

Symbolic Method and Thematic Function in *The Scarlet Letter*

Shuyi Li

School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

Abstract

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne makes an extensive use of symbols. The symbolic deployment of color, the action of the main character, words and names are rhetorically effective and thematically significant. While functioning as a structural principle that propels the plot development, this method encapsulates the theme of redemption. This paper argues that Hawthorne uses this method to critique rigid Puritan codes and express his attitude toward the concept of "original sin". The scarlet letter "A" is a controlling symbol in *The Scarlet Letter* and has structural function and thematic significance. First is the structural function of the scarlet letter "A". The scarlet letter "A" runs through the whole novel, weaving together the four main characters and it is inextricably linked to character relations and the main scenes. At the same time, the meaning of the letter "A" changes as the plot and characters develop, and varies according to the observer's foothold. It is interpreted differently by readers of different times, ages and backgrounds. Next is the thematic significance of the scarlet letter "A". As a controlling symbol that links the narrative components of the plot, the scarlet letter "A" reflects the theme of it. The process of changing the symbolic meaning of the scarlet letter "A" is the process of Hawthorne's criticism of Puritanism and his vindication of Hester, as well as the vindication of "original sin" from the perspective of the human nature. In the beginning, the scarlet letter "A" symbolizes "adultery". It is also the initials of Arthur- Hester's lover, representing her amour. Later, as the plot develops and Hester earns respect for her virtues, the meaning of the "A" gradually transforms into the meaning of "able" and "angel". By the end of the novel, as Hester gradually awakens, the letter "A" takes on the meaning of "amazon", representing Hester's struggle against Puritan rule. At the same time, the scarlet letter "A" symbolizes the relationship of the characters in the novel. The initials of the main character- Arthur Dimmesdale's name "A" and "D" are the initials of the "adultery", representing his adultery with Hester. The other main character, Roger Chillingworth, is a symbol of the religious forces. He buries Hester's youth and leads to Arthur's tragedy. His name symbolizes him as a chilly revenger. The Pearl represents the existence of adultery in the novel and is a symbol of "the scarlet letter". Her name is a symbol of hope and her happy ending is a symbol of a better future. The paper argues that through the use of symbol, Hawthorne expresses his views on "original sin". Hawthorne exposes the cruelty of Puritanism and offers a way for the "sinful" to redeem themselves through good works.

Keywords

The Scarlet Letter; Nathaniel Hawthorne; Symbolic meaning; Puritanism; Original sin.

1. Introduction

Nathaniel Hawthorne was one of the greatest American Romantic novelists of the 19th century. His novels provide an insightful exploration of moral and spiritual conflict. The use of the symbolic device is full of his novels.

Hawthorne was deeply influenced by Puritanism. His works are often very obscure, showing a state of confusion, doubt and uncertainty. He was born in the town of Salem, Massachusetts.

Hawthorne's ancestors had lived in Salem since the 17th century. One of his ancestors was a magistrate who, in staunchly defending Puritanism, sentenced a Quaker woman to public whipping. Another was a judge in the Salem witch trials. After his family going into decline during the 1700s, he wondered he decline of his family might be retribution for this act. This history bothered him all times and led him to develop a reflective and critical personality, hesitating over the original sin of human beings and the doctrines of Puritanism. Transcendentalism, which was widely influential at that time, gave him new spiritual strength. He began to explore the human condition and destiny on a deeper level. He was aware of the repression of humanity and the destruction of life's well-being by the Puritan ethic, but was unable to break away from the old cultural traditions that he had been brought up with. He wanted to find a way to change this condition, pursue the ideal of perfection and morality. Hawthorne thus not only inherited the serious moral tradition of the Puritans and deeply concerned with the concepts of original sin and guilt, but also embraced the ideas of transcendentalism. He takes a deep and critical look at life and finds that it full of pain and conflict, but also the redemptive power and love.

Puritanism is an ideology that encompasses the intricacies of nearly every aspect of human life, including religion, politics, family, social life, economics, art and science. For the Puritans, religious theology was deeply rooted in two related doctrines, one of which is original sin. Puritans believed that people were born sinners. The characteristic of Puritans was combined with the doctrine of predestination inherited from Calvinism, puritans believed that that man could not voluntarily receive salvation from his own sins, but had to be chosen through God. Hawthorne was deeply involved in the problem of original sin, and most of his works focus on the types of mistakes that men and women are prone to make, and which ultimately lead to personal dissociation and even the loss of humanity.

After nearly three hundred years of development in North America, Puritanism's negative and repressive effect on social life became increasingly evident by the time Hawthorne lived. Individual freedom, which seems natural to Americans today, was still an ideal to which people aspired at that era. Under these historical conditions, the transcendentalist philosophy arose. Transcendentalism, which absorbed the best of European civilization and encapsulated the American national spirit, became one of the key symbols of American literary independence. Transcendentalism is based on profound philosophical ideas and is strongly idealistic, emphasizing the supremacy of the spirit and the absolute perception of intuition from the principles of idealism. This theory played a positive role in weakening the power of the church, raising the status of the individual and liberating the mind.

In the preface to *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne mentions that he lived under Emerson's influence for three years and that he also joined the Brook Farm founded by the Transcendentalists. This shows that Hawthorne was deeply influenced by the transcendentalism of his time, and more or less his transcendentalist views are reflected in *The Scarlet Letter* - a reflection and even a criticism of traditional Puritanism. Yet Hawthorne, who had lived under Puritanism for a long time, could not be completely free of Puritan ideas.

For Hawthorne, the Puritans were a reality in the human historical condition. As Hawthorne describes, the seven-year period in which the novel's main storyline takes place is extremely relevant in the history of England. With his knowledge of the history of the American colonies, coupled with his considerable knowledge of England, allows Hawthorne to once again trace the development of Puritanism, which figured so prominently in American life, to reveal the grim, cold, intolerant of dissent, intolerant, and indiscriminate use of force and punishment that characterized Puritanism's teachings.

2. Symbols and Thematic Meanings

In *The Scarlet Letter*, symbols are used repeatedly in the novel, such as the symbol of color, the symbol of characters, and the symbol of scenery. As an image throughout the whole novel, the scarlet letter "A" has multiple symbolic meanings. As the plot develops, its symbolic meaning gradually shifts, and at the same time, it has different thematic meanings for each character.

2.1. The Symbolic Meaning of the Letter "A"

The scarlet letter "A" is the focus and the most typical symbol throughout the whole novel.

Hawthorne kept changing the meaning of "A", making it appear in various forms. "A" is in everywhere, sometimes real, sometimes obscure. It is embroidered on Hester's chest, shines in the night sky and is inscribed on the tombstone. For the different characters in the novel, "A" has different meanings.

As the heroine of the novel and the wearer of the scarlet letter A, "A" appears repeatedly around Hester and has many different symbolic meanings. "A" is the first letter of the English word "Adultery", which is an abbreviation for fornication. It was because Hester had broken the seventh of the Ten Commandments, adultery, that she was ordered by Puritan society to wear the scarlet letter A on her chest for her whole life as a punishment. It was because of her adultery that she led a life of isolation. At this time, "A" symbolizes "alienation". She "standing alone in the world - alone, as to any dependence on society" (Hawthorne 125). For seven years, she was abandoned, scorned and unaccepted. She lived in a cottage by the seashore, far away from others, her only contact with the outside world was her embroidery work. Her rich heart was surrounded by alone and alienation. Despite the scorn she suffered from the world, she still had hope for life. She did not bow down to her fate and eventually overcame the prejudices of society through her own efforts.

"The letter was the symbol of her calling; Such helpfulness was found in her-so much power to do and power to sympathise - that many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification; They said that it meant Able" (124).

Hester's scarlet letter "A" was no longer seen as a sign of adultery, but as a symbol of virtue and good deeds. People no longer interpreted the scarlet letter "A" as it originally appeared, but rather as a symbol of "able". Even faced with extreme hardship, Hester never sulked, but instead grew stronger and more mature. She fought against Puritanism with great tenacity. At this point, the meaning of the scarlet letter "A" gradually changed to "Amazon".

By contrast to Hester, the symbol of the letter "A" in Dimmesdale is more subtle. Firstly, A is the first letter of Arthur Dimmesdale's name, representing him as Hester's lover. As the person with whom Hester committed adultery, the A is also symbolic of the crime of adultery in Dimmesdale. Although he did not wear the scarlet letter A, he still felt a deep sense of shame and wore the scarlet letter A in his own heart. "A" is the first letter of the French word for love - amour. This love, for Dimmesdale, was not only his love for Hester, but also his pious love for God. The "A" symbolizes the contradiction between his pure dreams and his life, between love and sin. As he wandered in repentance, his "A" gradually became alienation from others and spiritual loneliness. When he repeatedly told people that he is a sinner, they did not understand the meaning, but praised him for his holiness. He wandered alone in his own contradictory spiritual world, where no one can really get close to him, not even the woman he loves. At this point, the meaning of "A" becomes an individual "A" in opposition to the "All". It is only at the end, when his scarlet letter "A" is completely revealed, that this opposition reaches unity.

For Chillingworth, the letter "A" symbolizes "avenge". After discovering that his wife had committed adultery, Chillingworth did not try to free her from her misery and suffering, but vowed to find the adulterer and take revenge. To do so, he changed his name, tried to track down Hester's adulterer, and subjected her to mental abuse and torture. When he realized that

the adulterer was Dimmesdale, he used the doctor's name to torture Dimmesdale mentally. In the end, Dimmesdale is immersed in a brutal mental torture of contradictions between regret and remorse, preaching and apostasy, love and adultery, and finally to his death. Chillingworth, on the other hand, got the pleasure that comes from revenge.

Pearl, for her part, symbolizes the living scarlet letter A. For Hester and all the Puritans, Pearl is a symbol of her mother's sin, and she appears wherever Hester is. Pearl's first appearance is in the first chapter, when the town officials bring Hester from prison to the crowds, "a baby of some three months old, who winked and turned aside its little face from the too vivid light of day" (41). As the storyline goes on, Pearl then lived a quiet life of isolation and penance with Hester in a house away from the world. Pearl was constantly reminded of the sins she committed, preventing her from falling into an even darker place. When Hester and Dimmesdale negotiated their escape in the forest, the sudden joy caused her to remove the scarlet letter "A" and throw it on a pile of dead leaves. She called Pearl, who was standing at a distance. But Pearl stretched a finger out and pointed it at her mother's breast, annoyed as if she had been provoked by something. Therefore, Hester picked up the scarlet letter "A" and put it back on her chest. The Pearl became a reflection of the "evil" in her human nature, a reminder of the sins she and Dimmesdale had committed and to purify their sinful souls. What's more, Pearl is the only solace for Hester's tainted soul and a bright light in her stifled life. Smart and rebellious, Pearl could shake her fist at the Puritan children and drive them away. In this way, Pearl symbolizes the development of history. Hawthorne denies the Puritan statutes and affirms humanity. The Puritan statutes will surely be replaced by the love and freedom that humanity deserves.

2.2. The Symbolic meaning of The Color Red

Red is a color that invites endless associations, and in the novel it is fully rendered, displaying a wealth of connotations. In Western culture, red has two meanings. One is positive - it symbolizes love and life. According to the Christian artistic tradition, it represents the blood of Christ at his martyrdom and the love. On the other hand, it also has a negative connotation, with skittish women wearing clothes that are red. Therefore, it is also a color that represents hell and the devil. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the color red has different meanings in different characters. For Hester, above all, red symbolizes passion, recklessness and the fire of desire. Her marriage with Chillingworth was full of insanity. She was young, beautiful and passionate, while Chillingworth was old, oblivious to his wife's needs, pains and interests. But they still married, which proves Hester's recklessness about lifelong events, and became the beginning of her tragedy. What's more, her recklessness and desire also showed in the adultery she committed with Dimmesdale. Dimmesdale was a young priest, who was eloquent and attractive, but became a co-conspirator in the crime of adultery. Hester certainly knew that she was not supposed to have an affair with a priest in a society ruled by Puritans. However, she was driven by passion and desire to commit adultery with Dimmesdale.

The immediate meaning of the scarlet letter is that its wearer is a sinner, and the red color is here also given the meaning of defilement and disgrace. "A" stands for "adultery", which is an unforgivable sin. Hester's scarlet letter, despite being meticulously and beautifully made, signifies that Hester is a fallen woman. Wearing the scarlet letter, Hester lived a lonely life. The people of the parish despised her. No one wanted to be with her except Pearl. People even wanted to take away her right to raise and educate Pearl.

Red is the color of the fires in the purgatory, where souls are purified and prepared for their ascension into heaven. When the dead person has made amends for their sins, the angels will admit them to heaven. Likewise, the living sinner can be cleansed of their sins by doing kind deeds and repentance. As Hester says when fighting for her custody of Pearl, "this badge hath taught me-it daily teaches me-it is teaching me at this moment-lessons whereof my child may

be the wiser and better, albeit they can profit nothing to thyself" (85). Here the color is shown as the fire of purgatory, which not only causes Hester pain, but reminds her to try to atone and cleanse herself of her sins.

Red is also a symbol of sunlight. It shines a light on the bleak world and the ugly and weak side of human nature. When Hester stands on the pedestal of shame, "midday sun burning down upon her face, and lighting up its shame; with the scarlet token of infamy on her breast" (49). The sunlight is used here to emphasize the shame of the scarlet letter and Hester's guilt. However, later on, Hester does good deeds in the parish.

"There glimmered the embroidered letter, with comfort in its unearthly ray; Elsewhere the token of sin, it was the taper of the sick-chamber; It had even thrown its gleam, in the sufferer's hard extremity, across the verge of time; It had shown him where to set his foot, while the light of earth was fast becoming dim, and ere the light of futurity could reach him...It was only the darkened house that could contain her; When sunshine came again, she was not there" (123).

She certainly acted as sunshine, and only at this point did the people of New England begin to reconsider whether Hester was as evil as they had previously judged her to be. For the people of New England, Hester was no longer a woman who had committed adultery in their eyes. On the contrary, her good deeds dispelled the darkness like sunlight. From the beginning of the novel, where the sunlight is used to highlight Hester's shame and emphasize her guilt, the sunlight is later used to reflect Hester's good deeds and highlight her kindness. This shift is a reflection of Hester's guilty transformation. For people, Hester gradually transforms from a sinner to an angel, bringing sunlight to dispel the darkness.

For Chillingworth, the color red symbolizes the fire of revenge. Since Chillingworth discovered that his wife had committed adultery, he has been determined to get back at the adulterer. When Hester refused to say the name of the adulterer, he claims that he will find out who it is. When he sensed that Dimmesdale may be the adulterer, he planned his revenge carefully. He did everything he could to prevent the priest from confessing his sins, while torturing Dimmesdale's heart with vicious words. In the end, his revenge became uncontrollable. Instead of showing the slightest sympathy for the priest on his way to death, he prevented Dimmesdale from making his deathbed confession.

Red is the symbol of blood. Chillingworth must pay the price for his sins. He devoted himself to his revenge and his energy was consumed. Dimmesdale's death also announced the end of his life. As Hawthorne describes Chillingworth's condition after Dimmesdale's death - "All his strength and energy-all his vital and intellectual force-seemed at once to desert him" (201).

As a symbol of blood, the color red also signifies the early death of Dimmesdale. He must also pay the price for his sins. As a priest, he was consecrated as a saint. His duty was to help the sinners to repent and to save those who were suffering from spiritual tribulations. But he himself was a sinner, who had committed the unpardonable sins of New England in the Puritan era. He punished himself severely in his heart as a devout believer in God. Dimmesdale tortured himself to the point of heart failure, which eventually led to his untimely death. He was driven to his death by his own conscience. Despite his outward success, inwardly he regarded himself as a complete failure as a priest, and he often felt so groundless that perhaps the other world was the best place for him to go.

Red is the main color of Pearl. This is the mark of Hester's sin, and Pearl is a living scarlet, having been the mark of Hester's sin even before she was born. Therefore, no matter what color Pearl wore, she always had the meaning of the scarlet letter. Hester also always let Pearl wear scarlet, which made her a scarlet letter in yet another form - a form of scarlet that has been given life.

The varied symbolic meanings of the color red reflect the author's rich thoughts and perceptions, which give the novel a subtle artistic effect.

As the focus of the novel, the scarlet letter "A" has a very rich meaning for everyone. These rich symbolic meanings form a thread that drives the destiny of the characters and the development of the storyline.

3. Thematic Functions

As a major writing technique in fiction, the symbol has an important role in the novel, especially the symbolic meaning of the scarlet letter "A". The meaning of the scarlet letter "A" changes as the novel's plot develops and is given a completely different meaning and with a structural function.

The letter "A" is the first letter of the English word and signifies the beginning. According to Christian doctrine, the ancestors of mankind were fallen and sinful from the beginning. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because they were sinned by stealing the forbidden fruit, and their children and grandchildren inherited the "original sin". That is to say, man is born sinful. In this sense, the letter "A" symbolizes the "original sin" of mankind. What the author wants to tell is that Hester and Dimmesdale in the novel are committing what Christianity calls "original sin", not adultery in the usual sense.

The scarlet letter "A" has always been close to Hester's fate. The scarlet "A" emblazoned on her chest, like a ruler from God, had a powerful effect on her. Not only does it regulate her behavior and cultivate her virtue, but it also suppresses her nature, adds to her suffering and finally drives her to rebellion and strengthens her quest for true happiness.

As the novel progresses, the letter "A" is given different symbolic meanings. Hester Prynne was a pure, innocent and beautiful girl whose husband, in appearance, character and moral qualities, could not match her. She lost contact with her husband after arriving in America, and later fornicated with a young priest and gave birth to a girl. In the eyes of the Puritans, the sins committed by Hester were against the God. The powers that be in Boston inflicted the worst punishment on Hester, displaying her on a scaffold. The women abused her in angry murmurs as "the hussy" and "the naughty baggage" who had "brought shame upon us all, and ought to die" (41). But Hester showed her beauty and nobility by her actions without any words. When she stepped out of the prison, "with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her townspeople and neighbours" (41). She bravely showed the letter "A" and her child. When the letter "A" first appears, the author writes

"On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A; It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore; and which was of a splendour in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony" (42).

The author describes the scarlet letter "A", the symbol of sin and disgrace with a considerable degree of praise, making it became a symbol of the purity and defiance of Hester's character. This purity, however, is out of place in New England society and predicts Hester's later isolation lifestyle of the time. The author uses others' perceptions of the scarlet letter "A" to foreshadow the final transformation of scarlet letter "A" - a sign of virtue. By describing this, the author shows his challenge to the worldly vision of the Puritans and his affirmation of Hester in sympathy.

As the plot of the story develops, another side of Hester, different from sinful, vile and ugly in the eyes of the Puritans, is fully revealed in the author's writing. During her long seven years of misery, she heard all kinds of unbearable abuse and the letter "A" completely separated her from the crowd. She lived alone in her house with only Pearl to keep her company. "All the light and graceful foliage of her character had been withered up by this red-hot brand, and had long

ago fallen away, leaving a bare and harsh outline which might have been repulsive, had she possessed friends or companions to be repelled by it" (125). Her feminine tenderness and passion, gradually shifts to reflection. She observed the society from a special point of view.

"The world's law was no law for her mind...As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down and built up anew; Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position; Finally, all other difficulties being obviated, woman cannot take advantage of these preliminary reforms, until she herself shall have undergone a still mightier change" (126).

Even if, in the end, Hester did not put these ideas into action, it is easy to see that she was an extraordinarily forward-thinking woman. She sought freedom in her heart, and she would reflect on society's laws and have her own opinions about them. Hester overcomes the unreality of society with her own truth, she dares to reflect on the unreasonable parts of society and has her own unique insights. This process of reflection, questioning and criticism is exactly how the author criticizes Puritanism and vindicates Hester's sin. Hester survives strongly and overcomes society's prejudice against her with her own strength. At this time, the letter "A" symbolizes "Amazon".

Her actions gradually changed people's perceptions of her. For years Hester lived her life with such strength. The people gradually changed their attitudes towards her. The rulers, and the wise and learned men of community's "sour and rigid wrinkles were relaxing into something which, in the due course of years, might grow to be an expression of almost benevolence". And those individuals in private life, "had quite forgiven Hester Prynne for her frailty; nay, more, they had begun to look upon the scarlet letter as the token, not of that one sin, for which she had borne so long and dreary a penance, but of her many good deeds since" (124). At this time the scarlet "A" represented angels, adored and other good things in the eyes of the people. Hester wore the scarlet letter until her death, when "the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world's scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence, too" (203). Hester broke free from the shackles placed on her by religion and law and won her freedom. Through her efforts, she proves that she is an autonomous person.

The novel begins with the scarlet letter "A" and ends with the scarlet letter "A". In *The Scarlet Letter*, the story begins with the scarlet letter "A" on Hester's chest. This is the beginning not only of sin, but also the beginning of the rule of society, the rule of God, and the creation of the rule in individual's minds. The novel begins with "A" showing the contradiction between the rule in the mind and the rule of God, the rule of society. For Dimmesdale, "A" represents the beginning of the contradiction between the individual and the whole. Until the end of the story, "ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES" (204). At this time, the individual and society are united, the rule in individual's mind represented by Hester is unified with the rule of God and the rule of society.

It is interesting that from the beginning, society tries to reform Hester, but it turns out that Hester, with her spirit of rebellion and charity, has awakened her fellow, transformed stereotypes and advanced society. In this way, the scarlet letter "A" also symbolizes "advance" and the pursuit of the "American dream" and the quest for a new life.

The changing process of the meaning of the scarlet letter "A" is the process of Hawthorne's criticism of Puritanism and the vindication of Hester. It is also a process of rehabilitating "original sin" from the perspective of human nature. The change in the meaning of the scarlet letter "A" demonstrates Hawthorne's particular view of "original sin" and moral issues. Under the author's writing, the scarlet letter A is exquisitely embroidered and gorgeous, and Hester is depicted as beautiful, kind and full of courage. This reflects the author's attitude of "original sin".

In his writing, “original sin” is not purely sinful. On the contrary, people can liberate themselves from the bondage of “original sin” through their own actions and efforts. He believes that hidden sin is more terrible than overt sin. *The Scarlet Letter* offers a peculiarly nineteenth-century answer to the eternal question of “original sin”. Through Hester, Hawthorne exposes the cruelty of Puritanism and offers a way for the “sinful” to redeem themselves through good works.

4. Conclusion

Symbol, as the main technique in *The Scarlet Letter*, has a profound thematic significance. The Scarlet Letter A's different symbols in each episode and scene reflect Hawthorne's view of original sin. From beauty to sinful behavior, Hester Prynne was strong enough to live through years of shame before she finally turned the scarlet letter “A” symbol on her breast into a sign of power and “angel”. Dimmesdale from respectable person to inner condemned sinner, exhausting his energy and talent before he finally dared to repent, clear his shame and found moral relief in death. And Hester's husband, Chillingworth, who was once an innocent victim, gradually lost his humanity and became an unforgivable sinner because he was focused on revenge and driven by the anger.

The Scarlet Letter tells the story about adultery, revenge and redemption. According to the Puritans, humans were born sinful. Because of the inheritance of Adam and Eve's original sin. Influenced by Puritanism, Hawthorne focuses on the effects of original sin, the effects of sin on the sinners themselves and their children, and the conflict between “intelligence” and “emotion”. Hawthorne makes everyone in the story a sinner, and can not escape their own fate.. However, Hawthorne holds different attitudes towards the three sinners in the story. Hester is portrayed as a beautiful, brave and loyal woman, but also as a kind, capable and compassionate woman who eventually wins a new life and freedom. Dimmesdale is portrayed as a coward, a hypocrite and a victim, while Chillingworth is portrayed as a devil and the greatest of sinners. The story of the lovers, Hester and Dimmesdale, is portrayed sympathetically, for although they have sinned, their mistaken actions are motivated by natural love. In Hawthorne's view, Chillingworth's sin was far greater, for his sin was facilitated by his self-righteousness and indifference. Hawthorne was influenced by Puritanism as much as he was by Transcendentalism. His view of the three sinners shows that he was not only a follower of Puritanism, but also a critic of it.

In conclusion, the symbolic meaning of the scarlet letter “A” has not only a structural function but also a profound thematic significance. Hawthorne insightfully dissects the social roots that produced this tragedy of love. At a time when the new American economy was emerging, in a seemingly newly developing society, outward innocence was nothing but a lie. It is the “sin of whom”, so to speak, both the “original sin” of mankind and the cowardice and hypocrisy of human nature, as well as the great tragedy of the times. The author reveals in a critical way the contradictions in the society, the inapplicability of the old customs and the hypocrisy of the new moral values. The author's rejection of the cruel laws of Puritanism and his desire for love, human rights and freedom are clearly expressed in the novel's lines, in which he praises and criticizes his characters and questions and reflects on morality and law.

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