
The Best Statement of Alcott's Larger Purpose

I believe the best statement of Alcott's larger purpose in telling this story was to show the readers the power of faith, and to demonstrate that blacks were just as human as whites.

The first place where I feel Alcott introduced the idea of man and slave "cohabitating" together was in the beginning of the story on page 1251. Nurse Dane just entered the room where Master Ned and Robert were, and she was admiring how handsome Robert was. She was so caught up in his physical features, she was admiring him as a man not as a slave. Yet, she explains that after she touched him on the shoulder "the man vanished and the slave appeared." I think this was the first instance of, for a second, applying humanizing qualities to a black man.

A more significant place in the story where I feel Alcott does a great job of broadcasting that blacks deserved to be treated and looked upon as humans was on the bottom of page 1260, beginning with "The future must show...". Here, Alcott was explaining the significance of the Fifty-Fourth regiment, and states that even though the battle at Fort Wagner was a failure, "the manhood of the colored race" was seen for the first time. This sentence was so powerful to me, because in the other passages we read this semester in regards to slavery and race, African Americans were always dehumanized. Forced to eat on the ground with the animals, compared to being a perfect mate for an orangutan, etc. Yet this is exclaiming that "eyes that would not see" and "ears that would not hear" saw, and heard of this proclamation of the fact that blacks were indeed human beings, and deserved to be treated that way. This short passage reminded me of the lyrics of Amazing Grace, which leads me into the discussion about faith.

The idea and power of faith – believing and trusting in someone or something that maybe cannot even be seen – is sprinkled throughout this story. The first place I want to point out the power of faith, is the end of the last paragraph above where I mentioned "Amazing Grace." Imagine the confirmation in the faith of the African Americans, witnessing the small acceptance of them being considered human beings for the first time. The people in this scene were specifically compared to people who could not "see" that "saw". If you can recall, this is much like the lyrics in Amazing Grace "was blind but now I see." To me a parallel can be drawn here to the providence of something that has the power to make blind men see, and I believe God was a monumental part in this action. Another example of the power of faith, is the scene when Nurse Dane is trying to convince Robert not to kill Master Ned (bottom of page 1258). When Robert questions Nurse Dane about the Lord giving him back his Lucy, and she states that "As surely as..." you can see two things happening here. First, you can see the power of Nurse Dane's faith that regardless of what happens or happened to Lucy here on Earth, she believes

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Lucy and Robert will be together in the “beautiful hereafter.” Second, you can see the power of faith in work being passed from Lucy to Robert. After this interaction Robert falls to his knees, and even though he was “Like a blind man who believes the sun, yet cannot see it” Robert believed in what Nurse Dane said, and let go of his brother’s throat. The comment about the blind man and the sun, is a perfect parallel to what true faith is - Believing in something you cannot see – and this is exactly what Robert did.

I definitely feel the ideas of showing the readers the power of faith, and demonstrating that blacks were just as human as whites were intertwined together in many places throughout this passage. Alcott did an impeccable job of allowing the reader to have just enough information to see a deep, surface meaning, yet she left just enough out of the reading that the ‘in between the lines’ deeper analysis was more than one could have imagined. This has to be by far, my favorite passage that we have read this semester and I have no negative comments to Alcott in her execution of what I feel her larger purpose was in writing this story.

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