

On the Symbolism of The Scarlet Letter

6 pages | 1472 words

Introduction:

Nathaniel Hawthorne is a great romantic novelist in America in the 19th century. His novel, The Scarlet Letter, is considered as the first American psychological novel written by Nathaniel Hawthorne. It reveals the psychological insight with which Hawthorne proved guilt and anxiety in the human soul. The Scarlet Letter is deeply concerned with ethical problems of sin, punishment, and atonement. The background of the story is set in Salem, Massachusetts, a strictly controlled Puritan town with harsh laws and fierce prejudices. Hester Prynne, a young wife whose husband is presumed dead, is being publicly humiliated for the sin of adultery. The proof of her sin is her baby girl Pearl. She conceals the identity of Pearl's father to protect him from the harsh judgment of Puritan law.

She however is doomed to spend the rest of her life marked as an adulterer by wearing a scarlet "A" on her chest. Hester's husband meanwhile has arrived in the colony and taken up practice as a doctor. He makes Hester promise that she will not reveal his identity to anyone. It is the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, who is renowned as an especially holy and pious man. Wracked by guilt he starts to show outward signs of serious illness. Hester's husband under the assumed name Roger Chillingworth moves in begins taking care of Dimmesdale. Chillingworth soon discovers that he is Pearl's father. For revenge, Chillingworth uses his influence to multiply the feelings of guilt in the minister as a form of emotional torture. At the climax of the story, Dimmesdale confesses his sin and dies.

Hester and Pearl leave the colony. Chillingworth's gets the purpose of revenge but suddenly finds his life meaningless and dies within a year. Hawthorne is outstanding in literary skills, especially in symbolism. In this novel, symbolism runs through the whole novel where the scarlet letter "A", the characters of story and the settings are all endowed with a deep symbolic significance. The main symbolism of the novel is represented by the colors, the scarlet letter "A", the four main characters and the settings. The wide use of symbolism makes his characters to be recalled embodiment of psychological traits or moral concepts. Few literature works equals The Scarlet Letter in intensity and effective use of images and symbols.

Significance:

This paper attempts to illustrate Nathaniel Hawthorne's wide use of symbolism in his masterpiece The Scarlet Letter, which shows its profound significance when facing the sin and the struggle of the human soul in the harsh Puritan society. The paper is mainly divided by sixth parts: the first part is the introduction of the author and the novel The Scarlet Letter; the second is the symbolism and its relation with the novel; the third is the symbolic meaning of the scarlet letter "A"; then the symbolic meaning of the four characters; the fifth part is the symbolic meaning of the settings as well as the places; the last part will be the conclusion of the paper.

Literature Review:

Many studies have related to...

Scarlet Letter Essays On Symbolism

M Lipman



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