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**THE ANALYSIS OF THE LITERARY CONCEPTS  
AND STYLISTIC TOOLS IN THE “SCARLET LETTER”  
BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE**

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This paper focuses on literary concepts and stylistic tools characteristic of romance fiction by N. Hawthorne. Special attention is given to symbolic imagery of this genre.

Key words: romance fiction, literary concepts, imagery, genre, stylistic tools.

The “Scarlet Letter” is a historical fiction with a romantic storyline written in 1850 by the American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne. Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) is an American novelist, a master of metaphorical and figurative tale who was preoccupied with the ideas of guilt, sin, and moral choices. He was brought up in Salem, Massachusetts, in a religious family with a tight set of puritan beliefs, which had a tremendous impact on his life and creation. The “Scarlet Letter” (1850) and “The House of the Seven Gables” (1851) are considered his greatest works, which influenced American novel writing in general and contributed to further development of such different genres as romance, historical novel and even Gothic novel. Moreover, he wrote a number of short stories like “The Hollow of the Three Hills” and “An Old Woman’s Tale”.

Set in a deeply religious time and place, the novel is focused on the concept of man's relationship to himself and to a Christian God.

The novel itself came out of a difficult time in Hawthorne's life. After graduating from Bowdoin College, where he got acquainted with the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and future United States President Franklin Pierce, Hawthorne found a government job at the Customs House in Salem. He had lost the job in 1849, just before his beloved mother died. Instead of suffering from his unemployment, Hawthorne decided to write a book. When he read the final words of the final chapter to his wife, he ran to bed crying [1].

The story begins with a description of a jail in the mid of 17<sup>th</sup> century in puritan colony in Boston. Inside that prison there is a woman Hester Prynne, she is accused of adultery. Upon releasing from the jail she is about to wind around the town to be recognized as a sinner and adulterer with the scarlet letter “A” for all inhabitants to know her shame. Hester Prynne has a baby daughter who was born in the absence of her husband. Hester refuses to reveal her beloved man identity. Later it is revealed that she fell in love with a young priest and sacrificed her reputation and herself to his safety. After seven years before his death, he confesses his sin. Hester Prynne after so many years of social ostracism and

squalls of life shows others an example of independence of spirit, courage and never-say-die attitude, as she firmly believes that her relationship with the priest has been inspired by true love.

Nathaniel Hawthorne in his novel touches on a variety of vital issues such as sin, hypocrisy, revenge, compassion and forgiveness, guilt and blame, justice and judgment, dignity, women and femininity, fate and free will, isolation, to name a few. We will dwell upon some of them in the analysis.

– Sin: to err is human, to forgive divine. This quote of A. Pope speaks volumes about Hawthorne's attitude to the conception of sin. Any human being makes mistakes and can commit a sin, but penitence prevents from repeating doing the same. Human desire can be overwhelmingly uncontrollable, so everyone must be strong enough to resist temptation and avoid further suffering. Hester Prynne and the priest Arthur Dimmesdale personify the idea of sin.

– Revenge: revenge is a dish best served cold. Nevertheless, irrespective of the depth of guilt of another person, revenge reveals the loss of humanity and transformation of a person into a creature obsessed with devil. Roger Chillingworth, Hester's husband and the puritan community embody the conception of revenge.

– Hypocrisy: they say that hypocrisy is the mother of all evil. It is becoming increasingly obvious that all life in a puritan settlement is based on hypocrisy, men lie to women, women cheat on their men, the priest Dimmesdale receives the adulation of his community for being basically a saint on earth.

– Dignity: not many can have dignity under pressure. Hester Prynne embodies dignity of the novel; even under harsh circumstances, she cannot betray herself, her love, her moral and ethical values.

The novel is rich in symbols and allegories.

– The scarlet letter represents the symbol of shame, adultery, hard work, sin and inevitable punishment.

– The door to the prison, which is "heavily timbered with oak, and studded with iron spikes". Near there's also a rosebush. If the prison represents the harsh justice of the Puritan, then that surprising rosebush represents kindness and forgiveness. The iron door is everything that is strict and unrelenting in Puritan society, while the rosebush seems to represent the concept of "grace" or forgiveness.

– The forest and the wilderness stand to the townspeople for the unknown. It is outside of the town, full of American Indians and scary creatures, and, worst of all, it is utterly lawless. The town is ruled by law and religion whereas the forest a place of passion and emotion.

– The red mark on Dimmesdale's chest represents a guilt-rash, he is stigmatized for his uncertainty and cowardice. Finally, Pearl, the daughter of Hester, comes up with a supernatural explanation: "It is because, when the minister wrote his name in the book, the Black Man set his mark in that place?" [2].

The *Scarlet Letter* was published during the height of Romanticism in literature in the United States. In combining realistic and imaginative elements to tell a moving and dreamlike story, the novel is an example of the romance genre based on historical drama.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's writing style of the novel is ornate and subtle characterized by predominance of complex sentences, clauses and modifiers. He widely employs figurative language and resorts to numerous metaphors, e.g. "...poor little Pearl was a demon offspring ..." [2].

Hawthorne refers to wheat as a *metaphor* for the wisdom of the veterans: The "golden grains" are the knowledge the men have gained from so many years of life, and by saying they "have stored their memory with the husks" [2] the narrator says all the wisdom is now unused.

The author uses a sustained metaphor containing genuine epithets and a simile "A writhing horror twisted itself across his features, like a snake gliding swiftly over them, and making one little pause, with all its wreathed involutions in open sight" [2].

As Hawthorne was raised in a religious family, he appeals to some Biblical allusions such as "...I, in whose daily life you discern the sanctity of Enoch..." [2].

Hawthorne novel abounds in metaphors related to the semantic field of light and darkness, e.g. "while the shadow of his figure, which the sunlight cast upon the floor..." [2]. The obvious implication is that the sunlight creates a shadow. This metaphor shows how evil can come from good – in this case, the light.

A metaphor based on satire "armour on their breasts..." reveals double standards towards the idea of sin. The armour on the soldier's breast represents bravery and protection, a direct contrast to the scarlet letter on Hester's breast, which signifies shame and vulnerability. Hawthorne includes this description, perhaps to satirize the idea that men who fight wars and kill are honored while "sinners" like Hester are forever punished in this society.

In the novel, one of the most powerful stylistic devices is irony that occurs when Hester is on the Puritan scaffold and is compared to the Virgin Mary, despite the fact that she is being punished for her sin in that very moment. Dramatic irony (when the reader, or audience, knows something the characters don't know) occurs throughout the story, whenever a member of the community speaks positively of Reverend Dimmesdale's piety, or shames Hester for her adultery.

"Scarlet letter" is the third person narration, which is more encompassing and involves more drama and reflection; it aims at proper describing the attitudes, feelings and thoughts of the characters. Also the narrator adds some backstage explanations about the characters and actions which increases the readers' engagement.

The slant of "Scarlet Letter" is of diverse character. In the beginning it is rather detached when the author describes the settlement and the people, then it

turns into skeptical when Hawthorne centers around idealistic goals of the Puritan founders. Finally the slant becomes more moralizing as the writer dwells upon the human nature, its strengths and weaknesses [3].

In this novel, we can see that the writer touches on many urgent issues that were prevalent in his society through his narrative technique as well as devices and tools that made his novel affect deeply the feelings of the reader.

The Scarlet Letter is a primary example of the Dark Romanticism genre. The novel reveals interconnection between social oppression and psychological repression; reflects pathology of the puritan society that needs to find scapegoats and isolate its so-called sinners.

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