

Dichotomies in the scarlet letter essay sample



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There are many dichotomies that are found throughout the novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Many of the characters in the story present strong dichotomies like Pearl, Roger, and Hester who show two totally different perspectives of themselves. A dichotomy is the division of something or someone into two parts; it can be good and be bad at the same time. For example spiders, no one likes spiders around their house, but they can be a use for trapping and killing unwanted flies around your home. It is contradicting, and dichotomies surround each and every one of us whether it's the things we do or events that happen around us. Hester Prynne, the protagonist in the story, lives in a strict town during the Puritans era where the towns people are really strict. Boston is the place, and they cant laugh, dance, sing or do anything fun because it would be considered sinful in the Puritan society. Hester committed the biggest sin any one could do, and that was cheating on her husband by having an affair.

This affair is where everything started, after realizing she was pregnant with her daughter named Pearl. In the story, Hester as a young girl married a man named Roger Chillingworth, who was much older than she was. Roger had sent Hester to America while he settled his affairs in Europe. While he was gone Hester, being young and confused, had an affair with a minister named Dimmesdale and later gave birth to a baby girl named Pearl. After Roger had been captured by Native Americans, he arrived to Boston and found his wife Hester and Pearl displayed on the scaffold. His aggravation made him decide to stay for revenge, and disguise himself as a doctor and find out who Hester's secret lover, and daughters father was. Everyone in town looked at Hester as a sinful, guilty, and shameful human being. " It would be greatly

for the public behoof, if we women, being of mature age and church-members in good repute, should have the handling of such male actresses as this Hester Prynne." (Ch. 2. Pg. 5), these were the words of a town's woman as Hester passes by the crowd walking towards the scaffold. The dichotomy in this is that even though everyone in Boston looked at her as a disgrace and wish to kick her out, they let her stay because of her skills at making clothes as a seamstress. Another dichotomy in the story is Pearl, Hester's daughter. Pearl is a sweet and innocent little girl who everyone loves. She is loving, caring and full of curiosity.

Really perceptive and honest, more than any of the adults in the story. She was like a beautiful flower growing out of sinful soil, a wonderful product with a label of sin. Interestingly, Pearl can be described like a pearl from the sea. A pearl starts off as dirt and water, and later turns into a beautiful pearl that everyone treasures and had come at great price. " She knew that her deed had been evil; she could have no faith, therefore, that its result would be for good."(Ch. 6 Pg. 41). Clearly, Hawthorne shows how much of a blessing Pearl was to Hester after committing that terrible sin. Hester watched her daughter grow without a father, her guiltiness turned into malignity. She was afraid of one day Pearl's curiosity would lead her to ask who her real father was. Roger who was terrified at the fact that Hester cheated on him and had a daughter by another man, was disguised as a doctor. As a doctor he had been described as a leech. A leech is a bloodsucking worm that was one used by physicians to bleed patients and cure from diseases.

Unfortunately, researchers later found out that not only did leeches not cure diseases but they actually spread them. So therefore, Roger was described

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as a leech because he was a Doctor with a few medical education and a few remedies. He found out that Dimmesdale, Pearl's biological father, was sick and has been suffering from severe health problems. He immediately insists to take care of him and take him to his laboratory. On chapter 9 Dimmensdale and Chillingworth's relationship was explored and testified. Chillingworth represents science, when Dimmesdale represents more of a spiritually presence. Neither Dimmesdale or Chillingworth could find a cure, they weren't able to heal Dimmesdale's illness scientifically or spiritually. As they were conversing, the topic of secrets hidden beneath people's hearts was brought up. " Yet some men bury their secrets thus...They are afraid to own up to the shame that is rightfully theirs. They may possess a holy love for mankind..." observed the calm physician." (Ch. 10 Pg. 84). Undoubtedly, Roger becomes to get suspicious and starts to suspect Dimmesdale's secret which is wearing Hester's sin, not openly like she does but hidden. The Scarlet Letter, in conclusion, had many dichotomies to present and these were only a few of them.

At the end of the story Dimmesdale and Hester planned to leave Boston and sail to Europe where they and their daughter can live as a happy family. The day before the ship to sail, Dimmesdale had all the townspeople gather together for his most powerful sermon ever. During the event Hester had found out that Roger figured out their plan and had booked a passage on the same ship. After Dimmesdale's sermon he sees Hester and Pearl, asks them to join him and walk towards the scaffold in front of a big crowd to confess his sin that him and Hester shared secretly this whole time. As he stands in front of the crowd who is hungry for a confession, he exposes the scarlet

letter that was seared into the flesh of his chest. As he injures himself to a painful death, he falls to the ground as Pearl kisses him. A year later, Chillingworth dies frustrated in his revenge. Hester and Pearl leave Boston and were never heard from again. Until many years later Hester arrives back to Boston without Pearl. Pearl had married a European and started a family of her own. Dimmesdale's refusal to confess to his sin, he struggled with his internal conflict by physically exposing it and died from it. Hawthorne's message in *The Scarlet Letter* is that salvation can only be earned by being open about and true to what you are.