

The Scarlet Letter is a book of much symbolism. One of the most complex and misunderstood symbols in the book is Pearl, the daughter of Hester Prynne. Pearl, throughout the story, develops into a dynamic symbol - one that is always changing. In the following essay, I will explore some of the symbolism which Pearl came to represent throughout the novel.

In The Scarlet Letter, Hester, for her sins, received a scarlet letter, "A" which she had to wear upon her chest. This was the Puritan way of treating her as a criminal, for the crime of adultery. The Puritan treatment continued, because as Hester would walk through the streets, she would be looked down upon as if she were some sort of demon from Hell, that committed a terrible crime. This would give her much mental anguish and grief. On the other hand, God's treatment of Hester for her sin was quite different than just a physical token: he gave Hester the punishment of a very unique child which she named Pearl. This punishment handed down from God was a constant mental and physical reminder to Hester of what she had done wrong, and she could not escape it. In this aspect, Pearl symbolized God's way of punishing Hester for adultery.

The way Hester's life was ruined for so long was the ultimate price that Hester paid for Pearl. With Pearl, Hester's life was one almost never filled with joy, but instead a constant nagging. Pearl would harass her mother over the scarlet "A" which she wore. Pearl would also make her own "A" to wear, and sometimes she played games with her mother's, trying to hit it with rocks. When Hester would go into the town with Pearl, the other children would make fun of her, and Pearl would yell and throw dirt at them. So, in this case, Pearl symbolized the decimation of Hester's life and mental state.

Although Hester had so much trouble with Pearl, she still felt that Pearl was her treasure. Pearl was really the only thing that Hester had in life, and if Pearl wasn't in Hester's life, Hester would almost surely have committed suicide. Once and a while, Pearl would bring joy to Hester's life, and that helped her to keep on living. Pearl really symbolized a rose to her mother, at some times she could be bright and vibrant, and really love her mother, but at other times, she could be wilting. It was at these times when she was "wilting" that brought Hester the most grief.

One final way in which Pearl symbolized something in the novel was with her association with the scarlet letter. Pearl really was the scarlet letter, because if Pearl had never been born, Hester would have never been found guilty of adultery, and thus never would have had to wear that burden upon her chest. Without that burden, Hester would have led a much better life than the one she had throughout the novel.

In closing, Pearl was a source of many different kinds of symbolism. From being a rose, to representing the scarlet letter "A", she was a kind of burden, yet love for Hester. And as a final note, Pearl was more than her mother's only treasure; she was her mother's only source of survival.

