Among Sin Essay, Research Paper

Sin is defined in Webster?s New World Dictionary as, ?any offense, fault, or the willful breaking of religious or moral law.? Mankind is prone to some degree of sin: it is a barrier that can not be avoided. But it is a question as to what mankind can do in order to achieve redemption from sinister ways, and also how to redeem. However great a sin may seem, it can only augment itself by the perpetrator not owning up and taking responsibility for it. In the book The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne, perhaps the greatest sinner was Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale.

Many of Hawthorne’s works center around what is right or wrong, and the consequences of breaking the basic links between humans by committing acts of sin (Brown). In this book, Reverend Dimmesdale is Hester Prynne?s secret lover, with whom he shares his sin, the sin of adultery. It is ironic that dispite Dimmesdale?s profession, he commits this sin. For a great amount of time in this book, author Nathaniel Hawthorne shows how this sin is frowned upon by many of the townspeople.

Arthur Dimmesdale is an eminent minister in Boston and also the father of Pearl. He is a tortured man who constantly places his hand over his heart when agitated. His health is quite bad, and it is thanks to Roger Chillingworth’s potions that he is able to stay alive. Dimmesdale admits to being Pearl’s father at the very end of the novel, and reveals that he has a scarlet letter branded into his flesh. He dies upon the scaffold while holding Hester’s hand.

For seven long years, Mr. Dimmesdale lacks the courage to admit his guilt publicly, which puts a tight clamp on his conscience and soul. His sin is prolonged inside of him, festering in every corner of his body and plaguing in his mind.

While Hester is standing on the scaffold with Pearl bearing the scarlet letter on her chest letting everyone know of her sin, she refuses to let the crowd know who the father of her child is. She declares, ?I will not speak! And my child must seek a heavenly father; she shall never know an earthly one!? (Hawthorne 47). In this is same scene, the author connects Hester’s openly displayed shame with Dimmesdale’s secret shame by having both characters touch the spot where the scarlet letter is displayed (Smith). He also feels that, ?what he and Hester did was indeed wicked, and so suffers from increasing self-hatred, mental anguish, and despair? (Characters).

Because Dimmesdale is feeling this way, naturally his emotions emerge, from the inside, out. From knowing the truth and keeping it bottled up inside, he lets them emerge while he is preaching.

Mr. Dimmesdale is so intensely overwhelmed with shame and remorse that he is feeling; he has started to become well known for his sermons. His ability to speak as a preacher is enhanced by the fact that he feels far more sinful than many sinners do in his audience. At times, Dimmesdale has even tried to tell his congregation about the sin he committed with Miss Prynne, however he does it always in such a way that they are led to believe that he is being modest. This in turn causes the reverend even more anguish, for he believes that he is also lying to his people. (Smith)

Hawthorne lets us know that Dimmesdale has attempted to reveal his sin to his congregation. However, each time he is unable to succeed because his followers fail to realize that what he is saying is true. Instead, his reputation is so high that many believe he is merely being humble.

It is ironic that a religious figure such as Dimmesdale is speaking from experience, his sin, for men such as he are primarily regarded as wholesome, pure, and free of any kind of sin.

As Hester is above the townspeople on a scaffold, Dimmesdale, Governor Wilson, and others are still above her. But, as us, the readers soon discover, Reverend Dimmesdale is his own worst enemy. He hates himself and must physically inflict pain upon himself. (Chuck III) “He thus typified the constant introspection wherewith he tortured, but could not purify, himself” (Hawthorne 141).

To Dimmesdale, it is unfavorable that Hester is shown publicly as a sinner, but people tend to overlook that. Dimmesdale’s own cruel inner shame is far worse than any public shame. Knowing what only he and Hester know, the secret eats away at every fiber of Dimmesdale’s being. As the Puritans hold up Dimmesdale, the Romantics level him as a human.

Moreover, it is not only to Reverend Dimmesdale?s audience that questions arise. Even little Pearl she has questions that come to her. As time goes on and as Pearl gets older, she begins to think and question the scarlet letter and the sin that lies behind the scarlet letter.

One day, Hester takes Pearl on a walk into the woods because she has heard that Dimmesdale will be walking along the path of the forest. While they are on their walk in the woods, Pearl asks Hester about the Black Man, which is more commonly known as the devil. Pearl asks, ?? is there such a Black Man? And didst thou ever meet him? And is this his mark?? (Hawthorne 127). Hester then answers her daughter and says, ?Once in my life I have met the Black Man! This scarlet letter is his mark! (127).? Hester?s meaning is that the Black Man puts a mark on those who have sinned. It is when Dimmesdale appears walking down the path in the woods when Pearl asks her mother why Dimmesdale does not wear his mark on the outside instead of where no one can see it.

The story of the Black Man is told in order to compare the nature of the suffering of Hester and Dimmesdale. Hester’s suffering is open and visible, marked on her bosom with gold threads. Dimmesdale’s is hidden under his clothing, and therefore internal. This internal suffering is due to the fact that Dimmesdale is bottling his sin up inside him, and for that his sin can only be augmented.

Although Dimmesdale and Hester are both guilty of adultery, Hester?s sin seems to be of the lesser degree. This is because Hester remained on the scaffold, advertising her sin as well as the product of it to the public of the Puritan community. In contrast, Hester is taking responsibility for her for her actions, whereas Dimmesdale is not. Hester realized that good can come from evil, and because she thought that, along with not concealing the sin, she was getting closer and closer to redeeming herself from her crime.

The greatest sinner in The Scarlet Letter is the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. Not only for the sin he committed, but also for avoiding the very important and essential confession: owning up to his sin. Because he didn?t own up to his sin of adultery, he took no responsibility whatsoever for Hester and their creation, Pearl. The events help us to understand how Hawthorne used criticism and duality to prove a point in this story, the point being that people sin and make mistakes, even in such a strict and religious society as the Puritans had long ago. Sin is a constant in society, and that perhaps will never change. A sin can only become deeper if the perpetrator spends a great deal of his or her own life concealing it, keeping it bottled up inside, until one is ready to burst.

Works ConsultedBrown, Bryan D. ?Reexamining Nathaniel Hawthorne?s The Scarlet Letter. http://www.usinternet.com/users/bdbournellonie.htm. March 1, 2000.

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