

# In nathaniel hawthorne's

People



The Scarlet Letter, various characters demonstrate sacrifice for what they value. The act of sacrifice is seen commonly in the book, especially with Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth, along with their interactions with each other.

The story begins with Hester Prynne with her daughter Pearl and a scarlet letter "A" on her breast.

Roger Chillingworth, a doctor and Hester's husband, comes to town and learns of Hester having an affair while he was away in England. As she is publicly shamed for not revealing the identity of her lover, Chillingworth is now intent on revenge against that man. Years later, Hester is still shunned as she finds a job in needle-working and Pearl grows to be a mischievous child.

After finding out that city officials plan to take Pearl away, Hester calls upon Arthur Dimmesdale, a frail, young minister to convince them otherwise. Chillingworth takes interest, and moves in with him as Dimmesdale's personal physician, and begins to pry open his character. As the minister's condition becomes increasingly worse, Hester meets with him and decides to run away to Europe where they can start over and live as a family with Pearl. On the day of the departure, Dimmesdale delivers a final speech and confesses to his affair with Hester, then dies. Chillingworth dies a year later, Hester returns years later, and Pearl is married to an aristocrat with a family.

The act of sacrifice is evident in Hester Prynne with her endurance of public shamings and being a societal outcast to defend the integrity of Arthur Dimmesdale. Prynne felt that "the sacrifice of the clergyman's good name, and death itself" (Hawthorne 174) would have been better than lying about

the identity of Chillingworth and Dimmesdale. Regardless, Hester chose to save the minister's reputation and in turn, was humiliated and isolated from society.

However, this choice would eventually cause anguish and suffering for Dimmesdale and later, his death. The narrator also states everyone " had frowned on her,—for seven long years had it frowned upon this lonely woman,—and still she bore it all" (175-176). Hester's sacrifice is made clear as she bears the scarlet letter and becomes an outcast for seven long years. She is constantly shamed as seen by her public humiliation, and neither her or Pearl can live a normal life as a result. After years of living like this, Hester realizes what she perceives as her mistake, and goes to meet with Chillingworth and Dimmesdale to settle their complex situation.

Throughout the text, Roger Chillingworth has also sacrificed much, namely his old life as a scholar in order to enact revenge. Hester notices that Chillingworth's " aspect of an intellectual and studious man" had disappeared and was replaced with a " blackness... a glare of red light out of his eyes, as if the old man's soul were on fire" (153). The doctor's old, scholarly personality has vanished as a result of his intent of revenge shortly after arriving in town.

Thirsty for revenge, he preyed on Dimmesdale and torment him by exploring his secrets, and investigating his character. Chillingworth's hatred would turn him to be a cold and cruel man, being seen as " transforming himself into a Devil, if he will only, for a reasonable space of time, undertake a Devil's office" (153).

Chillingworth stuck to the minister almost to the point of addiction, unraveling and torturing him to such an extent, his work is compared to that of the Devil. Roger had sacrificed his old personality and life, to the point of taking on a new identity, that the only value he saw in life was taking revenge on Dimmesdale. By pursuing his dream of vengeance, Chillingworth drives both himself and Dimmesdale to the edge of madness, eventually distorting his own soul and leading to the minister's act of flagellation before causing both their deaths.

Arthur Dimmesdale also displays sacrifice, most notably near the end of the text, by confessing and relinquishing his priestly position to stand with his family for the first and last time. As the minister stands on the scaffold, he calls out to Hester and Pearl, stating that he will do what he "withheld [himself] from doing seven years ago" (226) and for Hester to "support [him] up yonder scaffold" (226). In his final hour, Arthur decides to sacrifice his saintly appearance to the town in order to repent to everyone of his sin.

The minister realizes his position with his family after his encounter with Hester in the forest, and gives up his life as a preacher. Chillingworth tries to plead with his victim and begs "Do not blacken your fame, and perish in dishonor!" (225) and desperately asks "Would you bring infamy on your sacred profession?" (225).

Chillingworth attempts to stop the minister from confessing are futile as Dimmesdale knows exactly what he's giving up to be with his family. The townspeople cannot agree of what they saw that day, but Dimmesdale and

his sacrifice allows the townspeople to realize that anyone can be sinful, later sharing a grave with Hester with a scarlet letter on the headstone.