The Scarlet Letter: Character Analysis

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A. At the scaffold, while serving out her punishment she covers the letter A, her sin, with Pearl, the product of her sin. This action is symbolic of her shame, and later realization of how inevitable it was to escape the fate that she has been condemned to.

"when the young woman—the mother of this child—stood fully revealed before the crowd, it seemed her first impulse to clasp the infant closely to her bosom; not so much by an impulse of motherly affection, as that she might thereby conceal a certain token, which was wrought fastened to her dress. In a moment, however, wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly hide another..."

(Hawthorne 35)
B. Hester talking to the Minister’s and begging them not to take away Pearl from her. This emphasises her motherly qualities.

"God gave me this child!' cried she. 'He gave her in requital of all things else which ye had taken from me. She is my happiness!- she is my torture, none the less! Pearl keeps me here in life! Pearl punishes me, too! See ye not, she is the scarlet letter, only capable of being loved, and so endowed with a millionfold the power of retribution for my sin? Ye shall not take her! I will die first … God gave her into my keeping… I will not give her up." (Hawthorne 75)
C. when Hester removes her letter in Chapter 18, she feels liberated and free, as if sunshine has broken through on a cloudy day. She quickly puts her cap and letter back on when Pearl reprimands her.

"So speaking, she undid the clasp that fastened the scarlet letter, and, taking it from her bosom, threw it to a distance among the withered leaves... The stigma gone, Hester heaved a long, deep sigh, in which the burden of shame and anguish departed from her spirit. O exquisite relief! She had not known the weight until she felt the freedom." (Hawthorne 136)
A. Hester is standing at the Scaffold, holding little Pearl, having flashbacks of life before. She seems to struggle to come to grips with her reality. (Chapter 2)

B. Hester constantly thinks of the Scarlet Letter, she even goes as far as to dress Pearl to resemble her letter. This is evident of the countless time she spends thinking about her sin.

C. When Hester briefly removes her cap and letter, she feels relief. This relief is indicative of the heavy weight of the (physically small) letter that she has carried till now.
The purpose of having Hester Prynne is to convey the message of punishment and forgiveness. Hester is punished by others with jail time and a period of time on the scaffold, besides the fact that she is to be branded for life by wearing the scarlet letter. Hester also punishes herself by choosing to reside in the same town, and she even goes as far as to banish herself, even though none of this was part of the punishment she received. Hester learns to live with her punishment, taking it to her grave, only to briefly remove it once.
Hester Prynne

Rosebush was chosen for how much it relates to Hester Prynne. She is both beautiful and misplaced, very much like the rosebush she is compared to.
A. While it is being debated if Pearl is to be taken away from Hester, Dimmesdale speaks this in response. It is said that actions speak louder than words, in this case his words are his actions.

"For, if we deem it otherwise, do we not hereby say that the Heavenly Father, the creator of all flesh, hath lightly recognised a deed of sin, and made of no account the distinction between unhallowed lust and holy love? This child of its father's guilt and its mother's shame has come from the hand of God, to work in many ways upon her heart, who pleads so earnestly and with such bitterness of spirit the right to keep her. It was meant for a blessing—for the one blessing of her life! It was meant, doubtless, as the mother herself hath told us, for a retribution, too; a torture to be felt at many an unthought-of moment; a pang, a sting, an ever-recurring agony, in the midst of a troubled joy ..." (Hawthorne 76)
Dimmesdale

B. Dimmesdale has suffered a great deal by the time he confesses to his sin. He reveals to the public that he is the father of Pearl and shows his chest, which is seen to have his very own Scarlet letter. Immediately after this he collapses, and dies.

"God knows; and He is merciful! He hath proved his mercy, most of all, in my afflictions. By giving me this burning torture to bear upon my breast! By sending yonder dark and terrible old man, to keep the torture always at red-heat! By bringing me hither, to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people! Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost for ever! Praised be his name! His will be done! Farewell." (Hawthorne 174)
Dimmesdale feels a lot of guilt, to say the least. He tortures himself constantly with these negative thoughts, and even goes as far as to physically torture himself. He sees the letter everywhere. One night he’s walking about and sees it in the night sky. Dimmesdale is obsessed with the sin, and this obsession eventually becomes his death.
Hawthorne's purpose for including this character is primarily to show how guilt lives on in a person. In this case Dimmesdale. Dimmesdale carried his guilt, from being the father, the rest of his life. The guilt will eventually become his undoing and result in his death.
Dimmesdale

Dimmesdale symbol is his own scarlet letter. The scarlet letter he inflicted on himself is a token of the guilt he eventually died from.
A. First arriving into town only to witness his wife on display for the sin she has committed. As if that was the only problem, her sin is literally symbolized by the letter on her chest, and the newborn in her arms. He makes eye contact with her, but follows is by bringing a finger to his lips, this action is indicative of the beginning of his secrecy.

"At his arrival in the market-place, and some time before she saw him, the stranger had bent his eyes on Hester Prynne. It was carelessly at first, like a man chiefly accustomed to look inward, and to whom external matters are of little value and import, unless they bear relation to something within his mind. Very soon, however, his look became keen and penetrative. A writhing horror twisted itself across his features, like a snake gliding swiftly over them, and making one little pause, with all its wreathed intervolutions in open sight. His face darkened with some powerful emotion, which, nevertheless, he so instantaneously controlled by an effort of his will, that, save at a single moment, its expression might have passed for calmness. After a brief space, the convulsion grew almost imperceptible, and finally subsided into the depths of his nature, when he found the eyes of Hester Prynne fastened on his own, and saw that she appeared to recognize him, he slowly and calmly raised his finger, made a gesture with it in the air, and laid it on his lips." (Hawthorne 40)
B. He meets up with Hester posing as a doctor. He tells her how he is changing his name and she shall promise not to reveal his identity. He as well gets this determination to find out who Pearl's father is, only to torture him.

"Why dost thou smile so at me?" inquired Hester, troubled at the expression of his eyes. "Art thou like the Black Man that haunts the forest round about us? Hast thou enticed me into a bond that will prove the ruin of my soul?" (Hawthorn 51)
c. At the end of the novel when Roger Chillingworth passes away, he leaves Pearl a great amount of property as a sign of his remorse and regret. This can be interpreted as a token of his two-faced personality.

"At old Roger Chillingworth's decease (which took place within a year), and by his last will and testament, of which Governor Bellingham and the Reverend Mr. Wilson were executors, he bequeathed a very considerable amount of property, both here and in England, to little Pearl, the daughter of Hester Prynne" (Hawthorne 177)
Chillingworth

A. when first arriving at the town Chillingworth sees Hester on the scaffold and acknowledges that she is being punished for her sins. He feels shame to have been Hester's husband and does not want to be recognized.

B. His shame turns into anger when he visits her in prison and is determined to get revenge on the man that has helped her commit this crime.

C. At the end of his savage revenge, he has come to regret everything that he has done and as a way to ask for forgiveness he lives Pearl, Hester's daughter, a great amount of land.
Hawthorne only needed Chillingworth as a physical antagonist. His mere existence creates trouble for the main character, Hester. He also serves as the physical rendering of evil itself, doing maleficent things in order to achieve an evil goal.
Chillingworth

The two faced man is Roger Chillingworth because of his two faced personality. To the public he acts innocent, but he’s actually a maleficent character with ulterior motives.
A. Shortly after the reader meets little Pearl, the reader is exposed to all of her. Her seeming frail, and delicateness, is not the true way of her being. She is actually violent, temperamental and just off.

"Pearl saw, and gazed intently, but never sought to make acquaintance. If spoken to, she would not speak to again. If the children gathered about her, as they sometimes did, Pearl would grow positively terrible in puny wrath, snatching up stones to fling at them, with shrill, incoherent exclamations, that made her mother tremble, because they had so much the sound of a witch's anathemas in some unknown tongue" (Hawthorne 62)
B. The other children call Pearl an evil imp. But Hawthorne points out that Pearl, although temperamental, is not evil. He makes his argument by stating how Pearl plays, and what she uses to play.

"The unlikeliest materials—a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower—were the puppets of Pearl's witchcraft, and, without undergoing any outward change, became spiritually adapted to whatever drama occupied the stage of her inner world. Her one baby-voice served a multitude of imaginary personages, old and young, to talk withal... the ugliest weeds of the garden were their children, whom Pearl smote down and uprooted most unmercifully ... In the mere exercise of the fancy, however, and the sportiveness of a growing mind, there might be a little more than was observable in other children of bright faculties; except as Pearl, in the dearth of human playmates, was thrown more upon the visionary throng which she created. The singularity lay in the hostile feelings with which the child regarded all these offsprings of her own heart and mind." (Hawthorne 63)
Pearl realizes that Dimmesdale does not talk to them in public and she, as the child that she is, wonders why Dimmesdale changes his affection towards them when they are not alone.

"What a strange, sad man is he' said the child, as if speaking partly to herself. 'In the dark night-time, he calls us to him, and holds thy hand and mine, as when we stood with him on the scaffold yonder! And in the deep forest, where only the old trees can hear, and the strip sky see it, he talks with thee, sitting on a heap of moss! And he kisses my forehead, too, so that the little brook would hardly wash it off! But, here, in the sunny day, and among all the people, he knows us not; nor must we know him! A strange, sad man is he, with his hand always over his heart!" (Hathorne 155)
Pearl realizes Dimmesdale is her father. She does so after noticing Dimmesdale behavior in the woods, she later confirms her assumption after observing his behavior in public. After coming to this realization, she questions her entire existence.
Hawthorne’s purpose with Pearl is to convey living, breathing sin. Sin as noted can be symbolic, and can hardly ever render itself in a physical form. Sins such as greed, betrayal, and jealousy cannot take physical forms as adultery, lust, or even murder can take.
The rose was chosen for Pearl, because of her perceived delicateness, but upon closer examination, one finds the thorns of her personality. Pearl also resembles the rose, from how she was picked from the very rosebush that is her mother.