

The significance of the three scaffold scenes in the scarlet letter

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The scaffold played an important part in identifying the characters of the Scarlet Letter throughout the novel. At each scene, the reader comes to understand something of the main characters and glimpses how that sin represented by the scarlet "A" has affected them.

Hester Prynne, clutching both the living and the imposed () of her sin to her breast, is seen atop the scaffold, sternly looked on by all, but without her lover. She stood there in quiet defiance, refusing to reveal to the multitude before her who the father of her child was, and in this the reader sees a picture of a woman scorned and fearing for the life of herself and her child, but bearing the scrutiny of all with a calm defiance. Nearby, stood Arthur Dimmesdale, asking his secret lover to reveal the name of the father of that child. He did not, at that time, have the strength or the will to do so himself, and was begging Hester to reveal him for what he was. Among the crowd, Roger Chillingworth, Hester's wronged husband, adds his voice to the multitude in demanding that Hester reveal her secret. He seems an old, disappointed man, finding that the one he had waited three years to join had, during that time, left him for another. Thereafter, he would pledge to avenge himself of the man that had partnered in wronging him.

Late one night, Dimmesdale could have been seen on the scaffold, looking for some peace from the guilt tormenting his mind. His penitence, however, lacked an audience. Here, the reader sees a nearly mad man, too weak to reveal himself for what he really was, but too pious to otherwise ignore it. Hester and Pearl discover him there and join him, acknowledging the bond between the three before none other than themselves. Hester comes to

realize the poor state in which Dimmesdale has borne his guilt, and resolves to lend him her strength, which has served to uphold her throughout the years of her public shame. Pearl questions the minister as to whether he would stand with them there noon the next day, but he refuses.

Chillingworth discovers the trio atop the scaffold, and any suspicions he harbored of the identity of Pearl's father is all but confirmed.

Finally, again atop the scaffold, Hester again stands before the scrutiny of the town of Boston, but this time with her fellow sinner. Dimmesdale confesses before all his part in Hester's sin in a final show of strength. There, the minister dies, along with Hester's dreams of throwing off her public shame. Before his death, however, Pearl acknowledges him as her father with a final kiss and gains her humanity in the sight of the townspeople. His prey having escaped him and lacking another purpose for which to live, Chillingworth shrivels and dies, a mere shell of the man he once was. In each of those scenes revolving around the scaffold, Nathaniel Hawthorne revealed to the reader the state and mentality of the main characters, along with the effects of guilt, bitter revenge, and an attempt at human penitence rather than repentance.