

Scarlet letter analysis

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Nathaniel Hawthorne promotes the idea of socially on brought guilt through the interactions of characters and Puritan beliefs in *The Scarlet Letter*. He masterfully depicts a newly settled New England and its strict religious faith, which is still seen in much of New England today. He uses symbolism, irony and to fully bring out the true potential of his story. Nathaniel Hawthorne beautifully crafts his story by using symbolism to reveal details about the story and its characters. In *The Scarlet Letter* one of the most obvious and prominent symbols is the scarlet "A" placed on Hester. But many readers do not realize that to accompany the letter is Hester's daughter Pearl. Although they have the one similarity of having manifested themselves in a physical form they do evolve through the story into two completely different things. In the beginning the scarlet letter "A" represents Hester's adulterous sin. It is used against her to humiliate her and to persecute her. Through the story it slowly starts to become something more. The letter almost start to become a part of Hester. By the end of the story the letter "A" represents "Able". This is because she begins to help those that are sick and shows her community that she is not an evil sinner as they had previously viewed her. At the same time I feel as if Hester felt the actual impact of the scarlet letter after she had let go of the fact that it was a societal burden. "She had not known the weight, until she felt the freedom!" (pg. 211) While the letter was a punishment placed upon Hester by people, Pearl was placed on her as punishment from God. The guilt placed on Hester was the letter "A" while the guilt placed upon her by God was Pearl. So in a sense although the scarlet letter changed meaning Pearl would forever be there to remind her mother of the adulterous sin she had committed. In much of the story Pearl

is perceived by the reader to be a burden on her mother. This is shown when Pearl taunts her mother by making her own letter "A" and by throwing rocks at Hester. At the same time the author hints at small fragments of time when Pearl in fact brings joy into Hester's life. This is important because had Pearl not been born then Hester would have never been found guilty of adultery. And one can safely conclude that without Pearl in her life Hester would have had no way of surviving and may have even committed suicide due to the guilt that she felt. Another way that Nathaniel Hawthorne weaves the details of his story together is by using irony. Much of the guilt related irony that occurs in the story happens between Dimmesdale and Hester. It is ironic how Dimmesdale has an inner guilt about his adulterous sin although the town thinks of him as an angelic figure in the community. This inner guilt eventually manifests itself in a physical form which can be seen in this quote "A bodily disease, which we look upon as whole and entire within itself, may, after all, be but a symptom of some ailment in the spiritual part." (pg. 141) Also Hester being the one who was humiliated and publicly demised did not suffer as much as Dimmesdale. And quite ironically Hester survives all of the suffering she has gone through because she does not hold on to her guilt and at a point lets go of her guilt. Dimmesdale on the other hand dies of all the guilt that he has held onto this whole time. Hawthorne is known to use guilt in many of his books. The Scarlet Letter is no different. Nathaniel Hawthorne came from a family of the strictest Puritan tradition; one of his ancestors even played a part as a judge in the Salem witch trials. These strict Puritan roots fueled Hawthorne's obsession with guilt and sin; most of his writing reflects this obsession. Herman Melville, a close friend of

Hawthorne, also proposed that Hawthorne had a deep, dark, personal secret that would explain all his writings. The Scarlet Letter, a story of deep, dark sins and painful guilt, is a shining example of Hawthorne's work and obsession. He expresses this tone of guilt in the book through the way the characters interact with one another and through their actions. Such as the fact that Hester's husband keeps his identity secret. In a sense I felt that he was hiding himself because he felt guilty on behalf of his wife's actions. To conclude Nathaniel Hawthorne writes a tale of guilt through the use of symbolism, irony, and tone. He diligently incorporates both the literary elements and the theme so seamlessly that it seem as though the pieces of the puzzle were meant to fit perfectly. I strongly believe that Hawthorne is one of the few writers able to make his stories perfectly transition and blend into the beautiful works that are his stories. By using these three things he successfully creates a story that is both interesting and fulfilling for the reader providing a moral at the end of the story.