

The discussion about hester and the shame



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The Puritans were a very devoted group of Christians in Boston. They didn't believe in things that other people believed in like music and dancing, they were especially cruel to sinners even though everyone sins which included themselves. Sin as a theme asks the question, what does sinning really mean? In "The Scarlet Letter", Nathaniel Hawthorne creates many themes and uses different symbols to format the plot of this story. The main themes that Hawthorne talks about are portrayed out through the main characters, Hester Prynne, Roger Chillingworth, Hester's husband, Pearl Hester and Dimmesdale's daughter and Arthur Dimmesdale the town's Clergyman. The main theme that Hawthorne talks about in "The Scarlet Letter" is sin and how the characters deal with the sin of adultery and their own individual sins and the effect they have on them and other people of their town in Boston. Nathaniel Hawthorne uses the symbol "A" which Hester is forced to wear by the townspeople to represent the theme of her sin in the book. It all starts when we see Hester having to go on the scaffold and stand there as for all to see her shameful sin as it is exposed.

A group of women begin to have a discussion about Hester and the shame she has brought upon them, one woman states, "At the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead. She may cover it with a brooch, or such like heathenish adornment, and so walk the streets as brave as ever" (Hawthorne 39). Hawthorne uses this statement to show that it was not enough that the people who were there knew of the sin she committed, but they wanted Hester to constantly have to wear it on herself at all times. Committing adultery is Hester's announced sin, while Hester's sin is noticeable to all, Dimmesdale's sin is hidden. The

minister hides his wrong, as he has broken the moral law by not confessing about his involvement with Hester and lets her suffer for his own doings, and the only suggestion that something is wrong in his life is the habit of him constantly putting his hand over his heart. Rodger Chillingworth, Hester's husband, an older man is also guilty of marrying a young Hester even when he knew that Hester did not love him and he was not the kind of man to make her a good husband, Hawthorne writes " Mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay.

" (Hawthorne 53). As the story goes on, we see how the Scarlet letter has become a key town. Rather than bringing torture to Hester, it slowly becomes a symbol of different meaning to others, to some the meaning becomes " able", Hawthorne goes to illustrate this as he writes, " They said that it meant ' Able' ; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength" (Hawthorne106). Hawthorne continues on to say, " The scarlet letter had not done its office." (Hawthorne 109).

This statement shows that the scarlet letter was meant as to be a punishment for Hester, and yet we see that it had not fulfilled its purpose. Throughout the story, the scarlet letter has various meanings to different characters, it becomes a sign of curiosity for Pearl, the butler interprets it as a sign of him getting wealth, it also represents the motivation for Chillingworth's revenge on the man that committed sin with Hester and also the guilt which Dimmesdale is filled with as he cannot bring himself to confess the truth about being the Father of Pearl to the people as he fears he will be judged and shamed just as Hester is. This further illustrated in the <https://assignbuster.com/the-discussion-about-hester-and-the-shame/>

article by Franny Nudelman where she goes on to state, " the ' A' anatomizes the properties of the symbol: it is interesting because it means many things at once and no one thing reliably ".

Even though the true duty was to punish Hester and to be a lesson to the people, neither of which the letter performed successfully. Hawthorne is also seen using the symbol of sunshine the hope and purity that Hester sees in Pearl. In one scene Pearl requests sunshine from Hester and she goes to say " No my little Pearl! Thou must gather thine own sunshine. I have none to give thee" (Hawthorne 70).

This is used to show that Hester even though she poses her own sunshine she doesn't share it with Pearl as it has been tainted by her sin and this makes it not pure. This is later seen again when Hester takes Pearl as they walk together in the forest when Pearl talks about the sunshine avoiding her mother when a cloud comes over her. Hawthorne writes " the sunshine does not love you.

It runs away and hides itself, because it is afraid of something on your bosom... I am but a child. It will not flee from me; for I wear nothing on my bosom yet! " (Hawthorne 119), pearl in her innocence does not realize the significance what she says but Hester understand and knows the true meaning of this. The sun tends to focus on pearl as she is deemed pure but avoids Hester in particular to her impurity. Anne W.

Abbott in the Scarlet Letter and other Writings states " But Littler Pearl? gem of the purest water? what shall we say of her?... Let the author throw what light he will upon her, from his magical prism, she retains her perfect and
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vivid human individuality.” (Hawthorne 247). Dimmesdale talks to Hester about them going to England so they can be a family, they later on decide on going and we see Hester take off the Scarlet letter as Hawthorne uses this to show that Hester no longer bound to her sin. ” O exquisite relief! She had not known the weight, until she felt the freedom!...There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood. A crimson flush was glowing on her cheek, that had been long so pale.” (Hawthorne 130).

Hester’s sin was washed away when she took off the letter and threw it to the ground and she was pure again. Hawthorne uses this to show the connection between the sunshine and the scarlet letter as he writes: And, as the gloom of the earth and sky had been but the effluence of these mortal hearts, it vanished with their sorrow. All at once, as with a sudden smile of heaven, forth burst the sunshine, pouring a very flood into the obscure forest, gladdening each green leaf, transmuting the yellow fallen ones to gold, and gleaming adown the gray trunks of the solemn trees. (Hawthorne 130) In the article Hawthorne and sin Donoghue also illustrates when Dimmesdale accepts Hester’s offer to run away to and leave the community behind to go start over where nobody would know of their sins, she writes, “ The narrator—we may call this figure Hawthorne—seems to insist that love and nature are insuperable values, that morality has nothing to say to them.

When Dimmesdale agrees to Hester’s plan...”