Symbolism And The Scarlet Letter Essay, Research Paper

Symbolism, simply defined, is when one thing, a person or an object for example, is used in place of another, sometimes used as foreshadowing. Hawthorne was a master of symbolism, throughout his books, strong symbolism and vivid imagery are used to take the readers mind through a maze of thought provoking, heart wrenching realism, in which the reader actually feels part of. Many examples of symbolism can be found throughout Nathaniel Hawthorne s The Scarlet Letter.

One of the earliest examples of symbolism in The Scarlet Letter can be found at the end of Chapter One. Hawthorne ends the chapter with the image of a rosebush and suggests that one of its blooms can “symbolize some sweet moral blossom that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow.” It is thought that the rosebush was a last beautiful sight of the damned.

Another prime example of symbolism can be found in the beginning of chapter two. Hester emerges from the prison door and as she is approaching the scaffold Hawthorne says that she is displaying a “desperate recklessness of mood.” It is thought to symbolize her resistance to the Puritan church because of her grave sin of adultery.

The main example of symbolism in this book is the Scarlet Letter A found on Hester s chest. Hawthorne offers a very strong description of this scarlet letter saying that “in fine red cloth surrounded with elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter ‘A’.” This is thought to symbolize the passion of Hester and the crime that she committed in that Hester was a very passionate woman compared to the rest of the women in the town. And the fact that the letter was surrounded with elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread offers that she wasn t at all ashamed of the crime, possibly because it was committed in a moment of strong passion, and that no shame should be put upon such a moment.

Another form of symbolism is shown with the name of Hester s husband, or at least her husband before the Voyage to the New World. His name is Roger Chillingworth. The root word Chilling offers a hint that the man might be one for cold-blooded revenge, which proves to be foreshadowing as the story unfolds. Also, Hester even asks Chillingworth, “Art thou like the Black Man that haunts the forest round about us? Hast thou enticed me into a bold that will prove the ruin of my soul?” This bold question associates Chillingworth with Satan.

Perhaps the second most obvious symbol of the book, is Pearl, who is Hester s daughter conceived from the adulterous affair that Hester had. Once again, within Pearl s name lies the symbolism. Hawthorne says that Pearl was purchased at a great price. The scarlet letter, a life long mark of shame, and public humiliation upon the scaffold in front of the entire town, was the great price that Hester paid for Pearl. Another way in which Pearl is a symbol is that she is viewed by the townspeople as a Demon offspring, displaying a wide array of emotions and a wild temperament. It is thought that the townspeople thought of Pearl as a demon offspring not only because of her wild temperament but also because of the sin that her mother committed by which she was conceived.

Another symbol of this book is that Reverend Dimmesdale, the father of Pearl, has heart conditions that cause him to place his hand on his heart. This is symbolic of the weight of the sin he has hidden in him on his heart. Some actually think that there was an A on Reverend Dimmesdales chest, that was caused by an outward display of emotion from his heart. Others think that Dimmesdale carved the A as a way of penance.

A large amount of symbolism is displayed in one scene from Chapter Eleven in which Reverend Dimmesdale, Hester Prynne, and Pearl are all standing on the scaffold and Hawthorne says, “And there stood the minister, with his hand over his heart; and Hester Prynne, with the embroidered letter glimmering on her bosom; and little Pearl, herself a symbol, and the connecting link between the two.” This symbolizes the way in which all three are connected, bound by one sin. The sin gives the minister heart trouble, causes Hester to wear the A on her chest, and allowed Pearl to be born.

Symbols vary from the Scarlet A upon Hester s chest, to a living person, and even to a rosebush leading the path to the town prison. Hawthorne used symbolism in just about every possible way. In fact, there are so many ways that it is probably impossible to find all of them. Symbolism was found throughout this book in many places, some of which were very obscure.