment his income.

'The Scarlet Letter' was published in spring in 1850 by Ticknor & Fields, beginning Hawthorne's most lucrative period. When he delivered the final pages to James Thomas Fields in February 1850, Hawthorne said that '*some portions of the book are powerfully written*' but doubted it would be popular. In fact, the book was an instant best-seller though. Its initial publication brought wide protest from natives of Salem, who didn't approve of how Hawthorne had described them in his introduction 'The Custom-House'. The second edition of 'The Scarlet Letter' included a preface by Hawthorne dated March 30, 1850, that he had decided to reprint

his introduction '*without the change of a word... The only remarkable features of the sketch are its frank and genuine good-humor... As to enmity, or ill-feeling of any kind, personal or political, he utterly disclaims such motives*'.

The book's immediate success is due to the way it addresses spiritual and moral issues from a uniquely American point of view. In 1850, adultery was an extremely risqué subject, but because Hawthorne had the support of the New England literary establishment, it passed easily into the realm of appropriate reading. It has been said that this work represents the height of Hawthorne's literary genius. It remains relevant for its philosophical and psychological depth, and continues to be read as a classic tale on a universal theme.

The *Scarlet Letter* was also one of the first mass-produced books in America. Into the mid-nineteenth century, bookbinders of home-grown literature typically hand-made their books and sold them in small quantities. The first mechanized printing of 'The *Scarlet Letter*', 2,500 volumes, sold out within ten days, and was widely read and discussed to an extent not much experienced in the young country up until that time. Copies of the first edition are often sought by collectors as rare books. Twentieth century writer D. H. Lawrence said that there could be no more perfect work of the American imagination than *The Scarlet Letter*.

II MORAL ALLEGORY

With Hawthorne's use of details and symbolism where a moral message is presented to the reader, 'The *Scarlet Letter*' has often been described as a richly allegorical novel. Like much of Hawthorne's writings, it explores social and moral questions through the context of colonial New England. Strong and well developed characters used in the novel also help to reinforce the universal truths of the story. Hawthorne's symbolism and characters combine in such a way that an interesting story and many important messages are developed within the plot. 'The *Scarlet Letter*' connects all of these elements to become an allegory and to fully express Nathaniel Hawthorne's personal moral principles.

Throughout the story, symbolism is the most common method of Hawthorne's presenting conflicts and ideas, or linking people, objects, and events. The most obvious symbol in the story is the *scarlet letter*. It is intended by the clergy to be a symbol of the crime that Hester committed, but it does much more. The scarlet letter also represents her torturing agony and her ever-growing strength. In the beginning of the story, the letter serves its purpose as a punishment, and it alienates Hester from society. In the end, instead of being '*a general symbol at which preachers might point*', she becomes an object of admiration in the townspeople's eyes.

Hawthorne had a talent for adding meaning and atmosphere through his characters, such as the guilt-ridden minister Arthur Dimmesdale and the mysterious old doctor Roger Chillingworth. But the scarlet letter itself acts as the novel's most obvious, meaningful and complex symbol, representing her sin of adultery, initially a sign of Hester's shame and alienation but ultimately a mark of her strength and integrity.

The letter though, was always perceived by the colony in a different way than it was by Hester. For Hester the letter was a consequence of her sin that she learned to live

with, but to the people of the town it was a symbol of shame and made her the object of their judgment.

Another symbol, which is just as important, would be *Pearl*, Hester's daughter. Pearl signifies to Hester many sacrifices that have to be made in life to obtain a good thing, but to the town Pearl is nothing more than another sign of Hester's adultery.

Nathaniel Hawthorne formed certain characters that were able to portray certain messages and general truths. Hester Prynne, for example, was a woman who committed a sin and is now being publicly punished for it. Although, her sin was not committed with bad intentions she knows that it was still a sin. She accepts the consequences of her sin in the form of the scarlet letter and Pearl. Another example of a character who could reveal certain truths would be Reverend Dimmesdale. He accompanied Hester in the committing of their sin, but his sin went unacknowledged and unpunished, which tortures his soul even more for hiding his sin from the people who consider him a saint between mortals. And one more character, representing a Devil's messenger on the earth, is a revenge seeker – Roger Chillingworth.

The rosebush '*with its delicate gems*' is a contrast to all that surrounds it – as later the beautifully embroidered scarlet '**A**' will be – is an invitation and '*we could hardly do otherwise than pluck one of its flowers*' to find '*some sweet moral blossom*' in the following, tragic tale and, partly, as a proof that '*the deep heart of Nature*' (perhaps God) may look more kindly ('*could pity and be kind to the prisoner*') on Hester and her child (the roses among the weeds) than her Puritan neighbors do. Even Pearl will tell Mr. Wilson that she '*had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison-door*'. The nature images contrast with the darkness of the Puritans and their system throughout the whole novel.

III THE PURITANS & MORAL

Nathaniel Hawthorne had deep relations with his Puritan ancestors and created a story that both highlighted their weaknesses and their strengths. His knowledge of their beliefs and his admiration for their strengths were balanced by his concerns for their rigid and oppressive rules. 'The Scarlet Letter' shows his attitude toward these Puritans of Boston- 'a people among whom religion and law were almost identical', in his portrayal of characters, his plot, and the themes of his story.

As a descendant of one of the original Puritan families of Salem, Massachusetts, Hawthorne was painfully aware that the Puritans' strict way of life and intolerant moral code often could bring more harm than good to people. Among his direct ancestors was John Hathorne, one of the judges who condemned nearly twenty people to death in the notorious Salem witch trials of 1692. Not surprisingly, throughout 'The Scarlet Letter', Hawthorne contrasts the Puritan leaders' severity with Hester's grace and selflessness.

The early Puritans who first came to America in 1620 founded a precarious colony in Plymouth, Massachusetts. While half the colonists died that first year, the other

half were saved by the coming spring and the timely intervention of the Indians. These first settlers were followed ten years later by a wave of Puritans that continued in the 1630s and thereafter, until, by the 1640s, New England had over twenty-five thousand English settlers. The second group in the 1630s settled in the area of present-day Boston in a community they named Massachusetts Bay Colony. It is the colony that forms the setting of *The Scarlet Letter*.

The Puritans left the Old World because they wanted to ‘purify’ the Church of England. Their chief complaints were that the services should be simpler and that religion should contain an intense spiritual relationship between the individual and God. In England, the clergy and the government mediated in the relationship between the individual and God. Because the Puritans chose to defy these assumptions, they were persecuted in England. A group of them ran away to Holland and subsequently to the New World, where they hoped to build a society, of which John Winthrop said: ‘*We shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us*’. In such a place and as long as they followed His words and did their work to glorify His ways, God would bless them, and they would prosper.

The Puritans left for the New World because of their belief that the Church of England was hopelessly corrupt and no longer stood for their way of life. They believed that they could create an ideal Christian society – ‘*a city upon a hill*’ - across the ocean, which would be a model for others to follow. Some even compared themselves to the Hebrews and thought they were founding the New Israel. They would soon realize this goal would be more difficult to achieve than they originally expected. The Puritans had difficulty in establishing the authority of the Church in the New World due to their own corruption and the deterioration of their society.

Religion has long been the cause for conflict throughout the history of the world and continues to be today. Freedom of religion and the separation of church and state have been essential principals in the United States, but in the colonial period these were radically new ideas. As religious laws had governed the people of Israel, so the church would regulate New England society. There was no place for toleration in Puritan America.

‘*The Bible led the Puritans*’ lives. Anything a Puritan did had to be as it was written in the Bible. They even judged people by the Bible.

The Puritan elders, on the other hand, insisted on seeing earthly experience as merely an obstacle on the path to heaven. Thus, they view sin as a threat to the community that should be punished and suppressed. Their answer to Hester's sin is to isolate her. Yet, Puritan society is stagnant, while Hester and Dimmesdale's experience shows that a state of sinfulness can lead to personal growth, sympathy, and understanding of others. Paradoxically, these qualities are shown to be incompatible with a state of purity.

IV A SHORT VIEW OF THE PLOT

At the novel's start, Hawthorne presents to the reader the conflict that leads to the development of the characters: the proud and hard working Hester Prynne, the guilt stricken Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth, the devil incarnate, and the wild daughter of Hester and Dimmesdale, Pearl. Hawthorne reveals symbolism and allegory through these protagonists of the novel and their actions, thoughts, and words.

The story begins when Hester, the heroine of *The Scarlet Letter*, a young woman living in the Puritan town of Boston in the 1600s, appears from the darkness of a rusted jail into the summer morning. She is a woman accused of committing adultery. Although she had been married in England to a man many years older, he never followed her to the New World as he promised, and she assumes his ship was lost during the voyage. In Boston, as the result of an adulterous relationship with Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, Hester becomes pregnant and gives birth to a daughter named Pearl.

Adultery is considered a grave sin among a Puritan society. Since Hester sinned against God, the magistrates judges decide to condemn Hester from paradise. This means that Hester would not be considered a Puritan. On the other hand, Hester does not care about the judgments of the magistrates. Instead, she knows that God will judge her.

Hester refuses to name the child's father, despite intense pressure from the strict Puritan town leaders. Thus, they condemn her and force her to wear a shameful symbol of her adultery—a scarlet letter 'A' embroidered on a piece of gold cloth. In spite of the enormous social isolation she endures, Hester raises Pearl lovingly, never falls into despair, and feels no resentment against the rest of the community. Ultimately, the situation comes to a head as the identities of both Hester's still-living husband-Chillingworth, who appears at the same time when her sin is revealed, and reveals his true identity to no one but Hester, whom he has sworn secrecy, and the father of her child-Dimmesdale, who appears to be suffering from mysterious heart trouble, caused by psychological distress, are revealed. Having confessed that he was Pearl's father and Hester's fellow-sinner, Dimmesdale dies on the scaffold in front of the townspeople. '*At old Roger Chillingworth's decease took place within a year*' and, according to his last will, his property was left to Pearl. After Hester Prynne left the bay, the story about her life becomes a legend. Some say having seen a woman in a grey robe, many years after, entering a decaying house. '*Hester Prynne had returned and taken up her long-forsaken shame*', to lie next to her beloved clergyman and, as they had shared a shame before, to share the same tombstone with an epitaph '*On the field, sable, the letter A, gules*'. It is assumed that Pearl got married happily.

V CHARACTERS

HESTER PRYNNE

What is most remarkable about Hester Prynne is her strength of character. While Hawthorne doesn't give a lot of information about her life before the story begins, he does show her remarkable character, revealed through her public humiliation and later, isolated life in Puritan society. Her inner strength, her honesty, and her compassion might have been in her character all along, but the scarlet letter brings them to our attention.

Hester is physically described in the first scaffold scene as a tall young woman with a *'figure of perfect elegance on a large scale'*. The most impressive feature is her *'dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam'*. Her complexion is rich, her eyes are dark and deep, and her regular features give her a beautiful face. In fact, so physically stunning is she that *'her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped'*.

'Morally, as well as materially, there was a coarser fibre in those wives and maidens of old English birth and breeding than in their fair descendants;...every successive mother has transmitted to her child a fainter bloom, a more delicate and briefer beauty, and a slighter physical frame, if not a character of less force and solidity than her own.'

But under the burden of the scarlet letter on her bosom, and her beautiful hair hidden under her cap, her beauty and warmth are gone. When she removes the letter and takes off her cap, she once again becomes the radiant beauty of seven years earlier. Symbolically, when Hester removes the letter and takes off the cap, she is, in effect, removing the severe Puritan social and moral structure. However, Hester's got a brief respite, because Pearl angrily demands she resume wearing the scarlet 'A'. With the scarlet letter and her hair back in place, "her beauty, the warmth and richness of her womanhood, departed, like fading sunshine; and a gray shadow seemed to fall across her." While her punishment changes her physical appearance, it has a far more profound effect on her character.

What we know about Hester from the days prior to her punishment is that she came from a *'genteel but impoverished English family'*, from *'paternal home: a decayed house of grey stone...with antique gentility'*. She married much older Roger Chillingworth, who spent long hours over his books and experiments and she convinced herself that she was happy. When they left Amsterdam for the New World, he sent her ahead, but he was reportedly lost at sea, leaving Hester alone among the Puritans of Boston. Officially, she is a widow. Hester looks to a clergyman Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale for consolation and spiritual guidance. Somewhere during this period of time, their solace becomes passion and results in the birth of Pearl.

We first meet the incredibly strong Hester on the scaffold with Pearl in her arms, beginning her punishment. On the scaffold, she displays a sense of irony and contempt. The irony is present in the elaborate needlework of the scarlet letter. There are *'fantastic flourishes of gold-thread'*, and the letter is decorative, significantly beyond the colony's

laws about the unadorned clothes. The first description of Hester notes her *'natural dignity and force of character'* and mentions her specific *'haughty'* smile and strong glance that reveal no self-consciousness of her misfortune. While she might be feeling agony as if *'her heart had been flung into the street for them all to spurn and trample upon'*, her face reveals no such thought, and her demeanor is described as haughty. She displays a dignity and grace that reveals a deep trust in herself.

When in this first scene, Dimmesdale begs her to name the father of the baby and her penance may be lightened, Hester says *'Never!'* When asked again, she says *'I will not speak!'* While this declaration relieves Dimmesdale, it also shows Hester's determination to stand alone despite the opinion of society. Hester's self-reliance and inner strength are further revealed in her defiance of the law and in her iron will during her confrontation with the governor of the colony.

Despite her lonely existence, Hester somehow finds an inner strength to defy both the townspeople and the local government. This defiance becomes stronger and it will carry her through later interviews with both Chillingworth and Governor Bellingham. *'Alone in the world cast off by it, and with this sole treasure to keep her heart alive, she felt that she possessed indefeasible rights against the world, and was ready to defend them to the death.'* Her determination and lonely stand is repeated again when she confronts Governor Bellingham over the issue of Pearl's guardianship. When the governor determines to take Pearl away from her, Hester says, *'God gave me the child! He gave her in requital of all things else, which he had taken from me. She is my*



happiness! – she is my torture, none the less! Pearl keeps me here in life! Pearl punishes me, too! . . . Ye shall not take her! I will die first!' When pressed further with assurances of Pearl's good care, Hester defiantly pleads with him, *'God gave her into my keeping. I will not give her up!'* Here Hester turns to Dimmesdale for help, the one time in the novel where she doesn't stand alone.

Hester's strength is evident in her dealings with both her husband and her lover. Hester defies Chillingworth when he demands to know the name of her lover. When he interviews her in the jail, she firmly says, *'Ask me not! That thou shalt never know!'* In the forest scene, even Dimmesdale acknowledges that she has the strength he lacks. The minister pleads her to give him strength to overcome his indecisiveness twice

in the forest and again as he faces his confession on Election Day.

What is the source of this strength? As she walks out on the scaffold at the beginning of the novel, Hester determines that she must *'sustain and carry her burden forward by the ordinary resources of her nature, or sink with it. She could no longer borrow from the future to help her through the present.'* Her loneliness is described while she is thinking about how she can support herself and Pearl, and solves that problem with

her needlework. Yet she continues to lack adult companionship throughout her life. *'In all her intercourse with society, there was nothing that made her feel as if she belonged to it'*. She has nothing but her strength of spirit to sustain her. This inner calm is recognized in the changing attitude of the community when they acknowledge that the 'A' is for 'Able', *'so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength'*.

Another thing is interesting about Hester's strong will to sustain - what was the reason she didn't leave that area and her ignominy there forever, or what made her choose life under the burden of shame instead of death? And she gives the answer: *'Here had been the scene of my guilt, and here should be the scene of my earthly punishment... I have thought of death, have wished for it-would even pray for it, were it fit that such as I should pray for anything'*.

One of the most important qualities of Hester is that she is, above all, honest. She openly acknowledges her sin. She explains to Dimmesdale that she has been honest in all things except in disclosing his part in her pregnancy. *'A lie is never good, even though death threaten on the other side!'* She also explains to Chillingworth that, even in their sham of a marriage, *'thou knowest that I was frank with thee. I felt no love, nor feigned any'*. She kept her word in carrying her husband's secret identity, and she tells the minister the truth only after she is released from her oath. That life of public repentance, although bitter and difficult, helps her retain her sanity while Dimmesdale seems to be losing his.

Finally, Hester becomes an angel of mercy who eventually lives out her life as a figure of compassion in the community. Hester becomes known for her charitable deeds. She offers comfort to the poor, the sick, and the downtrodden. When the governor is dying, she is at his side. *'She came, not as a guest, but as a rightful inmate, into the household that was darkened by trouble.'* Yet Hester's presence is taken for granted, and those that she helps do not acknowledge her on the street.

Hawthorne attributes this transformation to her lonely position in the world and her suffering. No friend, no companion, no foot crossed the threshold of her cottage. In her solitude, she had a great deal of time to think. Also, Hester has Pearl to raise, and she must do that apart from other difficulties. Her shame in the face of public opinion, her loneliness and suffering, and her quiet acceptance of her position make her respond to the disasters of others.

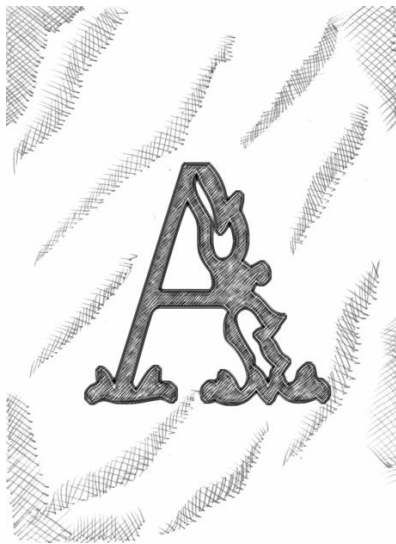
In the end, Hester's strength, honesty, and compassion carry her through a life she had not imagined. While Dimmesdale dies after his public confession and Chillingworth dies consumed by his own hatred and revenge, Hester lives on, quietly, and becomes something of a legend in the colony of Boston. The scarlet letter made her what she became, and, in the end, she grew stronger and more at peace through her suffering.

Since her punishment, she has done nothing wrong and devoted her entire life from that point on to others- *'it had been her habit, from an almost immemorial date, to go about the country as a kind of voluntary nurse, taking upon herself, likewise, to give advice in all matters, especially those of the heart.'*

THE SCARLET LETTER

Besides the characters, the most obvious symbol is the scarlet letter itself, which has various meanings depending on its context. It is a sign of adultery, penance, and penitence. It brings about Hester's suffering and loneliness and also provides her rejuvenation. In the book, it first appears as an actual material object in The Custom House preface. Then it becomes an elaborately gold-embroidered 'A' over Hester's heart and is magnified in the armor breast-plate at Governor Bellingham's mansion. Here Hester is hidden by the gigantic, magnified symbol just as her life and feelings are hidden behind the sign of her sin. Still later, the letter is a huge red 'A' in the sky, a green 'A' of eel-grass arranged by Pearl, the 'A' on Hester's dress decorated by Pearl with prickly burrs, an 'A' on Dimmesdale's chest seen by some spectators at the Election Day procession, and, finally, represented by the epitaph *'On a field, sable, the letter A, gules'* ('gules' as the heraldic term for 'red') on the tombstone that Hester and Dimmesdale share.

The community initially sees the letter on Hester's bosom as a mark of just punishment and a symbol to deter others from sin.



The scarlet letter is meant to be a symbol of shame, but instead it becomes a powerful symbol to identify Hester. The letter's meaning changes as time passes. Originally intended to mark Hester as an adulterer, the 'A' eventually comes to stand for 'Able', 'Angel', or 'Admirable'. Finally, it becomes indeterminate: the Native Americans who come to watch the Election Day pageant think it marks her as a person of importance and status. Like Pearl, the letter functions as a physical reminder of Hester's affair with Dimmesdale. But, compared with a human child, the letter seems insignificant, and thus helps to point out the ultimate meaninglessness of the community's system of judgment and punishment. The child has been sent from God, or at least from nature, but the letter is merely a human contrivance. Additionally, the fact that the letter's apparent meaning is not stable, shows that society has no ability to use symbols for ideological reinforcement.

ARTHUR DIMMESDALE

'Never, on New England soil, has stood the man so honoured by his moral brethren as the preacher.'

Dimmesdale is an ordained Puritan minister, well educated, and with a philosophical mind - *'a young clergyman, who had come from one of the great English universities, bringing all the learning of the age into our wild forest-land.'* There is no

doubt that he is devoted to God, passionate in his religion, and effective in the pulpit. He also has the principal conflict in the novel, and his agonized suffering is the direct result of his inability to reveal his sin.

Dimmesdale, as the personification of *'human frailty and sorrow'*, is young, pale, and physically delicate. He has large, brown, melancholy eyes and a tremulous mouth, suggesting great sensitivity. We first see Dimmesdale portrayed as a nervous and sensitive individual. While this seems to give Dimmesdale great strength, it is also his large defect. His body refuses to do what his heart says is right. Dimmesdale instructs Hester to reveal the truth – *'Be not silent from any mistaken pity and tenderness for your fellow-sinner. What can thy silence do for him, except it tempt him – to add hypocrisy to sin? Believe me, Hester, through he were to step down from a high place, and stand there beside thee, on thy pedestal of shame, yet better were it so than to hide a guilty heart through life'*. But when she refuses to say, he doesn't have the will power to confess himself. Therefore, his sin becomes even larger than hers, because hers is an exposed sin. He continues to lie to himself and his followers by keeping his secret hidden, so his is a concealed sin. Here Hawthorne shows us just how strong Dimmesdale actually is, by allowing him to hide his sin and bear the weight of it, he creates an extremely interesting and strong character.

Of the four major characters in this novel, which investigates the nature of evil and sin and which is a kind of criticism of Puritan rigidity and intolerance, Dimmesdale is the only Puritan. That's why Dimmesdale can hardly be understood, as a character, so as the Puritans who inhabited Boston at this time. He is unsure of his soul's status - he is an example in performing his duties as a Puritan minister, however, he knows he has sinned and considers himself a hypocrite. The vigils he keeps, represent his inward struggle to find out his heavenly status, the status of his soul. Hawthorne says of Dimmesdale's nightly vigils *'he thus typified the constant introspection wherewith he tortured . . .'*

Hester, who is not Puritan, believes that Dimmesdale's good works should bring him peace. The Puritan reasoning was that, if one could earn his way into heaven, God's will is diminished. Since God created the soul and infused it in the human body, salvation is predestined.

As a minister, Dimmesdale has *'a tremulously sweet, rich, deep and broken'* voice that consoles and he's got an ability to make an influence on the audience. *'His words caused it to vibrate within all hearts and brought the listeners into one accord of sympathy...and affected them like the speech of an angel.'* His congregation adores him and his parishioners seek his advice. They expect him to be above other mortals, and his life and thoughts must exist on a higher spiritual level than others. As a minister, Dimmesdale enjoys a reputation among his congregation and other ministers. His ministry aids people in leading good lives. If he confessed publicly, he would lose his ability to be effective in this regard. His congregation expects him to be above other mortals and his life and thoughts must exist on a higher spiritual level.

However, his desire to confess is betrayed by his effectiveness. More he suffers, his sermons become better. More he whips himself, more eloquent he is on Sunday and more his parishioners worship his words. Nevertheless, Hawthorne states, *'No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be true'*.

Dimmesdale's struggle is dark and his penance is horrifying as he tries to cover his mystery. He struggles with knowledge of his sin, his inability to reveal it to Puritan society, and his desire for penance. He knows his actions are beneath both God's standards and his own, and he fears this represents his lack of salvation. In an attempt to seek salvation, he fasts until he faints and whips himself on the shoulders until he bleeds. But these punishments are done in private rather than in public and do not provide the purifying Dimmesdale seeks and needs.

As a sinner, he is weakened to temptation. And Hester *'knowing what this poor fallen man had once been, her soul was moved by the shuddering terror with which he had appealed to her...felt responsibility 'in reference to the clergyman, which she owed to no other, to no other, nor to the whole world besides'*.

In the forest scene, Dimmesdale realizes that he is human and should ask forgiveness and do penance openly. These thoughts explain his determination to write his Election Day sermon easily, which is filled with the passion of his struggle.

Dimmesdale's confession in the third scaffold scene and the climax of the story is the action that ensures his salvation. The reader can sense that whether he chose or earned it, Dimmesdale's salvation is a reality. Having had several opportunities to confess, without success until this scene, akin to his nature if not his ministry, he asks God's forgiveness, not only for himself, but also for Chillingworth, who confirms the minister's triumph when he moans, *'Thou hast escaped me! . . . Thou hast escaped me!'*.

In the long run, Dimmesdale has not the strength of Hester Prynne or her honesty. He cannot stand alone to confess. In death, perhaps he will find a gentler judgment that his own or that of his fellow citizens of Boston.

Before Dimmesdale dies, in a dramatic sermon, he reveals the fact that he's Pearl's father, and, of course, Hester's lover. At this point, the reader sees how much Hester and Pearl were in the thoughts of the dying minister, and how much pain the separation from his woman and child caused, both in love and in torment, as he gives each a kiss on the forehead after the sermon. His last words are the answer to Hester's opinion that they had ransomed each other up to that moment – *'The law we broke! – the sin here so awfully revealed! – let these alone be in thy thoughts! I fear! I fear! It may be, that, when we forgot our God – when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul – it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion. God knows; and he is merciful!'*

In the long run, Dimmesdale hasn't got the strength of Hester Prynne or her honesty. He cannot stand alone to confess. In death, perhaps he will find a gentler judgment that his own or that of his fellow citizens of Boston.

PEARL

Although Pearl is a complex character, her primary function within the novel is as a symbol. Pearl is the embodiment of the scarlet letter and Hester rightly clothes her in a beautiful dress of scarlet, embroidered with gold thread, just like the scarlet letter upon Hester's bosom is.

The fullest description of Pearl we see at her age of three - she possesses a '*rich and luxuriant beauty; a beauty that shone with deep and vivid tints; a bright complexion, eyes possessing intensity both of depth and glow, and hair already of a deep, glossy brown and which, in after years, would be nearly akin to black*'. We can see further that Pearl has a 'perfect shape', 'vigor', 'natural dexterity' and 'a native grace', and that in public she is usually dressed in '*gorgeous robes which might have extinguished a paler loveliness*'.

Her personality is described as intelligent, imaginative, curious, determined, and even stubborn at times. She is a confusing mixture of strong moods, followed by an uncontrolled laughter at one moment and silence the next, with a severe temper and a capability for the '*bitterest hatred that can be supposed to rankle in a childish bosom*'. So unusual is her behavior that she is often described with such terms as 'elf-child', 'imp' and 'airy sprite', all of which heighten her symbolism. Governor Bellingham compares her to the 'children of the Lord of Misrule' and some of the Puritans believe that she is a 'demon offspring' and helps him keep his victim alive.

As a symbol, Pearl functions first as a reminder of Hester's passion. Hester realizes this in the first scaffold scene when she resists the temptation to hold Pearl in front of the scarlet 'A', '*wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another*'. As Pearl grows into a lovely, sprite-like child, Hester feels that her daughter's strange behavior is somehow associated with Pearl's conception and birth.

Pearl also functions as a constant reminder of Hester's adulterous act. She is, in fact, the personification of that act. Even as a baby, she instinctively touches the scarlet letter. Hawthorne says it is the first object of which she seemed to be aware, and she focuses on the letter in many scenes. She creates her own letter out of moss, sees the letter in the breastplate at Governor Bellingham's mansion, and points at it in the forest scene with Hester and Dimmesdale.

As a symbol which always keeps Hester aware of her sin, Pearl always keeps Hester aware that there is no escape from her passionate nature. The Puritans would call that nature 'sinful'. The poetic, intuitive, outlawed nature of this child is an object of evil to the Puritans, because this nature doesn't know the bounds of the Puritan village.

Hester herself tries to justify the nature of her child and comes to the symbolic union of the child with the idea of sin. Hester remembers the moment when she had given herself to Dimmesdale in love. The only way she can justify Pearl's nature is in seeing how the child is the symbol of that moment. She remembers '*. . . what she herself had been during that momentous period while Pearl was imbibing her soul from the spiritual world, and her bodily frame from its material of earth. The mother's impassioned state had been the medium through which were transmitted to the unborn infant the rays of its moral life; and, however white and clear originally, they had taken the deep stains of crimson and gold, the fiery lustre, the black shadow, and the untempered light of the intervening substance*'.

Even Pearl's clothes contribute to her symbolic purpose in the novel by making an association between her, the scarlet letter, and Hester's passion. Hester dresses Pearl in gold and red clothes, or both, as if it is her way to defy the townspeople. Even when she goes to Governor Bellingham's to plead for her daughter's custody, Hester dresses Pearl in a crimson velvet tunic. With Pearl's clothes, Hester can give '*the gorgeous tendencies*

of her imagination their full play', embroidering her clothes 'with fantasies and flourishes of gold-thread'.

There are moments when Pearl functions as the community's conscience, pointing her finger at Hester. In any number of places, she reminds Hester that she must wear, and continue to wear, the scarlet letter. In the forest when Hester removes the 'A', Pearl makes her put it back on. She tells her mother '*the sunshine does not love you, it runs away and hides itself, because it is afraid of something on your bosom*'.

It's strange, but, maybe thanks to her intuition, Pearl realizes what Dimmesdale must do in order to find salvation. When Hester stands with her on the scaffold, Pearl reaches out to her father, Dimmesdale, but he does not acknowledge her. Once again on the scaffold, Pearl asks the minister to stand with them in the light of day and the eyes of the community. When he denies her once again, she washes away his kiss and in that way punishes a man who will not take his responsibility. She repeats her request for recognition during the Election Day procession.

In the end, Dimmesdale's act 'saves' Pearl, making her truly human and giving her human sympathies and feelings. On the scaffold just before his death, Pearl kisses him and 'a spell was broken'. At that point, Pearl is no more a symbol. The great sense of grief, in which the wild infant took part, had developed all her sympathies, and as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the promise that she would '*grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it*'.

While Pearl functions mainly as a symbol, she is allowed to become a flesh and blood person at the end. She is a combination of her mother's passion and intuitive understanding and her father's keen mental acuity.

Finally, as a symbol, Pearl is a human manifestation of the scarlet letter, while other symbols are meant to represent hidden guilt and secrets. In spite of being result of Hester's and Dimmesdale's sin, besides their most sacred love, Pearl is the only link between them. And what's more important-PEARL is 'her mother's only treasure'.

ROGER CHILLINGWORTH

'He was small in stature, with a furrowed visage, which, as yet, could hardly be termed aged. There was a remarkable intelligence in his features, as of a person who had so cultivated his mental part that it could not fail to mould the physical to itself, and become manifest by unmistakable tokens.'

Roger Chillingworth, opposite to Hester and Dimmesdale, is a monotone, flat character. While he develops from a kind scholar into an obsessed fiend, he is more a symbol, than a character, doing the devil's bidding. Once he comes to Boston, we see him only in situations that involve his obsession with vengeance.

Hawthorne begins building this symbol of evil vengeance with Chillingworth's first appearance ('. . . dropping down, as it were, out of the sky, or starting from the nether earth . . .') in the novel by associating him with deformity, wildness (as the result of taking part in Indians' rituals), and mysterious power. Having just returned from the

captivity by the Indians, his appearance is hideous, partly because of his strange mixture of 'civilized and savage costume'.

Even when he is better dressed, Chillingworth is far from attractive. He is small, thin, and slightly deformed, with one shoulder higher than the other. Although he '*could hardly be termed aged*', he has a wrinkled face and appears '*well stricken in years*'. He has, however, a look of calm intelligence, and his eyes, though they have a '*strange, penetrating power*', are dim, testifying to long hours of study under lamplight. He's the man '*to whom external matters are of little value and import, unless they bear relation so something within his mind*'.

We feel a bit sorry for Chillingworth during the first scaffold scene when he arrives in Massachusetts Bay Colony and finds his wife suffering public shame for an adulterous act. At that point, however, he has several choices - he chooses revenge. His rude awakening is described a second time when Hawthorne calls him '*a man, elderly, travel-worn, who, just emerging from the perilous wilderness, beheld the woman, in whom he hoped to find embodied the warmth and cheerfulness of home, set up as a type of sin before the people*'. What should have been a warm and loving homecoming after being apart from his wife, became a nightmare.

Chillingworth is not a Puritan. While he was a captive of the Indians for '*upward of a year*' he didn't judge them as heathens and infidels, and, unlike the Puritans, he didn't seek to convert them. As a scholar, he studied their knowledge of herbs and medicines, instead. He spent his life as a lonely scholar, cutting himself off the world when necessary in the quest for knowledge.

On the other hand, acknowledging his faults, Chillingworth shows a kind of conscience. He tells Hester: '*We have wronged each other - mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay. A man in decay, having given my best years to feed the hungry dream of knowledge - what had I to do with youth and beauty like thine own? It was my folly, and thy weakness*'. Again, he feels no compassion for her and enjoys watching her shame - '*Live, therefore, and bear about thy doom with thee, in the eyes of men and women - in the eyes of him whom thou didst call thy husband-in the eyes of yonder child!*'. It seems, at the end, his only goal after his arrival to Massachusetts Bay, is vengeance. '*When, in short, there was no more Devil's work on earth for him to do, it only remained for the unhumanised mortal to betake himself whither his Master would find him tasks enough, and pay him his wages duly*'.

VI CONCLUSION

While the pilgrims were sailing to the New World, led by thought that they were coming to the pure, innocent, untouched and, according to their measures sacred land, since man's hand hadn't touched it before, they hadn't known that no man is perfect and every place he inhabits becomes changed according to his necessities. There are always

and everywhere those whose hearts learnt no good and who always tend to destroy a harmony between people, which has been created for such a long time.

In times of strict rigidity, emotions were a kind of unnecessary, or better to say - forbidden thing. But we wouldn't be what we are – meaning people, if we forfeited our emotions and let code laws lead our lives.

One soul, one body, longed to unite with another soul and body, to make themselves completed, and dared to break the rules. No man could say Hester Prynne did a thing opposite the human interior laws. There is no sin in such a thing as love in God's eyes. As a proof of this was that God created a magnificent 'imp', an embodiment of love between two people and something like a treasure house, where the spirit of their love lives.

Unacceptable behavior for such a period caused, not only misfortune of the two people, but a great turmoil among those who knew nothing else but to follow the rules of ordinary people who, it seems, considered themselves Gods on earth and neglected God himself. With conservative and 'rusty' attitudes about the world and people who had to live in it, some of the people forgot what's human being's essential – besides the power of mind, humans, also, have emotions, which make them break limits and bravely stand up for that. Hester Prynne was aware of the act she did and was ready to bear the hardest punishment of all – social isolation. But never repented for moments spent with the only one she felt something special for. She even came back to *'take up her long-forsaken shame'* after many years spent somewhere out of the bay, she came back to the place where her sin was waiting, in her opinion, not completely punished. I guess Hawthorne was right, having said that *'There is a fatality, a feeling so irresistible and inevitable that it has the force of doom, which almost invariably compels human beings to linger around and haunt, ghostlike, the spot where some great and marked event has given the color to their lifetime; and still the more irresistibly, the darker the tinge that saddens it'*. Even though she transforms to an angel and behaves according to the customs of the Puritans and the Lord above them, Hester never forgets her sin - perhaps it makes her a purer person, a person of dignity. That is how even a sin can transform.

'What we need for our happiness is often close at hand, if we knew but how to seek for it.' Hester reached happiness for at least one day with Dimmesdale, even though she paid too high price. Turning around at some moment in their life, people usually ask themselves what they have done, where they are, what they have built, or which is more probably, ruined up to that moment. And they usually realize they have been playing the role others had given to them, or living lives others had chosen for them. But there are those who have force to encounter the trials of life, grab life with their both hands and do their way. So did Hester.

But as she told Dimmesdale – *'A lie is never good, even though death threaten on the other side'* and as the writer pointed out as the moral – *'Be true!'*, there is no other way but to release our souls of all the hidden sins that torture it. There is no perfect man, neither woman. So, there is no perfect world for them. Then, our desire to reach the perfection makes sense only if we know that perfection can't really exist. What exists is a weak human between his worst and best and his aspiration to love and addiction to it.

'At some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness.'

Sources:

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet letter*

Edwin Haviland Miller, *Salem is My Dwelling Place: A life of Nathaniel Hawthorne*

D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*

en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Scarlet_Letter

www.sparknotes.com/lit/scarlet/canalysis.html

www.cliffnotes.com/WileyCDA/LitNote/The-Scarlet-Letter