

## SYMBOLISM IN THE NOVEL THE SCARLET LETTER

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All American literature is symbolic and 'The Scarlet letter' by Nathaniel Hawthorne is not exception to this Hawthorne does not state but suggest and it is through dynamic symbolism Hawthorne has conveyed to us various ideas and concepts and themes which the novel contain It is because of dynamic use of symbolism the theme of the novel can be interpreted in various ways. His symbolism is a changing one. The setting, the scenes and the characters are symbolic. They throw light on conflict between puritanism and liberalism. It is with symbolism the theme of sin and punishment is conveyed to us.

The theme of the novel is that of sin, punishment and regeneration The novel deals with the sin of adultery and the symbol of this adultery is "The Scarlet letter 'A', which Hester is forced to wear upon her bosom. 'A' stands for adultery. Hester Prynne commits the sin of adultery. She is a married woman but delivers a child by Dimmesdale who is a person rather than her husband Roger Chillingworth. So, she is punished. And this ideal of punishment is conveyed to us through the symbol of 'A'. This symbol is a dominations one in the novel. This 'A' letter throws a lurid gloom along the dark passage to the prison; When Hester is led to the prison. This not lurid gloom is the symbol of red fire of the Hell. It glows when she walks in the night time. Symbolically it suggests that the sin of adultery committed by Hester is hellish. So she must be punished to death and must go to hell.

'A' magnified in the mirror breastplate of governor is gigantic this conveys to us that the sin of adultery is the greatest and most serious sin. Pearl stands for living scarlet letter 'A'. In that sense this living 'A' reminds her mother of her sin. Pearl collects sea-weeds and frames figures. 'A' and decorates it with wild flowers. She always is seen 'A' letter hanging on her bosom. Hester throws away this 'A' letter in the forest, but Pearl restores it to her bosom, thus pearl tortures her with continuous remind of stigma. In this sense pearl is a symbol of living letter 'A'. It can be regarded as a symbol of retribution. Therefore novel is interpreted as a story of sin, punishment and retribution.

For Hester 'A' is a Blackman's mark. It has no moral motives of sin. Because she does not think to be a sinner. So 'A' points to the sin in man, in woman and in the whole universal plan. And that is conveyed to us by 'A' figure with red light seen by the minister in the sky. In that sense the subject of the novel is universal subject of sin.

Hawthorne's use of symbolism is dynamic. 'A' standing for adultery in the beginning stands for goodness, holiness. 'A' mean 'Arthur' so it does not remain as a taken of shame, guilt or a punishment but a taken of goodness holiness. And therefore the same scarlet letter refers to angel. Hester afterwards became mother angel, mother and mercy. She has attained

this moral height by rendering her selfless service to the society. She suffers service to the society. She suffers mental and physical tortures. She suffers from social punishment. But she is able to suffer. And therefore her scarlet letter stands for 'Able'. This throws light on Hawthorne's idea that it is through sin she had been regenerated, here is fortunate fall. Because to Hawthorne "We are all sinners" and that is symbolised by 'A' letter carved one tomb for the two graves of Dimmesdale and Hester. It also suggests that love becomes holy if that is the consent of the two. Thus the very title of the novel throws light on the theme of the novel. It is a tale of sin and punishment and regeneration.

The setting of the novel is symbolic. The novel opens with Boston locality which is puritan. Close to the church there is cemetery and close to it there is prison and in front of the prison there is scaffold, this setting is symbolic to the puritan attitude to the life. Sinner is compelled to climb up the scaffold for the public disgrace or she/is put into prison. Or sinner like Hester are deserve to put to death. This harsh and rigid, stunned attitude of puritans to life is suggested by this peculiar setting. It throws light on the nature of punishment assigned to Hester by the puritans.

Hester's needle-work functions as a symbol of puritan attitude to sin and guilt. Hester's skill in embroidery was not called to embroider a single wedding dress because it is believed that the sin could pass through the wedding dress. It throws light on stern and strict puritanism prevailing in 18<sup>th</sup> century. It throws light on puritanism as a way of life which Hawthorne despises. At the same time Hester's needlework symbolically throws light on independent character and defined spirit Hester. When she stands on the scaffold for three hours she shows boldly her embroidered 'A' letter. She is proud of her art. Therefore 'A' here stands for art and not for the sin of adultery and so Hester does not feel it sin moreover symbolically this Hester's needle work is both suppression as well as expression of her passionate nature. She makes pearl dressed Georgiou's rope. She embroiders ropes and dresses. She is free to embroider collar, rope in this sense she is intellectually free but she is not allowed to embroider wedding gown of bride symbolically it is the suppression of her passion by the puritans.

Even the scenes in the novel throw light on the puritan attitude life and sin. At the same time the forest scene throws light on liberal attitude to life. Forest it is dark.

Hester and Dimmesdale meet in the forest therefore their sin is the dark therefore forest stands for moral error. It is the forest where adultery takes place, the two meet lovers. It is the forest where Hester throws away that letter. Therefore the forest is the symbol of sin of Hester and Dimmesdale But forest has double meaning Hester in the forest throws away her scarlet letter. She lets her black hair loose. She asked Dimmesdale to escape from Boston. This suggests her romantic individualism. Forest also stands for innocence. Pearl a product of nature is the symbol of innocence. Forest stands for nature. It suggests that sex is natural to all men. Hester has followed her natural instincts and therefore she is not sinner. Thus the forest scene throws light on puritanism and romantic liberalism.

This novel can be interpreted as a tale of human frailty and sorrow and this is conveyed to us by the brook symbolic of life. The murmuring sound of brook water symbolises Hester's sorrows in her life. It laments over the sad tale of two sad lovers. The old tree producing sound due to the blast laments sorrows in Hester's life.

The very title of the characters throws light on their nature. Hester as her name suggests means haste in committing the sin. She makes Haste going away from Boston. Arthur Dimmesdale stands for holiness and that is signified by his name Arthur. Being a holy person he commits the sin of adultery and conceals his sin. His concealment of sin is suggested by Dimmesdale so Art holy men are sinners it is suggested by his name. It means that sex is natural to all, May he be religious man, who teaches that adultery is the greatest sin. Roger Chillingworth's name is suggestive of his cold heartedness. He is chilly and worthy to be chilly devil incarnate and he is a rogue because he never withdraws from his decision of revenge upon Dimmesdale who has dishonoured him. Thus the very names of the characters reveal their nature.

Moreover the characters symbolically throw light on the spirit of Victorian age, Conflict between science and religion. In this sense Roger stands for science that treats Dimmesdale standing for religion. Science affects religion as Roger inflicts mental and physical agonies upon Dimmesdale who afterwards dies. Thus as science progresses religion regresses science progresses religion regresses science destroyed religion. Though science is symbolised by Roger seems to be blessing initially Hester stands for art. Conflict between Roger and Hester throws light on the conflict between science and art. Under these circumstances only art survives. Dimmesdale dies, (science) Roger also dies and it is Hester who only lives even after her death because she still remembers as mother of mercy. Thus the very spirit of the age is reflected through symbolic character.

Moreover Hibbins symbolically throws light on blind belief and a superstition regarding magic witchcraft she was supposed to be a witch and exiled her speaks of black man. It means that she knows by her power of sorcery that Hester and Dimmesdale have had the secret meeting in the forest.

Scenes are symbolic. The scaffold scenes in the novel are significant because they throw light on the thematic matter of the novel. The first scene is a symbol of punishment as Hester is compelled to stand on the scaffold for public exposure for three hours. Therefore by it would be warning and reports to all people that sin of adultery follows a harsh punishment. The Second Scaffold scene becomes the symbol of confession in case of Dimmesdale. Dimmesdale in his vigil climbs up the steps of the scaffold and calls for Hester and Pearl close to him. This in view of confession the third scaffold scene is symbol of purification expiation at this moment he confesses his sin before the public and falls dead. Thus these three scaffold scenes throw light on theme of sin, punishment and regeneration respectively.

Close to the prison there is symmetry and by the way to prison there is rose bush and every sinner going to prison, happens to see this rose bush. This throws light on

Hawthorne's view of life. Prison symbolises sin, cemetery stands for death and rose bush symbolises hope. By this Hawthorne's conveys to us his view of life that even sinner can hope for better future and this foreshadows the ending of the novel. As Hester initially regarded as a sinful woman lives a better life as mother of mercy and pearl the product of sin gets married to an aristocrat and lives life as a woman happily.

Thus every detail in the novel throws light symbolically on the theme, Hawthorne's view of life, the spirit of age, conflict between puritanism and romantic individuals. Because of too mature of symbolism the novel seems to be mechanical therefore it is ceases to be impressive due to the intensive symbolism. There is a lack of action. It seems to be a typical short story rather than the novel due to symbolism but no doubt the symbolism creates the effects of woe and melancholy.

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