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***The Scarlet Letter* Essay**
Sins of the Characters

The novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, shows the serious impact a solitary, passionate act has on the lives of three citizens of a small Puritan town: the insubordinate Hester Prynne; the ardent, grief-stricken Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale; and the preoccupied, rancorous Roger Chillingworth. Throughout the novel these main characters commit different sins. Each main character has a particular sin that he or she has committed. Which of them committed the greatest sin?

Hester Prynne, the character that the novel is revolved around, is a young, attractive woman who by the opinions of the community is an evil lady. The community considers her evil because she had committed the sin of adultery. She had been living alone, without her husband who stayed behind in England, when she became pregnant. After giving birth Hester had to stand upon a scaffold, for several hours, with her newly born child, before the entire town and let them speak badly of her. "If the hussy stood up for judgment before us five, that...come off with such a sentence as the worshipful magistrates have awarded? Marry, I trow not!" (pg. 48). She stood abandoned and endured the shame alone, even though people knew she didn't conceive the child alone. She was given the chance to share the humiliation but refused. By not revealing the coward partner in her crime she only worsened her sentence. Hester was sentenced to wear a symbol of adultery, the scarlet A for her entire life. She could never conceal it. She wore the

letter with an almost pride, never letting the cutting remarks keep her from living her life the symbol became to have different meanings; it became a mark of strength. “And never had Hester Prynne appeared more lady-like, in the antique interpretation of the term, than as she issued from the prison.” (pg. 50). Others eventually took the symbol in a different meaning also. To others it meant able. “Such helpfulness was found in her,- so much power to do, and power to sympathize,- that many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original significance. They said that it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman’s strength. ” (pg. 148)

Dimmesdale committed the sin of chastity. He broke the oath he took to become a priest. His consequences were to cope with the guilt of his actions. Throughout the novel Arthur Dimmesdale let his guilt eat away at his soul. He tried to confess his sin to the people and God so he might receive forgiveness. In his sermons he would hint that he was the father of Hester’s bastard, Pearl, without saying those exact words. He even began to punish himself. Every night before Dimmesdale would go to sleep, he would whip himself. Arthur was so full of guilt he became ill. He could barely walk without a stagger in his stride. He needed to hold onto things as he traveled and his mind always seemed to be wandering. One evening he decided to confess his sin to the world in the dead of the night,

And thus, while standing on the scaffold, in this vain show of expiation, Mr. Dimmesdale was overcome with a great horror of mind, as if the universe were gazing at a scarlet token on his naked breast, right over his heart. On that spot, in every truth, there was, and there had long been, the gnawing and poisonous tooth of bodily pain. Without any effort of his will, or power to restrain himself, he shrieked aloud; an outcry that went pealing through the night, and was beaten back from one house to the another, and reverberated from the hills in the background; as if a company of devils, detecting so much misery and terror in it, had made a plaything of the sound, and were bandying it to and fro.” (pg. 136).

Dimmesdale did not have the courage to stand before anyone to face his shame, unlike Hester.

Chillingworth, Hester's husband, committed the sin of vengeance, which caused him to look down upon himself. His torture of Dimmesdale came back to haunt his morals.

“The overpowering vengeance and hatred felt by Chillingworth caused his life to be centered on demeaning Dimmesdale and tormenting him until the end of time. From the beginning, Chillingworth showed no signs of guilt and let his life be consumed by sin.” (MegaEssays.com)

Chillingworth even moved within the house of Dimmesdale so he could keep a keen eye upon him. Chillingworth's new purpose in life was to make sure Dimmesdale was not going to get off easily. Chillingworth succeeded well, but Dimmesdale really did not require aid on feeling guilty. He knew what he had done was dreadfully wrong and immoral and he knew he would pay.

When he first talked to Hester about whom the father might be he swore that he would find out and make him pay. “Believe me, Hester, there are few things, -whether in the outward world, or, to a certain depth, in the invisible sphere of thought, -few things hidden from the man who devotes himself earnestly and unreservedly to the solution of a mystery. Thou mayest conceal it, too, from the ministers...partner on the pedestal. But...I shall seek this man...sympathy that will make me conscious of him. I shall...unawares. Sooner or later, he must needs be mine!” (pg. 70). When he first saw Hester upon the scaffold he made it his responsibility to find out the fellow sinner and bring him to his own version of justice.

Arthur Dimmesdale, however, committed the greater sin because he was a priest, “a holy man” and he broke the vows he promised to obey. The people of the Puritan town believed that Arthur Dimmesdale was chosen by God to preach and to live by His word. The priest had a duty to represent the people and to be a good role model. Of course he was not expected to be perfect, but by their beliefs he was suppose to be close to flawless. A priest is supposed to be a

representative of God's power and holiness, but one cannot show this if they are themselves stained with sin.

Hester's defiance and pride, Dimmesdale's guilt and lies, and Chillingworth's vengeance with a harden heart; all sins. The novel *The Scarlet Letter* deals with the topic of sin in an unusual but realistic manner. It shows the typical triangle affair of love and all the pain involved. Even though written many years ago, the topic is still a possibility today.