

The scarlet letter: passage explication

Literature, Russian Literature



In this passage Dimmesdale is speaking about Pearl standing on the other side of the stream refusing to go to him and Hester. The contrast between Pearl standing on the opposite side as them parallels the contrast in their lives. Hester, now not wearing the scarlet letter, and Dimmesdale are concealing their relationship and their sin in the forest, representing a world of secrecy. Pearl, however, is representing a world of truth by refusing to join them until Hester once again wears the 'A', which throughout the book has been Hester's truth.

The two separate worlds that they're a part of cannot come together until they change; Dimmesdale wants Pearl to be the one to change by joining them in their new plan to escape to Europe and by joining them in their lie. Pearl however refuses to be with them until they join her in her truth. This is exemplified by Pearl not going to her mother until she wears the 'A' and by Pearl rejecting Dimmesdale. Pearl washes off Dimmesdale's kiss after he once again refuses to hold their hands in public, showing yet again how much she rejects dishonesty.

Dimmesdale refers to Pearl as an elf which is defined as, "one of a class of preternatural beings, especially from mountainous regions, with magical powers, given to capricious and often mischievous interference in human affairs, and usually imagined to be a diminutive being in human form". This parallels to Pearl's character very well because she is very capricious, her mood often changes very quickly and she can be really unpredictable also throughout the book she seems to be meddling in the affairs of Dimmesdale and Hester by not allowing them to live in secrecy.

When Dimmesdale says Hester can never meet Pearl again it shows a strong divide between Hester and Pearl as Pearl is still very innocent and pure while her mother is conveyed as a sinner, similar to the way Christians in the bible view sin as a wall between a person and God. Hawthorne says later in the chapter that the separation was the fault of Hester not the fault of Pearl meaning that it was because of Hester's transgression that the divide happened not because of anything Pearl did. This shows that Hawthorne believes that sin separates people and that doing something wrong to a person can damage the relationship.

This moment shows how Dimmesdale doesn't want to tell the truth; he wants to be in a loving relationship with Hester but doesn't want to deal with the sin that they shared. At the moment Hester is carrying the full load of their punishment while Dimmesdale claims he is suffering however he has not had to face the scrutiny of the town the way Hester has. Dimmesdale is asking Pearl to join him in his deceitfulness however she is doing what her mother is not doing by refusing to love and accept Dimmesdale until he reveals his truth and has to deal with the punishment that Hester had to deal with.

Overall Hawthorne uses this quote as imagery of the brook and a simile of the separation of the worlds of sin and truth and also uses this to characterize Dimmesdale as a dishonest person. "“ I have a strange fancy,' observed the sensitive minister, ' that this brook is the boundary between two worlds, and that thou canst never meet thy Pearl again. Or is she an elfish spirit, who, as the legends of our childhoodtaught us, is forbidden to cross a running stream? Pray hasten her; for this delay has already imparted a tremor to my nerves. ’” (pg. 188)