

RESEARCH ARTICLE



## THE ROLE OF SIN AND HYPOCRISY IN *THE SCARLETT LETTER*

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents an analysis of the text of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Young The Scarlet Letter*. It compares the works in terms of main characters. The text is one of the great works of Nathaniel Hawthorne in Puritan Society. He highlights the real image of the main characters in relation with their roles in the Puritan society and how their hypocrisy and sins affects their psychological behavior in daily life. *The Scarlet Letter* is a great work of literature in which the life of the protagonist is shown through many different stages and conditions.

In the text, hypocrisy and sins are shown in different ways in which occur in different time and place and its impact has different effects and role on their psychological development.

This thesis claims that this text create the ultimate view of life of Puritans in the eyes of author; it also shows the different behaviors of the characters in the Puritan society.

Key Words: Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, Hypocrisy, Sin, Puritan Society, Novel, Short story.

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While *The Scarlet Letter* is generally accepted as Hawthorne's greatest literary masterpiece, Hawthorne himself found it too gloomy, and his wife had a headache after reading the last chapters. However, *The Scarlet Letter* is the work that raised the perception Hawthorne to a writer of the first rank. It has been subjected to various critical evaluations from the time of its appearance until the present. Some raise it to the level of American classic (Cowley 1-2). Others honor it as "the first great novel to appear in America," still others found it a great love story (Robert 60). R. Lewis says of the novel and its opening scene: "With that sin and that novel, new world fiction arrived at its world fulfillment and Hawthorne at his" (Hart 35). But it is interesting to see that the novel is condemned in Hawthorne's time, by religious

groups, for trading on a theme which may "encourage social licentiousness" (Jay 32), for arousing sympathy for the sinners. In spite of their attack, those religionists admit that Hawthorne is a man of genius.

The main reason behind the abundance of critical evaluations of the novel lies in the fact that *The Scarlet Letter* is rich with life, a drama of "human frailty and sorrow" (74) which explores the inner regions of the human soul, revealing the conflict within. Its depth, warmth, psychological analysis and authenticity make it fascinating.

The focus of this chapter is the depiction of the effects of hypocrisy and sin upon those involved in it and to illustrate that Hester's fall is not all together fatal, because it gives her new insight. Further, Dimmesdale's fall can also be regarded as fortunate

because it helps him to attain wisdom. Chillingworth's hypocrisy on the other hand must be held accountable because he has committed the sin of abandoning. The moral abuses and social ostracism that Hester suffers are collective sins of the community. Simultaneously, *The Scarlet Letter* seems to follow the Biblical command to "judge not, that ye be not judged" (Mathew 7:1), meaning that since all humans are sinners, judging in God's place is yet another kind of sin. Thus, no one has right to decide the fate of others religious transgressions, essentially attempting to stand for God. Of the conclusion of the novel states that, "no man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself, and another the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true" (216). It means that no one can pretend to act one way to all, while knowing that the way you are acting is totally different with your real nature. It also speaks about being true to your nature of being.

Some types of sin focused on throughout the novel.

Adultery committed by Hester Prynne, the sin of concealment by Arthur Dimmesdale, the unpardonable sin committed by Chillingworth and the inherited sin of Pearl. Generally, Hawthorne writes about two types of sin in most of his work, inherited sin and the unpardonable sin. First, according to the Bible inherited sin is "the walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him, and his heart was not perfect with the lord his God, as the heart of David has father" (I Kings 15:3). So, Hawthorne says that they are the victim of their great grand- father's sins, by judging or transgressing in the rights of the others.

According to Hawthorne, an unpardonable sin is the act of announcing the secrets of the sin of another which is hidden between men and God. But Kane Egan in his article, "*The Adulteress in the Market-Place,*" believes that "Hawthorne comes before the public to condemn the sins of his generation" (Egan 1). Jonathan Edwards argues that human kind was "born in to the world with a tendency to sin" He also claims humanity was entitled to "misery and ruin for their sin, which actually will be the consequence unless more grace steps in and prevents it" (Edwards 228). The central question in his argument is whether or not men come into this world with a corrupted nature. In his

defense of original sin, Edwards offers a somber and dismal view of the human character.

According to Donoghue the exact meaning of sin in Hawthorne's fiction is that "all general and vague" at first, which "none of the characters has a convinced sense of sin" in total accordance with the Biblical canon. He also explains that when Hawthorne "referred to sin, he seemed to assume a force of evil so pervasive that it did not need to be embodied in anyone or in any particular action" (Donoghue 2- 3). From the beginning of the novel, the main characters do not accept adultery as sin, because they have not repented. For example, Hester's sin is rarely talked about openly, except through frequent allusions to adultery, the text of *The Scarlet Letter* is more concerned with a "kind of fetishistic fascination with the 'nameless'" (Egan 26). This seems to have a universal value than transcends the simple reference to a definite sin. Throughout the novel, the reader is confronted with several categories of sin, some of them hidden, some of them obvious.

Puritan doctrine believes that the guilt of Adam and Eve is handed down from one generation to another. Everyone has to carry the burden of original sin, the weight of which was more often than not increased by the addition of the sins of his or her own parents. Indeed, the beginning of *The Scarlet Letter* informs the reader "the past is not dead" (Pearson 100). This metaphor of a living past is repeated throughout the story as Hawthorne explores the character's desire to discover the hushed secret that lies the hidden beneath the complex symbols and taboos of the "Puritan instinct" (Pearson x). The desires of many of these characters are to find out the exact nature of sin.

The novel also examines deals with the sense of right and wrong through the effects of hidden sin (Crawford et al 120). It is about Hester Prynne, a beautiful woman who is punished by being forced wear a scarlet letter A for committing adultery. The secondary characters are: Dimmesdale, a respected minister who is actually Hester's illegal partner in sin, and the man known as Roger Chillingworth, Hester's husband, who is mysterious and sets up a personal and ominous relationship with Dimmesdale as his doctor (Crawford et al 102). Dimmesdale has no power to show the truth publicly since he is a

supposedly honorable reverend and highly praised within his congregation. Meanwhile, Dimmesdale is suffering from great pain of unrevealed sin, a pain fiendishly increased by Chillingworth, who has early assumed the hidden sin (*The Encyclopedia Americana* 1990). He does not know how to behave in the society and his identity is lost, since he is a lover of a church member.

On the scaffold, Dimmesdale asks Hester not to keep the name of her partner secret because it will be another kind of sin or the same as "add[ing] hypocrisy to [the existing] sin" (Hawthorne 47). Dimmesdale's hypocrisy starts when Hester is punished, forced to stand on the scaffold, a place of shame, for three hours at midday. By hiding his evil side, he wants to obey the Puritan rules and regulations. On the other side, society sees him as a holy man and no one doubts about piety. Dimmesdale appears on the scaffold as a clergyman beside Hester. This is his first act of public hypocrisy. He knows well that adultery is a serious sin and gives no confession to the public assembled at the scaffold, actively choosing to be a hypocrite. However, Dimmesdale tells Hester not to be hypocritical by keeping her partner's good name. When she refuses to name him, he shows his hypocrisy act in front of the multitude, pretending to be sinless and holy, denying any role in such a sinful act. The act of hypocrisy is "the practice of pretending to be different from what really is" (Hornby 586). Dimmesdale wants to hide his real personality, running away from the truth. Worse, he does not announce his sin directly and publicly.

Dimmesdale's hypocrisy also affects his psychological condition; during his sermon he delivers strange words to his congregation. His guilty feelings definitely depress him, corrupting both mind and soul. He is not only suffering physical problems but also a mental disorder. He is psychologically ill; he desires punishment, hurting himself as a form of repentance. He hurts himself to feel pain and to redeem his soul in the face of the sin he has committed. He also abuses his position as a clergyman for the sake of his desires. His effort to maintain his good name in front of society does not bring him in peace. It is a case of punishing himself, Dimmesdale keeps himself in pain, rejecting medical treatment offered to him, since, it will be useless.

The aged members of his flock, beholding Mr. Dimmesdale's frame feeble, while they were themselves so rugged in their infirmity, believed that he would go heavenward before them, and enjoined it upon their children that their old bones should be buried close to their young pastor's holy grave (Hawthorne 98).

The passage above illustrates that how his society honors him and always remembers whose death should be treated well. Dimmesdale in Puritan society dedicates his life to serve religion. In all of his sermons, the people do not understand the real meaning of his speech. Religiously, Arthur Dimmesdale is considered a hypocrite because he hides his sin of adultery acting and acts as if he were not the adulterer. He cannot admit what he has been doing with Hester for seven years.

The values and the rules Puritan society make Dimmesdale a hypocrite. In the case of not confessing publicly, he stands against his character, a supposedly a religious reverend whose sermons respect by his society.

Dimmesdale is labeled as a hypocrite in the novel specifically over his dealing with the conflict over his sin, adultery. The meeting between Dimmesdale and Hester leads them into a passionate affair resulting in immoral sexual intercourse. Hester and Dimmesdale considered from a religious perspective to be acting as an illegal husband and wife so that what they do is categorized as adultery. The Puritans believed that adultery is a great sin and that those who commit it must receive serious punishment. "Puritans did, however, scorn what they viewed as the libertine excesses of many of their peers, condemning not the drink, but the drunkard, not the expression of sexual love between husband and wife but extramarital sex" (Eliade 104). Thus, Dimmesdale a double identity, in one way, sinner abusing social norms he is violating.

The people on the scaffold do not know the true Dimmesdale. They are still hesitant to believe the extent of his betrayal even after he tells the truth. At the same time, he thanks God by saying;

Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale turned to the dignified and venerable rulers; to the holy ministers, who were his brethren; to the people, whose great heart was thoroughly appalled yet overflowing with tearful

sympathy, as knowing that some deep life-matter—which, if full of sin, was full of anguish and repentance likewise—was now to be laid open to them. The sun, but little past its meridian, shone down upon the clergyman, and gave a distinctness to his figure, as he stood out from (Hawthorne 174).

The society does not humiliate Dimmesdale but instead offers its sympathy. His speech does not raise hatred but pity as Dimmesdale says, “but there stood on the midst of you, at whose brand of sin and infamy ye have not shuddered” (Hawthorne 174). In this last breath he says that he has broken God’s law and hidden it for a long. Now, he reveals it and believes that God will forgive him. He believes that God will forgive him as he has confessed in front of his congregation.

Because Dimmesdale is respected, it allows him to deceive his community, lying to his congregation for seven years. However, during these seven years, he suffers greatly from the guilt of obscuring his crime. At the same time, he is remorseful for his sins against God. His speech also indicates that as he dies, but people still misunderstand his real meaning. Regardless of whether Dimmesdale speaks right or wrong the people understand him positively. They see him as an angel. The society does not treat each case of adultery equally. They do not recognize Dimmesdale as an adulterer, on the other side; his society helps him to maintain his image. In that case, he performs another sin which that of a liar.

Dimmesdale defiles Puritan Society which is supposed to be a utopian society with his hypocrisy. Hawthorne describes him as “a vilest companion of the vilest, the worst of sinners” (120). So, his internal suffering is due not to presenting himself on the Scaffold showing the true hypocrisy of Puritan society which would punish one while celebrating another. In keeping secrets, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth are the same.

After seven years, Dimmesdale goes to the scaffold with Hester and Pearl. On Election Day, which is an important day for Dimmesdale to get a chance to speak and give sermons. When his sermon finishes he goes to scaffold, where seven years before he stood with Hester not as an adulterer but as her clergyman. He now stands before them

showing his true self, an adulterer. They now finally understand the depth of his betrayal:

The crowd was in a tumult. The men of rank and dignity, who stood more immediately around the clergyman, were so taken by surprise, and so perplexed as to the purport of what they saw unable to receive the explanation which most readily presented itself, or to imagine any other that they remained silent and inactive spectators of the judgment which Providence seemed about to work (Hawthorne, 173).

Dimmesdale is finally freed from the torture he has succumbed to. At the end of the novel, Dimmesdale confesses publicly. This is a shock to Puritan society. Everyone is surprised by his sin because of his role as a committed minister.

As the other partner in this sinful act, Dimmesdale does not suffer publicly the way Hester had, but he did suffer internally as a result of extreme guilt. Dimmesdale offers two explanations for the concealment of his sin:

It may be that they are kept silent by the very constitution of their nature. Or—can we not suppose it?—guilty as they may be, retaining, nevertheless, a zeal for God’s glory and man’s welfare, they shrink from displaying themselves black and filthy in the view of men; because, thenceforward, no good can be achieved by them; no evil of the past be redeemed by better service (Hawthorne 153).

Another reason for Dimmesdale’s concealment is that he must remain silent so that he can continue to do God’s work as a minister. In the case of Hester, she projects her own hypocrisy onto others, including Dimmesdale when she refuses to share the name of her partner, thus denying her daughter a real father. She does not trust him because she does not trust herself (Harris 62). Both Dimmesdale and Hester have committed the same sins. The difference between them is that Hester is punished for what she did. But, Dimmesdale is not publicly punished, that is why he feels mentally and physically disabled.

Hester is aware that adultery in the eyes of Puritan society condemned as a sin, but she thinks that her sin is not so great. Because she represents her true nature which is actually is in contradict with the society’s laws. At the same time, she also thinks

that her sin is not against God, but her desires only goes against man made society.

In short, unpleasant as was my predicament, at best, I saw much reason to congratulate myself that I was on the losing side rather than the triumphant one. If, heretofore, I had been none of the warmest of partisans I began now, at this season of peril and adversity, to be pretty acutely sensible with which party my predilections lay; nor was it without something like regret and shame that, according to a reasonable calculation of chances, I saw my own prospect of retaining office to be better than those of my democratic brethren. But who can see an inch into futurity beyond his nose? My own head was the first that fell (Hawthorne 50).

The Puritans, "among whom religion and law were almost identical" (35), are presented in the novel as cruel people. Their rigidity is depicted in the conversation of the Puritan women, who are more intolerant than the judges themselves. One of these women shows her disagreement with the decision of the magistrates by declaring that "The magistrates are God-fearing gentlemen, but merciful overmuch ... at the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead." (114). Unlike Hester, and because of his position in society and the church, the people respected Arthur Dimmesdale. - Another woman disapproves of her companion's judgment, demanding one even more severe: "Hester has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die" (114). It seems that everyone condemning Hester's sin, they that God will not be satisfied if she is not punished by death.

On her way to the scaffold, Hester faces the hard ordeal of walking to the scaffold. We are told that "She perchance underwent an agony from every footstep of those that thronged to see her, as if her heart had been flung into the street for them all to spurn and trample upon" (116-17). On the scaffold, Hester and her baby at her bosom are shown as the Virgin and child, an image which intensifies the cruelty of a society which victimizes a lone woman. The solemnity of the multitude tortures her bitterly:

Had a roar of laughter burst from the multitude ..., Hester Prynne might have

repaid them all with a bitter and disdainful smile. But, under the leaden infliction which it was her doom to endure, she felt, at moments, as if she must needs shriek out with the full power of her lungs, and cast herself from the scaffold down upon the ground, or else go mad at once (118).

To escape her personal torture, Hester retreats into the world of memories, seeing her "native village, in Old England" (120). Her husband with a slight deformity, has sent her to Boston before him with the intention of following her, but never had. However, she is quickly brought back to the harshness of her new reality by the throngs of the people who fight to view her shame.

The whole scene makes it evident that the wise Puritan judges are not qualified to interfere with the private feelings of the people; in Hawthorne's words, they do not have the right to "meddle with a question of human guilt, passion, and anguish" (122). The way they deal with such questions are too complicated, because their harsh way creates the deep hatred in one's heart against the rules and regulations. Hester Prynne's case is a good example, for she will try to commit an even more serious sin, deliberately at the end of the romance, when she persuades her lover, Dimmesdale, to run away and leave Puritan society, which is governed by the stern aged men who do not understand the feelings of the young, and consequently suppress them.

Hester is given the choice to leave the place of her shame, but she prefers to stay there because she feels that this town is the place where she has sinned and was punished, thus it has become her real birthplace: "Her sin, her ignominy, were the roots which she had struck into the soil" (119). She is chained to the place by her sin: "The chain that bound her here was of iron links, and galling to her inmost soul, but could never be broken" (131). Another more physical reason keeps her in Boston: in this town lives the person with whom she is eternally joined by mutual sin. In fact, her love is the most important reason that keeps her in Boston, because, in the forest scene, at the end of novel, she is ready to leave the place for the sake of her love. In truth, she proposes the plan of escape and is more enthusiastic than her lover to carry it out. But because the society does not permit such a feeling,

Hester suppresses her love deep in her heart. It is in the forest, where Hester does not feel the guilt which is her constant companion in the town.

The stigma gone, Hester heaved a long, deep sigh, in which the burden of shame and anguish departed from her spirit. O exquisite relief! She had not known the weight until she felt the freedom! By another impulse, she took off the formal cap that confined her hair, and down it fell upon her shoulders, dark and rich, with at once a shadow and a light in its abundance, and imparting the charm of softness to her features. There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood (Hawthorne 202).

The vision of every individual is always with Hester's passion. This kind of passion takes place in the forest because the forest rejects any rules or norms related to the values of Puritan society. When Hester wears the scarlet A, she caught between society's regulations and the freedom of individual, and this is point, after the trial and punishment, where Hester's suffering really begins. The first consequence of sin is usually a sense of social isolation. Hester with her child, Pearl isolates herself from others in the town. *The Scarlet Letter* takes "her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and [encloses] her in a sphere by himself" (116). She does not choose isolation; it is imposed upon her and she becomes an outcast.

Being excellent at needlework, she spends her time in embroidery. Her occupation is like that of Ethan Brand, lonesome, thus it leads her to thinking about matters forbidden by the Puritans. She "assumed a freedom of speculation ... which our forefathers, had they known it, would have held to be a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter. In her lonesome cottage, by the seashore, thoughts visited her, such as dared to enter no other dwelling in New England" (Hawthorne 181). Hester wants the whole change in the rules of her society; women are victims of such society. Hester would "have suffered death from the stern tribunals of the period, for attempting to undermine the foundations of the Puritans establishment". She starts to even question the value of women's existence: "Was existence worth accepting, even to the happiest among them?"(182). Hester finds

herself in conflict with the society by defying Puritan law when she refuses to mention the name of her partner.

Though Hester isolates herself, she is not safe from the contempt of the people and is reminded of her sin whenever she meets them:

Clergymen paused in the street to address words of exhortation that brought a crowd, with its mingled grin and frown, around the poor, sinful woman. If she entered a church, trusting to share the Sabbath smile of the Universal Father, it was often her mishap to find herself the text of the discourse (Hawthorne 134).

Strangers, who did not know the story of Hester's shameful act, cause bitter pain to Hester by their curious gaze at the scarlet letter. The unintelligible cries of the children also cause her a sharp pain. Pearl, herself is a torture to her mother, for in addition to her being another token of Hester's sin; she is also a source of Hester's anguish. As Dimmesdale put it, Pearl is "a torture to be felt at many an unthought-of moment; a pang, an ever-recurring agony in the midst of a troubled joy" (151). Dimmesdale clarifies what is God's will in this case. In one way, he persuaded his society to spare Hester further tortures, by telling them it was God's will to give a child to her even though she had no husband. When Pearl, as a baby, touches the scarlet A, her touch causes immeasurable pain to her mother. Hawthorne explains her reactions: "so infinite was the torture inflicted by the intelligent touch of Pearl's baby-hand" that the mother "instinctively [endeavored] to tear it away" (Hawthorne 140). But, Pearl is not only always a torture to Hester; she is also her happiness: she is also center of her happiness. She is both a bringer of pain and happiness. Thus, Hester says of her: "she is my happiness! - She is my torture ... she is the scarlet letter, only capable of being loved, and so endowed with a million fold the power of retribution for my sin"(Hawthorne 150). Pearl, is the personification of the scarlet letter. Hester, herself knows the parallel, and hence she dresses the child in such a way as to show it: "the Childs attire... was distinguished by a fanciful , or...a fantastic ingenuity, which served, indeed to heighten the airy charm that early began to develop itself in the little girl, but which

appeared to have also a deeper meaning" (133). Later, Hawthorne says that Hester.

In contriving the child's garb, had allowed the gorgeous tendencies of her imagination their full play; arraying her in a crimson velvet tunic, of a peculiar cut, abundantly embroidered with fantasies and flourishes of gold-thread. ... [It] was a remarkable attribute of this garb, and, indeed, of the child's whole appearance, that it irresistibly and inevitably reminded the beholder of the token which Hester Prynne was doomed to wear upon her bosom. It was the scarlet letter in another form; the scarlet letter endowed with life! (143).

In making Pearl look like the embroidered scarlet letter, Hester tries to ridicule the Puritan idea of Pearl as a product of sin. Pearl is also taken to be the symbol of the sinful part of Hester's nature, seeing the similarity, Hester "could recognize her wild, desperate, defiant mood [and] the flightiness of her temper..." (Hawthorne 137). Though the mother tries hard to restrain the child's passionate nature, and to educate her well, Pearl remains defiant and wild until the end of the novel when the death of her father develops her sympathies, and tempers her wildness.

Looking deeply into Hester's suffering, one can discern that it is caused by the outside world, the contempt of the townspeople, the strangers, curious gazes, the children's innocent cries, and Pearl's touch on her badge of shame. Her torture does not come out of remorse, and she does not feel the sting of her conscience, mainly because she doesn't regret her deed. She thinks that she has not done committing wrong deeds, and more correctly, she thinks that what she has done is scared, as she tells her partner, Dimmesdale, in the forest scene, "What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so! We said so to each other!" (200). During their meetings in the forest, where Hester can truly be free because nature grants more rights than society's rules. In the forest, the romantic relationship between both characters is revealed.

The forest is only the place that both Dimmesdale and Hester can share their true feelings for each other. Dimmesdale tells Hester that "in bitterness and agony of heart, at the contrast between what I seem and what I am" (131). Dimmesdale is in severe conflict with himself. But

his conscience begins to torment him continually; being a clergyman was the only way to conceal his sin. Thus, he sins against his society twice.

Hester believes that her sin is mainly as a result of her passion, because she herself is passionate, and thus her sin is in accordance with her nature. Consequently, Hester believes that society has no right to punish her. Yet, as she represses her love deep in her heart, she also suppresses her rejection of the judgment of the magistrates because she knows that she cannot change it. Hester tries hard to accept the judgment, at least, to find meaning and purpose in her suffering (Cowley 607-10). She submits to society without rebellion. Trying to believe that she is really guilty, she "struggled to believe that no fellow mortal was guilty like herself" (135). Therefore she maintains a hard penance.

Hester's skill at embroidery gradually makes her skillful in the town people of various ranks hurry to her to have their clothes embroidered by her. But she does not exploit her profession for selfish benefits: she neither collects money nor intends any other material gain. She devotes most of her time to embroidering the clothes of the poor, and to helping them with the little she has. Her needle-work keeps her in contact with the world, but despite this contact, the outside world is still intolerant, it does not show her any sign by which she can feel that she belongs to it. She will always be an outcast. Even the poor, to whom she is charitable, scorn her. The rich "were accustomed to distil drops of bitterness into her heart" (134). In this way, Hawthorne depicts Hester's relationship with her community. She is talking about her feeling more than taking action in spite of all the attacks and scorn of the people. In the face of this, Hester remains submissive. As Hawthorne says;

She never responded to [the people's] attacks, save by a flush of crimson that rose irrepressibly over her pale cheek, and again subsided into the depths of her bosom. She was patient, - a martyr, indeed, - but she forbore to ray for her enemies; lest, in spite of her forgiving aspiration, the words of the blessing should stubbornly twist themselves into a curse (134).

She helps all those who need assistance, but she never waits for thanks or praise. As a

consequence of her sin, Hester undergoes a loss of faith. After her own encounter with sin in the forest, Hester Prynne begins to see that woman who are outwardly pure are often inwardly sinful. She also begins to see the venerable ministers and magistrates as evil. Hawthorne tells the reader that this is "one of the saddest results of sin" (135). Clearly, because all the people condemn and scorn Hester for her adultery, and she can not defend herself publicly, she imagines them as being a sinful as herself. However, unlike Goodman Brown whose corrupted mind makes him lose faith in human beings completely, Hester Prynne, whose mind is pure, does not believe her evil visions, and tries hard to convince herself that no one is more sinful than herself.

After Hester's long and bitter suffering, she emerges a mature and understanding women. Her fall is fortunate, then, for it educates and refines her. Her suffering is a period of preparation for a higher state of being. It can be argued that Hester would not have reached her new state without her fall, because while sin is a torture, it is, at the same time, a teacher. From her infamy, Hester is able to take a useful moral lesson. As she admits, the "badge hath taught me -- it daily teaches me -- it is teaching me at this moment -lessons whereof my child may be the wiser and better"(149). Hester's mentality is greatly developed, until her fall; she had been a woman of heart, very passionate, and after her fall, Hester is left alone to think. She does not think only about her condition, but also about the position of women, in her society. She starts thinking about subjects forbidden in Puritan society. She is able to see the wrong in the current system of society. She realizes at last that "the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew" (182). Dimmesdale and Hester are frustrated because they live in a restricted society. However, their true society lives in their heart.

Hester's daughter, Pearl is not a daughter of the Puritans. When she is practiced to learn the religious rules, she faced difficulty with it. We are told that "...had little Pearl never come to her from the spiritual world, Hester might have come down to us in history, hand in hand with Anne Hutchinson, as the founders of a religious sect. She might... have been a prophetess" (181-82). Through Pearl,

Hester's mind is raised to balance her heart. Thus she becomes more mature than before. She can see now that she has not wronged her husband: he has wronged her first because he has lured her into marrying him despite the great difference in age: "yes, I hated him [Chillingworth]!" repeated Hester, more bitterly than before. "He betrayed me! He has done me worse wrong than I did him!" (188). In this paragraph, Hester claims that she hates Chillingworth more than anything else. According to Hester, he had betrayed her by persuading her that everything would be better if they marry. This is the first time that Hester hates anyone.

Hester comes to sympathize with other people, especially those who are afflicted with distress. She is ready to help the poor with the little she possesses: she brings food and garments, made especially for them, to their doors despite their ingratitude. She is always seen in houses upon which a calamity falls:

None so-self-devoted as Hester, when pestilence stalked through the town. In all seasons of calamity, indeed, whether general or of individuals, the outcast of society at once found her place:... In such emergencies, Hester's nature showed itself warm and rich; a well-spring of human tenderness, unfailing to every real demand, and inexhaustible by the largest (179).

It is evident that Hester becomes morally superior to all the people in her society. They know this fact, for she is now "a sister of Mercy" to them, and gradually they begin to look upon the letter "A", not as the initial of "Adulteress" but of "Able" or "Angel" (Hawthorne 191).

Through her generosity, Hester has forced people to admire her. She does not beg their mercy, but forces her character upon them to the extent that they begin to consider the Scarlet Letter, the symbol of her infamy, as a badge of her good work and ability in assisting others. They do not only change their idea about the meaning of the scarlet letter, but they also praise her when strangers inquire about the wearer of that letter. They will tell them, "Do you see that woman with the embroidered badge? "...It is our Hester, -the towns own Hester, who is so kind to the poor, so helpful to the sick, so comfortable to the afflicted!" (180). Not only that, but the scarlet letter becomes her



safeguard. It gives Hester a solemnity or rather divinity which protects her from danger:

The scarlet letter had the effect of the cross on a nun's bosom. It imparted to the wearer a kind of sacredness, which enabled her to walk securely amid all peril. Had she fallen among thieves, it would have kept her safe. It was reported, and believed by many, that an Indian had drawn his arrow against the badge, and that the missile struck it, but fell harmless to the ground (180).

Hester's sin, then, has elevated her to the level of sainthood, and the scarlet letter does not degrade her as the judges had expected on the day of her trial. Hester is able to make a drastic change in her social position, after years of suffering. At the end of her life, she has developed into a trustworthy woman whom all troubled people seek for comfort. These people,

Brought all their sorrows and perplexities, and besought her counsel, as one who had herself gone through mighty trouble. Women, most especially, -in the continually recurring trials of wounded, wasted, wronged, misplaced, or erring and sinful passion, -or with the dreary burned of a heart unyielded, because unvalued and unsought, -came to Hester's cottage, demanding why they were so wretched, and what the remedy! Hester comforted and counseled them as best she might (240).

It is evident from *The Scarlet Letter* that sin to Hawthorne, has its benefits: it can raise the fallen sinner to a position higher than that which he (or she) had held before. Hester, in this tragic novel, rises to a great height as a result of her sin and its subsequent suffering. But it is important to observe that Hester has achieved the balance between her head and heart, which enables her to be wiser and more mature than before her fall when only the heart had dominated her behavior.

*The Scarlet Letter* illustrated both sin and hypocrisy through Puritan intolerance. Dimmesdale's problem of hidden sin in the novel is one of the examples. Adultery is considered a great sin which rates a serious punishment for transgressors, but while when Hester requires humiliating punishment, Dimmesdale is free from the punishment of adultery, only, suffering from his hypocritical act. Dimmesdale becomes a hypocrite

for disguising his sin and acting as if he were a sinless person. The hypocrisy of Arthur Dimmesdale is seen when he asks Hester to confess her adultery and publish the name of her partner who is actually Dimmesdale. As he said to Hester:

Thou hearest what this good man says, and seest the accountability under which I labour. If thou feelest it to be for thy soul's peace, and that thy earthly punishment will thereby be made more effectual to salvation ... how thou deniest to him—who, perchance, hath not the courage to grasp it for himself—the bitter, but wholesome, cup that is now presented to thy lips! (Hawthorne 46-7).

Dimmesdale chooses to hide his sin and in doing so injures both himself and others. His aim is to protect his sainthood in the eyes of the Puritan society.

Rodger Chillingworth, Hester's husband, an older man who tried to control his wife's emotions, but he was not successful in his attempts and knowing that their relationship will always lack of love, or as he says "mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay" (75). Chillingworth confesses that he was not a good husband and could never make her happy. But this speech does not stop him from seeking revenge on Hester's sin; he destroys the life of Dimmesdale and wants to avoid the shame of having unfaithful wife.

In the case of Dimmesdale, Chillingworth plans to take revenge on him because he has destroyed his life. Chillingworth is a clever character; he knows how to speak with Hester and treat Dimmesdale. He threatens Hester with the information that he knows about her partner and obliging Dimmesdale is a doctor, he teases out knowledge of his inner sufferings. Chillingworth commits two crimes against Hester; one of them is his marriage to Hester with the difference in their biological age, and another when he sends her to New England. As Hawthorne points out in the beginning of the novel, Chillingworth's "expression had been calm, meditative, and scholar-like. Now, there was something ugly and evil in his face, when they [the people of Boston] had not previously noticed, and which grew still the more obvious to sight the oftener they looked upon him (129). The

difference between Chillingworth and both Hester and Dimmesdale is that both characters accept that they have sinned and take responsibility for their action. In Hester's case, she took the public punishment instead of her partner, standing on the scaffold and wearing of the scarlet letter. Chillingworth's action is more sinful because he was interested only in revenge. As Dimmesdale states, "[we] are not, Hester, the worst sinner in the world. Hawthorne illustrates the different types of sinners to the readers. Upon learning the secret of Chillingworth's identity, Dimmesdale claims that the old man's sin is greater than theirs because "he has violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of the human heart. Thou and I, Hester, never did so!" (201). Dimmesdale is a very thoughtful man; his characteristics are not strong as Hester. He always needs Hester to carry the burden of his sin.

After Dimmesdale's death, there is no more reason for Chillingworth to live, "All his strength and energy-all his vital and intellectual force-seemed at once to desert him; insomuch that he positively withered up, shriveled away, and almost vanished from mortal site ...." (268). He lives for nothing, and can no longer take revenge on Dimmesdale, and as a result, he dies because of his inner suffering.

Finally, both Hester and Dimmesdale are not treated equally. Hester is punished for what she did, but Dimmesdale is forgiven. He symbolically wears the scarlet letter during seven years. At the end, the hypocrisy and sin of the main characters become a lesson for that society. Hawthorne's goal is not to provide a simple moral judgment about adultery, but to examine the adultery's psychological impact on everyone involved. Chillingworth's comments, add a new shade of meaning to *The Scarlet Letter*. He suggests that the letter will make Hester "a living sermon against sin" (Hawthorne 95). Functioning as a symbol of morality, she will lose her individuality.

As a result of the above-mentioned sins, that argument sin has a negative effect on those who commit it has been achieved. Hawthorne wants to make it clear that hidden sin destroys the inner feeling of human being more than publicly known sin, as it is clear in the case of Arthur Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne. The best way to live successfully

in the society is to be honest with your inner feeling and surroundings.

Hawthorne portrays Puritan society as a patriarchal society composed of hypocrites. Such society is always in search of females or religious minorities in order to root out their sins while they obscure their own. Hawthorne writes; "Had Hester sinned alone?" (164). Despite the ties she has to her society, she is never controlled by it; she is not the hypocrite as the other Puritans are. On the other hand, the narrator presents Hester as submissive and well aware of her guilt when accepting her punishment. In the end, "the world's law was no law for her mind" (164). Hester is the greatest character in *The Scarlet Letter*. Because she depended on herself to continue with Puritan morality, she also has achieved spiritual greatness. Sin not only isolates man from God, it also alienates him from his fellowmen. The characters in *The Scarlet Letter* all suffer isolation as a result of their sins.

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