

**THE THREE TYPES OF STYLE NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE
USES IN THE SCARLET LETTER**

PAUL ELLING

AP ENGLISH

NOVEMBER 17, 1995

Every author must use some kind of style when writing a story. Otherwise, without style, the story would not be worth reading. When Hawthorne writes The Scarlet Letter, he tries to get the story across as vividly as possible, using diction, mood, and symbolism.

The clearest example of Hawthorne's style in The Scarlet Letter is diction. Throughout this entire piece of literature, Hawthorne uses the highest level of concise vocabulary to convey his ideas. Hawthorne talks about the scarlet letter on Hester's chest as if the letter is something much more than just a piece of fabric. From the very beginning the "fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy" in the letter, gives it some kind of magical appearance. (50) The people respond to the letter with awe. The letter is a wild thing to the conservative Puritans. In the end, the scarlet letter becomes a legend to the Puritans. Hester Prynne is also the subject of Hawthorne's diction. Hawthorne describes Hester's appearance with much eloquence. Hester is "beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion." (50) Hester also carries herself with the grace that people expect from women during this time period. Seven years after this first appearance, Hester bores the "worst usage" of the town, with humbleness that would "give of her little substance to every demand of poverty." (147) This scorn by the public makes Hester into a very strong individual. Another part of Hawthorne's diction appears in the relationship between

Dimmesdale and Chillingworth. To be frank, Chillingworth is "the leech" of Dimmesdale. Chillingworth seeks revenge against Dimmesdale for adultery Dimmesdale commits with Chillingworth's wife, Hester. Chillingworth torments Dimmesdale, "like a treasure-seeker in a dark cavern," by digging into the heart, mind, and soul of the man. (114) As a result of Chillingworth's torture, Dimmesdale becomes sick. Dimmesdale passes away up on the scaffold, leaving Chillingworth with the feeling that "life seemed to be departed." (232) Hawthorne describes it as though Chillingworth's soul dies, when all he has to live for--the injuring of Dimmesdale--leaves him. Hawthorne's diction paves the way for certain moods that are present in The Scarlet Letter.

Nathaniel Hawthorne has success in presenting the mood of each scene in The Scarlet Letter. Mood paints itself all throughout the book. One example is when Hester appears before the crowd after spending time in jail. She clutches Pearl (who is a baby at the time) close to her chest. This would give the mood or feeling that Hester reacts to the people as if they are a pack of wolves. This is not "an impulse of motherly affection," rather it is to "conceal a certain token." (50) Hester gives "a haughty smile." (50) This gives a mood of arrogance on Hester's part, as though she knows a secret that they don't know. Another example of mood is Governor Bellingham. The governor gives a mood of royalty or majesty "in a loose gown and easy cap." (99) It is a mood of how easy and boring life can get when living in

luxury. A final example of mood is on the last scaffold. When Dimmesdale dies, there is a mood of hopelessness. It is truly pitiful when Dimmesdale says, "I had been lost forever!" (233) Chillingworth shows a mood of despair, because he won't have Dimmesdale to torment anymore. In these examples of mood, Hawthorne expresses the feeling he wants the story to possess.

Finally, Hawthorne uses symbolism to show how parts of his story represent something. The townspeople, as a whole, symbolize judgement. It is in the interest of the whole town to decide that Hester should be punished. The townspeople also individually symbolize something. John Wilson, a leading Puritan minister, symbolizes the authority and power that religion has over people's lives. Hester Prynne "grew pale and trembled," when John Wilson calls her name. (61) Another person of symbolism in town is Mistress Hibbins. She symbolizes trouble. Mistress Hibbins has nothing good to do, so she annoys Hester on Election Day. "What is it that minister seeks to hide, with his hand always over his heart?" (221) Another example of symbolism is the forest. It symbolizes mystery. At the same time, the forest symbolizes evil and darkness, whereas the town represents good and light. Lastly, Pearl is a subject of symbolism. When Pearl is an infant, she symbolizes innocence. By the time Pearl is seven, she comes to represent evil and seems to be an "elfish" child. Hester is even afraid of Pearl sometimes. Symbolism is an effective way for Hawthorne to have some of his characters and

themes represent something in The Scarlet Letter.

When Hawthorne writes The Scarlet Letter, he tries to get the story across as vividly as possible, using diction, mood, and symbolism. In using these three parts of style, Hawthorne sets The Scarlet Letter off as one of the milestones in American literature.