

Savanna Klem-TSL OCE

by Savanna Klem

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AP Language

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The Scarlet Letter Out-of-Class Essay: Option 4C

The Scarlet Letter is a novel, that, in its essence, has a heavy value placed on the interpretation of the reader. Throughout, the audience is left to come up with their own opinions of the characters, and the basic idea of who is right and ~~who's~~ wrong. Even as the story concludes, Hawthorne himself makes it clear that "the reader may choose among these theories" (Hawthorne 242) on the basis of what they have come to believe. With this variation in interpretation, naturally, there will be some discrepancies in what the true theme of the book can be narrowed down to. Although there can be many viewpoints, such as the idea of permanent sin and the internal effect of sin vs the external, the one that best connects the vital elements of the book and draws their meanings together is the idea that Hester and Dimmesdale's sin of adultery isn't the true sin present in the novel. The true sin is, instead, that of concealment, and a sin against the soul and oneself. This is presented in the difference of the development of Hester vs the development seen in Dimmesdale, who shared Hester's adulterous sin.

To truly understand the moral of this story, the effect of each of the character's sins within themselves must be truly understood. The main and most obvious sin, of course is Hester's accepted sin of her adultery. This, at face value, seems to be the most important and

most damaging sin, as it warrants the greatest response from those around her. At her presentation, her fellow Puritan women spout nasty threats and curses claiming, “they should have put a brand of hot iron on [her] forehead” to highlight the scarlet cast of horror this action should leave on her soul. She is impure, unclean, and should be outcast, if not even put to death. However, as the story progresses, the audience can see how much the sin itself doesn’t affect her.

3 takes her punishment courageously, proving they can’t define her and mark her for the rest of her life based off of a mistake she made in her past. The letter **A** is made to wear, emblazoned on her chest, becomes less of a “mark of the beast”, if you will, and becomes known to represent her “power to do, and power to sympathize” (150). This changes the perceived meaning of the adulterous A to one that represents Able and her strength. She is able to rise above the stigma that has been placed on her, proving this sin of adultery as, really, insignificant. The same can’t be said, however, for the other main characters that have sinned.

Dimmesdale, a man who shares Hester’s crime of adultery, finds that his sin draws a different fate for him. This sin, however, is not the expected sin of adultery, it is the fact that he chooses to hide it, denying a part of himself, and lying to all of those around him. It begins to physically deteriorate his existence as, “the poison of one morbid spot...[was] infecting his heart’s entire substance” (131). Hearing all the people around him claiming that he is this pure connection to God, an icon for the society, while knowing in his heart the truth of the matter, breaks him. He believes a “ruined soul, like [his, can’t] effect...the redemption of other souls” (180). Furthermore, by claiming “Happy are you...that wear the scarlet letter openly upon your bosom” (180) showing that even he understands to release this truth into the world does the soul

good. The constant reminder by both his congregation as well as Chillingworth, who reopens the wound any chance he has, serves to show that his obstruction of the truth is the true fault.



Even today, this essential idea can be seen. Not just with the specific example of adultery, but with any sin or crime a person might commit. Most times that lie will eat the person alive. Letting that sin be known and addressed, even if a punishment is received, is seen as the superior choice. Even in the simple case of a child, they will always make mistakes, sins of their own measure, but feel compelled to tell the truth. Imagine a young child, hiding from a mother, angry at a masterpiece she found splayed across her pristine wall. Nine times out of ten, any confrontation will end with the child breaking down crying, unable to lie about what they did. Or they will see their sibling blamed for their act, and it compels them to truth, knowing it should be on them. Once they accept that chastisement they can go back to playing and jumping, free of that guilt and better off, despite having received the original punishment. The kid, however, who rejects the responsibility, will have that falsity hanging over their head. A concept that can be seen in a child, the purest form of humanity, as well as Hawthorne's story, can surely be identified as a splendidly important one.

This, of course, can be tied back into the story. Only for the Puritan members of Boston, their painting is a child, a product of a crime against God. Hester accepts her sin, takes her punishment, and ultimately makes good use of her time in the town. She establishes her business of embroidery, and helps out those in the community that she can despite how even "the bitter-hearted pauper [would throw] back a gibe" (149) when she would offer her bread. Dimmesdale hides his sin, and is ultimately affected to a point where he is physically deteriorating. However,

once he is able to accept what he adultery and stop lying to the world around him, he is able to die peacefully. This just truly goes to show the effect that the concealment and sin against oneself can have, despite the outward assumption that the harshly punished sin of adultery is worse.



Bibliography

Hawthorne, Nathaniel, Nancy Stade, and George Stade. *The Scarlet Letter*. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003. Print.

FINAL GRADE

/50

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

PAGE 1



Comment 1

try to stay away from contractions when possible



Comment 2

this is a very strong, academic introduction

nice start here

QM

WC

Word choice error:

Sometimes choosing the correct word to express exactly what you have to say is very difficult to do. Word choice errors can be the result of not paying attention to the word or trying too hard to come up with a fancier word when a simple one is appropriate. A thesaurus can be a handy tool when you're trying to find a word that's similar to, but more accurate than, the one you're looking up. However, it can often introduce more problems if you use a word thinking it has exactly the same meaning.



Prep. You may be using the wrong preposition.

QM

WC

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PAGE 2



Article Error You may need to use an article before this word. Consider using the article **a**.



Comment 3

boom...good stuff here...



Word Error Did you type "**the**" instead of "**they**," or have you left out a word?



Missing "," You may need to place a comma after this word.

PAGE 3



Comment 4

good job, absolutely



Missing ","

Missing comma:

Though it may not always be grammatically necessary, a comma can often help to prevent a misreading. When a sentence opens with an introductory element (a phrase, clause or word that is logically related to another phrase or clause in the same sentence), it is a great help to your reader to place a comma after that introductory element. Such phrases will often begin with words like "because," "while" or "although," as in the following example: "While everyone was fighting, the bear wandered away." As you can see, without the comma, the sentence would be confusing.

PAGE 4



Proofread This part of the sentence contains a grammatical error or misspelled word that makes your meaning unclear.



Comment 5

this is a great job with this paper. you have maintained a strong academic tone throughout, produced an intelligent analysis, and have found a way to connect it to the things that we may experience today.

Great job

PAGE 5
