

Pearl's symbolism

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Pearl Prynne, the daughter of Hester Prynne, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* can be considered the most symbolic character in the novel. Throughout the book, she is portrayed as a symbol of adultery, truth, and hope. Pearl always represents these three important themes.

From the very first time we see Pearl she symbolises adultery. The name “Pearl” comes from Hester as a reminder of her sin: “But she named the infant ‘Pearl’ as being of great price,—purchased with all she had,—her mother's only treasure!” (Hawthorne 168). During the time of the Puritans a sin was not only a crime against God but also a crime against the community. Hester was outcast by her society and the church. The letter “A” she wore symbolized adultery and Pearl just seemed to make it more obvious.

Pearl was raised to believe she came from sin: “‘Thy Heavenly Father sent thee!’ answered Hester Prynne. But she said it with a hesitation that did not escape the acuteness of the child. Whether moved only by her ordinary freakishness, or because an evil spirit prompted her, she put up her small forefinger, and touched the scarlet letter. ‘He did not send me!’ cried she, positively. ‘I have no Heavenly Father!’” (Hawthorne 185). Pearl was raised with the knowledge that God is not their for her.

God is not her Heavenly Father. This is important to the story as well as to Pearl's symbolism. This shows that Hester has lost some faith in the church. This also shows that Pearl is still a symbol of adultery. Because she was born from an adulterous relationship she has been raised hearing that she has no

heavenly father. Hester's hesitation from revealing who sent Pearl, probably holds many of Pearl's doubts about having a Heavenly Father.

Pearl, without a doubt throughout her life (to this point) she has been given the message that she is a symbol of sin and adultery. Throughout the book, Pearl's symbolism evolves to represent truth as well. When Dimmesdale, Hester, and Pearl are in the forest planning when to leave, Pearl stops by the brook: "' Yes; now I will!' answered the child, bounding across the brook, and clasping Hester in her arms. ' Now thou art my mother indeed! And I am thy little Pearl!' in a mood of tenderness that was not usual with her, she drew down her mother's head, and kissed her brow and both her cheeks. But then—by a kind of necessity that always impelled this child to alloy whatever comfort she might chance to give with a throb of anguish—Pearl put up her mouth and kissed the scarlet letter too! ' That was not kind!' said Hester.

' When thou hast shown me a little love, thou mockest me!' ' Why doth the minister sit yonder?' asked Pearl... ' Doth he love us?' said Pearl, looking up with acute intelligence, into her mother's face. ' Will he go back with us, hand in hand, we three together into the town?'" (Hawthorne 407). This quote shows that even though Dimmesdale claims that he loves Hester and Pearl, why then can he not go back to town and reveal that he is the paramour? Pearl speaks the truth about Dimmesdale's relationship with Hester. Pearl's final portrayal is that of hope. Pearl has now grown up and moved away from Hester and the town: " So Pearl— the elf-child, —the demon offspring, as some people, up to that epoch, persisted in considering her,— became the richest heiress of her ay, in the New World.

Not improbably, this circumstance wrought a very material change in the public estimation; and, had the mother and child remained here, little Pearl, at a marriageable period of life, might have mingled her wild blood with the lineage of the devoutest Puritan among them all. But, in no long time after the physician's death, the wearer of the scarlet letter disappeared, and Pearl along with her" (Hawthorne 495). Pearl symbolizes that even though one is condemned, that doesn't mean one's life is over. Pearl managed to drag herself from the bottom of the social ladder to the very top. This is the most important symbol Pearl portrays.

Pearl's symbols vary and change throughout the novel beginning with, sin and adultery, then truth, and finally, hope. These symbols are the most important in the book. Pearl's symbolic actions and words almost always leave wakes behind for other characters in the novel. Pearl persistently asks why is it if Dimmesdale loves them he will not stand with them on the scaffold during the day or walk into town together with them hand in hand. These questions drive the novel and without Pearl much of the symbolism in the novel would be gone.