

In mid-nineteenth century american literary fiction, characters often face the id...

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The Idea of a “ Wall” that Human Beings Place between Themselves and Others The mid nineteenth century in America was plagued by many vices that tore the society apart, these include slavery and adultery. These vices sometimes served as walls that alienated people from others, and literary authors sort to display these symbolic and literal walls through their various works.

Characters in American literary fiction of the mid nineteenth century are faced with the idea of a “ wall” placed between themselves and others. We, however, that these wall are not only literal, but symbolic as well. In Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Roderick Usher is depicted as a wealthy man, living in a huge mansion, with high walls. These high walls separate Roderick from his neighbors, who are envious of him and his family (VanSpanckeren, K. p. 93). Moreover, we note that Roderick is, and has been excessively, reserved since childhood having grown up around temperamental adults. Roderick’s reserved nature discouraged friendship, thus when he is taken ill; nobody was around to help him. We note that the symbolic wall Roderick built around himself served to protect him from outsiders such as the temperamental adults in his childhood. Furthermore, we note that the idea of Roderick separating himself from his sister by burying her alive in a tomb also illustrates his desire for solitude.

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, further portrays the various kinds of walls put up by people in the community to distance themselves from the rest. Hester is accused of adultery and is mandated to wear the letter A on her gowns. The letter symbolizes her moral condition, and acceptance of the title put on her by the community. However, Hester’s adulterous behavior

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leads to her imprisonment; the aspect of her being hidden away behind the walls of a prison symbolizes her excommunication from the community and the contempt felt towards her. We also note that Dimmesdale's guilty conscience for being Hester's accomplice leads his withdrawal from the society. He puts up a symbolic wall that shields him from others, but this does not diminish his guilt so he opts to confess. Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* regards himself as an outsider as he symbolically refers to himself as an orphan. He alienates himself from his fellow mankind when he goes to sea. Ahab, on the other hand, refers to his wife as "girl-wife" and his son by these titles symbolizing the symbolic wall between him and his family as most of his life is spent at sea (VanSpanckeren, K. p. 75).

In conclusion, we realize that the symbolic walls people put construct around themselves serve to alienate them from other people. These walls are constructed by some to protect themselves from the rest, while in others; these walls portray their reserved personalities.

Work cited

VanSpanckeren, K. *Outline of American Literature*. United States Information Agency, 1998.

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