

# Scarlet letter by nathaniel hawthorne



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic novel *The Scarlet Letter*, the lives of three people are deeply altered by a single act of passion. After Hester Prynne has an illegitimate child, Pearl, from an undisclosed father, Hester is isolated from the Puritan community she resides in and forced to wear a token of her sin on her bosom. Ironically, the well-loved and revered Reverend Dimmesdale is Pearl's father and Hester's partner in sin. Another twist occurs when Hester's husband, presumed dead by the Puritan villagers, shows up while Hester is being publicly punished for adultery on the town scaffold. Throughout the novel Hester raises her child alone, Dimmesdale keeps his sin a secret from his parishioners, and Hester's husband becomes known as a physician under the alias Roger Chillingworth. Both Hester and Dimmesdale have committed a grave sin in the eyes of the Puritan community, yet Hawthorne doesn't convey either as the greatest sinner. Ghastly acts of revenge and attempts to take authority into his own hands, the evident deterioration of his soul, and the symbolism surrounding him makes it apparent that Roger Chillingworth commits the severest sin in *The Scarlet Letter*.

The sin Chillingworth commits is more immoral than that of Hester and Dimmesdale because his is methodically executed. Even Dimmesdale, a man tormented by guilt recognizes that there is one worse than even the polluted priest! That old man's revenge has been blacker than my sin. He has violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart. Thou and I, Hester, never did so! Both Hester and Dimmesdale's sin was made out of passion; they acted on the impulses of their heart. Chillingworth, on the other hand, uses meticulous planning and medicated steps that continually lead him to

the devil. He wants revenge, so he concludes that matters must be taken into his own hands through the secret torture of the reverend. Chillingworth presents himself as a physician who cared for the well being of his patient, Dimmesdale. Reverend Dimmesdale was haunted either by Satan himself, or Satans emissary, in the guise of old Roger Chillingworth. In reality, Chillingworth intentionally went out of his way to bring suffering and pain into Dimmesdales life. Chillingworths presence, as well as knowing comments, drove Dimmesdale deep into shame, causing him to commit heinous acts against himself. Chillingworth is assured that he is tormenting his wifes lover and 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 in his kingdom. The jubilation demonstrated is equal to that of the devil. His soul has been overtaken and his only means of pleasure comes from torturing Dimmesdale. Chillingworth never exhibits a conscience or a sense of morals; he is too completely consumed with revenge. This inability to make amends for his deliberate crime is further evidence Chillingworth is the worst sinner.

Chillingworths sin is graver than those of others because he never seeks penance for his wrongdoing; rather he becomes more distorted and full of vengeance as the years progress. Hester boldly confronts the dishonor of her sin standing on the scaffold in front of the whole community. As a permanent reminder, Hester is forced to wear a symbol of her sin, a scarlet letter A which has always this dreadful agony in feeling a human eye upon the token; the spot never grew callous; it seemed, on the contrary, to grow more sensitive with daily torture. Similarly, Dimmesdale recognizes his sin, and

attempts to negate the sin hes committed through atonement. Hawthorne elaborates, Never did mortal suffer what Dimmesdale has suffered. Chillingworth, on the other hand, never recognizes his transgression, but continues to torment Dimmesdales soul. Throughout the novel Chillingworth is obsessed with evil, and at no point does he try to make amends for his sin.

Hawthorne wants his reader to recognize Chillingworth as a worse sinner than Hester or Dimmesdale by identifying him with the black and evil, the morbid and dead. Chillingworth gathers weeds from the graves of the villagers who have passed away, using them in his potions for reverend. Furthermore, the name Chillingworth suggests the chill of evil and the emotional detachment Chillingworth exhibits. A chill is also the feeling Dimmesdale felt when under the malicious care of Chillingworth. Hawthorne proclaims Chillingworth, A mortal man, with once a human heart, has become a fiend for Satans especial torment! Chillingworth goes from a white mansmall in stature, with a furrowed visage which, as yet, could hardly be termed aged to a man comparable to the devil with smoldering eyes and a dark, sooty face. Hester described that one could see his blackness and there came a glare of red light out of his eyes; as if the old mans soul were on fire, and kept on smouldering duskily within his breast. Chillingworth lost the calm scholarly look he had possessed and gradually became the kin of the devil.

In Nathaniel Hawthornes The Scarlet Letter the criminal seem good and the good seem criminal. Unlike the single act of passion committed by Hester and Dimmesdale, Chillingworths transgression is ongoing and ends only with Dimmesdales death. The motive behind his sin is what makes it so vile.

Chillingworth becomes consumed with revenge; it becomes his whole existence. Everything is centered on making Dimmesdale suffer for his sin. He tries to play God, inflicting punishment on Dimmesdale as he sees fit. Hester accepting her sin is forgiven, Dimmesdale searching for penance is forgiven, but Chillingworth neither accepts sin nor seeks penance. A man taken over by the devil, he is never forgiven. This vindictive, shrunken old man has no conscience or sense of morals. All that is associated with Chillingworth is connected with the devil and evil. His soul, his mind, and his conscience have been taken over and he only thirsts for revenge. Chillingworth has committed the gravest sin in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, a sin from a cold, unfeeling heart.