

Scarlet letter – sin isolates the sinner essay sample



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In Nathaniel Hawthorne's, *Scarlet Letter*, he tells the story of a sinner, Hester Prynne. Hester has committed adultery and now has a child as a result of her sin. Hester has naturally put herself aside from the other puritan members of the community. She has mostly secluded herself from the puritan women of the town. Hester endures many issues involving Reverend Dimmesdale, who later find out is her fellow sinner in committing adultery. She also has many encounters with Roger Chillingworth. Roger Chillingworth turns out to be Hester's husband who has followed her back to New England from Europe. Hester has a child names Pearl, who is often looked upon by the community as a devil child. Pearl is frowned upon because she was born as a result of a sin that is deeply disapproved in the Puritan religion.

Pearl is also sought out to be a devil child because she denies having a "heavenly father", which also goes against the puritan faith. Chillingworth is in disguise, not letting the town know he is the husband of the adulterer, because he wishes to seek revenge on Hester's partner in crime.

Chillingworth eventually realizes that Dimmesdale is both Hester's sinner and Pearl's earthly father. Later in the novel, Dimmesdale admits to the community of committing the sin with Hester and dies from the guilt wearing him down. Within a year of Dimmesdale's death Chillingworth has nothing to live for and also passes. Pearl and Hester grow together until Hester dies of simply old age. Hawthorne demonstrates how Hester Prynne is a victim of sin, and therefore becomes isolated as a result of sin.

Hawthorne shows the development of Hester Prynne and how she is physically isolated throughout the novel. Hester is physically isolated at the beginning of the novel when she is brought onto the scaffold in the market

place. On her should the embroidery on her clothing is described as “ fine red cloth with and elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread in the shape of an A” on her chest (Hawthorne, 55). Hester is being physically secluded from the Puritan society by wearing the ‘ A’ for committing her sin of adultery. Hawthorne does this to demonstrate that the sinner is recognized for their sin and also as a punishment. Later in the novel, Hester is physically isolated because Hawthorne places her in a new setting. As the plot develops, Hester has the opportunity to leave to go to Europe. Hester decides that she wants to remain in Boston to live out her guilt in the origin of her sin.

Hester moves to live in a cabin “ not in close vicinity to any other habitation.” (Hawthorne, 84). Hawthorne is creating a distinct distance between Hester and the remainder of the town. This also implies that Hester does not belong or fit in with the faithful puritans back near a civilized area. Lastly, Hawthorne creates physical isolation for Hester when Pearl, Dimmesdale, and Hester herself are in the woods having a conversation about moving to Europe. After being in the woods, all three of them travel to the market place. While going to the market place Pearl begins the question the conversation that occurred back in the woods. Hester replies, “ We must not always talk in the market place of what happens in the forest” (Hawthorne, 250). Hester wants to keep their private life from the outskirts of town on the down low and simply that, private.

In the novel, Hawthorne also shows a form of mental isolation. In the beginning of the novel Hester begins to wonder why she is so frowned upon. She asks herself “ could they be other than the insidious whispers of the bad

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angle...” (Hawthorne, 90). Hester wonders if any other scarlet letters would “blaze forth on many a bosom” (Hawthorne, 90). Hawthorne is trying to demonstrate how Hester really feels inside, but will not speak out. Hester is also mentally isolated when Pearl brings up the forest in the market place. Hester explains to Pearl that they do not speak of the forest in the town. Hawthorne seems to imply that Hester is almost ashamed of being isolated in the forest on the outskirts of the community. Lastly, Hester is mentally isolated by convincing herself that keeping Chillingworth’s identity is potentially harming Dimmesdale. Hester is fretting that her secrets are putting others in harms way. Hester takes notice to how Dimmesdale’s “nerves seemed to be absolutely destroyed” when talking one on one with him (Hawthorne, 165). Hester believed that her actions, guilt and secrets were negatively affecting her peers.

Throughout the novel, Hawthorne demonstrates many ways Hester is a victim of social isolation. In the beginning of the novel, Hester is put in front of the whole town to recognize her sin. She was forced to stand on a scaffold in the middle of the market place that “constituted a portion of a penal machine” (Hawthorne, 57). She was on the scaffold so the town would know of her sin and so Hester could get her punishment. Another way Hester Prynne was socially isolated was in her occupation of needlework. She as not issue creating garments for highly ranked officials and officers, but any work involving the marital process was a problem. For a sinner it was “not recorded...in a single instance her skill was called... to cover the blushes of a bride” (Hawthorne, 86). Brides did not want a sinner or unfaithful puritan associated with their holy, and sacred bond. Lastly, Hester was socially

isolated because the people of the town wanted to take Pearl away from her. The town believed, even if Pearl wasn't a devil child, she deserved better parenting than from Hester Prynne. This had the potential to split up a mother and daughter and isolate them from each other. Hester had the right to keep her own daughter and to parent it as they grew together.

Hawthorne thoroughly illustrates Hester Prynne undergoing physical, mental and social isolation as a sinner. The sin of adultery isolated her from the community and was very costly to her. Hester was looked at as a woman who lived a good life. Hester had a well led life because she stood up for her beliefs and had a generally good attitude towards everything. She lived in New England, which was a good choice, and if she lived elsewhere she wouldn't have endured the same experiences. She died as a sinner, but was remembered as a woman who was strong although she was secluded. On her tombstone was a glowing 'A' that the town remembered her by. Today sin also isolates the sinner. Today if you have wronged than you serve the natural consequences that accompany your sin, but also suffer the enforced punishment for what you have done. The punishments and natural lessons you must undergo separate you from the ones who have not sinned like you.