

Art of Characterization in The Scarlet Letter



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The Hawthorne's power of characterization is superb. He shows great skill in the art of characterization. He was a master of character portrayal. As a novelist the most remarkable thing about Hawthorne is his power of characterization. The foremost quality of his characterization is the immense reality and humanity of his characters. His characters are not mere caricatures on the pages of fiction. They are real human beings. His characters display a unique blending of realism and humanism. The most important thing about his characters is this, they are human characters. "The most unfortunate thing in the whole incident was the effect it had on Hawthorne's attachment to his native place. It turned his cold love to a bitter feeling that he never overcame; and it also threw upon Salem the reproach of having injured as well as neglected her most famous son." (Woodberry 175)

His characters are universal characters. They do not belong to particular section or strata of society; they belong to the general humanity. His characters are life like and real. He sought his characters from general humanity; his characters often appear to us as living human beings. His characters produce an impression of reality. They are not wooden or stereotyped on the contrary his characters have all the dynamism of a living creature. They are convincingly drawn. They are not improbable. They are not static; they change and grow according to the situation in the story. They behave in the same manner as the human characters would have behaved in the same condition. So they are living characters. He picked up his characters from the common race of mankind. His characters are typical representatives of general human race. His characters are the characters we often encounter in our daily routine. Thus his characters are universal characters. It is the universality of his characters that appeals to the read-

ers. His characters are so alive that the reader often starts feeling for them. His readers develop an emotional relationship with his characters.

The real charm of his characterization lies in realism. All his characters are realistically drawn. Realism forms the core of his characters. Another important aspect of his characterization is his psychological approach to his characters. His treatment of characters was psychological. Here he shows a break from the conventional method of character portrayal. He was not content merely with the description of outer or superficial details of his characters. For him the most important aspect of a character is his inner or mental state. He had a deep psychological insight into his characters. He tries to problem deep within the human consciousness to trace the hidden instincts of man. The sole emphasis was placed on the human consciousness. Hawthorne explores the workings of the minds of his characters. He very minutely analyses the minds of his characters. He gives the minute details of his characters. The characters speak of his deep insight into the minds of his characters. He portrays the inner psychology of his characters. He is regarded as the first American novelist who portrayed the real human psychology.

The characters in The Scarlet Letter are not wooden in the sense that they do not grow. On the contrary these characters have all the dynamism of a living creature. They grow and develop and change their behavior because of certain inner compulsions, because of the changes in their environment, because of their interactions. All the characters are very realistically drawn and have verisimilitude. Though realism forms the core of these characters, Hawthorne has also tried to imbue these characters with certain idealism. The Scarlet Letter is one of the most significant novels of America. The novel is significant for its living

characters. The main characters of the novel, Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth and Pearl, are very convincing and aptly drawn. These characters might be unusual person, but they are certainly not unconvincing.

Hester Prynne, the heroine of *The Scarlet Letter* has been created in the image of a real woman, who committed the sin of adultery and fell a victim to the Puritan laws. In 1844, Nathaniel Hawthorne recorded in his diary about the idea of a story "The life of a woman who by the old colony law, was condemned always to wear the letter 'A' sewed on her garment in taken of her having committed an adultery".

Hester Prynne is a passionate woman of New England. She is a figure of perfect elegance. She is a tall young woman with an elegant figure. She has a beautiful face with regular features, a rich complexion and deep black eyes. She has dark and abundant hair. Hester Prynne is an emotional and Passionate character. She is a woman of imagination and artistic taste. She has a certain degree of exotic richness about her. She is full of love, charm and grace. She has an extraordinary beauty. She has a unique personality of her own. She is impressive and commanding. Her character is clearly above the ordinary characters. Her physical and mental traits are remarkably individualistic. She has the strength the courage, the potential to fight with the society. She is endowed with an extraordinary courage and endurance. It is Hester's Pride which sustains her from that opening scene until she dies, still wearing the letter 'A' and coupled with that pride is a passion which is demonstrated not only through her relations with Dimmesdale but also in her emotional attachment to Pearl, in her defiance of Governor Bellingham and even in her conversations with her husband old Chillingworth.

Hester Prynne has committed on act of adultery which is regarded as sinful and shameful in the puritan atmosphere of the community. The society inflicts punishment on her. She is made to stand on a scaffold in a public place before the huge crowd of Boston. She has to display herself along with the child in her arms for three hours. Not only this she is made to wear a scarlet letter in the shape of "A" on her bosom throughout her life. Hester's sin is the sin which gives the book its

title and around which the action of the book revolves. Hester Prynne very bravely takes up her punishment. She stands on the scaffold before the public. She puts on the scarlet letter on her dress. But she does not acknowledge herself to be a sinner in the truer sense of the world. She has no remorse. She does not feel sorry for her sin. She does not regard her action as a sin. She does not find herself wrong. She is not repentant for her act of adultery. She feels no sense of shame. She is not crushed down by the burden of sin. She is not led down by the circumstances. She fights very bravely. She is not a coward. She could have gone on an obscure place where she can start her life but she refuses to run away from the place of her earthly shame. Doomed to wear the mark of disgrace on her bosom, and the object of contempt and hatred of all the townspeople, she reconciles herself to her miserable existence and her loneliness, and prepares herself to go through prolonged ordeal of her life with a rare fortitude. She could have left the town of Boston and gone elsewhere, thus escaping from the disgrace and infamy to which she is subjected.

But she does not do so. She continues to live in the same community. She suffers intense humiliation. She suffers prolonged mental torture. She could have eluded this punishment by running away to an unknown destination. But she faces this humiliation. In contrast, Hawthorne does not condone Hester's adultery, but he does find it less serious a sin than the sins of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth. Clearly, Hawthorne sees Hester as a victim. He emphasizes, that Hester is a victim of her own youth, living in an age which forced her to marry Chillingworth without loving him. Hester is a victim of Chillingworth's selfishness, which permitted him to marry the young and passionate girl, knowing all the while that she did not return his love and knowing that he was not suited to the role of her husband.

"We may see the consequences of such an aesthetic credo clearly enough in *The Scarlet Letter*. It is not the fact of adultery itself that engages Hawthorne's interest. Adultery might mean anything or nothing. Let it occur before the novel opens and explore its consequences. In Hawthorne's view it was personal guilt, not sin abstractly defined, that was interesting."

(Waggoner 62) Hester Prynne's character is also endowed with striking human qualities. She is Portrayed as a typical female character. She is an ideal mother. She gives the name Pearl to her child. Pearl is the symbol of divine mercy of her. Hester's love for Arthur Dimmesdale is also very strong and deep. She loves him from the core of her heart. Her sentiments for Arthur Dimmesdale are genuine and sincere. She feels that she is responsible for the miserable condition of Arthur Dimmesdale. Thus Hester Prynne is a grand character. She is an extremely convincing character. There is no doubt that Hester has committed a sin, but she is not a sinner in the truer sense of the word. The sin committed by her is done only in a passionate moment, out of biological necessity, out of her ignorance and inexperience. She is guilty of sin and crime only in the eyes of the puritanic guardians of morality and blind upholders of justice.

Hester Prynne is, on the contrary a woman of responsibility and judged not from the social point of view, she bears a good moral character. It is wrong to access her just from the sexual point of view. For a true account of human personality, a person should be judged from his total performance. All the aspects of his personality should be considered, if one has to judge a person in the real sense. Thus on taking a complete account of Hester Prynne's personality, it is to be conducted that she is a good human being with an innocent soul. Hester

Prynne is a kind and compassionate character. She helps the poor and the sick. She dedicated her life to the service of the sick, poor and downtrodden. She is always ready to help the poor and the needy. She always renders her valuable services to those who are in distress. She is totally dedicated to the service of mankind. She is generous. The society has ill-treated her, banished her, but even then she renders her valuable services to the welfare of human kind. In spite of the cruelties and harsh treatment, she received at the hands of people, she is always ready to help them. She devotes her life to the service of mankind. Finally through her repentance and services, she is transformed from a fallen woman into a SISTER OF MERCY.

She finally makes her way into the hearts of people. People start liking her. They introduced her as "it is our Hester, the town's own Hester, who is so kind to the poor, so helpful to the sick, so comfortable to the afflicted." (Hawthorne 181) Her sympathy and her spirit of her service raise her to the status of a sister of mercy, in spite of the badge of shame on her bosom.

"Hester, the "woman taken in adultery," rises to saintliness as she becomes an "angel of mercy" to the community, but her dreams of a new order of society can find no expression in her life and resignation is all she has to take the place of happiness" (Waggoner 73)

REFERENCE

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