

Conflict in nathaniel hawthorne's the scarlet letter assignment

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Conflict in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* Conflict can take on many forms in one's life, such as conflict with self, with society, with religion and with others. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, develops the theme of conflict through the moral sin of Hester Prynne. Conflict is observed through Hester's difficulties with the townspeople, challenges with the Puritan way of life, struggles with herself and tensions with Roger Chillingworth. Committing sin in the Puritan society leads to a great deal of conflicts.

Conflict is first observed through Hester's ongoing difficulties with her fellow townspeople. Hester receives ridicule from on looking townspeople, as a gossiping woman states, ' " At the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead" ' (Hawthorne 45). This statement reveals that the women believe Hester's punishment is too simple and she should suffer more severe consequences. The women do not see the moral action behind Hester's sin, which initiates the conflict between the townspeople and Hester.

The conflict continues when Governor Bellingham confronts Hester about being an unfit parent as he states, ' " Were it not, thinkest thou, for thy little one's temporal and eternal welfare, that she be taken out of thy charge, and clad soberly . . . " ' (98). The Governor's main concern is about what will benefit himself. This quality is observed in his unjust treatment of Hester. He takes advantage of her seamstress skills, yet is judgmental about her parenting. This creates conflict for Hester as the Governor is unfair to her.

The issues that arise between Hester and the townspeople are simply the beginning of Hester's struggle with conflict. Conflict is seen once again when Hester struggles with the strict Puritan way of life. Hester's punishment for her committed sin is revealed when it is stated, " In Hester Prynne's instance, however, as not unfrequently in other cases, her sentence bore, that she should stand a certain time upon the platform . . ." (49). Although Hester has not done anything morally wrong, she is still punished for her actions.

Hester faces conflict with Puritan society again when she cannot use her elaborate seamstress skills to make bride veils. Although Hester is very talented she is restricted from anything that would offend the Puritan society, which becomes evident when it is stated, " But it is not recorded that, in a single instance, her skill was called in aid to embroider the white veil which was to cover the pure blushes of a bride" (73). The moral sin of Hester Prynne leads to conflict with the Puritan way of life. Hester continues to face conflict, this time with herself.

When Hester faces the reality of the unpleasant situation she is faced with, her self conflict begins. Hester's feelings are expressed when it is stated, " She clutched the child so fiercely to her breast that it sent forth a cry; she turned her eyes downward at the scarlet letter, and even touched it with her finger, to assure herself the infant and the shame were real" (52). Conflict within Hester's life continues in mothering her curious child. Pearl's curiosity is revealed when she asks, " . . . Mother dear, what does this scarlet letter mean? and why dost thou wear it on thy bosom? " (161). Hester feels the

responsibility of protecting Pearl from knowing her mother's sinful actions. The constant questioning puts Hester in a contradictory position. Mothering Pearl causes conflict a second time when Pearl is considered an outcast from other children. The children mimic the adults by treating Pearl as the adults treat Hester. Even though it is Pearl who is mocked, Hester feels the constant struggle being her mother. Although it appears that Hester's major conflicts are with others, in actuality many are within herself.

The theme of conflict is apparent as it is portrayed in a variety of situations in Hester's life. Lastly the theme of conflict is developed through Hester's struggle with Roger Chillingworth. Chillingworth wants Hester's fellow sinner to be revealed but Hester does not want to reveal his identity.

Chillingworth's interest is observed when he states, ' " Would it be beyond a philosopher's research, think ye, gentlemen, to analyze that child's nature, and from its make and mould, to give a shrewd guess at the father? " ' (103).

His curiousness generates tension between himself and Hester which intensifies Hester's conflict with Chillingworth. The ongoing conflict continues when Hester decides to return to England. She is informed by a shipmaster that Roger Chillingworth has decided to travel with her. The shipmaster states, ' " Ay, ay, you must have known it; for he tells me he is of your party and a close friend to the gentleman you spoke of . . . " ' (214). Although Hester wishes not to associate with Roger Chillingworth, he continually torments her, again creating conflict in Hester's life.

Hester's attempt to escape from the struggles within her life establishes another conflict, emphasizing the theme of conflict. Hester Prynne's moral

sin initiates conflict within her life. Hester's difficulties with the townspeople, with the Puritan religion, with herself and with Roger Chillingworth all aid in illustrating the theme of conflict. Although Hester is initially viewed as an emblem of shame, she returns to the place of her sin as a changed person as Telgen states, " Instead of being a figure of scorn and shame, she becomes a valued counselor in the community, resolving conflict, as opposed to representing it" (Telgen 319).

Conflict in Hester's life, and her committed sin brought out strength and courage in her as she could become a wise advisor. Hester's change proves that throughout life ongoing conflicts can turn around for the better. Works Cited Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc. , 1999. " *The Scarlet Letter*. " *Novels for Students*. Ed. Diane Telgen. Vol. 1. Detroit: Gale, 1997. 319.