

THE ROSE BUSH IMAGE IN HAWTHORNE'S THE SCARLET LETTER

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Abstract

- At the end of chapter one, The Prison Door, there is a passage which describes a single rose bush next to the prison door. Although the author did give many interpretations of the rosebush's meaning, there was no definite one.
- The roses can also be interpreted as a beacon of hope; the one last symbol of freedom and beauty before one is condemned to prison, a cold, heartless place.
- The scarlet colored rose is used "to symbolize a sweet moral blossom." This is little ironic because of the robe Hester is forced to wear. Hester, an adulteress is considered to have no morals and is shamed into wearing this scarlet letter. The scarlet flower is supposed to be a symbol of morals and the scarlet-letter-bearing Hester is thought of as the opposite of morals.
- These roses would "offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner." They offer a small but bold contrast to the strict, black and white world of the puritans. The rose can also represent Hester within her puritan world. She is the rebellious and beautiful, yet dangerous flower which is intriguing to the passerby. She is different from the rest of the surrounding world. She is awkward and alone in the only world she knows.
- This study will trace the development of the image of the rose bush represented by Hester, the wild rose of The *Scarlet Letter*.

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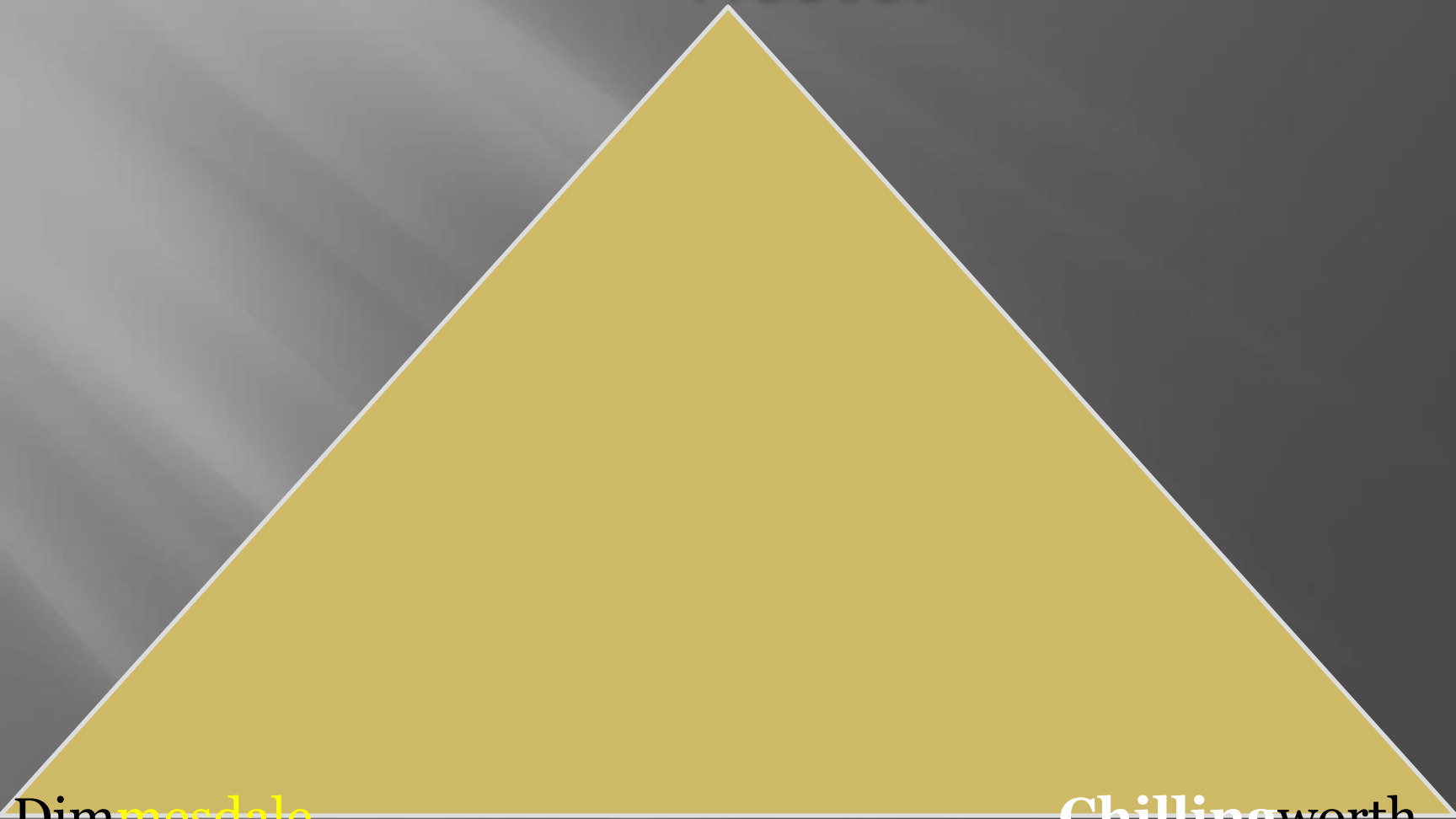
Key Words

- ▣ nature
- ▣ strange
- ▣ love
- ▣ far
- ▣ scarlet
- ▣ forest
- ▣ never
- ▣ truth
- ▣ kept secret
- ▣ wild eyes
- ▣ heart, soul, physician

Hester

Dimmesdale

Chillingworth





- ▣ On one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a **wild rose-bush**, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him.

The Scarlet Letter. Painting by [T. H. Matteson](#).
This 1860 oil-on-canvas may have been made
with Hawthorne's advice.



- ▣ “Pearl...that little creature, whose innocent life had sprung, by the inscrutable decree of Providence, a lovely and immortal **flower**, out of the rank luxuriance of a guilty passion.”
- ▣ “Pearl’s aspect was imbued with a spell of infinite variety; in this one child there were many children, comprehending the full scope between the wild-**flower** prettiness of a peasant-baby, and the pomp,...of an infant princess. ”
- ▣ In Pearl Hester “could recognize her wild, desperate, defiant mood.”
- ▣ Pearl “seemed rather an airy spirit...whenever that look appeared in her wild...eyes, it invested her with a strange remoteness and intangibility.”
- ▣ “Art thou my child, in every truth”

- ▣ “It was the child’s whole appearance, that ...irresistibly and inevitably reminded the beholder of the token which Hester Prynne was doomed to wear upon her bosom. It was the scarlet letter in another form ; the scarlet letter endowed with life. ”
- ▣ “Pearl?-Ruby, rather!-or Coral!-or **Red Rose**, at the very least.”
- ▣ “After many ...refusals to answer good Mr.Wilson’s questions, the child finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild **roses** that grew by the prison-door.”

Conclusion

- ▣ “The scarlet letter had not done its office.”
- ▣ “After many, many years, a new grave was delved, near an old and sunken one, in that burial-ground beside which King’s Chapel has since been built. It was near that old and sunken grave, yet with a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle.”



