

Scarlet letter analysis

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



Kelsey Federspill Scarlet Letter Literary Analysis R5 12. 2. 12 Over Coming Guilt Remorse is a feeling experienced after committing an act that produces a sense of guilt. A life lesson can be learned in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, about the theme of guilt. Everyone experiences guilt when they commit a sin or human frailty but the way one handles the feelings of guilt is different.

Guilt is expressed in three main ways: ignoring or hiding the sin and letting the guilt build up on the inside, blaming others for the sin and wanting revenge for the way the person feels, and embracing the sin committed and not releasing the guilt. The different ways guilt is experienced determines the way it is punished: by others or no one at all. But punishment for the sin doesn't always affect the amount of guilt felt by one. Hawthorne uses symbolism and irony to demonstrate that guilt should not take over one's life, rather it should be a lesson learned of embracement, forgiveness, and acceptance.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, the character Hester Prynne is well known for the scarlet letter that she was forced to wear. Prynne embraced the punishment of the scarlet letter and used the punishment in a unique way, "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" (37). The letter 'A' represented the sin of adultery that Prynne had committed.

The community choose this form of punishment for Prynne to make her feel guilty for the act of adultery she committed and used it as an example to the rest of the community. As Prynne egresses from prison Hawthorne describes <https://assignbuster.com/scarlet-letter-analysis-analytical-essay-samples/>

the scene, “ the scene was not without a mixture of awe, such as must always invest the spectacle of guilt and shame in a fellow-creature” (39). Prynne chooses to embrace the scarlet letter rather than let the feeling of guilt take over her life because she desired to set a good example for her daughter, Pearl.

She was able to embrace her sin and the scarlet letter because she was working to set an example for her daughter. It was ironic how the community tried to force guilt on to Prynne, but in return she embraced the punishment in full stride and even used it to purify herself, “ Here, she said to herself, had been the scene of her guilt, and her should be the scene of her punishment; and so, perchance, the torture of her daily shame would at length purge her soul, and work out another purity than that which she had lost; more saint-like, because the result of martyrdom” (55).

When the town people saw Prynne as she exited the prison, people said, “ thus she will be a living sermon against sin” (44). The town people would always be reminded of her sin. Prynne did not let the guilt of her sin produce a major impact on her life. Rather she accepted her transgression and learned the importance of not letting her past mistakes and guilt negatively affect her future. Rosebushes are full of beauty but pain can be inflicted on someone who tries to hold it due to the rosebush’s sharp thorns.

When Hawthorne depicts the town he describes the rosebush on the side of the prison, “ but, on one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rosebush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he

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came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of nature could pity and be kind to him” (33). The rosebush symbolizes forgiveness from guilt throughout *The Scarlet Letter*.

Pearl, Prynne’s daughter, was visiting the governor’s hall with her mother one day to deliver a pair of embroidered gloves Prynne had made. While at the governor’s house, Pearl saw a rosebush and reacted in an unusual way, “ Pearl, seeing the rosebushes, began to cry for a red rose, and would not be pacified,” (73). Pearl responded with this meltdown because she wanted forgiveness for her mother and for her father, Reverend Dimmesdale, to be accepted by the community. Pearl felt guilty but blamed it on others. She was seeking revenge on the townspeople for the way they made her mother feel.

The irony of the rosebush is how it hurt Prynne, Pearl, and Dimmesdale, like the thorns on a rosebush when touched. In the end the family moved out of their community attempting to not let the mistakes of the past take over their present lives. Ultimately, they choose a fresh start. Pearl was a product of Prynne’s sin of adultery. Pearl’s birth was very humiliating for Prynne; nevertheless Pearl still meant the world to Prynne. Pearl’s name even has significance, “ but she names the infant ‘ Pearl,’ as being of great price,-- purchased with all she had,-- her mother’s only treasure” (61).

The biblical allusion to the pearl is referred to in Matthew 13 about a parable of a man who gave up everything for a pearl of great price. Prynne gave up everything she had for her daughter. She even dresses Pearl in the best clothes, while she dresses very poorly. To Prynne, Pearl was a symbol of strength and overcoming obstacles. Prynne said, “ I can teach my little Pearl

what I have learned from this [the scarlet letter],” (76). Prynne is a great example and life lesson to Pearl of how to accept the mistakes made in the past and not let the shame define oneself. Prynne uses Pearl to show how tough a young child can be.

On the other hand, the town viewed Pearl as the devil child: evil. The town discussed Pearl as, “ an imp of evil, emblem and product of sin,” (64) and, “ poor little Pearl was a demon offspring,” (68). Pearl herself is truly a symbol of ignorance and hope. Hawthorne described an occurrence of Pearl talking to Mr. Wilson, a pastor, “ after putting her finger in her mouth, with many ungracious refusals to answer good Mr. Wilson’s question, the child finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the rosebush of wild roses, that grew by the prison,” (76).

Pearl believed she was created for good and had an optimistic attitude on life. She did not let guilt become an emotion known in her. Pearl did not let the past effect her future. In conclusion, life lessons were learned about embracement, forgiveness, and acceptance from guilt with the use of symbolism and irony from Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*. The different ways guilt can be handled was demonstrated in *The Scarlet Letter*, but not letting guilt take over one’s life was key. Moving on and learning from a sin or human frailty is significant and something everyone can learn from.