

In my thesis I will examine Nathaniel Hawthorne's stories *The Minister's Black Veil* and *The Artist of the Beautiful* as well as his famous romance *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of sign, symbol and allegory.

I chose these particular works as typical representatives of Hawthorne's production. *The Minister's Black Veil*, first published in 1836, is an expression of Hawthorne's Puritan heritage recovery period, *The Artist of the Beautiful*, which came out in 1846 is an expression of his Romanticism and his dealings with Transcendentalism, while his major work, *The Scarlet Letter*, 1850, is a remarkable and complex blend of the two strains of his thinking and art.

My thesis consists of four chapters. In the first chapter, named Sign, Symbol, and Allegory, I try to define what these terms mean, and to establish the difference between the first two, as some critics use the term sign and symbol interchangeably. I base my analysis on the Saussurian concept of sign, which will be outlined and contrasted with symbol. I will try to adumbrate the way in which reading of signs differs in the Puritan era and in the nineteenth century. I will characterize allegory and the patterns that enable us to recognize it, and I will mention how the understanding of what allegory is has changed in modern times.

In the following three chapters, named after the respective story titles, I will apply these terms to the chosen texts and analyse and interpret them on the level of sign, symbol and allegory in their particular contexts, with an appeal to the historical and ideological background of American Puritanism and nineteenth century Romanticism. The main focus of my interest will be Father Hooper's veil in *The Minister's Black Veil*, the butterfly in *The Artist of the Beautiful*, and the letter A in *The Scarlet Letter*. My procedure will start with their examination on the level of sign, continue to the more complex symbolic level, and end by examining them in terms of their participation in the wider allegorical context they are a part of.