

# Scarlet letter – central idea

Literature, Russian Literature



In *The Scarlet Letter*, there are two main central ideas presented throughout the book. The three main characters; Hester, Chillingworth, and Dimmesdale, all contribute to changing and shaping the core of the story. In addition, the setting and events in the book help to develop the two main points; secret sin and hypocrisy.

These two particular themes are presented within the book time and time again. With central ideas of secret sin and hypocrisy, this novel is a page turner. Within the novel, sin is deeply revealed not only as the crime itself, but the effects sin has on the mind, body, and soul. Secret sin is revealed most through the actual characters. Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth all have their demons. Ironically, they all live in the tiny Puritan town of Boston, Massachusetts where sin is strictly forbidden. Because Puritans believe all people to be born sinners, they consider it their job to watch over each other. The disowning and taunting of the towns citizens starts with Hester.

Hester committed adultery. This was a sin punishable by death, but they decide to instead make Hester a living reminder of what adultery looks like. They made Hester wear a big A on her chest so she would be reminded of her sin. Thus the young and pure would be taught to look at her, with the scarlet letter flaming on her breast, at her, the child of honorable parents, at her, the mother of a babe, that would hereafter be a woman, at her, who had once been innocent, as the figure, the body, the reality of sin. (Chapter 5, page 1). Her partner in this act of adultery was Dimmesdale. However, Dimmesdale was a minister. People looked up to him for moral guidance. This is where the hypocrisy is shown. Dimmesdale is in the midst of living

two lives. He claims to go about his life Godly, but actually he is doing the complete opposite. Chillingworth is much more vile and cruel than the two other characters. In contrast, Chillingworth's secret sin is more internal rather than external. He has this obsession to destroy Dimmesdale's life for committing adultery with Hester. "Hadst thou sought the whole earth over," said he, looking darkly at the clergyman, "there was no one place so secret, no high place nor lowly place, where thou couldst have escaped me, save on this very scaffold!" (Chapter 23, page 18). He is seen as evil or the devil/demon himself in the story. The story itself is hypocritical.

Three characters are living their life in sin, but yet the setting takes place in a Puritan society. Hypocrisy is the other big central idea in the book.

Dimmesdale is the root of hypocrisy in this book. He is the minister in the Puritan town, however he doesn't live his life accordingly. Living two lives can be exhausting. He goes about his everyday life worried someone will find out his truth, while juggling his respectable life as a minister. Keeping his sin secret is killing him physically and mentally. He judges Hester for her sin and not telling people the truth about who the father is, but why should that be Hester's responsibility? He is the one who made the mistake, but he is too cowardly to stand up for his own actions. Hypocrisy is yet seen another time from Dimmesdale when he judges Hester, but he hasn't even come clean about his own sin. Hypocrisy and secret sin are shaped and developed through the characters, setting, and timing of events. The lying, cheating, and darkness the characters display proves this notion. The setting is ironic because the town is supposed to be pure and authentic, however, all that is seen is sin and deception.