

truth of what Hester has learned: that individuality and strength are gained by quiet self-assertion and by a reconfiguration, not a rejection, of one's assigned identity.

- In *The Scarlet Letter*, the town and the surrounding forest represent opposing behavioral systems. The town represents civilization, a rule-bound space where everything one does is on display and where transgressions are quickly punished. The forest, on the other hand, is a space of natural rather than human authority. In the forest, society's rules do not apply, and alternate identities can be assumed. While this allows for misbehavior— Mistress Hibbins's midnight rides, for example—it also permits greater honesty and an escape from the repression of Boston. When Hester and Dimmesdale meet in the woods, for a few moments, they become happy young lovers once again. Hester's cottage, which, significantly, is located on the outskirts of town and at the edge of the forest, embodies both orders. It is her place of exile, which ties it to the authoritarian town, but because it lies apart from the settlement, it is a place where she can create for herself a life of relative peace.

Night Versus Day

- By emphasizing the alternation between sunlight and darkness, the novel organizes the plot's events into two categories: those which are socially acceptable, and those which must take place covertly. Daylight exposes an individual's activities and makes him or her vulnerable to punishment. Night, on the other hand, conceals and enables activities that would not be possible or tolerated during the day—for instance, Dimmesdale's encounter with Hester and Pearl on the scaffold. These notions of visibility versus concealment are linked to two of the book's larger themes—the themes of inner versus socially assigned identity and of outer appearances versus internal states. Night is the time when inner natures can manifest themselves. During the day, interiority is once again hidden from public view, and secrets remain secrets.

Evocative Names

- The names in this novel often seem to beg to be interpreted allegorically. Chillingworth is cold and inhuman and thus brings a "chill" to Hester's and Dimmesdale's lives. "Prynne" rhymes with "sin," while "Dimmesdale" suggests

Huckleberry Finn, Twain, by exposing the hypocrisy of slavery, demonstrates how racism distorts the oppressors as much as it does those who are oppressed. The result is a world of moral confusion, in which seemingly “good” white people such as Miss Watson and Sally Phelps express no concern about the injustice of slavery or the cruelty of separating Jim from his family.

Intellectual and Moral Education

- By focusing on Huck’s education, *Huckleberry Finn* fits into the tradition of the bildungsroman: a novel depicting an individual’s maturation and development. As a poor, uneducated boy, for all intents and purposes an orphan, Huck distrusts the morals and precepts of the society that treats him as an outcast and fails to protect him from abuse. This apprehension about society, and his growing relationship with Jim, lead Huck to question many of the teachings that he has received, especially regarding race and slavery. More than once, we see Huck choose to “go to hell” rather than go along with the rules and follow what he has been taught. Huck bases these decisions on his experiences, his own sense of logic, and what his developing conscience tells him. On the raft, away from civilization, Huck is especially free from society’s rules, able to make his own decisions without restriction. Through deep introspection, he comes to his own conclusions, unaffected by the accepted—and often hypocritical—rules and values of Southern culture. By the novel’s end, Huck has learned to “read” the world around him, to distinguish good, bad, right, wrong, menace, friend, and so on. His moral development is sharply contrasted to the character of Tom Sawyer, who is influenced by a bizarre mix of adventure novels and Sunday-school teachings, which he combines to justify his outrageous and potentially harmful escapades.

The Hypocrisy of “Civilized” Society

- When Huck plans to head west at the end of the novel in order to escape further “civilizing,” he is trying to avoid more than regular baths and mandatory school attendance. Throughout the novel, Twain depicts the society that surrounds Huck as little more than a collection of degraded rules and precepts that defy logic. This faulty logic appears early in the novel, when the new judge in town allows Pap to