

Comparison characters in the scarlet letter literature essay



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The Scarlet Letter is a classic, American novel written by renowned author, Nathaniel Hawthorne. The Scarlet Letter follows three characters, Hester Prynne, Reverend Dimmesdale, and Pearl. Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote the novel in 1850. The Scarlet Letter includes in his novel the infamous Christian view of sin and the knowledge that follows it. There are four dynamic characters that are featured in the The Scarlet Letter, Hester, her daughter, Pearl; her husband, Chillingworth; and the Reverend Dimmesdale. The Scarlet Letter is characteristic of the story of Adam and Eve because of the sin that was committed and desecrated the lives of those who were involved, as well as what would lead to the demise of their souls. The Scarlet Letter also has many of the symbolic details that are contained within the tale of Cain and Abel because of the sin that was committed, and how the "A" on the bosom of Hester's gown symbolized the mark of Cain.

When we first meet Hester Prynne, she is a prisoner in a jail in the Boston, Massachusetts area during a time when puritans were the main population. The character of Hester is rather flat and non-dynamic. The reader is more aware of the sins that Hester committed, rather than who she is as one of the main characters in the book and what her place is. After her affair with the Reverend Dimmesdale, Hester is shamed by the community for her acts that are spread across the township. Hester is married to a man that she claims that she does not love, his name is Chillingworth. Hester is a very strong-willed woman and this is seen primarily through the first few chapters before she meets Chillingworth. After the alienation of Hester by society, Hester becomes more of an open-minded thinker. The happenings that

happen to Prynne shape her into a more motherly figure for her daughter, Pearl, who is born after the tryst.

Pearl is first introduced as the baby that is pressed against Hester when she emerges from the doorway. Pearl is an adolescent for most of the novel. The imperative fact about Pearl is her ability to instigate the mature figures of the story. She is able to capture the attention of her elders through means of bringing questions about, ones that are particularly direct and piercing. Pearl is always making the reader aware of the fact that her mother, Hester, has the letter that is embroidered on her gown and the fact that the people of the community and the market are emphasizing it. Ironically, in the latter part of the book, Pearl is the one that states the disappointment of Dimmesdale to admit his portion of the situation that caused the shame to be placed on Hester.

Hawthorne's characters names all have certain meaning to them. One of the best examples is that of Chillingworth, Roger Chillingworth. Roger is the husband of Hester, but as his name suggest, he is a very cold person that is void of warmth and comfort. For most of the time he is not affectionate towards his wife like a husband should be; although his wife was expected by him to be affectionate towards him. Chillingworth would be considered the antagonist of the novel. He is representative of forms of unacceptable knowledge.

The last of the important characters is the Reverend Dimmesdale.

Dimmesdale is the man that is involved in the tryst between him and Hester.

The book states that the reverend was a very intelligent and educated man

that had received his education from the prestigious Oxford University. After the affair that takes place, Hester takes all of the blame for the sin that they share. This is characteristic of the type of person that he is, and the highlight of his consciousness of his soul. Being that the Reverend Dimmesdale is an important authority figure in the community, it isn't ever thought that someone in his position would commit such an act. In church, the crowds find his great speeches to be more of a metaphor or allegorical, rather than him expressing his discontent of the sin that he committed.

The framework of his order inevitably hemmed him. As a man who had once sinned, but who kept his consciousness all alive and painfully sensitive by the fretting, [...] but this had been a sin of passion, not of principle, nor even purpose (Hawthorne 180).

Dimmesdale's death is taken into many different directions by the people of the town. His confession before his death is seen as a form of one last sermon, although some believe that the death was a type of divine intervention.

When Hester emerged from the prison, she had a beautifully embroidered letter "A" on the breast of her gown. This letter was the talk of the town when Hester made her way to market. Many people in the village and at the market were at shock and awed by this display that was centered on the bosom of Hester's gown. One thing that was most unusual of what happened at the market was the fact that people were more distracted at the attention to detail of the embroidering in her gown of the particular letter that was being displayed.

Adam and Eve are part of the first story in The Bible, "Genesis." Adam is created by God to be cast upon the Earth. Once Adam is on Earth, he is placed into a very deep sleep where God takes one of Adam's ribs and created a woman with that particular rib. The woman was created and named Eve. Adam and Eve are one; they are created from one another, are part of one another, and are one flesh. Adam and Eve live in the Garden of Eden, a paradise on Earth. God created this place for Adam and Eve and said that it is theirs. The only thing that they were not allowed was to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The one rule that Adam and Eve had promised God that they would obey was that one rule. It was the rule that would test their desires, and show their faith in God. God did, however, allow Satan to roam freely within this Garden of Eden. In the story of Adam and Eve, Satan takes the form of a snake and entices them to eat the fruit that has been forbidden by God. Once they ate the fruit, the original sin had been committed. This is the part where they lose their innocence and obtain fig leaves to cover their genitals. This sin leads to the banishment of Adam and Eve, by God, from the Garden of Eden [1].

Hawthorne's word choice that is used to symbolize the sin between Hester and Dimmesdale, also symbolizes the sin that took place between Adam and Eve.

But there is a fatality, a feeling so irresistible and inevitable that it has the force of doom, which [...] the spot where some great and marked event has given the color to their lifetime; and [...] the darker the tinge that saddens it (Hawthorne 83).

The fatality could be seen as Satan, who was in the form of a snake in The Garden of Eden, snakes are poisonous which is another word for fatal. It could also be seen as symbolizing one of the deadly sins, lust. He then continues on to state that sins that are committed are not without the conscious knowing. That even when a sin is committed, and the sinner is the only one that is aware, the conscious will still know what happened, and a feeling of guilt will ensue.

Hawthorne makes reference of the fig leaves that are in the story of Adam and Eve by using a metaphor in the form of a glove.

Satan dropped it there; I take it intending a scurrilous jest against your reference. But, indeed he was blind and foolish, as he ever and always is. A pure hand needs no glove to cover it (Hawthorne 143).

As previously stated, after the sin of Adam and Eve was committed, their genitals were then covered by fig leaves to signify that their innocence had been lost. By stating that a pure hand doesn't need a glove is referencing the fact of the nature between Hester, Dimmesdale, Adam and Eve were very similar in nature. By stating that something was placed by Satan, he is making a reference to the Garden of Eden and the fruit, because of the fact that God allowed Satan to roam freely in and around the Garden of Eden to tempt the couple that was staying there at the time.

Hawthorne was a man of god, not as a preacher or a reverend, but rather a follower of Jesus Christ. One of the most infamous stories in The Bible is the story of Cain and Abel. Cain and Abel were brothers and the offspring of

Adam and Eve. Cain and Abel were the first two humans to be born via <https://assignbuster.com/comparison-characters-in-the-scarlet-letter-literature-essay/>

conception and delivery, rather than being created by God as their parents were. They were born after Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden. Cain was a gardener who worked the ground, and Abel was a shepherd. Later on, the time came for Cain and Able to present their offering to God. Both brothers brought their contribution to God. Abel, being a shepherd brought some of the finest creatures in his flock. Cain, on the other hand, brought something that was very average and barely satisfactory. Cain had every option to present something that was of much better quality than what he chose to do, but it is speculated that he assumed that God would not know the difference and be oblivious to his offerings. However, God did notice the difference and accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's offering. As with any siblings that are not granted the same thing, jealousy developed. Cain let his rage become anger and let it grow out of control. This led Cain to eventually murder his brother Abel. God was furious with Cain for the deed in which he had done. God made Cain aware that for the death of his brother, he was going to bestow a mark on him that was going to make the people aware of the deed that he had done. This was forever known as the mark of Cain. It is unknown what the mark of Cain was, specifically, but it has been speculated that the mark was placed on Cain's forehead [2].

Many of Hawthorne's works have many meanings that can be debated to the point where there are many possibilities. It was explained that the embroidered "A" on Hester's bosom stood for adulterer, however there is more meaning behind it. Hester had had an affair with the reverend. The affair took place before Hester was married. Therefore, it by definition was not an act of adultery on her part, but it was however a sin. They would have

not placed an “ A” for adultery on a person who wasn’t an adulterer, but rather as a form of symbolism. As mentioned above, the mark of Cain was a way to symbolize that a sin had been committed. Although the sins were not the same in severity, they were however sins.

“ Ah, but let her cover the mark as she will, the pang of it will be always in her heart [....] What do we talk of marks and brands whether on the bodice of her gown, or the flesh of her forehead (Hawthorne 49).”

The “ A” of Hester’s gown was Hawthorne’s way of placing emphasis on the mark of Cain and that “ A” rather than standing for Adultery, could have stood for something relevant to the mark, such as that of Abel. It has been speculated and debated by religious and Christian scholars that the mark, given to Cain by God, was located on Cain’s forehead. If you will note the reference above, there is a direct statement that mentions branding a persons forehead.

Hawthorne’s literature collection can be taken many ways by many different people that read his stories. This particular book bares reference to the strict by laws that governed the puritanical society that controlled and undermined the citizens of a particular region within a young United States. With this book being based off of a puritanical platform of belief, there are going to be many references to The Bible, which is the greatest book that has ever been published. Puritans were extremely grounded on the foundations of that particular book. One of the most well known stories that come forth from The Bible is the story of Adam and Eve and the original sin that they committed. Also, you will find many references to the story of Cain and Abel, the sons of

Adam and Eve, which are conflicted by jealousy, and Cain is given a mark by God for sinning on his brother. Hawthorne's characters that are featured in this particular literary work mirror those infamous characters that are featured in The Bible; characters that were well known in the community of that particular time and place in history.

Work Cited

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. New York, New York: Bantam Books, 2003. Print.