

Symbols and symbolism in the scarlet letter

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Nathaniel Hawthorne is one of the most famous writers in the world. He uses vivid words, stunning details and amazing symbolism to express the point of the story along with deeper messages. Symbolism is most often a concrete object used to represent an idea more abstract and broader in scope and meaning. Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* is riddled with symbolism and hidden meanings that even I can't comprehend. His symbolism reaches characters, symbols, and concepts throughout the book.

One of the most obvious forms of symbolism is the scarlet letter. Its meaning changes and grows as the people in the story grow and learn to accept. The scarlet letter is simply a letter A used to mark Hester for her sins of adultery. At first, it stands for something as horrific as this but as Hester starts to accept, or at least but behind her, her sin of adultery the letter begins to stand for something more, it stands for Able, or Angel. The Puritans see the symbols as angel when the governor passes on. the death-chamber of Governor Winthrop, who had passed from earth to heaven within that very hour. [Hawthorne 225]. Over all the scarlet letter A stands for many things depending on whose perspective you look at.

The main character Hester can also be seen as a symbol. She symbolizes what it's like to be publicly punished and ridiculed and brings a nice human side to the concept. She commits acts of adultery but being trustworthy and even brave she hides the identity of the father of the child. As she grows as a character she begins to see a new meaning, and even starts to accept what she had done and what had happened because of it. "The tendency of her fate and fortunes had been to set her free. The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not tread." [Hawthorne 299].

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She often struggles throughout the book with how she should handle many things and many challenges. She symbolizes the human aspect of being publicly shamed and ridiculed by a whole town of people.

Her daughter Pearl is one of the biggest symbolisms in the book. She is the child of Hester and Dimmesdale. She is viewed as the “freedom of a broken law” [Hawthorn 201], or even “the living hieroglyphic of their sin [Hawthorn 310], and even as a result of the devils work. Pearl is the most imaginative of the characters and she easily reads people. She easily finds out what happened between her mother and Dimmesdale. She herself is viewed by people in many different ways as the story progresses. First as a sin and a reminder of shame. Hester always had faith in her daughter throughout the book, and by the end of the book she is viewed as a liberated sin. Hesters faith was well placed and was fulfilled. Pearls symbolism may very depend on your point of view, but Hawthorn definitely left some deeper meaning with her character.

Dimmesdale is also a form of symbolism. His character is a lot different than the others. He is the father of Pearl and the one that Hester committed adultery with. For most of the book the townspeople dont know he is Pearls father. This makes him one of the more discreet characters. Dimmesdales character knows what is right and wants to do what is right but doesnt have the courage to do so. He wants to come forward and confess his sin about the adultery with Hester but waits. He confesses in the end, showing the growth in his character. He symbolizes moral battle people have on a day to day basis regarding choices they may have to make.

Hawthorn's symbolism is scattered throughout the novel and is hard to interpret in places or times. He dives into moral issues, societal issues, and even judgment issues. Overall he told a great story with many meanings, but still found a way to make it entertaining. Hester's growth throughout the novel is relatable and Dimmesdale's inner moral battle can be too. Hawthorn wrote an excellently written, and relatable novel.