

It is time to chill out

[Philosophy](#)



It is time to chill out. The Scarlet Letter, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, is a book written in the 1800s concerning the early Puritan society. The Puritan society reveres their religious beliefs to the point where it takes precedence over logical and irrefutable truths about their rule-bound society.

This particular story takes place in the town of Salem. Out of the many complex characters in this book, the focus of this research will be on Roger Chillingworth. To thoroughly understand his character, three important subjects of scrutiny will be discussed including Chillingworth's life, motivations, and his state of mind.

All things have a beginning. This is how the character, Roger Chillingworth, was at the beginning of the novel. Roger Chillingworth is a scholar well known for his work. At the same time Chillingworth was a peaceful man who was law abiding. Here is a quote from Chillingworth pertaining to his previous life.

" Even then I was in the autumn of my days, nor was it the early autumn. But all my life had been made up of earnest, studious, thoughtful, quiet years, bestowed faithfully for the increase of mine own knowledge, and faithfully, too, though this latter object was but casual to the other--faithfully for the advancement of human welfare. No life had been more peaceful and innocent than mine; few lives so rich with benefits conferred."

Before he came to Salem, Chillingworth was a man in the pursuit of knowledge for himself and his fellow humans. At some point Chillingworth decided to travel to Salem. He believed that it would be prudent to send his

wife Hester ahead of him so he would have home waiting for him when he arrived.

On his way to Salem, Chillingworth encountered many obstacles. His first problem was his ship being lost at sea. When he finally reached land, he was captured by Native Americans. When he finally overcame all of his hardships and reached Salem, he witnessed the wife he had the pleasure of calling his own ostracized for the sin of adultery.

" Such an interview, perhaps, would have been more terrible than even to meet him as she now did, with the hot mid-day sun burning down upon her face, and lighting up its shame; with the scarlet token of infamy on her breast; with the sin-born infant in her arms; with a whole people, drawn forth as to a festival, staring at the features that should have been seen only in the quiet gleam of the fireside, in the happy shadow of a home, or beneath a matronly veil at church. Dreadful as it was, she was conscious of a shelter in the presence of these thousand witnesses. It was better to stand thus, with so many betwixt him and her, than to greet him face to face--they two alone. She fled for refuge, as it were, to the public exposure, and dreaded the moment when its protection should be withdrawn from her."

This is the sight that Chillingworth beheld when he saw Hester on the scaffold. This is the origin of Chillingworth as we know him. Now this is how his life developed since the day of realization. After discovering his wife's sin, Roger's life changed in many ways. After his realization of his wife's, Hester's, sin, Chillingworth's heart froze over in a rigid determination in finding the one who had destroyed his last haven.

In his perusal of the man at fault, he asked Hester about his identity only to be rejected. " It has been related, how, in the crowd that witnessed Hester Prynne's ignominious exposure, stood a man, elderly, travel-worn, who, just emerging from the perilous wilderness, beheld the woman, in whom he hoped to find embodied the warmth and cheerfulness of home, set up as a type of sin before the people."

As can be seen despite Hester's silence on the matter, Chillingworth's determination continues to be resolute in his goal to find the adulterer. Under the guise of a physician, Chillingworth begins his search with plenty of failure. However, that would soon change when the town sought him out in order to aid Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale.

" Such was the young clergyman's condition, and so imminent the prospect that his dawning light would be extinguished, all untimely, when Roger Chillingworth made his advent to the town. His first entry on the scene, few people could tell whence, dropping down as it were out of the sky or starting from the nether earth, had an aspect of mystery, which was easily heightened to the miraculous.

He was now known to be a man of skill; it was observed that he gathered herbs and the blossoms of wild-flowers, and dug up roots and plucked off twigs from the forest-trees like one acquainted with hidden virtues in what was valueless to common eyes. He was heard to speak of Sir Kenelm Digby and other famous men—whose scientific attainments were esteemed hardly less than supernatural—as having been his correspondents or associates.

Why, with such rank in the learned world, had he come hither? What, could he, whose sphere was in great cities, be seeking in the wilderness? In answer to this query, a rumour gained ground--and however absurd, was entertained by some very sensible people--that Heaven had wrought an absolute miracle, by transporting an eminent Doctor of Physic from a German university bodily through the air and setting him down at the door of Mr. Dimmesdale's study!

Individuals of wiser faith, indeed, who knew that Heaven promotes its purposes without aiming at the stage-effect of what is called miraculous interposition, were inclined to see a providential hand in Roger Chillingworth's so opportune arrival." The people were overjoyed at his presence with the hope that he could assist the recovery of Dimmesdale.

This is the beginning of the complex relationship between Chillingworth and Dimmesdale. When he first started living with Dimmesdale he examined feverishly only to discover that the Reverend had no physical signs of a sickness that has brought him to this state. This lack of discovery brought Dimmesdale onto Chillingworth's list of potential adulterer candidates.

Upon further investigations, Roger discovered that Dimmesdale, who had come to regard Chillingworth as stalwart companion, was hiding a secret that he hides at the risk of his own health. This secret causes Chillingworth's inner sirens to go off at max volume. As a result of his suspicions Chillingworth dug into Dimmesdale's mind with the single goal of uncovering his secret.

" He had begun an investigation, as he imagined, with the severe and equal integrity of a judge, desirous only of truth, even as if the question involved

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no more than the air-drawn lines and figures of a geometrical problem, instead of human passions, and wrongs inflicted on himself. But, as he proceeded, a terrible fascination, a kind of fierce, though still calm, necessity, seized the old man within its gripe, and never set him free again until he had done all its bidding.

He now dug into the poor clergyman's heart, like a miner searching for gold; or, rather, like a sexton delving into a grave, possibly in quest of a jewel that had been buried on the dead man's bosom, but likely to find nothing save mortality and corruption. Alas, for his own soul, if these were what he sought!" Roger's actions in his pursuit of the truth began to show signs of wear on Dimmesdale's mental and physical state of being.

Eventually Roger found clear evidence that showed that Dimmesdale was the adulterer including biblical paintings of adultery, a whip, and a branded A on Dimmesdale's body. At this truth Roger had uncovered he was ecstatic. " But with what a wild look of wonder, joy, and honor! With what a ghastly rapture, as it were, too mighty to be expressed only by the eye and features, and therefore bursting forth through the whole ugliness of his figure, and making itself even riotously manifest by the extravagant gestures with which he threw up his arms towards the ceiling, and stamped his foot upon the floor!

Had a man seen old Roger Chillingworth, at that moment of his ecstasy, he would have had no need to ask how Satan comports himself when a precious human soul is lost to heaven, and won into his kingdom." After his discovery Dimmesdale began to torment the man with a new abandon. His tormenting

ends however when Dimmesdale finally succumbs to his poor health and passes away.

In the beginning of the Scarlet Letter Chillingworth was just a man who wanted to come home and be loved. Even before that he was a kind man who, although being anti-social and abrasive, had no ill intentions towards the people around him and sought to improve the world. " Old Roger Chillingworth, throughout life, had been calm in temperament, kindly, though not of warm affections, but ever, and in all his relations with the world, a pure and upright man."

When he Chillingworth saw Hester on the platform for the sin of sexually loving and lusting after another, he felt betrayed and hurt by her actions. Hearing how she refused to give up the name of the adulterer redirected the pain and hurt into a cold, seething anger towards the man who stolen and abandoned his wife in her time of need.

This anger started as a rejection of the injustice in this case of adultery. However, over time that anger became a deep hatred and obsession in finding the man who betrayed his wife. He was willing to do anything to find the man who had caused hurt for both him and his wife, even at the expense of hurting others in the process.

When he finally found the man he had sought to bring to justice, instead of doing what he had initially set out to do he took a perverse and sadistic pleasure in watching the man's soul and spirit break under the constant of his actions. " Thus, a sickness," continued Roger Chillingworth, going on, in an unaltered tone, without heeding the interruption, but standing up and

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confronting the emaciated and white-cheeked minister, with his low, dark, and misshapen figure,--" a sickness, a sore place, if we may so call it, in your spirit hath immediately its appropriate manifestation in your bodily frame.

Would you, therefore, that your physician heal the bodily evil? How may this be unless you first lay open to him the wound or trouble in your soul?" By the point Dimmesdale died, Roger had become so obsessed with Dimmesdale that he had nothing else to live for. This is seen as his body loses energy, just stops working, and dies one year later.

A surprising and somewhat relieving fact about his last days is that he left his fortunes to Pearl, the child of Hester and Dimmesdale. " Leaving this discussion apart, we have a matter of business to communicate to the reader. At old Roger Chillingworth's decease, (which took place within the year), and by his last will and testament, of which Governor Bellingham and the Reverend Mr. Wilson were executors, he bequeathed a very considerable amount of property, both here and in England to little Pearl, the daughter of Hester Prynne".

This shows that he bared no ill will to the child and thus had not lost all of his humanity in the end. In conclusion, Chillingworth was a sad, corrupted, old man. People's views on Roger are different depending on the point of view. Some people think he is the essence of evil. " Roger Chillingworth, fictional character, the vengeful cuckolded physician husband of Hester Prynne, protagonist of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).

Vindictive and sly, Chillingworth ministers to the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale, with whom his wife has had an affair, after Dimmesdale becomes ill.

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Ostensibly concerned with Dimmesdale's health, Chillingworth wants only to spy on him and gloat over his misfortunes. Chillingworth is held up as a greater sinner than the adulterer Dimmesdale, whose spirit he malevolently destroys."

Others would say that he was a victim of circumstance in this tragic tale. " The beginning of Chillingworth's descent into madness begins when he internalizes Hester's adultery as a personal betrayal rather than as a consequence of his aloofness." All can agree though that he was betrayed and had committed many sins in the aftermath.