

Analysis of the scarlet letter scaffolding scenes essay

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Three Scaffold Scenes In Hawthorn's novel The Scarlet Letter, there are three detailed scaffold scenes, each of which embody significant descriptive elements and ultimately unite the book as a whole. The three eminent elements found amongst these scenes are the four main character's physical appearances, behaviors and demeanor. Through these characters, Hawthorne suggests valid points about goodness, sin, and guilt, which are encoded in the form of symbols, signs, and events. The first scaffold scene is verbally focused upon Hester and the scarlet letter, but when dissected and viewed through an analytical lens, Hawthorne endows his audience with an amazement of other character and plot based elements.

Hester Prynne is depicted as a beautiful young woman in this scene with "dark abundant hair" and a lady-like affinity. The irony weaved within this is that people are not paying attention to her outward appearance, for they are only gathering around her to observe the scarlet letter for themselves. One of the first descriptions shortly prior to the actual scaffold scene is of the scarlet letter pinned upon Hester's bosom; it is a red "A" brilliantly embroidered by Hester herself with gold thread, thus creating a gorgeous piece of embroidery. The beauty of the scarlet letter drastically contrasts with its shameful recognition of adultery, analogous to how Hester is beautiful, yet burdened with the ownership of an ignominious affair. The "scarlet letter" is literally a symbol intended to mark Hester's sin. Through its beautiful and bold design, it is conveyed to the reader that Hester is not hiding behind denial, nor afraid to accept the branding mark of her umbilical actions, which are also blatantly represented by sin. However, goodness is also prevalent through Hester's behavior.

When Dimmesdale asked who her lover was, Hester refuses to capitulate and makes the noble decision to keep his name covert, thus sacrificing her body to wear the scarlet letter forever. It is Hester's demeanor in this scaffold scene that symbolizes her utter guilt. Hawthorne writes, " Had a roar of laughter burst from the multitude—each man, each woman, each little shrill-voiced child, contributing their individual parts—Hester Prynne might have repaid them all with a bitter and disdainful smile. But, under the leaden infliction which it was her doom to endure, she felt, at moments, as if she must needs shriek out with the full power of her lungs, and cast herself from the scaffold down upon the ground, or else go mad at once. (Hawthorne 52-53) This quote explains how Hester's guilt and frustration does threaten to exalt from within her as a cacophony of screams. However, instead of appealing to society and breaking down, she locks her broken feelings of guilt within herself and allows it to fabricate a callous demeanor. Mr.

Dimmesdale is delineated as a young man with a high set white brow leaving an apprehensive look on his face, trembling lips that he forcefully latched through his own self restraint, and large brown eyes that were described as denial slowly gnawing away at his heart. It is clearly stated that his facial expressions differ from those of Hester even though they both committed the same sin, but why? Well, Hester is considered the publicly known sinner in this scenario, thus she does not feel the same perpetual guilt that Dimmesdale does for being too cowardly to confess his sins. However, while lecturing Hester he exclaims, " If thou findest it to be for thy soul's peace, and that thy earthly punishment will thereby be made more effectual to salvation, I

charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer! (Hawthorne 62) Timescale said this hoping that Hester would be strong enough to expose the hidden sin that he could not find the courage to confess, but due to her still existing feelings for Timescale, Hester repudiates his demands. Although his attempts to publicly repent fail, there is goodness found within Damselfly's intentions.

Lastly, guilt and anguish completely compose Damselfly's demeanor in the first scaffold scene, and it is easily detected upon his face. As the main from his bitter ignominy augments within him, he clutches his heart to assuage the searing burn. During this first scaffold scene Pearl is just a small infant, but acts as a symbol of goodness, guilt, and sin. Due to the fact that she is a baby, Pearl withholds an innocence associated with goodness. However, the child is a product of sin and externally symbolizes her parent's frowned upon affair. Pearl's parents also both experience the feeling of guilt for their actions throughout this scene.

Although they brought upon the guilt by themselves, Pearl is innately the image of their regret. The last important character that is involved in these scenes is Roger Chlorinating. At this point in the novel, he is characterized as a short middle aged man with an intelligent physique and is identified by his uneven shoulders and slightly deformed figure. It is referenced multiple times that Chlorinating is comparable to the devil in both his appearance and demeanor, thus directly making him a symbol of sin. This scaffold scene is the initiative spark that ignites his obsession to find the man who has betrayed him. He makes eye contact with Hester at one point and signals her

to keep his anonymity by casting his finger over his lips. Also, Chillingworth played the part as a stranger and asked another townsman who Hester was and what she had done.

He also hollered, “ But he will be known! -he will be known! -he will be known! ”(Hawthorne 58) foreshadowing his persistent search for the man who had sinned against him. At the end of the scene, Chillingworth is caught up in a vengeful state of mind as the thought of revealing the secret sinner’s identity consumes him. The second scaffold scene’s main purpose is to exemplify Dimmesdale’s utter agony and inner struggles relating to his veiling ignominy. Hawthorne adds in a variety of symbols that seem to emphasize the guilt causing Dimmesdale to internally writhe in pain. Hester Prynne arrives to the second scaffold scene a little while after Dimmesdale had cried out in repentance. She was attired in her ordinary clothing with Pearl by her side as always.

Dimmesdale spots little Pearl and calls her and Hester over to the scaffold to join him and link hands. The “ A” is once again resurfaced when Hawthorne writes, “ And there stood the minister, with his hand over his heart; and Hester Prynne, with the embroidered letter glimmering on her bosom; and little Pearl, herself a symbol, and the connecting link between the two of them. ” (Hawthorne 144), but this time it is symbolizing goodness through the reunion on the very same scaffold that she had stood upon seven years prior with the same two significant people, but this time she is listening to Dimmesdale confess his sins. Instead. In the second scaffold scene, Dimmesdale’s health has further deteriorated since his guilt has been slowly killing him.

from the inside out. He exclaims how he wants to stand on the scaffold until the morning sun lightens the sky, but cannot because of the cold evening air irritating his arthritis and turning his throat raw. Hawthorne also describes Dimmesdale once again clutching his heart and resembling his guilt, which continues to fester inside of him and torment his soul.

A meteor shower rains above Dimmesdale, Hester, and Pearl lighting up a red “A” in the sky, which is thought to represent the death of Governor Winthrop by all the townspeople, but Dimmesdale is acute enough to know better than to believe that. He knows very well that the red “A” was displayed to resemble his silent, yet bold repentance of his sin. Although Dimmesdale makes progress towards repentance in this scene, when Pearl asks him to join her and Hester upon the scaffold publicly, Dimmesdale declines and tells her to wait until Judgment day. This is another exemplification of Dimmesdale’s weakened morals and symbolizes his sin in the manner of which it is too powerful for him to dominate. Dimmesdale sustains his melancholy and ill demeanor for the most part throughout this scene, but there is a slight aberration within him which he should be commended for; this was the first time he had ever truly confessed to his sins. Dimmesdale says himself, “I have both men here before, but I was not with you. Come up hither once again, and we will stand all three together!” meaning that when he stood on the scaffold the first time he was not there to support Hester and little Pearl, but this time he wants to stand with them in union. Although there were only a few people present to hear him boast in his weakness, he still stood upon the scaffold

and spoke about his most wretched sin symbolizing a miniscule step in the direction of goodness.

Pearl is significantly older in the second scaffold scene than she was in the first. At this point in the book, he has aged into a beautiful young child and strongly resembles her mother's scarlet letter. Her innocence has eroded away and she is viewed through many strong allegorical lenses; her mother refers to her as a "living hieroglyphic" in the manner that Pearl constantly reminds Hester and Timescale of their sin.

Society sees Pearl as the "devil's work" since they perceive she was only made out of sin and not derived from the glory of God. While Timescale is holding Pearl's hand, she asks him to stand with Hester and her in front of the whole town on the scaffold, and Nee he declines she tries to pull her hand away. This small gesture is another action that indicates Pearl's refusal to accept Timescale until he admits he is her father to the public. Pearl maintains her usual clever and "elfish" demeanor during this scene symbolizing an untamable freedom that is unfathomable to the orthodox Puritan colony. Hawthorne uses the meteor in the second scaffold scene to enhance the hideous features of Chlorinating.

It is interesting how the light from the meteor that formed the scarlet "A" in the sky made his unappealing appearance intensified because it is analogous to Clownishness's relationship with the scarlet letter; the ensue of betrayal and sin that the scarlet letter has shed upon Chlorinating has Changed him into a fiend and ugly old man consumed by the need to have a victim. Evil

such as when Hawthorne writes, “ Certainly, if the meteor up the sky, and disclosed the earth, with an awfulness that admonished Hester Prynne and the clergyman of the day of Judgment, then might Roger Chillingworth have passed with them for the arch-fiend, standing there, with a smile and scowl, to claim his own. ” (Hawthorne 145) This excerpt undeviatingly makes a connection between Chillingworth and sin as the devil is perhaps the most symbolic reference to sin and evil.

Also, Chillingworth witnesses Dimmesdale, Hester, and Pearl’s reunion under the cloak of darkness, which confirms his suspicions of Dimmesdale being Hester’s mutual sinner and escalates his revenge. When Chillingworth is finally discerned by Pearl, he acts as if he has simply come to bring Dimmesdale back to their house, contributing to his cunning and deceitful demeanor. Once again, Chillingworth has distinguished himself as a man living out of betrayal and malevolence. The third and final scaffold scene illustrates Dimmesdale’s full repentance of his sin, thus casting Change upon all of the main characters.

Through his repentance Dimmesdale salvages his soul from the guilt, ameliorates Hester of her burden, unites Pearl to her humanity, and rids Chillingworth of his victim. Over the course of the seven years between the first and third scaffold scene, Hester’s appearance drastically changes. In the beginning of the book, she is illustrated as a beautiful young woman, but through the years her beauty has essentially vanished along with all of her qualities of femininity. Previous to the third scaffold scene, Hawthorne states, “ If she survive, the tenderness will either be crushed out of her, or? and the outward semblance is the same? crushed so deeply into her heart

that it can never show itself more. “(Hawthorne 152) Hester homely physical appearance at the third scaffold scene resembles her loss of tenderness due to her years spent living in sin. After Dimmesdale makes his public confession, Hester gingerly holds his head and asks him if they will spend eternity together now that they have endured the suffering for their sins. Dimmesdale replies that God knows what they have done and had blessed them both with the torture to help navigate their way to repentance, but they would not spend eternity together in heaven. This is resembled years later when Hester is buried near Dimmesdale, but instead of sharing a grave, they only share a tombstone.

This is comparable to that fact that Hester and Dimmesdale are both in heaven, but are not there as a united pair, thus exemplifying that even after her sin is forgiven Hester is forever forced to face the consequences. Hester's demeanor after this scene changes as her dream of being with Dimmesdale becomes utterly impossible for her to fulfill. This unfortunate fate is an honest representation of God's eternal punishment towards sin. Years after Hester's disappearance from the Puritan colony, she returns to her previous position as the isolated sinner and reclaims her ownership to the scarlet letter by wearing it on her bosom once again. This represents her reluctance to let her sin go because woven within the caustic strands of her wrongdoings laid her only connection to her true love. Dimmesdale is the main focus of this particular scene as his self-acceptance towards his sin seems to progress in the right direction through each scaffold scene. In the third scaffold scene, Dimmesdale's physical appearance is described, “ The glow,

which they had just before beheld burning on his cheek, was extinguished, like a flame that sinks defining him as a man on his death bed. This description demonstrates the severe destruction that guilt can cause a person over time if the penance is not fully endured.

As if a very popular figure standing on a scaffold in a crowd of people is not captivating enough, it is said that the sun shone down upon him and illuminated his fugue, setting him apart from the rest of the scenery. Also, Hawthorne includes a part in this scene when Timescale rips open his shirt to reveal a scarlet letter similar to Hester, but permanently carved into his skin. Timescale heroically states while speaking about himself, “ He tells you, that, with all its mysterious horror, it is but the shadow of what he bears on his own breast, and that even this, his own red stigma, is no more than the type of what has seared his inmost heart! “(Hawthorne 240) Through saying this, Timescale insists that Hester scarlet letter is nothing but a shadow of his own sin, therefore fully admitting to his breach in the commandments of God. This symbolizes goodness, as Timescale has finally taken some of the public burden off Hester shoulders. Although Timescale is anally ridden from his sin, he dies immediately after his repentance from the massive amounts of damage that had been caused over the past seven years. Timescale dies with a righteous demeanor once he had come to the conclusion that all of his suffering was a blessing from God because it has brought him to repentance, thus saving his soul.

Through his last words, Timescale represented oddness as he conveyed to the townspeople that God does not see different degrees of sin, but sees

everyone as sinners in need of his salvation. Although Pearl's hysterical appearance does not change during the small time increment between the second and third scaffold scenes, her personality transforms as she finally finds humanity within herself. Before this scene, Pearl had been living her life simply to torture her parents, while obsessing over the idea of surfacing the truth. Pearl makes significant change after Dimmesdale repents and confesses his sin. Hawthorne "rites," "The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor for ever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it. (Hawthorne 240) suggesting that Pearl has finally accepted Dimmesdale as her earthly father, which liberates herself of her 'elfish' qualities and allows her to develop a more sensitive demeanor and the humanistic trait of sympathy. Once described as a direct product of sin, Pearl is now portrayed as a human capable of living a pure life and symbolizes the journey from a state of sin to goodness. After Dimmesdale falls to the ground while standing on the scaffold, it is said that, 'Old Roger Dimmesdale kneeled down next to him, his face blank and dull, as though the life had drained out of it.

(Hawthorne 240) Directly after Dimmesdale kneeled down next to Dimmesdale, he screams, "My wife has escaped me!" (Hawthorne 240) multiple times meaning that Dimmesdale has escaped playing the role of Dimmesdale's victim. This also foreshadows Dimmesdale's death that occurs soon after Dimmesdale dies. It turns out that Dimmesdale's only reason to live anymore was to victimize Dimmesdale and relentlessly torture him, resembling sin in the

most basic manner. When Timescale dies, so does Clownishness's purpose of life; as he goes up onto the scaffold, Chillingworth practically begs him to stay silent and claims that he can still save Timescale. The apprehension in Clownishness's actions and the expressions that are illustrated upon his face leaves Chillingworth with a defeated demeanor. It goes without explanation that Hawthorne purposely made the three scaffold scenes the most prominent and dramatic chapters in *The Scarlet Letter*, but they also unite the entire book together in more than one fashion. The most blatantly clear tactic that Hawthorne uses to unite the novel is that he incorporates each of the four main characters into all three scaffold scenes. This is beneficial to the novel because it allows Hawthorne to verbally illustrate dramatic scenes that pertain to each character individually.

Also, Hawthorne uses the time in between the scaffold scenes to allow the effects of goodness, sin, and guilt to seep into the characters and bring about change. Hawthorne used Hester to symbolize sin and the tragic circumstances that can occur even after repentance, just like he used Timescale to symbolize the effects of hidden guilt throughout each scaffold scene, Pearl to symbolize the scarlet letter itself and the goodness of finding humanity, and Chillingworth to symbolize intentional sin and the devil. Also, the scaffold scenes unite the book because Hawthorne can place all four main characters into the same situation, yet have them each play a different role, thus each character is affected in a diverse, but related way. Lastly, Hawthorne unites the book through the scaffold scenes by showing

Damselfly's progression towards repentance, and by correlating his health status to the amount of time that his soul had been eroded by guilt.

Throughout the entire book, Timescale was battling with his lack of courage towards repentance, but the only times he made progress was while he was at the scaffold.