

Rhetorical strategies as a tool to characterize puritans in the scarlet letter no...

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Rhetorical Analysis of The Scarlet Letter

In the book, *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne uses rhetorical strategies to characterize Puritans by stressing upon their rigorous moral values through the use of symbolism, extended metaphors, and hypocrisy to create the story of a woman who commits adultery and is exposed and punished in the Puritan society. Hawthorne also uses specific language to create a setting which produces a negative environment. Mainly written to express his hatred for Puritan society because of the infamous Salem Witch trials which Hawthorne's grandfather judged, Hawthorne focuses on his feelings about a faith which is common throughout religious stories.

Hawthorne begins the novel with the illustration of the New England Prison by using different forms of nature. A black flower is used to symbolize the corruption present in the Puritan society and a rose-bush is used as a symbol of nature in the story. In chapter 1, the black flower is associated with the criminals housed in the prison and the harsh justice they faced. The rose-bush is located on the side of the prison therefore representing God's grace for the prisoners leaving and for the ones dragged in. Together, the rose bush represents how the Puritans pretend to be, basically acting as if they are accepting and pretty, but the black flower represents the dark reality: that the Puritans are corrupt and judgmental. Another example of symbolism is Hester's daughter, Pearl. Pearl is the symbol of Hester's sin and adultery and in a sense leads to Dimmesdale's death since she leads to the confession and regret of his sin with Hester. She is the only living symbol of the Scarlet Letter "A". Pearl would often pester her mother and ask her what

the Scarlet Letter meant, "" But in good earnest, now, mother dear, what does this scarlet letter mean? — and why dost thou wear it on thy bosom? — and why does the minister keep his hand over his heart?". Pearl implies that she knows more about the dreaded scarlet letter than she lets on.

Hawthorne gives the power of intuition to Hester, who understands the real meaning of the scarlet letter. Hawthorne also plays with language and uses metaphors as a figure of speech to describe Pearl.

Another rhetorical technique is the utilization of extended metaphors: the lengthening of a metaphor. This was developed in this passage to thoroughly describe Pearl's reaction to Reverend Dimmesdale's approach, " The child, with bird-like motion which was one of her characteristics, flew to him, and clasped her arms about his knees," This is an extraordinary example of the portrayal of an extended metaphor. By saying that one of Pearl's characteristics were having bird-like motion, Hawthorne tells the reader that Pearl is moving swiftly or gracefully. When Hawthorne says she " flew to him," that extends the metaphor since humans can't fly. The effect of this rhetorical device was to amplify the effect of both Pearl and Reverend Dimmesdale's connection and create an emotional stirring for Hester's husband, disguised as Roger Chillingworth.

Not only does Hawthorne utilize language to convey his point across, he also uses the theme of hypocrisy, or irony, within the Puritan society. Hypocrisy plays a huge role in Hawthorne's novel and it shows how illogical the Puritan's beliefs were. The Puritans escaped England because of being persecuted based on their religious beliefs. However, they were the strictest

of all religious sects and began persecuting others in the same way they had been treated before. They were extremely superstitious and therefore horrified by Hester's sin and humiliated her with the scarlet "A". It is also ironic that their so called "Reverend" Dimmesdale was the sinner as well - the Puritans supported him blindly. In fact, Dimmesdale even acted as if he had nothing to do with the sin when he commands, "Be not silent from any mistaken pity and tenderness for him; for believe me, Hester, though 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. What can thy silence do for him except it tempt him-yea, compel him, as it were- to add hypocrisy to sin?" (Hawthorne 47). This quote clearly shows how Dimmesdale was begging Hester to reveal the identity of her fellow sinner when in reality he doesn't want her to. Remaining silent about the sin committed with Prynne and then giving the consequences for the silencer shows yet another form of hypocrisy via Dimmesdale. Another hypocritical event that takes place is Chillingworth's sin. His sin of hypocrisy is directed towards Dimmesdale. Chillingworth is supposed to be Dimmesdale's physician. A doctor is one who provides cares for their patient, offers help, heals him, etc. Chillingworth on the other hand intends on hurting Dimmesdale. Chillingworth becomes Dimmesdale's doctor in order for revenge. "I seek no vengeance" claims Chillingworth, but clearly Chillingworth plans on mentally and emotionally torturing Dimmesdale (74). This is hypocritical of Chillingworth because he takes pleasure in Dimmesdale's discomfort, but at the same time claims to be a great

physician. Hawthorne's view of hypocrisy adds on to his feeling of hatred for the Puritan society.

Finally, the way Hawthorne tells the story creates a very dark and gloomy setting which ties in to the gloomy feelings Hawthorne has for the Puritans. Using words such as "heavy sin", "miserable agony", and "sin-born" produce a very negative environment and feeling and gives the reader a sense of curiosity and a fearful type of wonderment throughout the passage. Hawthorne uses language to grasp the reader's attention to make an emotional connection on a more personable level to the reader mind and imagination.

All in all, Hawthorne effectively demonstrates his hatred of the Puritans and the hypocrisy of the Puritan society via *The Scarlet Letter* by proficiently portraying the use of rhetorical strategies such as symbols and extended metaphors, He also uses language to help alter the reader's mind about the environment or the situation being discussed in the passage and explains the hypocritical views of the Puritans and how ironic it is.