

The scarlet letter by nathaniel hawthorne

Literature



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The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne explores sin and atonement in various ways. The narrator likes to use contrasting ideas to create this idea of uncertainty for the reader. These contrasting concepts give the essence that there is no black and white; there is always a gray area. By doing this the narrator makes the reader think more about right and wrong. The narrator uses the idea of a gray area to show there is no right or wrong, contradicting statements to reach a higher level of thinking, and the idea that that atonement cannot be achieved without forgiving yourself first.

The narrator uses the gray area idea to prove that there is no right or wrong; there is always an in between area. One example of the gray area would be the opposing ideas in these two quotes. " Love to dwell upon; nothing in Hester's form, though majestic and statue-like, that Passion would ever dream of clasping in its embrace; nothing in Hester's bosom to make it ever again the pillow of Affection. "(158), and the quote " Thus, Hester Prynne, whose heart had lost its regular and healthy throb... now turned aside by an insurmountable precipice; now starting back from deep chasm. (160).

The first quote gives the feeling that Hester has grown so much because of the scarlet letter and is a better and more caring person then she was before. It says that she is a loving person and it has provided a pillow of affection. But the second quote states that Hester's heart decreased in size and that she has changed in a negative way because of her sin. It says that her heart is no longer normal and refers to her distance from the society.

The narrator has the power to control what the audience thinks and how they feel. By controlling the reader's feelings the narrator has a greater control of

the story, but it also allows them to develop an opinion on the character after hearing both sides of the story. By controlling the reader's feelings the narrator has a greater control of the story, but it also allows the reader to develop an opinion on the characters after hearing both sides of the story.

Most of the characters in the story committed a sin. Hester committed adultery and so did Dimmesdale, while Chillingworth was trying to get revenge on Hester and Dimmesdale for what they did to him. The narrator says things that make the audience believe that Hester's debauchery isn't that bad and that she should be forgiven. Then the narrator contradicts himself and says things that make us believe that Hester is a terrible sinner and should be punished even more.

An example of this would be, " When strangers looked curiously at the scarlet letter-and none ever failed to do so-they branded it afresh into Hester's soul; so that, oftentimes, she could scarcely refrain, yet always did refrain, from covering the symbol with her hand. "(150) And, " Such helpfulness was found in her-so much power to do and power to symbolize-that many people refused to interpret the " A" by its original signification. They said it meant " Able"; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength. (158).

The first quote shows Hester's weakness and how she is almost embarrassed of the " A". We get the feeling that Hester is being looked at this way because the town feels as if she is an alien because of her sin and should be looked at differently than everybody else. While in the second quote the narrator makes the reader feel as if she deserves another chance for

redemption because she has changed the meaning of the “ A”. The sin that she committed isn’t all that people think of her now, they see her true colors.

Hester compensates for her sin by having to wear the “ A” and also by seeing Pearl everyday who is a living reminder of her sin. Dimmesdale atoned for his sin by coming out with the secret, and it also ate him alive more and more every day. But he was also tempted to sin more. He was tempted to teach some kids cuss words, he was tantalized to do things with the young girl, and he was to provoked tell old Mrs. Hibbins that there is no after life. Chillingworth never fully atoned for his sin; he died in the end only because after Dimmesdale died his satisfaction ended because he couldn’t give him pain anymore.

But he did give Pearl all of his land, sort of as an apology for ruining her life by helping kill her father. Chillingworth was said to die because his “ patient” died as well, but it could be the idea that you cannot atone for a sin without forgiving yourself first. The narrator uses atonement to show how the lenience on what “ bad” actually is. In conclusion, the book revolves and thrives off of sin. The narrator uses sin and atonement to show the readers how the puritans lived and the rules they abided by.

The idea of the gray area is a massive and greatly important theme in the book. The gray area gives the reader’s an opinion on the situation and shows us both sides of the situation. This idea also gives the narrator all of the power to control the reader’s feelings, which the narrator uses to his advantage. So what really is considered bad and what is considered good?

The narrator gives the idea that there is no definition of right and wrong, it is all about the person's perspective.