

Hawthorne's Literary Utilization of Characterization and Figurative Language in the *Scarlet Letter*

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ABSTRACT

The research explores Nathaniel Hawthorne's use of characterization techniques and figurative language in his masterpiece, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). The study examines the major use by Hawthorne of metaphor, simile, personification, and irony as key elements of his literary craft, and how he uses them to develop complex, multi-dimensional characters and to express deep thematic issues around sin, guilt, redemption, and hypocrisy in American society. The research, based on a close examination of the text, illustrates how Hawthorne's characters (especially Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, and Roger Chillingworth) serve as symbolic representations of moral and psychological conditions, and how his figurative elements produce a multifaceted plot that plays out literally and metaphorically at the same time. The results indicate that the characterization and figurative elements in Hawthorne's work are intertwined strategies used to make a historical romance into a lasting study of human nature and moral intricacy.

Keywords: Characterization, figurative language, metaphor, symbolism, Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*

INTRODUCTION

The Scarlet Letter (1850) is a great American novel, not only for the dark and vivid story of sin and redemption, but for the sophisticated literary style. Hawthorne's use of characterization and figurative language in the novel is remarkable for his ability to use these two methods together to delve into the depths of human consciousness and the complexities of moral experience. As a writer who was preoccupied by the themes of sin, guilt, loneliness, alienation, and moral downfall, Hawthorne used a variety of narrative strategies to make this tale of adultery a psychological and moral enquiry (Fadlilah, 2017). From the view of Minderop and Hidayat (2022), Hawthorne's work includes social criticism and he has mentioned the concept of morality and the literary works are closely related to psychological concepts.

This research focuses on the systematic study of the ways in which Hawthorne's literary devices (his approach to character and his use of figurative language) combine to define meaning and render his thematic vision. The use of figurative language in *The Scarlet Letter* is where something or someone is compared to a symbolic meaning through simile, metaphor, allusion, or personification. Less has been written about the way Hawthorne develops his characters and employs figurative language to manifest their interior lives as an integrated process than has been done on the novel's symbolism. The objective of this study is to help solve this problem by studying the interaction of characterization and figurative language in the novel in detail (Fadlilah, 2017).

The first goal of this study is to examine the role of the characterization techniques used by Hawthorne to develop the main characters of the novel (direct description, dialogue, action and symbolic association). The second aim is to explore the role of figurative language, especially metaphor, simile, and personification, in depicting the psychological and moral attributes of these characters (Shaft, 2024). This investigation considers the question: How does Hawthorne use characterization and figurative language as related literary devices to create meaning and express motifs in *The Scarlet Letter*?

This study is important because it adds to the growing body of scholarship on Hawthorne's literary artistry. The relationship of characterization and figurative language is explored, and the results show how these elements give the novel its psychological depth and moral complexities, which have cemented its position in the literary canon. In addition, this analysis gives insight into Hawthorne's unique style of writing, which includes ornate, intricate sentences and multiple meanings that require close reading.

Characterization and Figurative Language in Literature

The two key concepts that are the basis of literary artistry are characterization and figurative language, and they both play an important role in the development of meaning in narrative text. There are many methods for revealing the personalities, motivations and inner thoughts of fictional characters, such as description, dialogue, action and reaction to other characters, which are all part of the process of characterization. Like Minderop and Hidayat (2022) noted, Hawthorne uses characterization devices to indicate the mind of his characters, thus showcasing their mental struggle and psychological problems. Especially in *The Scarlet Letter*, one's outward behavior often conveys the opposite emotions from those being felt inside.

Metaphor, simile, personification and irony are all forms of figurative language that enable writers to say something other than what is literally true. As Fadlilah (2017) has mentioned, figurative language relates objects or characters to symbolic meanings, which makes the fable created to be very stylized and symbolic, carrying strong messages to readers. Perrine (1982) as cited in Fadlilah (2017), the effectiveness of figurative language is that it can provide imagination pleasure for the reader, introduce additional imagery to the story, give emotional power to descriptive sentences, and put a lot of meaning into a few words. The difference between a simile (explicit comparison using 'like' or 'as') and a metaphor (implicit comparison) is very important in literary analysis, since both devices help the author explain the unknown by using the known, and the complex by making use of the simple (Soudani & Bekkocha, 2024).

Characterization relates closely with figurative language, especially in the study of literary psychology. Metaphors and similes provide insight into the characters' internal world, their feelings, and their intentions that may be internalized and not be immediately apparent. Hawthorne's characters and characters' personalities are created through the use of linguistic and stylistic devices, including metaphor, imagery and irony, making them multi-dimensional and complex. Here, characterization and figurative language come together and what literary critics refer to as psychological realism emerges, defined as the representation of inner life in a sufficiently deep and complex manner to make characters believable and compelling (Shaft, 2024). Furthermore, Minderop and Hidayat (2022) state that the use of figurative language in the characterization can make the impression made by the story more powerful. Simile, metaphor displays the character's: feeling, thinking, regret, shame, sorrow, helplessness and death instinct. This indicates the use of figurative language is not just decorative language, but also it has a number of important psychological functions in the characterizations that the writer creates in literature (Awadasid, 2015).

The Scarlet Letter: A Synopsis

Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is set in the seventeenth-century Puritan Boston, Massachusetts, and features the story of Hester Prynne, a woman who becomes pregnant after committing adultery with another man and is doomed to wear the scarlet letter "A" on her breast as a symbol of her sin (Fadlilah, 2017).

Hester's public punishment begins in the novel as she is put on the scaffold to be publicly shamed for her sin of adultery. Her husband, Roger Chillingworth, arrives in Boston as a physician and falls in love with finding out who Hester's lover is; he eventually finds out that it is the revered Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale (Minderop & Hidayat, 2022).

For more than seven years, Hester lives alone, self-taught and kind in the face of adversity, with her daughter Pearl. Meanwhile, Dimmesdale is burdened with his own hidden guilt and his health is suffering as he is tormented by Chillingworth's psychological abuse. A final public confession on the scaffold, in which Dimmesdale admits his sin, and he dies in Hester's arms. In the end, the novel ends with Hester's eventual return to Boston,

no longer disrespected for the scarlet letter, but respected by them as a symbol of her charitable ways and personal character (Soudani & Bekkocha, 2024).

Characterization and Figurative Language in The Scarlet Letter

The Scarlet Letter is a masterpiece of characterization and figurative language that makes this story very deep and complex in terms of emotions and moral. All four main characters, Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth and Pearl, are both realistic individuals and symbolic characters that are revealed through Hawthorne's rich and varied figurative language (Shaft, 2024).

Through both explicit and implied characterization, the novel's most interesting character is Hester Prynne. At first Hawthorne characterizes Hester as "tall, with a figure of perfect elegance" and "dark and abundant hair" , which shines the sunshine off like glass. This physical description makes her an extremely handsome and noble woman, which is a stark contrast to her social outcast status. But Hawthorne shows more about the nature of Hester in figurative language. Hester is released from the prison and the scarlet letter is said to be "so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 49) (Fadlilah, 2017). This description is metaphorical in that it implies that Hester's sin is not just a stain on her, but a part of her.

Metaphor is used to describe Hester's transformation within herself in Hawthorne's work. Writes, "the tendency of her fate and fortunes had been to set her free" (Hawthorne, 1850) (Shaft, 2024). The metaphor places Hester's penalty in a dual role: in the end, it is her punishment that allows her to gain a perspective that is not available to other, more mainstream, members of the Puritan society. Likewise, Hawthorne equates Hester's character with a shriveled plant: "All the light and graceful foliage of her character had been withered up by this red hot brand" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 182). This metaphor expresses the psychological toll of public shame as well as its power to demonstrate Hester's resilience, the way plants recover from harming (Minderop & Hidayat, 2022).

The character of Arthur Dimmesdale is influenced by the contrast between his public piety and his private sinfulness, making him the representative of the secret sinner. Dimmesdale's descriptions of events are often metaphoric, alluding to decay, hiding, and anguish. The minister's expression is said to be "a writhing horror twisted itself across his features, like a snake gliding swiftly over them" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 67). This simile of his face like a snake's has Biblical overtones of the snake being the tempter and deceiver, hinting that Dimmesdale's sin is hidden and has defiled him. The snake imagery also suggests a connection between Dimmesdale and the "Black Man" of Puritan folklore, implying that, in spite of his public image as God's servant, Dimmesdale is engaged in the work of the devil (Awadasid, 2015).

The minister's soul is dead, yet his body is alive, and the minister is "like a ghost, evoked unseasonably from the grave" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 145) to bear witness to his sinful secrets and the consequences of his actions. The minister's soul is dead, but his body is alive, and the minister is "like a ghost, evoked unseasonably from the grave" (Minderop & Hidayat, 2022, p. 145) to serve as a witness to his sinful secrets and the consequences of his actions.

The metaphor of Dimmesdale's heart is a theme that is present throughout the novel, giving clues to his inner state. He is suffering from "some black trouble of the soul" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 114) which is a metaphor for spiritual suffering as a dark consuming power (Fadlilah, 2017). This literary device illustrates the very strong impact that hypocrisy has on Dimmesdale's inner life, the conflict between his public and private persona (Shaft, 2024).

In this context, the characterization of Roger Chillingworth as the embodiment of evil fits together with the figurative language used in his description, which indicates that he has become morally degraded, and this characterization and figurative language work together to highlight his moral degradation (Minderop & Hidayat, 2022). Chillingworth is always linked to the dark elements and demonic imagery. When he first appears a "writhing horror" crosses his face "like a snake gliding swiftly over them" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 67) the same simile used of Dimmesdale, which is used to show the similarity between the two men's concealed guilt (Awadasid, 2015).

As Chillingworth's revenge takes hold, however, Hawthorne adds to the satanic elements: "Had a man seen old Roger Chillingworth at that moment of his ecstasy, he would have had no need to ask how Satan comported himself when a precious human soul was lost to heaven and won into his kingdom" (Hawthorne, 1850). Such an overt reference to the devil makes Chillingworth a figure of evil, and his revenge has turned him into something unnatural (Fadlilah, 2017). The metaphor of Chillingworth as "a miner" searching for treasure is also used: "He was like a miner who, digging in a rich vein, has found a precious gem of inestimable value" (Hawthorne, 1850). The metaphor demonstrates Chillingworth's predatory nature, as he sees Dimmesdale as less than human and more like a resource to be used (Minderop & Hidayat, 2022).

Pearl is a character and an extended metaphor, as described by Hester as the scarlet letter in another form; the scarlet letter endowed with life" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 184) (Shaft, 2024). This metaphor equates Pearl with her mother's sin, and Hester is constantly reminded of her sin. But Hawthorne similarly employs a figurative language that hints at Pearl's means of redemption as well. Writing, he says, "Pearl was the oneness of their being," a metaphor he uses to suggest that the child is the embodiment of their love, both in the physical and spiritual senses, as Hester and Dimmesdale are joined in love (Fadlilah, 2017).

Natural imagery further helps to characterize Pearl: She is referred to as a "lovely and immortal flower" and the beauty of this flower is reminiscent of the fact that it is "permanent, perhaps eternal". The use of the simile "a wild tropical bird" suggests that Pearl's character is untamed and free-spirited; her life is different from the one led by the Puritan community (Shaft, 2024).

Just as the metaphorical complexity of Hawthorne's characterization is extended with his characterization of the characters, so too is metaphorical complexity extended with his characterization of the relationship between characters. Hawthorne says that when Dimmesdale, Hester, and Pearl stand together on the scaffold, they are "an electric chain" (Hawthorne, 1850). Their relationship is depicted as a strong, possibly destructive, force in this metaphor, indicating the possibility of both positive and negative aspects to the relationship (Soudani & Bekkocha, 2024).

The forest scene between Hester and Dimmesdale is also metaphorically toned, and the potential for freedom and renewal is suggested: "The sunshine poured a very flood into the obscure forest, gladdening each green leaf" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 193). The metaphor of light in darkness implies that even in circumstances of moral lapses, there is a potential for redemption. (Minderop & Hidayat, 2022).

In addition to the other figured speech used in Hawthorne's characterization, there is personification. The sunshine is said to run away and hide itself, terrified of something on her bosom; "the sunshine does not love you" (Hawthorne, 1850). This personification externalizes Hester's feeling of shame and isolation and implies that nature is aware of her sin. Likewise, the brook in the forest is personified, it is babbling and it is telling tales out of the old forest's heart (Awadasid, 2015).

The blending of the characterization with the figurative language in *The Scarlet Letter* demonstrates that Hawthorne possessed a subtle insight into the minds of men and a finesse in literary technique. On the contrary, his characters are not only symbolic, but they are also psychologically complex people whose inner lives are depicted through careful selection of figurative language (Minderop & Hidayat, 2022). The metaphorical portrayals of sin, guilt and redemption that permeate the novel encourage readers to explore the novel's themes at multiple levels, and Fadlilah (2017) characterizes it as a "highly stylized symbolic fable" in which "every fact in unending succession of relation to every other fact" (Fadlilah, 2017, p. 35). What Hawthorne does so well is to keep the characters in the novel real and at the same time use figurative language to imply their symbolic role, making the novel a milestone in American literature (Awadasid, 2015).

CONCLUSION

This research has explored Hawthorne's superior use of characterization and figurative language in *The Scarlet Letter*, highlighting their interdependent uses as tools to build meaning and to express thematic issues. Through the realistic depiction of the character of his novel, Hawthorne becomes a master of literature whose characters are psychologically developed and at the same time serve the moral and philosophical issues of the novel

.Through figurative language the analysis shows that the process of Hester Prynne's changing from a sinner to a sage is traced; Arthur Dimmesdale's inner turmoil is portrayed through metaphors of decay and concealment; Roger Chillingworth's moral decline is expressed through the demonic imagery; and Pearl is an extended metaphor of sin and redemption .

The results of this research emphasize the importance of figurative language as Hawthorne's means of characterization. Metaphors, similes and personification allow readers to gain insight into the hearts and minds of characters who may not express their true inner feelings through their outward actions. This style, typical of Hawthorne's ornate and intricate, encourages careful attention to detail and invites close reading. The snake imagery of both Dimmesdale and Chillingworth creates a moral similarity between the two men and also highlights their two separate reactions to guilt; nature is personified to shift the emphasis from what is inside the character to the outside, thus enriching the novel's symbolic world; the personification of nature is used to externalize the character's inner feelings and emotions, which adds to the novel's symbolic richness.

The purpose of this study is to show the value of figurative language in Hawthorne's characterization techniques in the broader context of the artist in his literary work. The novel's structure and figurative language, as mentioned by Fadlilah (2017), are indeed very tight as if "walking into many-sided mirrors where we see every fact in unending succession of relation to every other fact" (p. 35). A more in-depth study of Hawthorne's characterization and the use of figurative language could be expanded to his other novels, to show how these devices developed throughout his career. Comparative studies also could examine the impact of Hawthorne's methods upon subsequent American writers or his use of characterization and figurative language within the context of American Romanticism. This research is an affirmation that despite its strong plot, the book *The Scarlet Letter* is a masterpiece due to Hawthorne's unparalleled ability in characterizing characters in the book with language of exceptional beauty and precision, which makes them appear psychological and not just superficial.

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