

Student Response:

Are the characters too simplistic? Henry James, the famous American novelist, thought Hawthorne overused symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter*. In the following passage, he cites one example:

In *The Scarlet Letter* there is a great deal of symbolism; there is, I think, too much. It is overdone at times, and becomes mechanical; it ceases to be impressive, and grazes triviality. The Idea of the mystic A which the young minister finds imprinted upon his breast and eating into his flesh, in sympathy with the embroidered badge that Hester is condemned to wear, appears to me to be a case in point. This suggestion should, I think have been just made and dropped; to insist upon it, and return to it, is to exaggerate the weak side of the subject. Hawthorne returns to it constantly, plays with it, and seems charmed by it; until at last the reader feels tempted to declare that his employment of it is puerile.

Agree or disagree and justify.