

THE SCARLET LETTER

FINAL REVIEW: THEMES, SYMBOLISM, ETC.

The Scarlet Letter. Masterprose. Perfection Learning Corporation. Logan, Iowa. 1978.

THE PHILOSOPHER–HAWTHORNE

He was immensely critical of Puritanism

However, he possessed a profound belief in man's obligation to seek the highest truth and a strong moral sense

He was appalled by moral decay and human suffering –so his writing explored the inner workings of the human mind, spirit, and heart

He was convinced that the rigidity of Puritanism and its emphasis on how original sin undermined rather than strengthened morality

SYMBOLISM OF THE 'A'

Early on Hester views the A as a reminder of the Affection the token shields from her heart.

The letter, isolating her and Pearl from society, seems to stand for “Alone.”

To many Puritans, the letter changes to become a badge of honor standing for “Able.”

It was also seen as Governor Winthrop’s ascendance as an Angel.

On Dimmesdale’s heart the A symbolizes Anguish until he confesses; then, the A becomes a symbol of Atonement.

Ironically, the most obvious meaning is never mentioned—Adultery; and, it seems to stand more for those things that were not acknowledged.

DARK/LIGHT

Puritans are made to seem cold, rigid, and hypocritical

The scarlet letter contrasts this with its brilliant red and gold as compared to the dark grays, browns, worn by the people, the forest, and the town

The darkness surrounding the symbol suppresses joy and truth while the red offers compassion and honesty. Like a distant light on a cold, dark night, the scarlet letter offers hope.

Darkness is also evil—as Chillingworth becomes more obsessed with revenge, he becomes darker, more strange, and sinister—he's linked with the Black Man

Hester and Dimmesdale are enveloped with darkness and shadow as long as neither stand in full sunlight—notice the only time sunlight penetrates them, forest and at the end when he confesses, and this is when the shadow of secret sin is lifted.