

The effects of sin on hester in the scarlet letter

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The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne shows the effects of sin on a person's heart and mind, and how a person's undoing may be caused by hidden guilt and fragility of human nature. The Puritans traveled from Europe to the new world to escape religious victimization and they arrived in America with plans of creating a new society being built on the ideology of a so called religious freedom. The Scarlet Letter shows the different pieces of the Puritan society such as the religion in general, the community as a whole, and punishment, and it also shows the moral and psychological aspects of life.

The novel depicts the consequences of sin on the individual.

“ The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison.” (pg 45) As shown in the passage the first things that the Puritan community built were a cemetery and a prison. This suggests that the Puritan community has a rather demoralized view of all people, that people are either perfectly good, or are sinners and not pure and must be punished. There is no inbetween. They have a small amount of faith in the goodness of people and believe it to be their duty to punish those who differ from Puritan ideology.

Throughout the novel, we slowly realize that Arthur Dimmesdale is the one with whom Hester Prynne committed adultery. Hester is publicly shamed and condemned, but Dimmesdale hides his guilt inside. Like the church,

Dimmesdale's is all good and pious to the public and inwardly he is corrupt and full of sin.

By portraying Dimmesdale in this way, Hawthorne is showing his criticism of organized religion. As a man of God, Dimmesdale is seen as the most holy, trustworthy and credible person in the entire Puritan community. Puritan society was sought to be a judge free utopian society to do away with the old English religious traditions. Dimmesdale was sought out to be holy, and was trusted as a perfect being yet he was a sinner.

Hester Prynne is convicted of adultery, sentenced to prison, and required to wear a scarlet "A" on her chest for the rest of her life to remind her and the community of her trespasses. Reverend Dimmesdale hides his participation in the adultery and his wrong doings "addressed to the multitude a discourse on sin, in all its branches." Dimmesdale much like the Puritans is hypocritical. Dimmesdale hides his sin while putting on the facade of a most righteous and godly man. The Puritans came to the new world in search of religious freedom yet they imposed harsh rules and severe punishment upon those who broke those rules and upon those who did not follow their beliefs.

"What do we talk of marks and brands, whether on the bodice of her gown or the flesh of her forehead?" cried another female, the ugliest as well as the most pitiless of these self-constituted judges. "This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die; Is there not law for it? Truly there is, both in the Scripture and the statute book. Then let the magistrates, who have made it of no effect, thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray." This suggests that the Puritan community is about constantly

being pure and sinless and must punish those who have sinned to keep the community pure. Normally adultery would not end in capital punishment but some puritans in the community do decide that capital punishment is justified due to adultery. The Puritans aren't satisfied enough with just "" marks and brands"", they want death. " This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die; Is there not law for it?" Truly there is, both in their religious belief and the statute book. So She believe that the puritan law ' can' kill hester for adultery. Also ' brought shame' suggests that looking good is a higher priority in the puritan community.

Arthur Dimmesdale's secret (his adultery) is literally sucking the life out of him. "...with every successive Sabbath, his cheek was paler and thinner, and his voice more tremulous than before,-when has it now become a constant habit , rather than a casual gesture to press his hand over his heart?" (p111). He retreats to his study and rarely goes outside and his only real companion is Roger Chillingworth.

When Hester and Dimmesdale speak in the forest and decide to return to the old world to start anew, his spirit is lightened. Dimmesdale plans to confess his sins on the inauguration and quit the church. The thought of making his sins public frees him. In his mind.

When Dimmesdale finally confesses his adulterous sin on the scaffold, the community is dumbfounded. The crowd was in a tumult. The men of rank and dignity who stood more immediately around the clergyman, were so taken by surprise, and so perplexed as to the purport of what they saw,

unable to receive the explanation which most readily presented itself..." (pg 226)

The puritan community views their religion as being of utmost importance, and by extension, the physical beings of the church in Boston. When Dimmesdale is standing upon the scaffold professing his 'sin' to the world, the people are unable to comprehend what is occurring. They openly deny that it could be possible for a reverend to be the adulterer, a sinner, because they it simply cannot be true in their minds." As a result of not being able to be rid of his sin, Dimmesdale succumbs.

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne shows the effects of sin on the heart and minds, how a person's downfall may be caused by hidden guilt and fragility of human nature. The Puritans traveled from Europe to the new world to escape religious persecution and they arrived in America with ideas of creating a new society to be built on the ideology of religious freedom. The Scarlet Letter shows the different layers of the Puritan society for example, the religion in general, the community, and punishment, and it also shows the moral and psychological aspects of life. The novel depicts the consequences of sin on the individual.