

Landscape in *The Scarlet Letter*

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ABSTRACT: *Nathaniel Hawthorn was a man of imaginative sense with moral experiences. He is one of the earliest writers of America who contributes on American literature from his real experience of American Puritan society, culture, and their geographical existence. He made a real effort to understand the history of New England and attempts to show culture, society norms and nature of his country in writing. The natural landscape gives real pleasure to a romantic and nature loving reader. Landscape is very important and can focus the suspense of the story symbolically. It also can focus on the emotional crisis and mental support to the characters of the text and also the readers. My paper describes the natural landscape in details and shows how Hawthorn used it in The Scarlet Letter. It also shows landscapes' influence on its inhabitants. The focus of my essay will be on the nature, and emotions and feelings directed toward it by dwellers, and how the real natural world can be protector or savior to them. To me, reading Hawthorn means reading and knowing the real American nature and its influence on people. In his The Scarlet Letter we find a collection of sketches dealing with English scenery, life and manners. He was able to show Salem Customs house, seventeenth-century Boston, wooden prison, rosebush, forest, stream, and other natural and geographical existences of New England his to readers. I have found the real American pictures in The Scarlet Letter which make me feel that I am in America while reading the text. I think other foreign readers, like me, will get the same feelings. So to say, my paper will help understand Landscape, Nature, American culture, their influence and, as a result understand Hawthorne.*

KEY WORDS: landscape, nature, culture, forest walk.

INTRODUCTION

Landscape is a broad artistic and aesthetic concept that appreciates a return to nature in its purest elemental sense. It is a symbolic abbreviation which is capable of an infinite extension beyond the mere spatiotemporal limitation of characters in a sense, they are in it but it is never permissively

subservient to theme. The symbolic character of the scarlet letter originates in the analogical relationship between landscape style, the emotions of the characters, and the emergent theme of the work. The function of the landscape, however, and the way in which Hawthorn transcends landscape through an extension of the principles by which he visualizes it, can be described only by an analyses of the conventions that give his work its moral and aesthetic organization. In other way “Landscape.....is inseparable from policy and action and meaning.... [Hawthorne] turns the whole landscape into a metaphor”¹.

The connectional mode of the picturesque, with its interplay of light and shadow, uncertain brightness, and obscurely visualized outlines, determines the graphic form of the forest background against which Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale meet after their seven-year separation. The dimness, mystery, and pervasive gloom of this setting are an effect an evaluation of the plight of the lovers. Landscape is one kind of visible form of an emotional crisis. Authors often use landscape details to reinforce textural implications; however, all readers do not understand the values incorporated in those scenes at their first reading. Careful readers as well as ordinary readers sometimes become charmed by sharing natural details stored in the author’s sensory experience. Sometime readers who do share the same experiences as the author might show no interest in or not understand in the same way. But either all the readers understand or no, a landscape is very important device for literary work which represents geographical area of a group of people through its natural description. Nathaniel Hawthorn is successful in depicting the landscape of this novel which has a great impact on characters- especially on Hester, Dimmesdale, Miss Hibbins even if the little child Pearl, daughter of Hester. The landscape mood is noticeable in the first chapter, in the forest scene and finally at the last chapter of the novel.

Textual Analysis

The story starts during the summer of 1642, near Boston, Massachusetts, in a Puritan village. A young woman, named Hester Prynne, has been led from the town prison with her infant daughter in her arms, and on the breast of her gown a rag of scarlet cloth that assumed the shape of a letter. It is the uppercase letter "A." The Scarlet Letter "A" represents the act of adultery that she has committed and it is to be a symbol of her sin—a badge of shame—for all to see. About this town and its description of landscape with prison, cemetery, and rose bush Hawthorne says

“The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison.... Certain it is that, some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement of the town, the wooden jail was already marked with weather-stains and other indications of age, which gave a yet darker aspect to its beetle-browed and gloomy front..... Before this ugly edifice, and between it and the wheel-track of the street, was a grass- plot, much overgrown with

¹ Levy, Leo. “Foreword”, *The Scarlet Letter* (signet ed.: New York, 1959).Pp .vii, ix.

burdock, pig-weed, apple- perm, and such unsightly vegetation, which evidently found something congenial in the soil that had so early borne the black flower of civilized society, a prison. But on one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose-bush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him.”² (Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 49)

Thus the first chapter deals with landscape and Hester’s inquiry about her adultery. Hester’s husband, who is much older than she, and whose real name is unknown, has sent her ahead to America whilst settling affairs in Europe. However, her husband does not arrive in Boston and the consensus is that he has been lost at sea. It is apparent that, while waiting for her husband, Hester has had an affair, leading to the birth of her daughter. She will not reveal her lover’s identity, however, and the scarlet letter, along with her subsequent public shaming, is the punishment for her sin and secrecy. On this day, Hester is led to the town scaffold and harangued by the town fathers, but she again refuses to identify her child’s father.

The elderly onlooker is Hester’s missing husband, who is now practicing medicine and calling himself Roger Chillingworth. He reveals his true identity to Hester and medicates her daughter. They have a frank discussion where Chillingworth states that it was foolish and wrong for a cold, old intellectual like him to marry a young lively woman like Hester. He expressly states that he thinks that they have wronged each other and that he is even with her — her lover is a completely different matter. Hester refuses to divulge the name of her lover and Chillingworth does not press her stating that he will find out anyway. He does elicit a promise from her to keep his true identity as Hester’s husband secret, though. He settles in Boston to practice medicine there. Several years pass. Hester supports herself by working as a seamstress, and her daughter, Pearl, grows into a willful, impish child, and is said to be the scarlet letter come to life as both Hester’s love and her punishment. Shunned by the community, they live in a small cottage on the outskirts of Boston. Her release from prison is stated like-

“Her prison-door was thrown open, and she came forth into the sunshine, which, falling on all alike seemed, to her sick and morbid heart, as if meant for no other purpose than to reveal the scarlet letter on her breast..... But now, with this unattended walk from her prison door, began the daily custom.... Hester Prynne, therefore, did not flee. On the outskirts of the town, there was a small thatched cottage. It had been built by an earlier settler, and abandoned. It stood on the shore, looking across a basin of the sea at the forest-

² Hawthorn, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*, (Dhaka: Friend’s book corner, 2008). PP. 49-50.

covered hills, towards the west. A clump of scrubby trees, such as alone grew on the peninsula." (82-85)

Hester and Pearl thus live in the forest. While Pearl is growing up for her future community officials attempt to take Pearl away from Hester. But with the help of Arthur Dimmesdale, an eloquent minister, the mother and daughter manage to stay together. Dimmesdale, however, appears to be wasting away and suffers from mysterious heart trouble, seemingly caused by psychological distress. Chillingworth attaches himself to the ailing minister and eventually moves in with him so that he can provide his patient with round-the-clock care. Chillingworth also suspects that there may be a connection between the minister's torments and Hester's secret, and he begins to test Dimmesdale to see what he can learn. One afternoon, while the minister sleeps, Chillingworth discovers something undescribed to the reader, supposedly an "A" burned into Dimmesdale's chest, which convinces him that his suspicions are correct.

Dimmesdale's psychological anguish deepens, and he invents new tortures for himself. In the meantime, Hester's charitable deeds and quiet humility have earned her a reprieve from the scorn of the community. One night, when Pearl is about seven years old, she and her mother are returning home from a visit to the deathbed of John Winthrop when they encounter Dimmesdale atop the town scaffold, trying to punish himself for his sins. Hester and Pearl join him, and the three link hands. Dimmesdale refuses Pearl's request that he acknowledge her publicly the next day, and a meteor marks a dull red "A" in the night sky as Dimmesdale sees Chillingworth in the distance. It is interpreted by the townsfolk to mean *Angel*, as a prominent figure in the community had died that night, but Dimmesdale sees it as meaning *adultery*. Hester can see that the minister's condition is worsening, and she resolves to intervene. She goes to Chillingworth and asks him to stop adding to Dimmesdale's self-torment. Chillingworth refuses. She suggests that she may reveal his true identity to Dimmesdale.

Hester is now anxious to tell Dimmesdale the true identity of Chillingworth, but she doesn't want to go to his apartment. For several days, she tries to intercept him on one of his frequent walks along the shore or through the woods. Then she hears that Dimmesdale is spending night with a missionary at nearby Indian village and that he is expected back the following afternoon. So she goes to forest with Pearl. As Hester walks through the forest, she is unable to feel the sunshine. According to Hawthorne-

“The road, after the two wayfarers had crossed from the peninsula to the mainland, was no other than a footpath. It straggled onward into the mystery of the primeval forest. This hemmed it in so narrowly, and stood so black and dense on either side, and disclosed such imperfect glimpses of the sky above, that, to Hester's mind, it imagined not amiss the moral wilderness in which she had so long been wandering. The day was chill and somber. Overhead was a gray expanse of cloud, slightly stirred, however, by a breeze, so that a

gleam of the flickering sunshine might now and then be seen at its solitary play along the path. This flitting cheerfulness was always at the further extremity of some long vista through the forest. The sportive sunlight – feebly sportive, at best, in the predominant pensiveness of the day and scene – withdrew itself as they came nigh, and left the spots where it had danced the drearier, because they had hoped to find them bright..... [Hester to Pearl] ‘If thou hast a sorrow of thy own, the brook might tell thee of it,’ answered her mother, ‘even as it is telling me of mine.....’ ‘Go now, child, and thou shalt tease me as thou wilt another time,’ cried Hester Prynne. ‘But do not stray far. Keep where thou canst hear the babble of the brook.’ The child went singing away, following up the current of the brook, and striving to mingle a more lightsome cadence with its melancholy voice. But the little stream would not be comforted, and still kept telling its unintelligible secret of some very mournful mystery that had happened—or making a prophetic lamentation about something that was yet to happen—within the verge of the dismal forest. So Pearl, who had enough of shadow in her own little life, chose to break off all acquaintance with this repining brook.” (196-201)

By these lines writer reflects the inner feelings of Hester through these lines. She understands that nature reflects the sorrows and happiness of an individual. So she is telling this truth about nature to Pearl.

Then she meets with Dimmesdale on the woods. Hester informs him of the true identity of Chillingworth. The former lovers decide to flee to Europe, where they can live with Pearl as a family. They will take a ship sailing from Boston in four days. Both feel a sense of relief and Hester removes her scarlet letter and lets down her hair. The sun immediately breaks through the clouds and trees to illuminate her release and joy. Pearl, playing nearby, does not recognize her mother without the letter. She is unnerved and expels a shriek until her mother points out the letter on the ground. Hester beckons Pearl to come to her, but Pearl will not go to her mother until Hester buttons the letter back onto her dress. Pearl then goes to her mother. Dimmesdale gives Pearl a kiss on the forehead, which Pearl immediately tries to wash off in the brook, because he again refuses to make known publicly their relationship.

“It was strange, the way in which Pearl stood, looking so steadfastly at them through the dim medium of the forest-gloom; herself, meanwhile, all glorified with a ray of sunshine, that was attracted thitherward as by a certain sympathy. In the brook beneath stood another child,—another and the same,—with likewise its ray of golden light. Hester felt herself, in some indistinct and tantalizing manner, estranged from Pearl; as if the child, in her lonely ramble through the forest, had strayed out of the sphere in which she and her mother dwelt together, and was now vainly seeking to return to it.” (223)

However, he clearly feels a release from the presence of his former life, and the laws and sins he has lived with. Thus he himself gets sudden release from his public life with Pearl and Hester.

The day before the ship is to sail, the townspeople gather for a holiday in honor of an election and Dimmesdale preaches his most eloquent sermon ever. Meanwhile, Hester has learned that Chillingworth knows of their plan and has booked passage on the same ship. Dimmesdale, leaving the church after his sermon, sees Hester and Pearl standing before the town scaffold. He looks ill. Knowing his life is about to end, he mounts the scaffold with his lover and his daughter, and confesses publicly, exposing the mark supposedly seared into the flesh of his chest. He dies in Hester's arms after Pearl kisses him.

Frustrated in his revenge, Chillingworth dies within the year. Hester and Pearl leave Boston, and no one knows what has happened to them. Many years later, Hester returns alone, still wearing the scarlet letter, to live in her old cottage and resumes her charitable work. She receives occasional letters from Pearl, who was rumored to have married a European aristocrat and established a family of her own. Pearl also inherits all of Chillingworth's money even though he knows she is not his daughter. There is a sense of liberation in her and the townspeople, especially the women, who had finally begun to forgive Hester of her tragic indiscretion. Then the narrator ends the novel giving us the pictorial description of Hester's death and tombstone –

“After many, many years, a new grave was delved, near an old and sunken one, in that burial-ground beside which King's Chapel has since been built. It was near that old and sunken grave, yet with a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle. Yet one tomb-stone served for both. All around, there were monuments carved with armorial bearings; and on this simple slab of slate—as the curious investigator may still discern, and perplex himself with the purport—there appeared the semblance of an engraved escutcheon. It bore a device, a herald's wording of which may serve for a motto and brief description of our now concluded legend; so sombre is it, and relieved only by one ever-glowing point of light gloomier than the shadow: —

“ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES” (284).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In most of the novels, there are locales - town, forest, stream, sea, port, ocean, shore, east, and west. And in most of works, the authors try to show the internal relationship between human and nature with the physical appearances of these elements. Sometimes an author tries to indicate one particular matter in writing but his readers take it otherwise. We may find opposite meaning from a reader about the text and sometimes more deep meaning than the author thinks himself. From many thinkers' ideas about a particular matter, we can enrich our better understanding on that particular point. *The Scarlet Letter* of Hawthorn is not out of such kind of criticism. Thus different

critics have different views about the landscape mood or natural scenario of *The Scarlet Letter*. I have tried to sum up some of the views of renowned persons comments to fulfill the lacking of my paper. I think these will help the reader of my paper get better understanding of nature of this text used by Hawthorne.

Leo Marx thinks that the landscape as a “metaphor” in Hawthorne’s works improves “inseparable from policy and action and meaning” (viii-ix). Leo Levy further gives special prominence to the landscape with which Hawthorne fabricates the structure and meaning of his romances. The most conspicuous examples observed by Levy are the sunlight in the forest episode, the wildness in Mistress Hibbins as pagan, the mossy trunk, the meteor light, and the rose-bush. With a close-reading strategy, intent readers might perceive the delicate natural representations embroidered in the novel to enliven the setting, plot, characters, and themes. This study employs some of Hawthorne’s natural metaphors to investigate our students’ perception of them: the burrs as a surrogate for Pearl’s nature (recognized by Waggoner), the moss as the irretrievable past (recognized by Marx), and the “obscure night of early May” when Dimmesdale cries out standing on the scaffold at midnight.

Hyatt Waggoner explores the connection between Hester and landscape in Nathaniel Hawthorn novel “The Scarlet Letter”. He frequently sets up “impressive association between Hester and normal flowers”³. Her beauty is focused by natural elements like rose, beam of sun, and different colors that reflected from different spot especially red, black, brown and gray are skillfully depicted here. Hester’s situation of mind is sometimes reflected in nature with natural devices even if on artificial devices. Even the bandage on her shame the scarlet letter ‘A’ which is a token of her guilty love is associated with natural beauty and color – red rose.

Thus natural landscape is carefully depicted with both good and evil..... . In the forest scene, we find that pearl daughter of Hester plays with flowers and throws flowers toward Hester’s scarlet ‘A’. We also see that she (p) makes a green ‘A’ for herself.

Forest scene also reminds us the witchcraft of Hawthorns contemporary society/time. Hawthorne generously shows that the witches like Miss Hibbins can live in society happily where people who are good at heart cannot live in society. It also indicates that people who are good at heart can adjust themselves in both good and bad; and are able to remain pure in both of these places. Thus Hester proves herself as very helpful and kind hearted who always serves the people though she lives in isolation.

Thus through nature and natural imagery characters are portrayed in the touch of nature/natural elements. Hester is here associated with rose and black-gray –brown colors, pearl with flower, Chilingworth with weeds where Dimmesdale with no natural growing thing at all.

³ Waggoner, H. *Hawthorne: A Critical Study*. Cambridge Mass.: Belknap, Harvard University Press. 1963. Print

Lin explains that from natural space or wilderness, an environment originates. After being occupied, named and inscribed, the natural space transforms into a 'place'. Thus the place develops personal, racial and national identity and cultural value of its inhabitants in the mind of a person who lives in this place. A strong sense of interdependence connects the resident of a particular place and creates feelings and emotions directed toward the place. He also interprets the concept of place saying that people's reflection on space strongly affects their interpretation of life.

Brian Jarvis shows the relationship between landscape and society stands side by side. He thinks these are inter-related. According to him there has a relationship between place with its inhabitants that reveals the "inseparability of space/place/landscape and social relations"⁴. He also says that each place has its own story because geographical knowledge helps to create it which is obviously /clearly shown in the scarlet letter. In this novel we find that each place or geographical place also reflect the emotion purity expression and inner meaning of the characters. He says that - "All spaces contain stories and must be recognized as the site of ongoing struggle over meaning and value."⁵

Another critic Rob shield defines space or land as a "site zone or place characterized by specific social activities with a culturally given identity (name) and image". His explanation on landscape or space is also related with natural sites or places which are very skillfully depicted by Nathaniel Hawthorne in the scarlet letter.

Thus Jarvis, Shields and Lin all acknowledge the symbolic connection of space and some aspects of human life. By reading and studying Nathaniel's *The Scarlet Letter*, W.H. New poses question illuminating the close relation between space and cultural representation and how people are influenced by their own land. These are-

- i. Why people treat the land as protector, or as cloak or as comforter?
- ii. Why and in what ways do they consider it theirs?
- iii. What words and signs do they use?
- iv. What assumptions does the 'language' make about the 'natural' character of the relations between people and environment?
- v. What, in short, does land have to do with representation?
- vi. What does land have to do with representation?
- vii. What does land have to do with Powers?
- viii. Who implement laws for inhabitants and control these powers?

⁴ Jarvis, B. *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture*. New York: St. Martin.1998. Print

⁵ Jarvis, B. *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture*. New York: St. Martin.1998. Print

ix. Why the people of the land maintain these rules?

If we try to answer these questions or think about them we will easily understand natural landscape is an important matter and how we all depend on our own land become our comfort and we arrange our culture based on our surroundings.

Social, psychological and linguistic forces shaping a text come to fruition as the artist interacts with them: artists shape these forces while the forces shape them. Writing is a product not only of what the artist *does*, but of who the artist *is* at the time of writing. Kenneth Burke notes that “the natural tendency of symbolic enterprise is toward integration” and that the artist, made up of diverse “personalities,” seeks “to build the symbolic superstructures that put them together into a comprehensive ‘super-personality’” (184). In this effort everyone, especially the artist, partially succeeds.

Whatever the varied elements of the artist’s being achieve; everything is shaped as a product of the artist’s temperament, thought, discipline, and labor. Equally as important as character and action in a text, the symbolic representations surround and permeate and enlighten readers about those actions and characters. Attention to the “background” or “landscape” will focus the reader’s attention to the linguistic “facts” of the text. Analysis of the materials of the text, the signs throughout it, will reveal the natural scenery underlying the central idea informing a text, the semantic principles shaping it. Thus the aesthetic integrity of the work can be demonstrated and appreciated.

Barry Lopez’s work on landscape and narrative posits that readers would conjure their “interior landscape” on geographical environments presented by the author, whose description of nature would provide “a kind of projection within a person of a part of the exterior landscape” composed through a “harmonic” synthesis of the two landscapes (65-68).

In “Psychology and Form” Kenneth Burke defines form in terms of the audience’s appetite. The reader-oriented point of view assumes the reader and only the reader can make meaning from a text, and that meaning will vary with the reader’s cultural and intellectual background. Fish says the “meaning” is not in the text at all but becomes present, or real, only when the reader interprets it using personal experiences and strategies.

Landscape

Landscape in *The Scarlet Letter*

Environment originates from a natural space, a so-called wildness. After being occupied, named, and inscribed, the natural space transforms into a “place.” The sense of place thus fermented in the dweller’s mind gradually develops personal, racial, and national identities reflected in the lifestyles

and cultural values of its inhabitants. A strong sense of interdependence connects the residents of a particular place and creates feelings and emotions directed towards that place.

As this is an emotional and psychological novel, Hawthorne uses landscape as a unique literary device to convey his opinions and views about events in an efficient manner. Natural, geographical and environmental scenery of puritan society of 17th century Boston or New Englander was used by him, which involves with the rosebush near the prison door, cemetery, market place, sun shine, meteor, forest, darkness, stream, sea, shipyard etc. These elements are used symbolically in this novel to show us the real feelings and views of characters. Within these symbols, Nathaniel Hawthorne incorporates symbolism to expose a deeper meaning in the story. In this novel we find many events which are related to mankind and landscape.

The art of symbolism which involves the use of objects or images to represent an idea, meaning, philosophy, or entity beyond itself, expands the plot of the novel to include human society and human interactions. The symbols found throughout the novel allow the readers to relate the symbols to their own world and life, an effect absent from self-evident statements in the microcosm of the fictional Puritan society from the novel.

The opening chapter introduces several of the images and the themes within the story to follow." The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison."⁶(P45) The prison represents several different symbols. Foremost it is a symbol for the Puritanical severity of law. The description of the prison indicates that it is old, rusted, yet strong with an "iron-clamped oaken door." This represents the rigorous enforcement of laws and the inability to break free of them. The prison also serves as the symbol of the authority of the regime, which will not tolerate deviance. Hawthorne directly challenges this notion by throwing the name Ann Hutchinson into the opening pages. Hutchinson was a religious woman who disagreed with the Puritanical teachings, and as a result was imprisoned in Boston. Hawthorne claims that it is possible the beautiful rosebush growing directly at the prison door sprang from her footsteps. "But, on one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose-bush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as they came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart if Nature could pity and be kind to him."(P46) This implies that the Puritanical authoritarianism may be too rigid, to the point of obliterating things of beauty.

⁶ Hawthorn, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*, Dhaka: Friend's book corner, (2008). P.45

In this chapter Hawthorne also describes the prison as "the black flower of civilized society". The prison represents the crime and punishment that was incorporated in the early Puritan life. He also contrasts the prison with the tombstone at the end of the novel by suggesting that crime and punishment bring about the end of civilized life. In the same chapter he describes the overgrown vegetation of weeds around the prison. The weeds symbolize how corrupt civilization really is. He also points out a positive symbol, the wild rose bush. This represents the blossoming of good out of the darkness of all civilized life. Beside this the narrator also discusses about the cemetery which is necessary for a community for the burial of its people.

We will easily realize the importance of forest if we deeply think of its impacts and impartial role toward every character. We see that in forest scene that forest is a place of comfort for Hester as well as Dimmsdale. Pearl as an innocent child also enjoys the pleasure of nature. We also know that forest is the holly place of witches and wizards. Miss Hibbins represent such kind of character who has signed on the book of black man. She frequently visits the forest at night.

Rose Bush

The rose bush is a symbol of passion. As will later become obvious, Hester Prynne's sin is one of passion, thus linking her crime to the image of the rosebush. Hawthorne also indirectly compares Hester with Ann Hutchinson via the rosebush, and again makes the same parallel in Chapter 13, Another View of Hester. Hawthorne cleverly links the rosebush to the wilderness surrounding Boston, commenting that the bush may be a remnant of the former forest, which covered the area. This is important, because it is only in the forest wilderness where the Puritans' laws fail to have any force. Thus the image of the rosebush serves to foreshadow that some of the passionate wilderness, in the form of Hester Prynne, may have accidentally made its way into Boston. The rosebush in full bloom indicates that Hester is at the peak of her passion. This parallels the fact that Hester has just born a child as a result of her passion. The child is thus comparable to the blossoms on the rosebush. Hawthorn's comment that the rose may serve as a "moral blossom" in the story is therefore actually saying that Hester's child will serve to provide the moral of the story.

Prison Door and Garden

The scaffold near the meeting house of the town hints at the very essence and meaning of sin to the townspeople. Forced upon the scaffold as punishment for her affair, Hester must withstand three long, torturous hours under the disapproving and scornful eyes of the townspeople. Dimmesdale himself rushes to the scaffold at night in an attempt to accept his shame and deal with his self-inflicted punishment of secrecy. The scaffold symbolizes punishment, shame, and the fate of isolation. It takes up a life of its own, haunting the town with the terrors with abilities to inflict on the image and life of any member of the society, rich or poor, prominent or unknown.

Governor Bellingham's ornamental, English garden planted in his mansion serves as a powerful symbol of the failure of Old World principles in the New World's environment. The governor

recreates an important, personal aspect of his old world, the garden planted in a manner identical to Old World principles and methods, in the mansion. However, the decaying condition becomes evident to all who visit the mansion, with no way to reverse the damage. This relates to the fact that the governor, a man of politics from the Old World, may be extremely unsuccessful in transplanting ideologies of perfection and total religious purity into the New World. His social "garden," the community, falls apart. Hester Prynne, bound by isolation, and Arthur Dimmesdale, haunted by an evil physician, faces a losing struggle against society.

Hester's House

Following her expulsion from common society, Hester and Pearl take up residence in an abandoned house on a hill. The forsaken, lifeless brick home symbolizes Hester's emotional and social isolation from the Puritan society. Physically, Hester's residence stands on the outskirts of the town away from the town center. Hester's home becomes an entity of her isolation, which in turn indicates her place in society. Moreover, the fact that Hester's new brick home lacks life and spirit represent her new emotional status. The barren hearth relates to Hester's loss of happiness and excitement. The lifeless brick walls of the house resemble her broken physical appearance in a matching gray dress.

Forest Walk

The forest that surrounds the town symbolizes two entities; true passions and emotions, and thoughts of the people. The forest shields those who travel through it from sunlight, creating a dark environment hidden from the eyes of society, who may disapprove of many un-Puritan activities. Hidden amidst trees and away from a society that rejects her, Hester reveals her true character. Dimmesdale, Hester's sinful partner, also reveals himself in the forest during his encounter with Pearl. In addition, Mistress Hibbins meets her fellow witches in the forest, free from the chains of society and free to reveal any secrets. The forest also symbolizes the Devil's seduction of humans; in the forest, people experience the temptation to violate the rules and morals of society, unleashing their true spirits to commit crimes and sins. The forest, or Satan himself, offers a protective barrier from the eyes of the public behind which any activity remains a secret.

Several days later, Hester intercepts Arthur Dimmesdale as he is walking through the forest. The two retreat to the seclusion of the woods and talk while Pearl plays among the nearby trees. Arthur tells Hester he detests living a lie and is relieved to look into the eyes of one who knows him for what he really is. Hester tells him that Chillingworth also possesses this knowledge, and that he was the husband she betrayed. Dimmesdale is initially horrified, but soon forgives Hester for keeping Chillingworth's secret. Fearing further revenge from Chillingworth, Dimmesdale asks Hester what he should do. She suggests they leave Boston and return to the Old World. Arthur agrees, and they plan to leave aboard the ship currently in the harbor. In their newly discovered freedom, Hester removes the scarlet letter and the cap which binds her hair. Hester wants Arthur to know Pearl and summons her from the trees. But Pearl, distressed by her mother's altered

appearance, comes reluctantly. Pearl then bursts into a fit of passion and insists her mother don the letter and cap before she will behave civilly. Hester does this sadly. Dimmesdale gives the child a kiss, which she immediately washes off in the brook.

Lewis says in his comments about the forest of *The Scarlet Letter*-

“For Hawthorne, the forest scene was neither the proper home of the admirable Adam, nor was it the hideout of the malevolent adversary. It was the ambiguous setting of moral choice, the scene of reversal and discovery in his characteristic tragic drama. The forest was the pivot in Hawthorne’s grand recurring pattern of escape and return.” (Lewis)

He also says-

“The situation... moment of crucial choice; an invitation to the lost Emersonian, the thunder- struck Adam, to make up his mind- whether to accept the world he had fallen into, or whether to flee it, taking his chances in the allegedly free wilderness to the west.” (Lewis)

In the deep, dark portions of the forest, many of the pivotal characters bring forth hidden thoughts and emotions. The forest track leads away from the settlement out into the wilderness where all sign mandates of law and religion, to a refuge where men, as well as women, can open up and be themselves. It is here that Dimmesdale openly acknowledges Hester and his undying love for her. It is also here that the two of them can openly engage in conversation without being preoccupied with the constraints that Puritan society place on them.

Symbolism of the Forest Scene

In the epic story, the forest represents a place of evil and delight, but in the *Scarlet Letter* the forest symbolizes much more than that. Each character brings out a different side of the forest; however the forest also brings out a different side in each character. For some the forest may be a place of sinister thoughts and wrong doing, but for others it is a place of happiness and freedom.

The first encounter with the forest we have symbolizes just some of the evil that lingers within the darkness of the forest. As Hester and Pearl are leaving governor Bellinghams estate they are confronted by mistress Hibbins who explains that the witches are meeting in the forest, and she then invites Hester to become more deeply involved with her evil ways. She explains that the only reason she does not sign is because Pearl is still in her life. At this time the forest itself is an open door to another world, a wicked world that would take her away from her present situation, but that is not the only door that the forest holds. The forest is an open door to love and freedom for both Hester and Dimmesdale. It is a place where the letter on their bodies can no longer have an effect on them if they choose. It is a place where the letter on their bodies can no longer have an effect on them if they choose. A world ruled by nature and governed by natural law as opposed to the artificial strict community with its manmade puritan laws. It’s as if the forest represents a key

to the shackles the Hester and Dimmesdale have been forced to wear, all that they have to do is unlock it. Although they choose not to unlock them, they begin to dwell on the things that they have done to deserve the shackles. In this the forest represents a thing of truth, whether it is good or bad.

In Pearl's eyes the forest has a totally different concept. To Pearl the forest is like a best friend. It treats her as if she were one of its own. The animals do not run away at her every move, instead they come to her with open arms. The light is chasing her no matter where she goes. She is able to run and play freely to her innocent heart's content. She can do that because her heart is innocent and the forest recognizes that.

CONCLUSION

The role of nature is significant because it was in the forest that Hester's aberrant act with Dimmesdale began. The scarlet letter is a constant reminder of her infamous act with the town's minister, Arthur Dimmesdale, she overcomes her humiliation, even mocking it as if she is proud to wear it. Furthermore, the forest is a place that whispers the darkness of the town. The forest never forgets even when people do. To the Puritans at that time, the forest is seen as "wild", or a state of mind rejected by their culture. "Such was the sympathy of nature-that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never subjugated by human law nor illuminated by higher truth-with the bliss of these two spirits!" (Baym 1442) Arthur and Hester experienced so many different forces pulling them apart. Hester experienced humiliation from the town and Dimmesdale with his own secret of sin, especially concerning the fact that he was a man of God, a role model for the community. He directly sinned and kept it a secret to protect his reputation, maybe even his life. While Hester had no other choice considering her sin was evident in her enlarged stomach and absent husband, Hester and Dimmesdale were as star-crossed as lovers can be. Yet, the forest cared not for who they are; only that it provided a natural environment for love to blossom, completely unheard of in a Calvinist society. They become one within their natural environment, a blissful reunion. Conclusively, the nature aspect of both stories contributes to revelation of sin experienced by both Hester and Goodman Brown. The secrets uncovered in the forest leads each character to face their fears and either triumph or crumble beneath the weight of the burden they carry. In Goodman, the face of reality was dark and cold, weakening his faith. With Hester, it gave her strength but also alienated her as a person from the world. Goodman on the other hand, loses his faith and carries with him the cynical ideas of a darkened man.

The rosebush near the prison door serves as an elegant yet powerful symbol of nature's and God's wisdom and truth. Filled with disapproval, hatred, and disgust, the townspeople gather to witness Hester's punishment on the scaffold. However, a small, rich bush of roses lingers between the cold, iron prison door and the sickly scaffold. Blossoming magnificently in the eerie atmosphere, the beautiful red rosebush, a product of God's craftiness, suggests nature's and God's awareness of

truths hidden from the townspeople. Instead of embracing Hester in cold and hate, the rosebush hints at the warmth of divine understanding and wisdom. Moreover, the red rosebush also symbolizes Hester's burning, internal flame of passion. Despite the darkness and scold of the townsfolk, Hester's beauty, life, and love blossom internally amidst a harsh external environment.

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