

SCAFFOLD motif

What does the scaffold represent and how does that influence the crowd, Hester, Dimmesdale, Pearl, and Chillingworth?

“Thy strength, Hester; but let it be guided by the will which God hath granted me! This wretched and wronged old man is opposing it with all his might!—with all his own might and the fiend’s! Come, Hester, come! Support me up yonder scaffold!”

The crowd was in a tumult. The men of rank and dignity, who stood more immediately around the clergyman, were so taken by surprise, and so perplexed as to the purport of what they saw,—unable to receive the explanation which most readily presented itself, or to imagine any other,—that they remained silent and inactive spectators of the judgment which Providence seemed about to work. They beheld the minister, leaning on Hester’s shoulder and supported by her arm around him, approach the scaffold, and ascend its steps; while still the little hand of the sin-born child was clasped in his. Old Roger Chillingworth followed, as one intimately connected with the drama of guilt and sorrow in which they had all been actors, and well entitled, therefore, to be present at its closing scene.

“Hadst thou sought the whole earth over,” said he, looking darkly at the clergyman, “there was no one place so secret,—no high place nor lowly place, where thou couldst have escaped me,—save on this very scaffold.

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“Meagre, indeed, and cold was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for from such by-standers, at the scaffold” (47).

“The very ideal of ignominy was embodied and made manifest in this contrivance of wood and iron” (52).