Symbolic Characters In S.L. Essay, Research Paper

Within such a plethora of excellent Puritan literature, The Scarlet Letter stands out because of the exquisite use of literary techniques for enrichment throughout. One of these techniques is the use of characters as symbols, to procreate the message of the story within the simple narrative of the daily travails of the characters. This method of enhancing prose appears throughout many popular works from every sector or division of modern literature. Three examples of symbolic characters from the book are that of Roger, symbolizing vengeance; the kind young woman, symbolizing hope; and Pearl, symbolizing the nature of hidden sin. One character in the story that is symbolic is Roger, Hester’s husband. He is the symbol of a life consumed with revenge. When the reader first meets Roger, he is a mostly normal man. “He was small in stature, with a furrowed visage, which, as yet, could hardly be termed aged. There was a remarkable intelligence in his features…” The only unusual trait of his is a slight deformity of the shoulder. He is an intelligent man who spends most of his time reading. When Roger finds out that Hester has been unfaithful to him, he vows to take revenge on the man who sinned with her. Later he finds out that the man is Minister Arthur Dimmesdale and meticulously plots revenge. His life becomes consumed with the carrying out of his revenge. He himself sins as he tries to destroy Arthur’s soul. Roger soon comes to resemble the devil. He even notices this similarity in himself. He says, “I have already told thee what I am! A fiend!” Hester also says that she pities him, “…for the hatred that has transformed a wise and just man to a fiend.” Each of them recognize that Roger’s life centered around hatred and revenge have made him like the devil. The symbol working in Roger, living to destroy, shows that tearing down another person causes as much damage to one’s own life. Roger is the symbol of a life consumed by desire for revenge. Another symbolic character is the kind young woman. She is symbolic of hope in the story. Surrounded by people criticizing and being self-righteous the young woman alone has kind words to say to and about Hester Prynne. The first instance when she is kind is at the beginning when Hester is on the scaffold for the first time. Other women were making remarks like, “This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die.” But the young woman says,”…let her cover the mark as she will, the pang of it will be always in her heart.” Even thought this remark is not extremely kind it is the only thing said in Hester’s defense. Later in the scene the young woman speaks again. “Oh, peace, neighbors, peace!’ whispered their youngest companion; do not let her hear you! Not a stitch in that embroidered letter, but she has felt it in her heart.” Once again, she is the only person to defend Hester. This makes her symbolic of the hope that Hester can return to a somewhat normal life. She is Hester’s hope. At the end of the story, the reader learns that the young woman dies and Hester makes her burial robe.

“Hester saw and recognized the self-same faces of that group of matrons, who had awaited her forthcoming from the prison-door, seven years ago; all save one, the youngest and only compassionate among them, whose burial-robe she had since made.” The death of the kind woman, who symbolizes hope, is significant because Hester’s hope also dies and she is forever an outcast in the society. The young woman is, within this natural progression, utterly symbolic of hope in the novel. Another character who is symbolic is Pearl, who symbolizes secret sin. Pearl is wild and uncontrolled like the passion that caused the sin. Throughout most of the book, Pearl is wild. When she is in the forest with her mother, she fits in with the wild things and they seem to accept her. “…the mother forest, and these wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child.” Nature recognizes in Pearl a wildness. Also, Pearl’s character is described as developing, “…the steadfast principles of an unflinching courage, an uncontrollable will, a sturdy pride…” All of these characteristics relate to sin, especially sin that is not recognized. While committing the sin, a person has strong will, pride, and courage just like Pearl does. Pearl is wild and passionate. Also, when the sin is discovered, Pearl’s character changes dramatically. Before, Pearl had been wild and almost insensitive, when her father, Arthur, finally admits he is Pearl’s father and is dying, Pearl changes. “Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father’s cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it.” Pearl is not wild after this experience. Instead she is sensitive and calm. As soon as Pearl, or the sin, is acknowledged she is no longer wild and passionate but controlled, calm, and happy. Pearl is, in turn, the symbol of sin in hiding. Such symbols, appearing within the characters of a popular story, enhance the message of the work. The hidden sin that Pearl symbolizes is the cause of great vengeance, represented by Roger, and the hope exemplified by the young woman is the only way to conquer the shame that is a result of such sin. The beautiful interrelation of such concepts is that which makes Hawthorne’s work a classic.

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