

Pearl, the scarlet letter



Pearl, who is named because she came "of great price,"(81) grows into a physically beautiful, vigorous, and graceful little girl. She is radiant in the rich and elaborate dresses that Hester sews for her. Inwardly, however, Pearl possesses a complex character. She shows an unusual depth of mind, coupled with a fiery passion that Hester is incapable of controlling either with kindness or threats. Pearl shows a love of mischief and a disrespect for authority, which frequently reminds Hester of her own sin of passion.

This personality described to the reader as, "a lovely and immortal flower out of the rank luxurious of a guilty passion," (81) shows both the dark and lights sides to Pearl's personality. An example of Pearl's dark side can be seen when walking with Hester. When Pearl is on walks with her mother, she occasionally finds herself surrounded by the curious children of the village. Rather than attempt to make friends with them, she pelts them with stones and violent words.

Not only is she out casted for her mother's actions, but she seems to separate herself from society as well. Pearl's only ally is her mind, which seems to have a firm grasp on the situation and the world around her, after only 3 years. This chapter develops Pearl both as a character and as a symbol. Pearl is a mischievous and almost unworldly child, whose uncontrollable nature reflects the sinful passion that led to her birth. Pearl's character is closely tied to her birth, which justifies and makes the unusualness about her very important.

Hawthorne states, "[Pearl] was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden; worthy to have been left there, to be the plaything of the angels,"(83) However, she "lacked reference and adaptation to the world into which she

was born. "(84) Pearl's nature is questioned by the puritanical views from within the society that she lives. Pearl is a product of pre-marital sex, and this action is thought to be that of the devil. Which then brings to light the question, can something good come from something so bad? Hawthorne's view on the Puritan society in this chapter holds a major importance when analyzing Hester's situation. Hawthorne compares the puritan communities treatment of her to God's treatment of her.

He notes God's view saying, " Man had marked this woman's sin by a scarlet letter, which had such potent and disastrous efficacy that no human sympathy could reach her, save it were sinful like herself. "(85) Ironically juxtaposed against the Puritan's sentence that Hester wear the scarlet letter A is " God, [who] as a direct consequence of the sin which man thus punished, had given her a lovely child, . . . o be finally a blessed soul in heaven! (85) The comparison between the community's (Puritan's) and God's responses to Hester's extramarital affair is dramatic. Pearl also functions as a constant reminder of Hester's adulterous act. She is, in fact, the personification of that act. Even as a baby, she instinctively reaches for the scarlet letter. Hawthorne says it is the first object of which she seemed aware, and she focuses on the letter in many scenes. She creates her own letter out of moss, sees the letter in the breastplate at Governor Bellingham's mansion, and points at it in the forest scene with Hester and Dimmesdale.

As a symbol, Pearl always keeps Hester aware of her sin. Just as Dimmesdale cannot escape to Europe because Chillingworth has cut off his exit, Pearl always keeps Hester aware that there is no escape from her passionate

nature. The Puritans would call that nature " sinful. "(19) In Chapter 6 Hawthorne's handling of mirror images has both the goal of representing the passionate side of man, and also the idea that truths can be pictured in mirror images.

Hester looks into " the black mirror of Pearl's eye"(86) and she sees " a face, fiend-like, full of smiling malice, yet bearing the semblance of features that she had known full well, though seldom with a smile, and never with malice in them. "(86) Hawthorne's style of writing leaves the reader wondering if this mirror image is a version of Hester herself. Pearl and her mother both have a more natural view than Puritan, which makes the question whether Hester's sin is truly evil. Coming from a more natural and modern point of view people would tend toward saying that Hester is in no way deserving of the punishment she has been deemed.

She is used as a public message to all those who have doubt in their mind. When the narrator describes Pearl as an " outcast,"(56) he understates: Pearl is an " imp of evil, emblem and product of sin, she had no right among christened infants. "(56) Pearl herself is aware of her difference from others, and when Hester tries to teach her about God, Pearl says, " I have no Heavenly Father! " Because Pearl is her mother's constant companion, she, too, is subject to the cruelties of the townspeople. The other children are particularly cruel because they can sense that something is not quite right about Hester and her child.

Knowing that she is alone in this world, Pearl creates casts of characters in her imagination to keep her company. This chapter is one of the most important in my mind, bringing to light the contrast of light and dark within

Pearl, and the themes of the natural world vs. the puritanical, contrasted with heavy judgment from Hawthorne. Although no serious information pertaining to Hester's story is given in this chapter, there is a lot to be learned. Ideas that Hawthorne plants in your head during this chapter lead to bigger ideas in the book that help the reader to understand. Pearl and this chapter are both beautiful, vigorous, and graceful.