

# Lucas 1

Literature, Russian Literature



Lucas 1 Chris F. Lucas Dr. Coleman English 3 Honors 5 October 2012 The Scarlet Letter In The Scarlet Letter, the author Nathaniel Hawthorne utilizes the minor characters Pearl Prynne and Roger Chillingworth to provoke the major characters in the novel, as well as to further portray existent themes and ideas developing through other parts of the story. Throughout the course of the novel, Pearl's persistent fixation on the scarlet letter " A" embroidered on Hester's chest acts as a constant reminder for Hester of her committed sin and reveals deeper emotions within Hester. Unintentionally, Pearl continues to draw Hester's attention to her letter through her words and her actions. Even as a baby " the first object of which Pearl seemed to become aware was . . . the scarlet letter in Hester's bosom" and would "[put] up her little hand [and grasp] it, smiling"(85-86). Of course Pearl is not aware of the significance of the letter, however the key purpose of Pearl's obsession with the mark is demonstrated through Hester's reaction. She would " clutch the fatal token . . . ; [for] so infinite was the torture inflicted by the intelligent touch of Pearl's baby hand" (86). Pearl's actions towards the scarlet letter catalyze her mother's emotions, thus bringing out deeper reactions in Hester. Another example is when Pearl " amused herself with gathering handfuls of wild-flowers and flinging them . . . at her mother's bosom, Lucas 2 dancing up and down . . . whenever she hit the scarlet letter"(86). Again, Hawthorne is using Pearl and her actions to guide Hester's attention back to her bosom, to evoke a response from Hester. While Hester's " first motion had been to cover her bosom with her clasped hands . . . she resisted the impulse, and sat erect, pale as death, looking sadly into little Pearl's wild eyes" (86). Hawthorne uses such a benign and innocent

character to force Hester to emotionally delve into her sin and to expose heavy feelings found inside her. Although many characters coerce Hester into bearing her punishment, Pearl's case is significantly unique because Hawthorne writes Pearl to come from a loving and benevolent place as opposed to the hypocrisy and ridicule of the townspeople. Additionally, Pearl, being Hester's daughter, is the physical embodiment of Hester's adultery, which is a crucial point of Hawthorne's usage of Pearl in the novel. Aside from her actions, Pearl also draws Hester to her letter with her words. Pearl inquisitively tells her mother "the sunshine does not love [her]. It runs away and hides itself, because it is afraid of something on [her] bosom"(166). Pearl does not understand the purpose of the symbol or the meaning of her words, yet recognizes their importance, and thus profoundly reminds Hester of her sin. Hawthorne uses Pearl's naïve intelligence to expose Hester's sin and guide her attention to the mark that inhabits her bosom, in order to uncover Hester's emotions and reactions, which ultimately shapes Hester into a more dynamic character. Like Pearl, Roger Chillingworth's purpose in *The Scarlet Letter* is to provoke the principle character Arthur Dimmesdale, and to cause him as much pain and Lucas 3 torture as possible, but also to hint at relevant issues emerging in the book. Hawthorne describes, "his interference . . . with [Dimmesdale's] physical and spiritual infirmities" as "bad opportunities [that have] been turned to a cruel purpose" (175). Nathaniel Hawthorne uses Chillingworth to expose Dimmesdale's hidden pain and his mental and spiritual agony. Chillingworth, "a mortal man, with once a human heart, [who] has become a fiend for [Dimmesdale's] especial torment" targets Dimmesdale to inflict pain and suffering on him for his sins. Hawthorne uses

Chillingworth's obsessive persona towards Dimmesdale, in the same way he uses Pearl's obsession with the Scarlet Letter, in order to heighten the emotional atmosphere of the major characters. Chillingworth becomes so fixated on Dimmesdale's pain that once he reveals his sin, Chillingworth has no reason to live and "all his strength and energy- all his vital and intellectual force- seemed at once to desert him . . . that . . . he withered up, and shriveled away, and . . . vanished" (237). Hawthorne writes Chillingworth to be such a hideous character consistently throughout the novel, so that at the end of the story when "he bequeath[s] a very considerable amount of property . . . to little Pearl" (237) it emphasizes some of the same ideas found in Hester's predicament. Just as Hester was relieved of her crime from the townspeople, Hawthorne uses Chillingworth to mirror this issue of redemption from sin. Hawthorne uses Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter* to demonstrate a pure corruption and evilness, not found in other characters, to provoke Dimmesdale, and to parallel Chillingworth's personality and actions to that of Hester's, the main focus of the novel. Lucas 4 Hawthorne uses Pearl and Roger Chillingworth in his novel to heighten the effectiveness of his major characters and to strengthen their emotions, as well as to clearly emphasize protruding themes and ideas of *The Scarlet Letter* discussing revenge, sin, and ultimate redemption.