

Plant imagery throughout the scarlet letter

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Honors American Lit. BThe Scarlet LetterPathway Paper - 694 wordsApril 23, 2013 Throughout The Scarlet Letter Nathaniel Hawthorne uses vegetation imagery in correlation with his ideas about sinful nature and god. When describing the prison in the very beginning of the novel, Hawthorne writes, “ a grass-plot, much overgrown with... such unsightly vegetation, which evidently found something congenial in the soil that had so early borne the black flower of civilized society, a prison” (45-46).

Hawthorne uses the imagery of a black flower to depict the sinful nature of humans as it was inevitable that even in this new flourishing society the people there saw the need to build a prison. This vivid image also relates to the Puritan’s harsh view on sin in the community. Throughout the novel Hawthorne frequently criticizes the Puritan society, this being another example, “ but the proprietor appeared already to have relinquished, as hopeless, the effort to perpetuate on this side of the Atlantic, in a hard soil and amid the close struggle for subsistence, the native English taste for ornamental gardening” (97).

The description of the Governor’s ornamental garden shows the garden failing, as if the person caring for it had given up and realized that it was impossible to have the ornamental garden in Boston the way it was in England. This parallels Hawthorne’s beliefs about Puritan society in that their abstruse beliefs would not sustain in the new world they were creating, for god is depicted through nature demonstrating how Hawthorne feels god is looking down on the materialistic and frivolous ways of the Puritans.

Later in the novel Chillingworth says, “ wherefore not, since all the powers of nature call so earnestly for the confession of sin, that these black weeds

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have sprung up out of a buried heart, to make manifest an unspoken crime? " (119). Nature is being associated with god in this passage therefore Hawthorne is saying that god calls for the confession of sin and goes on to say that god disapproves of a person that does not confess, thus the black weeds, mirroring sin, grow on the graves of those who cling to secrets.

This idea is also repeated later in the novel, " and all this time, perchance, when poor Mr. Dimmesdale was thinking of his grave, he questioned with himself whether the grass would ever grow on it, because an accursed thing must there be buried! " (130). Sin is again depicted as lifelessness in this passage, for Dimmesdale has sinned, and not confessed; therefore he is concerned that god will reject him. Hawthorne clearly writes with a style of dark romanticism epitomized through his description of sin in the beginning of the novel as inexorable in every society.

Hawthorne also reflects his religious views and those of his times period in the way he sees god and nature as one, similar to the ideas of Pantheism, a belief in the manifestation of god through nature. Hawthorne frequently links god to nature as seen when Hester calls to nature, as if calling to god, for forgiveness, "'Thou shalt forgive me!' cried Hester, flinging herself on the fallen leaves beside him" (175). While nature symbolizes sin, it also symbolizes the comforting and forgiving appearance of god.

In relation to the bible, "...the yellow leaves will show no vestige of the white man's tread" (178), the yellow leaves reference the scripture Isaiah 43: 25, which reads, " I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more" displaying the tie between nature and god both covering and forgetting sins; also tying into Hawthorne's <https://assignbuster.com/plant-imagery-throughout-the-scarlet-letter/>

religious perspective in his writing. Nathaniel Hawthorne articulates his views on sin and god through his use of vegetation imagery throughout the scarlet letter; he continually uses dead and “ black” imagery to allude to sin and secrets.

His use of dead vegetation implies that he believes confession is the relief of the burden of sin and the necessary action to obtain god’s approval and forgiveness. Hawthorne also represents god’s forgiveness through plant imagery; connecting god’s washing away of sin to the forest and nature washing away of sin. Fundamentally Hawthorne uses vegetation to convey his ideas on divinity and human sinful nature in *The Scarlet Letter*.