

The consequences of sin in the scarlet letter



**ASSIGN
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The scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne, written In 1850, Is a product of the literary struggle between Classicism and Romanticism. Classicism is based upon writing in a traditional tone that involves no emotion, while Romanticism is the idea of letting emotion flow through literary outlets, such as a novel. This struggle Is plainly embodied In the character of Hester Prone, who must contain her passionate personality to the guidelines placed before her in a strict Puritan society.

Within a Puritan society, committing a sin is viewed as the worst possible thing one could do ND one must be punished accordingly for It. “ In The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne turned back to the age of his first American ancestor for a historical background against which to display a tragic drama of guilt–revealed and concealed, real and imagined–and its effects on those touched by the guilt” (Dictionary of Literary Biography, 3).

Guilt is a strong after-effect of sin within The Scarlet Letter.

The consequences and effects of sin are different to every person who commits one. The novel, The Scarlet Letter opens as the narrator states that Hester Prone and the Reverend Arthur Timescale have committed adultery and that Hester has borne a child named Pearl. Hester is punished publicly for her sin of adultery by the placing of a scarlet letter on her breast and public humiliation, while Timescale does not confess to the sin and Is spared public scorning for It.

Instead, Timescale must seek inner redemption through physical beatings and praying, with little success. Hawthorne utilizes his novel to trace the less visible, long-range effects of a sin such as adultery, In the harsh setting of

Puritan society through Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth, and Hester Prynne. In order to illustrate how an obsession with vengeance or a devotion to atonement can destroy a person's spirit or personality. Through the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, Hawthorne shows that man can decrease his spiritual worth through his devotion to atonement.

Reverend Dimmesdale originally sees himself as a holy, righteous man of the Lord, but quickly begins to rethink his position in the Puritan society after he commits the sin of adultery and then publicly denies it. Dimmesdale's view of his spiritual worth decreases when he realizes that his actions have led to Hester facing public ridicule through her punishment, "that she should stand a certain time upon the platform" (63). While Hester's punishment exposes her to embarrassment in front of the entire community, Dimmesdale's part in the sin is hidden from society to stew within his mind.

The "platform of pillory" (62) that Hester is placed upon exposes her to the glaring eyes of Puritan society, leaving cowardly Dimmesdale to deny his part in the sin of adultery. Obvious to the Puritan society, Hester did not commit her sin alone, for she could not have done so without Dimmesdale. Dimmesdale's keeping his sin to himself is leaving Hester open to the gossip of the well-to-do women in town. One woman decides that "At the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead" (59), and another woman states that Hester "has brought shame upon all and ought to die" (59).

While Hester is being ridiculed on the scaffold, Dimmesdale screams to her that "[He] charge[s] thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-

sufferer" (73) even though he knows in his heart that he is the fellow-sinner of Hester Prynne.

In questioning Hester on her partner in adultery, he is once again lowering his spiritual worth by adding hypocrisy to his sin. Timescale then makes Hester even more isolated in her sin of adultery by forcing Reverend Wilson to give a " discourse on sin, in all its branches, with continual reference to the ignominious [scarlet] letter" (74).

His speech is so powerful that it causes Hester's scarlet letter to "[assume] new terrors in [the puritan society's] imagination, and it seemed to derive its scarlet hue from the flames of the infernal pit" (74). Timescale once again minimizes himself by not daring to show himself to Hester leaving her " lonely.

.. And without a friend on earth who dared to show himself" (85). After Reverend Wilson's speech, Timescale begins to try to improve his spiritual worth. He continues to ignore Hester but tries to help her in life.

One day when she goes to the governor's house to give him a pair of gloves she sewed for him, the governor tries to take Pearl, Hester's child and tells her " my poor woman, the child shall be well cared for! Far better than thou canst do it" (112). Hester cries out in terror and screams for Timescale to " speak thou for [her]" (112), and Timescale finally shows some spiritual improvement by telling the Governor that " there is truth in what she says, and in the feeling which inspires her!

God gave her the child, and gave her, too, an instinctive knowledge of its nature and requirements—both seemingly so peculiar— which no other mortal being can possess. And, moreover, is there not a quality of awful sacredness in the relation between this mother and this child? ” (113). Dimmesdale tries to deal with the guilt of his sin by helping Hester. When he shows the Governor how much Hester needs her child, and her child needs her, he feels like he is finally doing something to help alleviate a little bit of his guilt.

Reverend Dimmesdale begins to take responsibility for his actions when he defends Hester, but he still remains incapable of public confession.

Because of this, Dimmesdale continues to physically punish himself his entire life through fasting and self-hatred. Chillingham is introduced in *The Scarlet Letter* as being morally superior to Hester and Dimmesdale because he has not committed the sin of adultery. However, unlike Dimmesdale and Hester, Chillingham does not work to further his spiritual worth, but instead he chooses to commit sin, perhaps leading to his ultimate demise.

When Chillingham arrives at Hester's public shaming on the scaffold he does not share in the society's anger at her because of her sin, and appears to sympathize with her.

Chillingham views himself as one of the causes for Hester's sin of adultery and makes statements such as “ it was my folly” (77) and “ mine was the first wrong” (79). Chillingham blames himself for Hester's adultery because he feels he “ betrayed thy budding youth into false and unnatural relation with my decay” (80). Puritan society “ physician's frankly offered skill” (70) to the society.

However, the plot soon reveals that Chloring is not in the community for good, he is there to destroy Timescale. Chloring has no intentions to harm Hester, however, and tells her ' Even if I imagine a scheme of vengeance, what I could do better for my object than to let thee live..

. So that this burning shame may still blaze upon thy bosom? " (78).

Chloring avenges Hester sin by letting her live and forcing her to go on with her shame. The consequence of sin upon Chloring is not a consequence of his own sin, but of the joint sin of Hester and Timescale.

At first, the reader cannot tell Chloring's true intentions but Hester soon draws the conclusion that ' Chloring's acts are like mercy, but his words interpret thee as a terror" (81). She even goes as far as to describe him as " the Black Man that haunts the forest" (82). Chloring begins to act immorally, reducing his spiritual worth just like Timescale. Chloring's obsession commences with his unrelenting search for Hester fellow sinner. This unhealthy search, not only deteriorates Chloring's moral status within the novel, his inner sin begins to show itself in his outward appearance.

Hester remarks, " how his dark complexion seemed to have grown dusker"(113). Hester also states that, " his figure appeared more misshapen" (113) than she remembered it from the years they lived together as husband and wife. The deterioration of his physical appearance shows the sin that is taking over his body and soul. Throughout the novel, The Scarlet Letter a drastic change comes over Chloring's character.

Chlorinating ends the novel as a man obsessed with thing other than vengeance upon those have committed sin against him.

Within a Puritan society, committing a sin is viewed as the worst possible thing one could do and one must be punished accordingly for it.

In The Scarlet Letter the sin of adultery not only affects the committees of the sin, Timescale and Hester, but also Chlorinating, Hester husband. The consequences and effects of sin are different to every person who commits one. Hester grows wiser from her sin, and becomes a better person, Timescale slowly destroys himself, and Chlorinating becomes bent on revenge and eventually is the cause of his own demise.